

# REPUTATION & RELATIONSHIPS



Officeworx's **Howard Law**, business development, and **Katie Weyman**, marketing and sales, describe how the company balances a laid-back attitude with consistent diversification and strong customer relationships



## Tell us a little about your roles.

**Katie:** "I've been here nine years after coming straight from university. I do the marketing here – including the social media – as well as helping with sales."

**Howard:** "After a long history in retail with John Lewis I joined Officeworx on the business development side after it acquired a business in Kettering and needed a bit of extra help with managing the new customers, new staff and changing the way we do things."

## To what would you attribute the success Officeworx has enjoyed so far?

**Katie:** "The ability to constantly evolve. We started as print brokers over 30 years ago and, gradually, moved into office stationery. We do furniture now, as well as janitorial and catering. 10 years ago we merged – that's when we became Officeworx – which allowed us to also offer network cabling and IT installations – that's another side of the business. So we're always adding extra services and products to fulfil customers' needs so they can, basically, purchase everything from us."

**Howard:** "I agree with that but also I would say it's our reputation with our customers; we have a very loyal customer base who really do like doing business with us. We've had these customers for years and years, and it's always a pleasure to deal with them because they're nice people."

**Katie:** "You know these people, their history, their children – everything about

them! Every time you get an order you talk about holidays and their aunts and uncles, and I think that also adds to the constant relationship with someone. They like having a personality at the end of the 'phone.'"

## What are some of the biggest challenges the business has faced?

**Howard:** "In the last year one of the biggest challenges was taking on another company – the one based in Kettering – that wasn't historically ours, and bringing it into the Officeworx family. It was quite a militant style of management there, whereas we're very relaxed and flexible, so it was a shock for them! It was difficult to bring them in line with how we do things. They were a little resistant to change, whereas we're not. We're more 'Let's try it and see'. We always try everything, and every approach, and evaluate it and see how we get on."

**Katie:** "If it doesn't work, we don't do it next time. If it does, we improve it."

## So, what's your company culture like?

**Howard:** "Very focused on customer service. At John Lewis the ethos was really driven into me about customer service and I've brought that with me here. It's so important and, for our customers; the reason they keep coming back isn't the products, or their cost – it's about the way we do things. People like people and the brand. We can't compete with Amazon, and we can't pretend to be them, but what we can do is add the customer service element they can't do." »





**Officeworx has obviously gone through a great deal of change regarding its offerings – has that been guided by the customers or the suppliers?**

**Katie:** “Definitely the customers. We found that we were getting the sort of orders where people were not only asking for furniture but also needed a screen on the wall, or cabling for their computers because they were having a refit, so that product diversification was very much directed by customers because we were being asked for it. We always say to customers, just ask us and we’ll see if we can find it! We do get some really obscure requests but, 99% of the time, we can find a supplier we can source it from.”

Officeworx is a firm believer that businesses should be able to concentrate on what they do best – running their own companies. How do you empower them to do that?

**Howard:** “One of the biggest ways we’ve enabled this recently is by changing our back-house operating system to Prima. This eliminated a lot of paperwork for us, which helped in our responsibility to the environment, and also meant that the website was much better and slicker for our customers. It really was a back-to-back operation and enabled a lot of our customers

to move across and feel more comfortable; we’ve seen a massive rise in the number of people ordering through the internet which helps us and helps them save time.”

**Even so, does the customer still want face-to-face contact?**

**Katie:** “They do. We have more customers ordering online but, then, they still will call up if they haven’t got time to key those products into the system, or simply because they want to have a catch-up chat.”

**Howard:** “We also have a massive arsenal of suppliers we’ve been dealing with for years so we can’t put every single product on our website. If our customers can’t find it, they call us and we try to find a local Gloucestershire supplier.”

**What has been the biggest growth area for Officeworx?**

**Katie:** “Packaging is a big area for us, and we offer a wide range thanks to having a big variety of customers. We’ve also seen print make a comeback; it all went digital for a while but promotional printing with flyers and direct mail is growing again.”

**Howard:** “The networking and cabling side also continues to grow and grow. It got to the point in the summer where we couldn’t take

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on any more jobs because we were fully-booked, which is a nice situation to be in!”

**What’s your main focus for the future?**

**Howard:** “We’ve started Office Friendly’s Weaver programme and we’re aiming for gold accreditation. We were already very environmentally friendly in terms of having zero waste-to-landfill, and now we’re looking at using recycled packaging to ship out to customers.”

**Katie:** “We’re trying to educate the customers and advise them on the differences between green items and non-green items. There isn’t much difference in terms of the cost involved and, if we’re preaching that we’re environmentally friendly, we should help our customers be the same. It’s great that we’re doing it but, if we can spread that to more of our customer base, we’ll make a much bigger difference.”

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