

# How the personal service is paying dividends



**"We are of a size that means we can give dealer groups a very personal service as we focus very much on the prime market, high-quality used and new"**

Alan Carson, Northridge Finance

**N**orthridge Finance's customer-focused philosophy has seen it prioritise both its clients and their customers to develop a range of innovative finance models and technology solutions.

In a marketplace where compliance and ease of application have risen to the top of the agenda for most dealerships, the business has not only developed its own unique funding solution through its Joint Venture product, but has turned to technology to simplify and streamline the sales process.

And at the heart of the business's thinking is to make services accessible whatever the time, wherever the location.

Northridge's Target365 product allows dealers and customers to work through a finance application together, on screen, in an easily understandable and transparent process designed to aid FCA compliance.

Its eDoc365 system means finance agreements can be signed electronically by customers. Future plans to develop off-site signing will make it possible to trade remotely at any time.

Northridge's new Go365 system has brought dealer finance tools into the salesperson's pocket with a smartphone-optimised app which allows the status of finance applications to be checked on the go.

Northridge sales director Alan Carson explained that transparency and a personal customer focus are central to the business's approach.

He said: "I'm sure every business in our sector would probably

claim the same thing, that putting the client first and offering a personal service is their main priority, but that is certainly the approach we take at Northridge.

"We're not one of the biggest industry operators by far – we currently fall in around about number five – but we are of a size that means we can give dealer groups a very personal service as we focus very much on the prime market, high quality used and new."

Northridge currently deals with seven of the AM100's top ten dealer groups and around 30 of the top 50, according to Carson.

Arnold Clark managing director Eddie Hawthorne is one partner keen to sing the business's praises. He said that it was "highly competitive on rate", but praised its flexible and responsive support service.

He added: "Alan and his team have worked very hard at developing the relationship with our company. I find them to be extremely professional and I would have no hesitation in recommending Northridge."

Northridge's unique Joint Venture proposition allows dealerships to deliver the perfect finance product to sell nearly new and ex-demonstrator vehicles in a market where the push towards bigger volumes is seeing newer products flooding into the used sector and margins squeezed as a result.

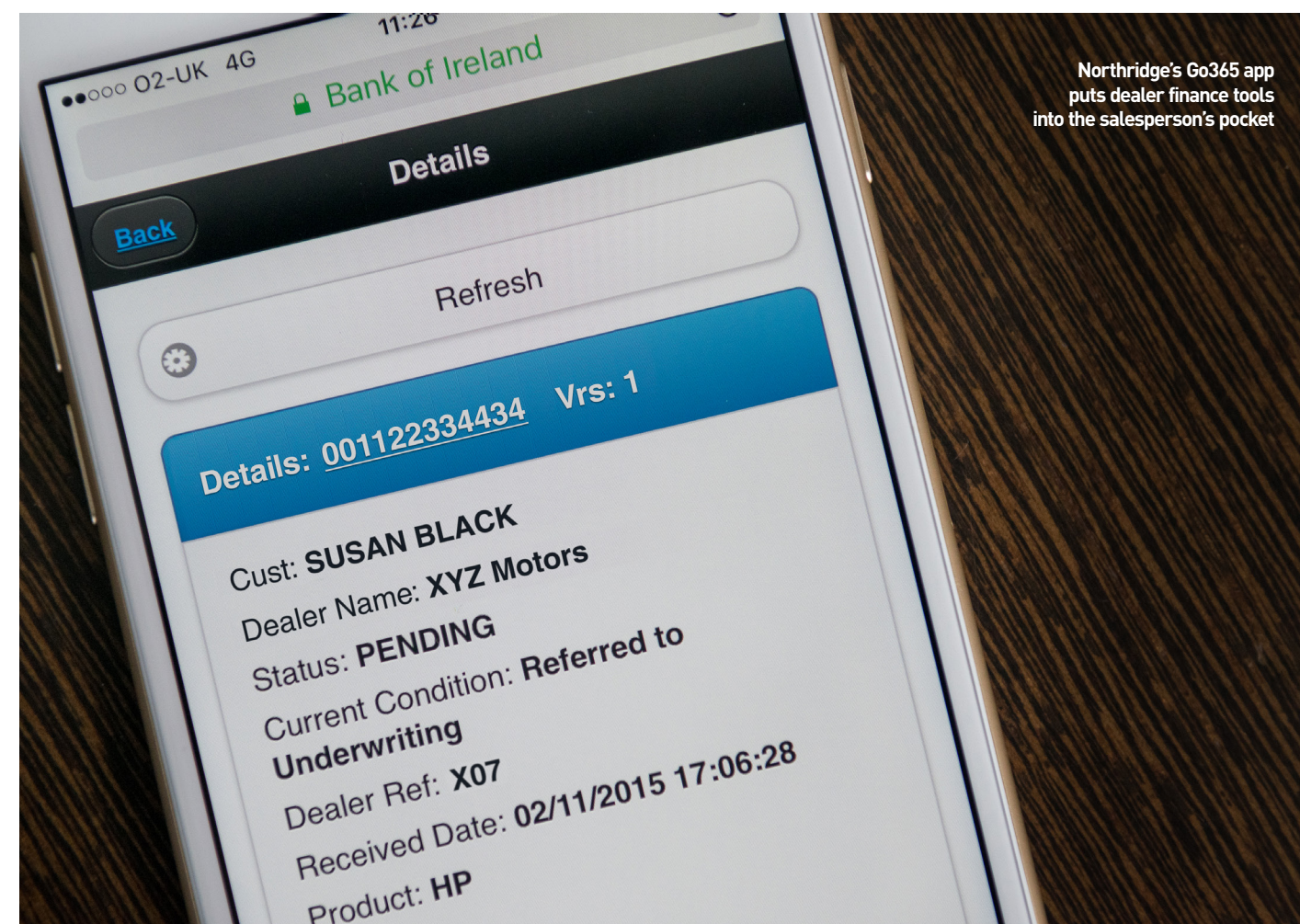
Named Best Finance Product at last year's Motor Finance Europe Awards in Munich, Joint Venture is a shared risk and reward arrangement, currently employed by 43 dealer groups, which allows dealers access to money market figures – which can deliver "very, very sharp base rates", said Carson.

