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INSIDER

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Warren Richards
Head of Group Parts
Operations, Volkswagen
Group UK

HELLO AND WELCOME...

...to the latest issue of TPS Insider.

This issue looks to both the past and the future, with features that celebrate innovation ahead of its time and recognise how technology is helping to drive business success.

Our trip back in time begins with a review of the evolution of vehicle safety, with a detailed look at all the major milestones and innovations within the Volkswagen Group over the last 25 years.

We will celebrate the Audi A2, a hall of fame car as much admired now as it was when first launched back in 1998. A model considered ahead of its time, with the help of our guest contributor, we explore why this small car has such a big reputation for innovation.

In Business Builder, the focus is on social media and how it's providing the platform for garages such as VDS to grow their business. There will also be top tips from our own TPS experts on how to make the most of social media channels.

I hope you enjoy this edition and the stories featured. Please take care, stay safe and we will speak again soon.

All the best,

W. Richards

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We'd love to know what you think and what you'd like to see in future issues.

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BUCKLE UP: IT'S TIME TO JOURNEY THROUGH THE HISTORY OF CAR SAFETY



For this special edition of Tech Talk, we are chatting with Ben Knight, Technical Support Specialist for Volkswagen Group Aftersales, about the history and evolution of car safety systems.

Q: Historically, what is the most important safety innovation to ever be introduced?

Three-point seat belts are probably the biggest safety innovation of all time. In fact, it's not just the seatbelts, it's the laws that were made to make wearing a seatbelt mandatory. This has probably saved more lives over the last 100 years than any other single safety system. Speed limits and trafficators/indicators were also important developments.

Q: What is the most important safety innovation in the last 25 years?

Mandatory airbags and seatbelt pretensioners have been a hugely important innovation. Airbags now work in conjunction with seat occupancy and position sensors, so the system knows if a heavy or light person is sat in the seat, and how close to the steering wheel the person is. As a result, the stages of airbag deployment can be adjusted accordingly. Impact sensors determine where on the vehicle an impact has occurred, how severe it is and whether an airbag needs to be deployed in that area or not, leaving that area as a crumple zone to further protect the passengers. All of this occurs in milliseconds as the impact is happening.

Q: How much have vehicle safety systems evolved in the last 25 years?

The last 25 years have been as much about the evolution and integration of existing safety systems to work together as it has been about developing new systems. Brake and

tyre technology have evolved to help keep vehicles safe on the road and able to stop and steer better under wet or icy conditions. Tyres have been specifically designed for the type of vehicle they will be used on and brakes are manufactured out of more modern materials, enabling them to be more efficient, operate in all conditions and last longer.

Q: Which key safety measures introduced for Volkswagen Group vehicles in the last 25 years rank as the most important?

A top three if you like, are traction control systems, pedestrian protection and crash testing:

TRACTION CONTROL

With traction control systems, as vehicles become larger, heavier and more powerful, systems have been required to assist drivers should bad road conditions or excessive speed overcome their control of the vehicle. Early systems relied on inputs from the speed of the driven wheels vs the non-driven wheels to determine if one was spinning faster than the other and counteracting any difference by reducing the engine torque. The latest systems use advanced speed sensors on all four wheels and multi-directional motion sensors. These monitor lateral, horizontal and yaw rates with the ability to individually reduce the torque to any of the wheels using the ABS system to apply braking force to individual wheels.

This means if the driver loses control of the vehicle, the system is able to calculate the exact actions to perform in order to regain control.

PEDESTRIAN PROTECTION

This is a passive safety system that relies on the design of the front bumper, bonnet and windscreen to absorb impact should a collision with a pedestrian occur. By using simulated pedestrian collisions with children as well as adults, development has resulted in engines and drivetrains being moved lower and further back in the vehicle to create a crumple zone. Bumpers and front grilles have been redesigned to crumple more effectively. An Audi Active Bonnet also creates more space between the bonnet and hard engine components by using solenoids that push the bonnet up away from the engine bay in the milliseconds before an impact.

CRASH TESTING

The introduction of more advanced safety testing has proven valuable to the development of safety systems. The technology used in the crash test vehicles and dummies is translated into valuable data which has a huge input into the design of vehicles and safety systems. Vehicles are now required to have a crash avoidance system in order to obtain a 5-star NCAP rating and the level and variety of testing is hugely more comprehensive compared to vehicles 25 years ago.

