

An education in distribution

Croydon-based Electron Electronics is a worldwide distributor of electronic components to manufacturers, distributors, contractors, schools, colleges and universities. Its roots are firmly embedded in the education sector – indeed when the company was formed in 1984, its main function was the supply of electronic components to schools and colleges. Today, the company remains active in this sector, but has extended its customer-base to more industrial applications as *Dave Tudor* learned when he spoke to managing director, Noel Humphrey.

"I've never really regarded Electron as a specialist distributor," Noel reveals. "We stock everything from capacitors to semiconductors, but if necessary – as I do with some of our customers – I'm quite happy to stock specialised components in reasonable quantities if the demand warrants it. An example of this is some specialised connectors that I purchase from Metway. I buy these in for a single customer who places regular orders for them and it's an arrangement that works very well. If the demand is there and I can source it, I'll consider stocking any component, however obscure."

A to Z

Like many businesses, things started in a small way operating from home, but as business increased, the need for dedicated premises, particularly warehousing and storage space became essential and the company now occupies a 600ft² of real estate. Up until recently, Noel ran the business alone but he now has employed an additional person to help with the day-to-day running.

Noel cites Electron's product range as being a real A to Z offering, with much of the range being available on a next-day delivery. "The range we stock is almost entirely based on customer demand," Noel says. "At present we carry around 3,000 product lines encompassing cable, batteries and power products, semiconductors, connectors, motors, optoelectronics, relays and resistors, capacitors and fuses, soldering equipment and test equipment and because we are very much a stocking distributor, we always carry large quantities in our warehouse so lead-times to our customers are kept to a minimum. Also, we are always looking to expand our product portfolio and regularly take on new product lines to meet the needs of our customers and although I do have a selection of regular tried and trusted

suppliers that I use, both UK-based and overseas, I'm always looking for new opportunities."

Captured by the web

Much of Electron's business – as much as a third – is generated via the company's website, designed and maintained by Noel himself. "We've always featured highly on Google listings and what we're finding is that when people are looking for a specific component by part number, rather than component type, we're being listed and they come to our website," he remarks. "This has brought in a lot of new business, particularly in the export market where we have customers in Japan, the US and India and as well as the commercial advantages, the site is also a good resource for technical information such as product datasheets and I try to include as much regularly updated technical information as possible. For those customers that prefer it, we do still produce a hard copy catalogue and particularly in the education market, it's still the preferred way of viewing our component range."

As a stocking distributor, Noel believes the company can offer its customers real benefits in terms of supply chain management. "The role of the distributor is to act as the conduit between the customer and the product manufacturer, and we never forget that basic concept," he declares. "Our job is to stock the right products in the right quantities at all times so our customers don't have the headache of wondering where the next delivery will come from. It then makes it a simple task for them to get on the phone or fax or email an order, knowing that in most instances they can get product on a next day delivery. When we know that a product is on a long lead-time, we'll stock extra quantities to ensure that the supply chain and level of service isn't interrupted. Also in the case of product withdrawal,

we'll make every effort to source a viable alternative product for the customer. Our business is all about service and for this reason we're much more than just a shifter of parts. We can provide technical information on products for clients and offer advice and guidance on product selection and support. If we don't know the answer to a particular query, we'll contact the manufacturer direct on behalf of the customer."

Legislation matters

Protection of the environment is an issue that everyone in industry needs to take seriously and Noel is particularly proactive in this area. "Legislation aimed at protecting the environment is constantly emerging," says Noel. "The RoHS directive was implemented last year and fast on its heels is the WEEE legislation. From a personal point of view, we take environmental issues very seriously and wherever possible, try and recycle everything from paper to packaging. This was recognised by our local council last year and we were presented with a Silver Award in recognition of our endeavours towards preserving the environment. Naturally we're very proud of this achievement."

One of the advantages of being a relatively small company is that Noel can be flexible in responding quickly in responding to customer needs. "We offer a fast, friendly and honest service," assures Noel. "Our pricing is competitive and we're not afraid to stock product in large quantities here so our customers don't have to. In terms of service, I believe we really can compete and outperform some of the larger organisations."

Top tracking

Anglia has introduced significant enhancements to its PartTracker website which now automatically notifies users of any changes to parts already purchased, or of any termination of parts in the supply chain.

When a user logs into the site, a list is displayed that shows all Product Change Notifications (PCNs) and Product Termination Notifications (PTNs) relating to part numbers purchased from Anglia.

PartTracker was first launched just over a year ago, with the aim of providing a web-based information resource that keeps users up to date with the RoHS compliance status of parts on their BoMs. The same framework is now being used to keep customers informed of all the relevant changes to specifications or availability of purchased components.

David Pearson, Anglia's technical marketing manager elaborated: "PartTracker gives our customers immediate access to all the relevant data about the components they are interested in – including any changes to mechanical or



electrical specifications and whether they are scheduled to be discontinued. This gives the engineer or purchaser a high level of control over decisions on sourcing components for their products."

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Distributor recognition

Manufacturer of EMC filters and components, Schaffner has announced Farnell as the winner of its distributor of the year award for 2007. The award recognises sales performance and the close co-operation between the two companies on the introduction of new products in which Farnell has played a key role in the design phase.

Schaffner and Farnell have worked closely together to raise awareness about EMC compliance in the design engineering community ensuring EMC components are considered early in the design process and correctly specified.

Paul Dixon, managing director of Schaffner stated: "We are very pleased to make this award to Farnell and it marks a very successful, long-standing partnership. Farnell's business with us has shown continuous growth. In 2006, we saw a 29% increase in sales over the 2005 figure and we are looking forward to 2007 to find further opportunities to drive the relationship forward at an even greater pace."

Harriet Green, CEO of Premier Farnell, added: "Farnell is delighted to have been awarded this honour. Our extensive supplier portfolio, the expertise of our people and the commitment



[L-R] Ferdinand Leicher and Harriet Green of Farnell and Paul Dixon and Sam Williamson of Schaffner

we've put into our online support services have contributed significantly to our success. It is extremely gratifying for this to be recognised by our suppliers."

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