Established with a small number of dealer groups in Northern Ireland almost 20 years ago, the offering now accounts for almost 20% of annual new business lending across the UK for Northridge.

Carson said that Joint Venture had been successful in raising finance penetration on the average forecourt by 5% and providing a valuable income stream for Northridge's partners.

Judges at the Motor Finance Europe Awards also recognised the benefits to end customers – who enjoy market-leading interest rates and cheaper repayments on their credit deals, leading to good customer outcomes.

Carson said: "Joint Venture allows Northridge's partners to compete with the very best finance offers on the market, offering really low rates which bring with them a level of flexibility that can liberate greater margins or facilitate the sale of ex-demon-



Northridge's Go365 app puts dealer finance tools into the salesperson's pocket

strator cars and nearly new vehicles, which might otherwise be difficult to sell at a profit.

"Of course the shared risk element of the offering means that Joint Venture isn't available to everyone – we have to be sure that we are entering into a partnership with a business on a sound financial footing – but it is a great solution."

The success of the Joint Venture offering saw Northridge team up with the IMI for a special ITN-produced feature as part of its recent "Driving Change" series.

Carson said that its transparency and flexibility was a reflection of Northridge's overall approach to the finance market.

Understanding that customers now want to complete the purchase of their vehicle within a single dealership visit has shaped its 365 range of technology solutions.

A significant proportion of proposals obtain immediate automated decisions, but of those requiring manual underwriting through eDoc, 90% are turned around in under 30 minutes.

Northridge, established in 1956 in Bangor, Northern Ireland, and bought by the Bank of Ireland



Group in 1984, has been a leading independent finance company on its home shores for three decades.

After entering the Scottish market in 1999 the business spread its influence into England and Wales in 2003.

The business now employs 130 members of staff and has a team of between four and five customer-facing account managers in each region within which it operates – a total tally of 32.

Carson said that the business wants to maintain the personal approach which has made the close relationships with its clients possible.

But it is also looking to grow and expand its influence with new dealer group partners.

Carson said: "Northridge volumes of lending are at the same level that we last experienced before 2008 and things are looking very positive.

"Of course we want to expand but we want to be sensible about our growth plans to ensure that the values of the business aren't compromised in any way at all. It's vital that we are known for our customer service and strong relationships with our clients."

As a result, Northridge focuses on establishing long term partnerships to enhance dealer finance offerings.

Even as an increasing number of customers choose to line up their own offers via online comparison tools before they reach the forecourt, Carson said that Northridge would always focus on being "an intermediary-based finance house."

He added: "We aim to be a partner, not the competitor. The dealerships we work with get the best offers available to us."

For more information, please visit [northridgefinance.com](http://northridgefinance.com)

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