Q: Which modern day safety features stand out most in the current market?

Pre-sense systems, which are an active safety system operating all the time as well as during a collision. Pre-sense systems will use a combination of radar and camera inputs, along with signals from other vehicle systems such as the speed of the vehicle's wheels, steering angle, the vehicle's surroundings and road surface conditions to anticipate a stopping distance at a given speed.

If the vehicle believes an impact will occur, the system becomes active, the brakes are primed and a warning is displayed to the driver. If this is not actioned, the brakes are automatically applied to prevent an accident.

In the event of an unavoidable accident, the system will still act to protect vehicle occupants by slowing the road speed as much as possible, adjusting seatbelts to ensure the occupants are braced for an impact, activating the hazard warning lights and closing the sunroof and windows. Following an accident, the vehicle's SOS system can call the emergency services automatically, relay information such as GPS coordinates, how many occupants are in the vehicle and how severe the impact has been.

Q: Without giving away too many secrets, what is the next generation of Volkswagen Group safety features to look out for?

Volkswagen Group safety systems are constantly evolving and there is so much technology on the vehicles in terms of

cameras, radar sensors and processing power. The next generation of safety systems will likely be written into autonomous driving software and I think a lot of the safety features will determine how the vehicles behave and react while driving autonomously.

Q: Finally, across the broader automotive industry, what are the major safety innovations we can expect to see in the next 25 years?

The main trend in the next 25 years will be a movement towards fully or partially autonomous vehicles. In terms of safety, connected vehicles and connected towns and cities will be integrated and communicate together as an infrastructure. With autonomous vehicles constantly communicating with one another, accidents will be greatly reduced as the human element of driving is removed. Vehicles will communicate with their surroundings and speed limits, traffic lights and congestion on the road will be shared with the vehicle so routes can be amended accordingly. Emergency services will also be able to broadcast route data, giving notice to vehicles to move aside as they respond to emergency situations on the road.



A CHALLENGING YEAR PROVES NO WRITE-OFF FOR TPS NATIONAL

For a dedicated parts support service set up to prevent write-offs, it's fitting that TPS National never accepted 2020 as one.

As a result, TPS National will look to do in 2021 what it's been doing since it began in 2018, delivering cost-effective solutions to get vehicles repaired that would otherwise result in insurance write-offs.

TPS National provide a dedicated team for handling bodyshop enquiries, offering specialist Total Loss Avoidance (TLA) and TPS Genuine Pricing (formerly known as Aged Parts Pricing) services to bodyshops across the country.

Available for C and D crash categories, the TLA programme offers access to additional parts discounts on Volkswagen Group Genuine Parts. In order to ensure a quick and hassle-free process, discounts are offered at the invoice stage and supported by the TPS National team every step of the way.

The TLA scheme is a win-win situation for all involved. The vehicle owner keeps their vehicle with the assurance that it's been repaired back to factory standard using Volkswagen Genuine Parts, the bodyshop

benefits from the labour hours, paint and parts margin and the insurance company keeps a policy holder.

Lee Harrison, TPS National Account Manager, said: "During 2020, with the support of the Performance Managers, we now have almost 100 Approved Paint and Bodyshops with us up and down the country.

"We have hosted numerous online meetings with the bodyshops to educate them on the simplicity of the TLA scheme and answer any questions they may have. The message is really getting through and they see how TLA can work for them and their customers.

"We have worked in a similar way with the insurance companies. One of our biggest challenges with the TLA scheme is the stipulations insurance companies put on the repairs. A lot of our customers tell us that the insurance company have told them they have to use non-genuine parts, but with the TLA scheme we can be a lot more competitive with our prices.

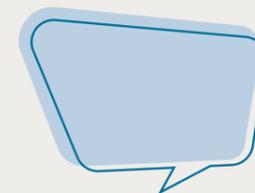
"In 2021, we are planning to work with more insurance companies who see the benefit of the TLA scheme."

Similarly, Lee and his team are making leaps forward with the TPS Genuine Pricing programme.

Lee adds: "As with TLA, the bodyshops are increasingly seeing the benefits of TPS Genuine Pricing, which includes offering discounts on parts that we know customers can purchase on the aftermarket. As a result, we have over 500 bodyshops live with us.

