



Scott MacCallum met up with Hayter Sales and Marketing Director, Kim Macfie to chat about the company, the industry and the memorable Hayter Golf Competitions...

Quality assured



Mention the name Hayter to many greenkeepers and you might see their eyes begin to glaze over and their minds drifting off.

Don't be too concerned though as they are probably just thinking back to a wonderful memory from some Hayter Challenge or Hayter International Cup match they'd played in.

With 25 regional finals, five finals, not to mention all the Section qualifiers in the Challenge matches and two International Cups, one at West Lancashire Golf Club and the other in Atlanta, Georgia, the events, played over a five year period in the 90s, touched many BIGGA members and helped forge many lasting friendships.

At the heart of it all was Kim Macfie, Sales and Marketing Director of Hayter, who also retains wonderful memories of the events.

"I have to say that I cannot think of any particular instance throughout

the five years that we did it, that wasn't an absolute joy and pleasure to be a part of," said Kim, who personally attended all but one or two of the regional finals plus all the finals.

The Hayter International Cup in America was contested between teams of 10 greenkeepers representing the Americas and the Rest of the World - which was played on some superb courses including Peachtree and the Atlanta Athletic Club, which this month hosts the US PGA Championship.

"The match in America was just out of this world but having said that the one that sticks in my mind more than anything else was the excitement of that last match as it came down the 18th at West Lancashire. All the staff from the clubhouse, plus many of the members and all those who were playing in it were standing on the balcony and the atmosphere was electric. I'll never forget that until the day I die. It was just outstanding," reflected Kim, as we sat in the BIGGA Marquee at this year's Open Championship.

Hayter had taken the original decision to sponsor the Challenge Tournament - which gave every greenkeeper in the country a chance of competing for his Region in a team event which was always fiercely contested - in a bid to break into the golf market and add that particular sector to that of the municipal market where they were already strong.

"It was our vehicle to get

our name accepted in the golf market and I really do think it achieved that. It might have been an expensive way of doing it but we did set out what we achieved to do," said Kim, who estimated that Hayter spent between a quarter and half a million over the five year period.

Towards the end of the sponsorship agreement however Hayter concluded that in terms of golf you had to be a world player to make significant strides into the market.

"Hayter were never going to be a world player. We were going to be a niche player as we were in other markets. We are more interested in having a quality business than a quantity business and know we can't compete with the likes of John Deere and Toro in particular and with Textron, when they brought Jacobsen and Ransomes together."

Hayter therefore made the decision to keep its focus on the municipal business and to keep a finger hold in a couple of sectors within the golf market, particularly with its greens machine and its fairway five machine.

"I think that was the right decision. We had to make sure that the Hayter name stood for what we believed in. It had to be quality, and it had to go through the specialist dealers so people received a package of after sales and not just bought a product which cut grass. The customer had to be confident that the purchase was a decent investment and that perhaps wouldn't have happened if we'd tried to be all things to all people," he explained.

And with the golf market experiencing a temporary blip the policy has reaped dividends as Hayter has found itself weathering the commercial storms relatively well.

Above: Kim Macfie checks his busy schedule
Below: The participants in the second Hayter International Cup in Atlanta





"It's been a funny old year on both sides of the business - commercial and consumer. We are on budget and still profitable which bucks a lot of the trends because the industry has been going through a tough time with the weather and foot and mouth.

"Whether it has been by luck or good judgment the markets we are in have held up quite well. I'll leave others to decide which one it is," he joked.

Looking back at the Hayter Challenge and International Cups Kim admits that they didn't see a return on their investment over the period of the sponsorship agreement.

"In actual fact we've done more business with golf clubs since we stopped sponsoring that we did during the it."

Below: The unique Macfie follow-through



A slow sell?

"A very slow sell! I know the gestation period in this business can be very long but that's a bit much," said Kim, displaying the sort of humour which has made him so many friends within the greenkeeping industry.

However, he does see a potential market within golf clubs for another Hayter product which they perhaps didn't push until recently.

"The titivation of golf courses has become ever more important, and rightly so, but you don't have to cut those areas with a cylinder mower our Hayter Harrier was the first rear rotary to stripe the lawn when it was introduced in 1970. It doesn't have all the maintenance costs of a cylinder mower and it cuts bents as well and, low and behold, it will also collect leaves in the autumn. Over the years it has virtually wiped out what used to be the Suffolk Punch market.

"So there is no reason why that kind of machine, which costs less than the machines they are currently using, couldn't be used to cut ornamental and other similar areas and still have a nice finish. We are the market leader with this type of machine," said Kim, who kindly donates a Hayter Harrier as the main prize in the Great BIGGA Bunker Competition which is run in the Media Centre during The Open and has done for the last seven years.

Hayter changed hands last October but such is the autonomous nature of the company there has been no outward signs of any changes.

"Our previous owners Tomkins did a deal to sell ourselves and Murray, one of the three volume domestic grass cutting companies in the States, to D'Long an American based Chinese owned investment group.

"If anything we are even more autonomous now than we were before. Tony Burke, our Managing Director, and a man also well known to BIGGA members through the Hayter events, has only been to one board meeting in the States since we were bought over. We as a Board of Management for Hayter are left to run our company," explained Kim.

"We are still a British registered company in our own right although we are part of Murray, and now part of D'Long and we intend to remain that way because I think that gives us a strength," he added.

Kim is a true BIGGA enthusiast and as a respected voice within the industry is worth listening to when passing opinion on the Association.

"We've always had a good relationship with BIGGA but I think that we, as a supporter of the Association, have got to be aware of the limitations an organisation like BIGGA can have. It is so easy for people to snipe at organisations like BIGGA and I think it is unfair because it is like everything else - you only get out of something what you put into it and the people who are the most vociferous opponents of BIGGA are the people who do least for the organisation. It is up to us to find the right way to bring out the maximum benefit for both parties.

"I've always been very clear in saying that BIGGA does a good job for its members and I think that as a supplier to the industry, albeit a small supplier, I think we've got a part to play in ensuring that BIGGA is supported."

There is one area in which he does feel that BIGGA could make more of an impact.

"I think that the organisation has to look constantly at what it is offering its membership and I think that there are areas of lobbying that could be strengthened to give the membership a path to the powers that be.

"In our trade organisation, the AEA, we spend an inordinate amount of time trying to influence and keep up to date with all the legislation coming out of Brussels. We are weighed down with a plethora of legislation but lobbying is one of our main purposes and I think it could play a bigger role within BIGGA," said Kim.

Coming to the end of the interview the \$64,000 question has to be posed. Is there any chance of the Hayter International Cup being resurrected? You can see that Kim is desperate to give a different answer to the one he delivers.

"I would love it to be resurrected but that is the heart ruling the head. I think that unless we could find another sponsor to help us I don't see it happening," said Kim, who actually approached fellow Troon man and personal friend, Colin Montgomerie, to ask his assistance in finding sponsorship.

"I'd love it to happen because I really do think it did so much good for international relations in the fraternity of greenkeeping."

Hayter, and Kim Macfie, have a permanent place within that fraternity.

HAYTER