



# Secure Valeting Group emerges stronger

**A**s Secure Valeting Group enters its 24th year, the company has emerged in a much stronger position from the pandemic than before the first lockdown was established.

When the nation's households and businesses began to batten down the hatches, the automotive sector closed its physical doors and began focusing on its virtual showrooms.

Secure's professional valeting, driver hire and auto imaging services were utilised by around 350 dealerships.

Over the past 15 months, Secure has continued to grow, gaining around 100 customers in that time.

The group also provides services to fleet businesses, vehicle auction groups and bodyshops as well as having relationships with dealer groups nationwide including many in the AM top 10.

It currently has 2,500 franchised valeters, known as operators, working in the field with around 1,000-1,500 actively working this week alone (June 9, 2021).

UK executive sales director

Michaela Gunney, one of the group's seven directors which formed part of a management buy-out (MBO), in 2019, pinpoints a number of reasons for its growth.

They include working closely with its dealer partners and operators to best manage costs and ensuring compliances are in place while its franchised business model meant its workforce remained well supported during the pandemic, enabling them to return to work quickly when the economy began reopening.

Gunney said: "Unfortunately, we have also gained business as a result of some competitors sadly going into administration.

"At the height of the pandemic, I took a call from one dealer group which suddenly found itself without a valeting partner. However, Secure was able to successfully launch this group along with an average 15 other new accounts per week."

Secure Valeting Group is now operating at more than 90% of its pre-pandemic levels on a like-for-like basis, while the additional sites, the

surge in used car sales and the demand for new services such as intensive vehicle sanitisation has seen activity in April and May increase even further.

The company had enjoyed an average growth of around 7% since its inception with a particular spurt in 2009/10 when growth topped 16%. Since the MBO, the business has been growing steadily year-on-year at around 7% albeit impacted by the pandemic in 2020.

### New services

As showroom doors reopened and a contactless sales process became the norm, the demand for increased sanitisation services skyrocketed as strict COVID-19 infection regulations were implemented. Even now, the demand for more intense sanitisation of vehicles following a service, test drive or as part of the vehicle preparation process, remains high.

Gunney said: "Secure is providing customers and dealers with the confidence they require to transact, whether that's sales or service. It is



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**MICHAELA GUNNEY**

something we have taken very seriously, we have devised our new sanitisation services to meet stringent hygiene standards and, wherever possible included this within our existing charging rates.

"I think this will be something that will be here to stay as we all adjust to life post-COVID with our heightened sense of cleanliness and sanitisation."

### Additional services

The company set up its imaging arm in 2017 when it became apparent that the ability to capture digital assets – images and video, to market a used vehicle online immediately and effectively following its prep and valet made sense, saving dealers time and improving efficiencies. Auto Imaging became a standalone company in 2019 as its services were in demand from dealerships in addition to those utilising its valeting facility.

Secure Valeting's field operators use the Auto Imaging app to capture digital assets of vehicles with nearly 10% of its dealerships taking advantage of this service. A further 20% of its dealership client base also use Auto Imaging although prefer its own sales team to capture vehicle photographs and video. Overall Auto Imaging sales were increasing each year by 70% (pre-pandemic) yet still increased by more than 30% in the pandemic year.

Secure's Driver Hire service provides drivers nationwide to help dealers meet the logistics of moving vehicles around the country including collection and delivery for bodyshops. This service is different from our normal franchised operator arrangement as it's based on an employed contract to be in line with HMRC status rules.

### Partnership

The franchised business model devised by Secure Valeting and approved by HMRC since its inception, provides the flexibility demanded by operators and the security of a reliable valeting workforce for dealers with the ability to scale up and down according to requirements. The model also means complications surrounding IR35 rules are negated as it sits outside the scope of IR35, providing assurances to clients.

Gunney said: "Our customers are



confident that our valeters are paid in line with the market. At the same time, our agreement with HMRC eliminates any issues surrounding employment status under IR35 and our compliance procedures ensure operators have legal status to work in the UK."

She added: "Mostly, valeters work at the same dealership and become an integral part of the dealer's team.

"However, our system allows flexibility, enabling us to deploy operators where needed to both reduce capacity and meet volume demands elsewhere while creating a higher level of income for individual operators. We see ourselves in strong partnerships with both our franchised operatives and our customers."

### Investment in technology

Secure Valeting's secure online



**Michaela Gunney**  
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booking system has formed a part of its offering for a number of years but the company made significant upgrades during the pandemic to improve functionality and efficiency such as automatically avoiding duplications on occasions when different departments may upload the same car.

The system enables dealers to control their costs since they can upload vehicle requirements determining the number of operators required on site.

Gunney said: "This means that dealers are able to have full control and oversight of their valeting requirements. This strong partnership, I believe, gives a guarantee to all clients that they will receive the best service possible."



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