"In 2021, to further increase our competitiveness, we aim to increase the models of vehicles that sit within our TPS Genuine Pricing criteria, which means the opportunity to quote for work will go up from 4,000 per month to 10,000 per month."

In 2020, TPS National received 33,224 quotes from its customers on vehicles they were able to offer support for – an average of 3,750 quotes per month.



POOLE-ING RESOURCES WITH TPS TO KEEP VEHICLES ON THE ROAD

We chat with Brian Singer, General Manager at Poole Accident Repair, a Volkswagen Group approved bodyshop and repair centre based on the South Coast.

The award-winning Poole repair centre is part of the wider Ocean Automotive Group, one of the UK's leading automotive groups operating across multiple sites in both Dorset and Somerset.

Poole Accident Repair has been a customer of TPS for over a decade. They appreciate the quality parts and services offered. TPS meets their company values, benefits Volkswagen Group Drivers, and assists in ensuring the vehicles they repair are returned meeting the high standards that the Volkswagen Group intended. This also included a recent Audi R8 repair that provided the workshop with one of its most challenging and yet rewarding projects to date.

Brian said: "As an approved body repair centre, we have manufacturer approvals for a wide range of brands that includes Bentley, Porsche, Volvo, Tesla and Volkswagen Group UK.

"As with all our manufacturer approvals, we are committed to using only genuine manufacturer parts on any vehicle we repair. Our ambition is always to keep our customer's vehicle on the road and the excellent support provided by TPS National gives us every opportunity to do exactly that on Volkswagen Group vehicles.

"In 2020, we carried out quite a few large repairs requiring a considerable amount of parts support from TPS National and commend their efficiency in helping get those repairs completed.

"The assistance provided by TPS National during the lockdown months has been particularly welcomed. During the first lockdown, TPS kept running and that helped us continue to work our way through it. The parts supply and the efficiency of the systems was so good, that at times it did not feel like we were in the midst of a pandemic.

"From beginning to end, with TPS National it's a straightforward process and that's one of the great benefits of working with them. We can get an estimate quickly on the parts support we need for a particular job, and that allows us to communicate swiftly with the insurance company and our customer.

"With the Audi R8 repair that we worked on, the support from TPS National has helped us considerably in our negotiations with the insurance company, and gave our customer peace of mind that the car would be restored to its original specification with Volkswagen Group Genuine Parts.

"The R8 is a very complex and challenging repair, but it's been made easier through the availability of Genuine Parts. There are a lot of specific parts required, but with TPS keeping us constantly up-to-date on availability, we're able to update our customer and progress the repair in the most efficient way possible.

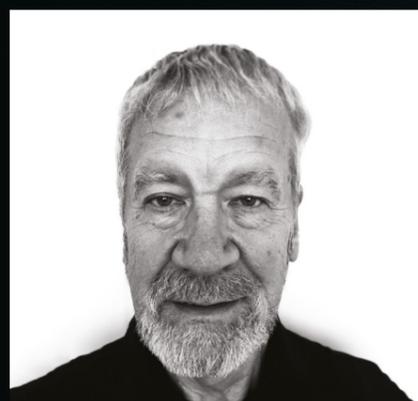
"The main benefits of working with TPS is the simplicity of the process. The channels of communication for the Volkswagen Group marques are always open and you are always kept up-to-date on parts supply, which is essential when working to tight repair schedules.

"We worked a great deal with TPS last year, despite all the challenges that were going on with the pandemic, and it will be the same again this year. Both TPS and ourselves are in the business of keeping quality vehicles on the road – and long may we continue doing that."



AUDI A2: AN ICON AHEAD OF ITS TIME

For a car that supposedly evolved from the creative brief “Transport four people from Stuttgart to Milan on a single tank of petrol”, there is a lot more to the Audi A2 than the miles per gallon achieved.



Steve Birchall is our latest contributor to choose a Volkswagen Group Icon. For the day job, he works as a computer consultant, but out of hours, Steve is happily swapping megabytes for modifying as he puts the work in on his beloved Audi A2, our latest Group Icon.

As a car modifier for almost 50 years, Steve has worked on a variety of projects. They include a London black cab, to which he added an 8.2 litre V8 engine, but it's his passion for the Audi A2 TDI that really turbocharges his interest.

For a car that supposedly evolved from the creative brief “Transport four people from Stuttgart to Milan on a single tank of petrol”, there is a lot more to the Audi A2 than the miles per gallon (mpg) achieved.

