

From a converted garage in Glasgow to global expansion

Supagard is ready to make an impact on the world stage after an 18-month period of expansion and product development culminated in the creation of an expanding international accounts division.

The company, which started from humble beginnings in a Glaswegian house where the garage doubled as its warehouse, has grown so extensively it now dominates an entire street less than half-a-mile away.

But its family-run business ethos remains strong among its 50 employees and supplier network, as does its UK roots.

Apart from its original paint and protection product, which is still sourced from Switzerland, Supagard's product range, including fabric and leather protection, glass protection and a new tyre safety kit, is researched, developed and manufactured in the UK with processes such as logistics, marketing and worldwide distribution managed from its Scottish headquarters.

Following a restructuring, Supagard has now pooled its UK and international key account divisions to create one global team covering its core markets of Europe, the Middle East and Asia and is currently recruiting another two members.

Head of sales Alan Graham says: "There were so many synergies, since most of our clients trade worldwide themselves from large dealer groups to our 16 manufacturer partners. It also reflects the increasing

globalisation of trade; we can no longer think of the UK as an entity in itself but as part of a far more complex worldwide trading network. Our international arm took off at an extremely fast rate as a direct result of many of our UK clients having extensive international interests. Our name was well-established and our products well-known."

Despite its globalisation, Supagard remains fiercely British – using around 20 chemists based in three different labs nationwide, a fundamental part of its product development programme, while all raw materials are UK-sourced and UK suppliers undertake the manufacturing process.

Graham adds: "We pride ourselves on being a British company which relies on local suppliers. I also think our Britishness has been a crucial element in our international success, particularly in the automotive sector, where the British heritage is held in high regard."

The business has its own R&D department, which is also housed in one of the units in the mainly 'Supagard-owned' Gavinton Street.

Typically, a product is 'road tested' for around two years as part of the preparation for market, with technical and purchasing director James Smyth keeping a close eye on developments from the lab to bottle or aerosol.

Market firsts for the company include fabric and leather protection, and Smyth said the various bespoke formulas and the use of polymers are the building blocks of all its car protection products. He speaks of emulsified cream in the same way celebrity endorsers extol the virtues of beauty products to keep skin looking younger in TV ads.

Supagard continually refines and improves its product range, including the original Swiss-sourced paint and protection, with two of its latest products being its glass protection and tyre inflator.

With safety and protection being its core values, Smyth is quick to highlight how applying the glass protection product Supavision ensures maximum visibility in the harshest weather.

If you can follow the chemical process he describes, which allows the specially-formulated cleanser to penetrate the glass and remove impurities, the many intricate steps involved in bringing such a product to market is soon apparent.

"Visibility is much clearer," says Smyth. "The rainwater is quickly dispersed and runs off the windscreen for safer driving."

Likewise, Supagard's tyre inflation product is designed to enable the motorist to reach safety, particularly if a puncture happens on a motorway, as soon as possible. The product re-inflates the tyre and pumps latex to the affected area sealing the puncture so the car can be driven a short distance.

Smyth says: "It takes just two minutes;



customers open the valve on the tyre, attach the aerosol and it's done. It means you can drive your car to a safe place, although we have been told by some clients they have had customers who have managed to drive 20 or 30 miles to reach home.

"For us, it was about developing a product which makes driving safer so if you do have a puncture, and you're on the motorway or alone on a dark country road, you can apply a quick remedy which allows you to drive to a safer location."

Currently, Smyth and the Supagard R&D team is developing a product specifically for bodyshops to return used vehicles with a series of scratches, often as a result of car washing, to pristine, forecourt ready condition. Sold in one-litre bottles, Supagard is aiming to be the most competitively priced on the market and has already secured a £1m international deal with a large dealer group.

Supagard's international success has also had

additional implications for the company – with marketing director David Paterson continually needing to expand his team, incorporating bilingual marketers and translators as well as an in-house graphic designer and website specialists to launch the products in a variety of markets across the globe.

He said: "Everyone is based here in Glasgow because we wanted all employees to work together and feel a part of our team. The marketing department has grown substantially as a result of the international demand."

"James has a keen eye for detail and has been



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Alan Graham, Supagard



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