The name Grass Roots is perhaps a bit of a misnomer. Things are so fast moving at the Wokingham-based company, which have just become both a BIGGA Golden Key supporter and co-sponsor of the BIGGA Golf Environment Competition along with Amazone, that there is scarcely time for the grass to grow under their feet never mind have a chance to take root.

The day I visited Jamie Bennett, Managing Director of the Grass Roots Trading Company, had just returned from inspecting the premises the company were due to moving into in the first week of this month (March), having spent much of the previous few weeks recruiting new staff for a major company expansion.

"I think we've probably been the most talked about company in the industry over the last few weeks," joked Jamie, the catalyst being a two-page recruitment advertisement in the December issue of Greenkeeper International asking for applications for an array of posts, including a veritable array of Business Development Managers, all on attractive salaries with enviable benefits.

"The answer to the question of 'what's happening at Grass Roots?' is the launch of the Genesis range of natural microbial products. That's where we have focused our investment practices in place combined with the amount of chemical that is presently used and this has pushed grass, and the soil it lives in, right to the limit.

"If I were to take a bacteria count from a domestic lawn and another from a golf green the lawn would be up here and the green down there," he asked as he held one hand at about eyebrow level and the other somewhere around his knees, adding, "When did you last see Fusarium on your lawn?"

"In simple terms the natural bacteria in the soil which are there to compete with the disease pathogens have been dramatically reduced by the chemicals which are not selective in what they damage."

However, Jamie feels that changes are taking place in the way we look at different ways of working - "We've lost 20% of our chemicals in the last two years and there will be a snowball effect" - and people are becoming a lot more socially conscious about the environment and recycling things.

Jamie is genuinely excited about the prospects for Genesis and the direction in which Grass Roots are now heading.

"In 18 months time we won't be selling anything but Genesis," he predicts. Each of the 18 Business Development Managers, who include some extremely well known Course Managers, have been equipped with a library of products, telephones and computers, giving them the ability to contact immediately and see how the Americans operate.

"They all being trained in Business Development and information technology," said Jamie who has also been taken up on the idea of setting up a Business Development Managers in Britain, as has been the case in the States. Jamie will train the staff in Business Development and offer them the opportunity to develop their own markets.

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Trading Company was initially a trading company. "We introduced a product base and then when a customer asked for a specific product we'd set up the deal. We'd source the product, ring four or five companies to get the best price then give a definite time for it to be delivered. If it didn't arrive the customer would get a discount for every day that it was late," explained Jamie.

"Over a period of a year we started with 900 products but now we have 18,000 in our product range which, on the whole, we can supply within 48 hours."

As you can imagine, with over 1,200 suppliers, it is an administration headache. "We have a financial controller who came from a company which turned over £60 million. We turn over a fraction of that but there is more paper work with us. It is an administration nightmare but it set us up in business."

Among the other innovative approaches taken by Grass Roots was to operate some unusual business hours. "We were the first company to operate between 7 and 9 in the morning than in the rest of the day."

To reinforce the benefits of the "one-stop shop" philosophy employed by Grass Roots they asked a greenkeeper to note how much time he spent talking to suppliers on the phone, chasing products, making enquiries and distributor meetings. "Over a six month period he spent over 180 hours doing this which, worked out over a year, relates to a month and a half worth of work. "Clubs are under enough pressure as it is without this additional burden and they know that if they phone us we can get them any product they need, in the time that they need it."

As well as products Grass Roots also supply manpower and this was particularly vital to one club a couple of years ago. "Just before a big competition the greenkeeping staff went out for a meal and all came down with food poisoning. I got a call, put a team together and we set the course up and sorted everything out," recalled Jamie.

Having operated from the Bennett home, and a old pig farm which was used for storage, Grass Roots moved to new premises in April '96 on an industrial estate in Finchampstead, near Wokingham. Such has been the rapid rate of growth these have become overly cramped for the company's latest expansion hence the need for new premises. "We smashed our first year target by 300% and achieved our first three years of objectives in the first 18 months. Our success was recognised by winning the Lloyd's Bank Small Business of the Year Award of which we were very proud!"

"The company always has and will continue to spend a significant proportion of its marketing budget on hospitality events. "Reps from other companies were very well known by their customers - they'd become friends, so it was difficult to pull customers from them."

"So we put on go-karting events, five-a-side football competitions, take them to top sporting events anything just to get to know our customers better," he said.

They also sponsor many of the local BIGGA Section events and run educational seminars free of charge. "This will continue and each of our Business Development Managers will have a budget to spend on market relations in their area."

The company also made strides when it took on Standard Golf at the beginning of last year. "While were were predominately South East based, Standard Golf were national and had a data base of 2,700 golf clubs. Standard Golf products are being used as incentives to companies who take on the Genesis products."

"We want to venture into Europe and then maybe global," said Jamie, who doesn't rule out the purchase of other companies to assist in this expansion.

It may be that they will sit down and think of a more appropriate company name. "Fast Track" perhaps...