The A2 does indeed boast some impressive fuel efficiency stats – a 140mpg best on the 1.2 version and 60mpg average for the TDI version – but that tells only a fraction of the story of this small car with a big reputation for innovation.

It made its debut as a concept car at the Frankfurt Motor Show in 1997, the first time Audi made public their plans to launch an aluminium-bodied model for the supermini segment. The decision was a bold move, with the A2 only the second model at the time after the A8 to be built based on Audi's revolutionary space frame design.

Steve said: “The A2 is a phenomenal car, so much so that we have 7 of them in our immediate family. They are very special and so much fun to drive. The A2 I bought for my 17-year old grandson has 232,000 miles but it runs as well as any of the low mileage ones we have. It's incredible to think they first came off the production line over 20 years ago and here we are now all still enjoying the benefits.”

The A2 was produced at Audi's “aluminium” Neckarsulm plant in Germany on a special line purpose built for it. Audi was the first manufacturer to try to incorporate lightweight building concepts using aluminium and associated alloys into a “mass market” vehicle.

Alongside the A2's revolutionary aluminium frame and great mpg stats, the 1.2 version was the first car to be launched with an eco-mode. The Audi A2 1.2 TDI version had the lowest drag co-efficient for any car at the time of its launch. And the roll call of innovation doesn't end there.

Moving away from the engine and into the vehicle's interior, there is innovation in space efficiency and all-round roominess that would put the Tardis to shame.

Steve adds: “The A2 really is like the Tardis, it's unbelievable how much interior space they have. At times, you think you could get a couple of washing machines in there! They are so practical and it's part of the appeal of them.”

The interior of the Audi A2 is a magic box of innovative design features that help to make it one of the most space-efficient vehicles of all time. It has a very large interior space relative to its exterior dimensions, including a boot with 390 litres (13.8 cu ft) of space that is significantly larger than the luggage space of the next model in Audi's range, the A3.

The boot was in fact a double (false) floor boot, where items could be hidden from thieves or where the space saver spare wheel could be stored. An innovative space floor storage system also included a box that slotted in the rear passenger foot well,

a rear cup holder which unclipped, and a toolkit, which depending on equipment, was stored next to the battery.

Another unusual design feature, situated at the front of the car, was the “Serviceklappe” or translated into English, the “service panel”. A key feature of early models, this was a black panel located at the lower edge of the bonnet, with filling points for oil and screen wash fluid and the dipstick, that helped reduce the number of times the bonnet had to be raised. It's the kind of standout feature that marked the A2 out from other models and helped to eventually seal its iconic status.

Despite its reputation for innovation, the Audi A2 was not a huge market success and as a result its production run ended in 2005. Since then the Audi A2, particularly those early models, has seen rapidly diminishing numbers, with the car now living on through dedicated enthusiasts like Steve and his fellow A2 club members. For more information on the club visit www.a2oc.net.

Steve adds: “There is a real sense of community with the A2 members' club. It's not about ego or showing off the most powerful car, it's all about people who have a passion for their cars and love to drive them. With so many enthusiasts now driving them, they really are on the cusp of being a modern classic and are truly deserving of that status.”

Overall, the A2 remains remarkably fresh for a car entering its third decade. It proved that small cars could be radical and different, pushing the boundaries of design innovation to a level that marked it out as a vehicle way ahead of its time.

Its reputation for innovation makes it truly deserving of its place in the Hall of Fame. A small car with big tyre tracks to fill for those seeking to achieve similar iconic status in the future.

LOCAL HEROES

HOW INDEPENDENT GARAGES ARE RISING TO THE CHALLENGE IN CHANGING TIMES

CURTIS HUTCHINSON REPORTS



2020 was a bruising year for the independent garage repair sector. With lockdowns, fire breaks, circuit-breakers and tiered restrictions all severely impacting the way garages operated.

Yet the sector also displayed remarkable resilience. It adapted to the national lockdown in March – having been given the green light to remain open for repairs and servicing work – and worked hard to keep essential workers safe and mobile.

These experiences proved invaluable as garages subsequently faced the challenges of responding to fast changing regional and national restrictions caused by the pandemic.

It was also a time of confusion.

