

BIGGA's latest Golden Key company, Amenity Technology, has quickly become a recognisable name within the industry thanks to a combination of inspiration and perspiration. Scott MacCallum travelled to Reading to meet the team.

Growth industry



Gary Haines,
Stuart Ashworth,
Carl Crome and
Alex Wright



In terms of change there can be few equivalent industries to match fine turf over the last few years.

Keeping up with the growth and, more importantly, increasing levels of sophistication takes commitment, imagination, not to mention sheer hard work, but as Amenity Technology, BIGGA's latest Golden Key member, has proved the rewards are there.

The company started small in 1993, with just one man armed with a good idea, but it has grown out of all proportion to the extent that it

has recently moved into new premises in Reading, the fourth move in six years of trading; has 12 full time members of staff and an attractive set of product ranges packed with items which are becoming more and more popular with greenkeepers.

That original idea was to bring unique products into the market place and the key was to choose a time when the industry was ready for such a change.

"I saw niche market emerging because there was a lot of new golf club development at the time and

the demand for courses to sell themselves, and pay more attention to the cosmetics and presentation, was becoming much greater," said Managing Director, Carl Crome.

Having the idea is one thing but putting it into practice is quite another but Carl built solid foundations for the fledgling company by spending valuable time and effort researching his potential product base in the country which leads the way in such things - the USA.

"America has far outgrown us with 22,000 golf courses and still growing



An unusual addition to the office!

and so with much greater competition they had to learn to sell themselves and products have been developed which were perhaps five to ten years ahead of the UK," explained Carl.

He spent a number of months sourcing new products from America which were unavailable in the UK market.

"I brought these specialist products over to Britain and marketed them out through a distributor network. There was no-one else at the time doing the same thing."

It is a measure of the success the company has subsequently enjoyed, and Carl's ability to spot talent among the thousands of products available Stateside, that many are now established as key weapons in a British greenkeeper's armoury.

"Many of the products we brought over initially were thought of as no more than gimmicks and it is satisfying to see them now so well established."

Initially Amenity Technology's market tended to be clubs at the upper end of the game but this has now filtered down to the more regular members' clubs. The question of whether this has been caused by the golfers demand for a higher standard of golf course, or that education is reaching the level that greenkeepers are demanding better quality products elicits an answer from Carl of "Both".

"The education of the greenkeeper now is just streets ahead of where it was even five years ago but the golfer is also much more demanding."

Amenity Technology now concentrates its efforts on five product ranges and within these its own Research and Development division has introduced several own-brand products.

"When it comes to our own development we always try to avoid 'Me Too' products," said Stuart Ashworth, the company's Technical Director and a qualified soil scientist.

"Instead we try to come up with something which is better, more environmentally sound; better researched and with better back-up. In other words we are always trying to

improve on the quality of the products that are out there rather than coming up with another 8-0-0. We want to be one step ahead."

An area where much development is expected over the next few years is bio technology and Amenity Technology is making sure it can meet customer needs in that regard.

"People are becoming much more aware of the environment. There is always news about, whether it be genetically modified food, global warming or that having a 1.1 litre car will reduce your road tax and this rubs off at work too and we're thinking about how we can help the environment," said Stuart.

"One of our main fertiliser ranges is based on turkey manure so again we're turning one man's waste into another man's useful product. We are trying to cater for that need by providing environmentally sound products that can be used for a sustainable resource," he added.

The desire to avoid the "same again" mentality also goes for the imported products where the team can look at 100 products and end up only bringing one of them on board... if that.

"There has been real change in the last couple of years. Previously we would approach potential suppliers but now we are approached regularly by companies who want us to be their distributors. They have heard what we have done for other large name American suppliers like The Andersons and realise the potential we could offer them," said Carl.

"But we are limited by whether the potential product fits into our portfolio and has sufficient research and trial data to backup the suppliers claims," he added.

The company has an open management structure with regular meetings where all members are able to put forward their point of view.

"We have a very relaxed approach and hope that comes across to our customers," said Carl, and the easy banter within the team itself is proof of that approach.

They use a distributor network, which stretches the length and breadth of the country to reach their customers.

"We want greenkeepers to be able to deal with their local distributor so they can talk easily about our products, and receive high levels of service," said Sales Director, Gary Haines.

To keep the distributors up to speed on what are often highly advanced, technical products regu-

lar presentations are held to provide product information on the latest releases while Amenity Technology staff will often accompany distributors on greenkeeper visits or make visits themselves to learn what the end-user thinks about products or wants from future developments.

As well as developing its five product ranges Amenity Technology has made a conscious decision to raise the profile of the company recently.

"I don't think there can be many greenkeepers now who haven't heard of Amenity Technology," said Sales and Marketing Co-ordinator, Alex Wright, who charts this change over the last two and a half years.

"BIGGA has helped us in this regard as we have done a great deal of advertising in Greenkeeper International while BTME is also a superb opportunity for us to get to know our customers."

During Harrogate week Amenity Technology hosted a reception for up to 450 in the Old Swan Hotel. It is a friendly hands-on approach that has been well received by the nation's greenkeepers and is one which is now being taken beyond these shores. The team also understands that a selling job often has to be done to the committee, members and people who just play the course as well as the Course Manager or Head Greenkeeper.

"Often a product is bought by a club because it answers the demands that the club golfers have whether it be green indicator dye or colourant for lakes. If the membership is happy the greenkeepers job is much easier," said Gary.

"We are now moving into Europe and are doing particularly well throughout the EEC"

The decision to formalise the relationship between the company and BIGGA was taken through a genuine desire to make a contribution to greenkeeper education. "As I said earlier much of our success is based on our products being taken on by knowledgeable greenkeepers and anything we can do to assist with greenkeeper education obviously helps us as well as the profession," explained Carl.

While impressive, the growth and expansion of Amenity Technology over the last six years has been achieved in a measured fashion and feet have stayed very firmly on the ground.

"We have a long term strategy for Amenity Technology and that involves doing things the right way. We believe we do that," concluded Carl.



- The fertilisers include The Andersons and The Sustane ranges from America

- The golf equipment and accessories come from the Bayco range

- The Water Management range includes Crystal Clear, biological algae control and lake clarifier

- The Biotech range includes root enhancers and disease suppressants

- The wetting agents which include the new Drencher range