The government's move at the end of March to grant car, van and motorcycle owners a six-month extension to their MOT test was implemented to reduce unnecessary journeys and maintain newly enforced social distancing rules. But with independent garages carrying out 80% of the UK's 30 million yearly MOT tests¹, it had a significant impact on revenue streams and prompted the furloughing of under-utilised technicians.

However, the lifting of the exemption from the beginning of August opened the floodgates. The Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) reported an additional 310,000 MOTs were conducted in August, equating to an extra 10,000 tests conducted every day of the month.²

This presented garages with a logistical nightmare requiring them to staff-up and work flat-out to satisfy the higher than normal demand for MOTs which lasted through to the end of 2020.

The ramifications of the extension are continuing to be felt this year with garages now preparing for a significant fall in demand for MOTs from April, the first anniversary of the extension.

For Hayley Pells, the second-generation owner of the family-run Avia Autos in Bridgend, Wales, this is all part of the challenges she faces of running a busy local garage.

"April 2021 is a major concern. As a sector we're expecting to see MOT tests drop between 35-40% of normal levels in April because of the impact of the extension. I think this legacy will continue to be felt each year until new car sales drop into that month and start to reduce that gaping ravine of absent work," she said.

The business already has contingency plans in place with a planned shutdown of her site in April, enabling the four-strong team to have a well-deserved break, while also giving her time to overhaul the workshop's maintenance schedule.

However, Pells believes some garages will be caught out and could be seriously impacted by the abrupt fall in demand for MOT work.



"The drop-off in April will have a major impact on garages that are not prepared. There will be closures as it will be difficult to sustain that interruption to cash-flow after the year we've just had; not everyone will be able to sweat it out," she said.

Ahead of the planned shutdown Pells says the business will go into "communication overdrive" to inform customers of its plans and encourage them to book vehicles in for service, repair and MOT work before April and from May onwards.

As a business Avia Autos has built a strong local reputation and punched above its weight on the national stage, having won Automechanika's highly coveted Garage of the Year Award in 2019 and the Motor Ombudsman's 2020 Garage Star Award for Wales.

Like all independent garages Avia also competes against national chains, something Pells is comfortable with as she believes her business has a strong local focus which has created a loyal customer base.

"I can't demand loyalty from my customers, but I would like to think that informed choices on transparent services allows them to make the best possible judgement about using us.

"My business is very different from a big national chain, it's one that local customers can depend on. I have an excellent team and we are doing our bit to raise standards in the independent garage sector and don't feel there needs to be an "us and them".

Finally, Pells believes lessons learned in 2020 places her garage in a strong position to tackle whatever 2021 has in store.

"I believe in over-communication as a successful marketing strategy and we are truly fortunate to have been robust in this area before the pandemic. So, during the lockdowns and fire break, we were able to work with local media organisations and use social media to communicate with our customers."

Curtis Hutchinson is a B2B motoring journalist and former editor of Motor Trader and Company Car.

Sources:

1. IGA, 26 March 2020. 2. Driver and Vehicle Standards Authority, 9 October 2020. 3. IMI, 7 December 2020

SKILLS IN DEMAND



In the months ahead, independent garages will continue to face the ebb and flow challenge of balancing workshop staffing levels with customer demand, following the long-term impact of the MOT extension and the possibility of further lockdowns.

Autotech Recruit, which specialises in the placement of vehicle technicians on a temporary basis, helped garages maintain staffing levels when the pandemic hit last year. Its CEO Gavin White believes independents were at the sharp end and, without the security of an OEM to fall back on, worked hard to keep their businesses going.

"Since August, many garages have been working around the clock to deal with the backlog, and this has been further compounded by the MOT exemption. There is a lot of fatigue out there, coupled with absenteeism. Garages are turning to temporary solutions to help them run at full capacity and meet demand," he said.

The pandemic has also setback the sector's drive to upskill technicians to prepare for higher volumes of electric vehicles (EVs), plug-in hybrids and hybrids entering independent garages.

The Institute of the Motor Industry estimates³ that only 5% of the current vehicle technician workforce are qualified to work on these vehicles, an issue brought to the fore following the government announcing the ban of new petrol and diesel engine car sales from 2030.

"With the vaccine, I would like to think that upskilling, particularly in the case of EVs, will be pushed to the top of the agenda in 2021," said White.

"The industry also needs to focus its attention on creating a new pipeline of young talent which will sustain the industry in generations to come. The sector saw an 87% fall in apprentice recruitment during the pandemic and we need to turn this around."

MAKING THE RIGHT SOCIAL CONNECTIONS TO BOOST YOUR BUSINESS



As customer interaction continues to shift towards digital platforms, social media offers a great form of free advertising. In this edition of Business Builder, we look at how garages can benefit from using social media to help drive business growth, simply by giving it a bit of time each week.

Whether you choose to focus on one social media platform or multiple platforms, it is important to get the fundamental details for your business on there. This includes full business name, website and contact details – adding these things may seem basic but they are great for SEO (search engine optimisation).



To download a content calendar ready to use, scan the QR code, or visit tps.trade/content-calendar

Facebook also has a dedicated section for business hours, so it is important that customers know when they can contact you. You will find these under the 'About' section when editing your Facebook page.

If you want to make social media work for your business, it is key to find the time to keep your page up to date. We recommend creating a **content calendar** to plan what you want to discuss and draft short posts.

If you are unsure on what content to post, start with the **80-20% rule**. Use 80% of your content to inform and entertain your audience and the remaining 20% to sell your brand – this way, you can focus on building a rapport with your audience, keeping them inspired and satisfying the interests of both parties.

When looking to entertain and inform your followers, either create your own content or post links to third party content sites. They can be links such as tips on MOT testing <https://mattersoftesting.blog.gov.uk/> or the UK's favourite car programme <https://www.topgear.com/>. It's entirely up to you what you post, just ensure that it follows the 80% rule to reach maximum engagement potential.

It's important that your audience doesn't feel they're constantly being sold to. By following your page, they gain access to informative content that they're happy to have on their personal feeds.

Don't feel the need to post every day. Focus your time on quality rather than quantity. Your audience will value your content more if you do so and will not expect you to give them something new every day.

By reducing this pressure, you can focus your time on making real, honest, and great content. Customers are more likely to use garages they can trust, so being honest and approachable will help build relationships online too.

When it comes to the content itself, we always recommend publishing a post with an asset, whether this be a video or a still image. If you are feeling creative, try your hand at creating a brand asset. There are some great online tools for businesses to use – for example, [canva.com](https://www.canva.com) has ready-made templates for social media posts and banners.

It's estimated that 98% of Facebook users access this platform through their mobile device, so bear that in mind for your content too. If an asset is too small for suitable phone viewing, it is likely that your customer is going to struggle to view it too.

The fact that so many users access websites and apps via their phones has increased the demand for swift responses. That's ok, you can manage Facebook, Twitter and Instagram from your mobile. Plus, you can set up automated responses to let customers know you'll get back to them in time.

If you're able to draft more than one post, you can also pre-schedule content on Facebook. On a Business Page, go to 'Creator Studio', and here you will see all of your posts on Facebook and Instagram. You can post content instantly, or schedule it for a time that works better for you or the content.



VDS – IN TUNE WITH SOCIAL MEDIA TO BOOST BUSINESS PERFORMANCE

Meet James Etherington, owner of VDS Performance, an independent garage based just outside Redhill, Surrey. VDS offers everything from servicing and repairs to performance upgrades, and specialises in Volkswagen Group vehicles. James discusses how social media provided a platform to turbo boost his business fortunes.

Q: Tell us about your business?

I started VDS Performance back in 2015 having worked for another local specialist for many years. I have always been a Volkswagen Group enthusiast, in fact my first car was a MK1 Golf, and I have specialised in the brand since starting my career some 18 years ago!

Q: How has the pandemic affected your business?

It has been an interesting 12 months, that's for sure. We did experience a pronounced drop in demand and turnover in 2020, particularly during the lockdown period. However, overall, I am very grateful the motor trade was allowed to remain open, as that has kept us going. We also made a few changes to how we operate the business, including reducing the number of customers visiting the site, offering a courtesy collection/delivery service to all customers and wiping down vehicles before and after they have been worked on.

Q: How has social media directly benefited your business?

It's been hugely beneficial. It's amazing sometimes how one post on something can drum up so much interest and it's not always the post you think people will find the most interesting that turns out to be the most popular.

By posting about a job that you have recently completed, it can often lead to several more people enquiring about the same job and ultimately them becoming customers.

Q: What social media platforms are you on and what is so effective about them?

Facebook and Instagram are the two platforms I currently use. It's important to use the right platform for the right type of customer. Facebook generally attracts an older age group, so that's great for day-to-day service and repair work and related posts for the type of customers I target. Instagram is used a lot more by the younger generation, so that's good for the more interesting jobs like the tuning work.

Q: How important is social media in your overall marketing strategy?

Social media is so important nowadays. It has almost overtaken the average website as the initial 'go-to' place to research a company. Previously I would come into work in the morning to find a handful of answerphone messages left overnight, but now I deal with as many enquiries outside of working hours as during the day through social media platforms and private messaging. The use of social media has helped the reach of many businesses, including my own.

Q: Do you plan to expand your social media activity in the next 12 months?

Going forward, I would like to do a bit more on social media, with more regular updates and further info about the business. However, I am happy with where the business is right now.

Q: If so, how does this fit with your overall business plan?

Once we are 'back to normal', the plan is still to expand the business with new premises and staff and that will go hand-in-hand with an increased social media presence.

Q: Without giving too much away, what would be your top tips for businesses looking to use social media?

As with all marketing, it's important to understand what you are trying to achieve and who your target audience is. Conduct an audit to review who your followers are and from what age group etc. I would also advise posting regular, relevant content to engage with your followers and provide links on how they can contact you for further information. It's important to remember you are not necessarily trying to make a sale with every post you make, but each post will help to build brand awareness.

HOW FRIENDS REUNITED BECAME A KEY CUSTOMER ACCOUNT

For this edition, we're chatting to John Norrington, TPS Norwich Centre Manager, and Alfonso Piccoli, owner of Piccolino Engineering, about how the two former college friends were reunited after 30 years following a chance parts delivery to Alfonso's garage. Following the reunion, John and Alfonso have maintained both their friendship and professional relationship, with Alfonso's business remaining one of TPS Norwich's most valued customers.

John and Alfonso pick up the story, beginning with that chance first visit to Alfonso's garage...



THE REUNION AND BEYOND...
**TPS NORWICH CENTRE MANAGER,
JOHN NORRINGTON**

Q: So tell us, how's it going working with an old college friend?

Incredibly well. The relationship has benefits for both of us. As Alf's garage is only 11 miles from my home and on my daily route to TPS Norwich he has the benefit of me taking parts home at night for an early morning delivery. Alf calls me regularly to discuss many items with regards to Volkswagen Group vehicles.

Q: How much of a surprise was it to you when you found out he was working in the garage business?

A massive shock. I delivered some parts there and immediately recognised a certificate mounted on his wall from Havering Technical College in Essex. I have the exact same certificate. To then come face-to-face with Alfonso who I'd not seen since 1981 was really amazing!

Q: Did you both share a mutual interest in cars back in college?

We were both completing a City & Guilds Motor Technicians course as part of our 5-year apprenticeships, so the Motor Industry has been our whole working life.

Q: What's it like to have a former college friend as a longstanding TPS customer?

Alfonso has been using TPS Norwich for 14 years now and has become friends with most of the staff. He has remained a loyal and valued customer throughout.

Q: Do you both know of any more college friends working in the aftermarket sector?

Another friend from the class of 76-81 worked for Alfonso as a Technician, with another as an RAC patrol man in Essex who I also still see on a regular basis.

Q: Tell us more about your role as TPS Centre Manager and how this has changed since you started back in 2007?

The TPS Centre Manager role today is different to what it was in 2007. Our focus now is much more about building customer relationships and achieving high customer satisfaction levels based on the service we deliver. For instance, while Alfonso is a valued friend, he is first and foremost a valued customer and this is the approach we take with all our customers in the business.

Q: TPS Norwich moved locations a year ago, what have been the benefits of the new site?

We've been in the new location for one year now as we had simply outgrown the Paddock Street site and needed bigger premises to serve our increasing customer base.

The move to the new location has benefited both staff and customers alike. From a staff perspective, it's boosted morale and really helped focus everyone in their determination to make the move succeed. Our customers are also very positive about the move, as it has helped increase our capabilities and enabled us to service a wider range of territories. Overall, it's been a good move for everyone involved.

Q: Have you done anything special to commemorate the one-year anniversary move to the site?

6th December 2020 was our first anniversary in the new site, and 17th January 2021 was TPS Norwich's fourteenth anniversary of being the fourth Centre in the network to open, so we have a double celebration to have when things get back to normal.



THE REUNION AND BEYOND...
**ALFONSO PICCOLI, OWNER OF PICCOLINO
ENGINEERING LTD**

Q: So, tell us how it is working with an old college friend?

Communication is so much easier when your business contact is also a long standing friend. John appreciates our business, and this is reciprocated.

Q: How much of a surprise was it to you when you found out he was working in the same line of business?

Sometimes people disappear from your lives, I was so surprised and pleased when John walked into our reception back in 2007. It was good to reconnect again and rekindle relationships from the past.

Q: Did you both share a mutual interest in cars back in college?

We both went to the same college together for five years and shared a great passion for cars.

Q: It must be good to have a trusted friendship in your working relationship?

We communicate on a regular basis and have a great mutual respect for each other.

Q: Describe your working relationship with TPS and what are the benefits of working with them?

I get along well with everyone at TPS Norwich, I respect their knowledge and vast experience. I feel I have a special relationship with them, and they have a very respectful working ethos with me. They are always extremely professional in all my dealings with them.

Q: Do you both know of any more college friends working in the aftermarket sector?

Another of our college friends was employed by me as a Technician for many years before he went on to a field-based role.

Q: Tell us more about your business?

I opened Piccolino Engineering in 1986 and we have experienced a massive growth in our customer database ever since. Based on the RAF Marham site, we have provided a service for the surrounding areas. I have over 45 years of experience and coupled with a consistent track record of excellent workmanship, Piccolino Engineering now offers a comprehensive range of services to our clients.

Q: What's the business plan for the next 12 months?

After 45 years we have built-up a number of exclusive clients who we now service and repair their fleets of vehicles. This work alone is enough to keep us busy on a constant basis.

At the moment we are considering restricting our work levels to these clients only so that I can take a well-deserved and overdue rest.



MEET THE TPS SUPERHEROES OF 2020

At TPS, we recognise that our customers are the true heroes in keeping vehicles on the road – going the extra mile in support of their drivers and always delivering to the highest professional standards. This is why we created the Superhero programme, to provide an opportunity for employees to nominate colleagues who have excelled in their roles and always delivered outstanding service.

So, let us introduce some of the TPS Superheroes of 2020.



NAME
Michael Dougan

CENTRE
TPS Glasgow North East

JOB ROLE
Apprentice

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES
Providing a high level of customer service at all times, understanding customer requirements, achieving the highest possible customer satisfaction scores for the Centre, responding to customer requests face-to-face and on the phone and applying technical knowledge to provide expert advice.

RECOGNISED FOR
TPS Apprentice of the Year

QUOTE
"One of the most enjoyable parts of the job is speaking with the customers and growing relationships, so it's fantastic to have that recognised through the Superheroes programme."



NAME
Dan Corber

CENTRE
TPS Exeter

JOB ROLE
Warehouse Manager

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES
Providing a high level of service to customers by managing the handling and timely delivery of stock, and working with the sales team to deliver exceptional customer experience.

RECOGNISED FOR
TPS Warehouse Manager of the Year

QUOTE
"I was absolutely buzzing, not just for myself but my colleagues as well. They have helped me oversee some massive improvements with the warehouse which has really helped benefit our customers, so it really felt like a win for the team, not just me!"



NAME
Josh Green

CENTRE
TPS Shrewsbury

JOB ROLE
Parts Sales Executive

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES
Building strong working relationships with customers, providing high level of customer service, handling incoming calls and customer enquiries and identifying parts to meet customer sales requirements.

RECOGNISED FOR
TPS Parts Sales Executive of the Year

QUOTE
"It was a great feeling to win the award. I am a PSE but have recently been filling in as the Centre Manager, Sales Manager and Administrator. They are all different roles but with a common purpose of delivering the best possible service to our customers, which is what I enjoy most about them."



NAME
Sheri Peach

CENTRE
TPS Head Office

JOB ROLE
Operations Support Manager

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES
Management and development of all TPS support systems, maintaining and developing the quality environment embedded across TPS via Brand Standards audits and providing operational support to TPS Centres.

RECOGNISED FOR
TPS Head Office Member of the Year

QUOTE
"It's lovely to be recognised and I was overwhelmed that everyone took time to nominate and vote for me. The most enjoyable part of my role is the people, both the customers and across the TPS network. We would not be able to achieve such performance without working together."

For the full list of winners, please scan the QR code, or visit tps.trade/superheroes



**for Volkswagen Group
Genuine Parts**