



A GOOD PERFORMANCE ACKNOWLEDGED

Understanding what's important to your customers, and knowing how well you perform in their eyes is recognised as one of the keys to business success. One person's view is different from another's and a supplier's view may be different from that of the customers.

It's tempting and often easier to assume everything is fine and keep going on as you always have. But it's not a very sensible or sound way of building a business. Customer requirements change, competitors improve.

We believe strongly in keeping close to our customers and are always keen to hear feedback directly. But we also put our beliefs to the test by paying close attention to the annual cellular foam Benchmarks study, a highly respected industry report, published by Michael Rigby Associates.



TONY WALSH MANAGING DIRECTOR

So how did we do?

The findings were very positive for Freefoam.

- Overall, we exceeded customer expectations (i.e. rated greater than 100%) for
 - Colour-fastness (non-yellowing)
 - Product appearance
 - Comprehensive product range
 - Approachable responsive management
- In comparison with the 15 other cellular foam companies, Customers rated us 1st for
 - Colourfastness (non-yellowing)
 - Dealing with complaints
 - Ease of installation of product
 - Building close relationships with customers
 - Knowledgeable sales reps

BENCHMARKS - What is it?

The Benchmarks survey is a wide-ranging and comprehensive study of over 300 stockists, specifiers and installers within the PVC-UE industry. It reports on customers' views and opinions of their own cellular foam suppliers, and their perceptions and expectations of other suppliers within the industry.

Freefoam participated in the survey for the first time this year, and was one of 16 cellular foam manufacturers surveyed. Each participant was rated, individually and in comparison with the other suppliers, on their performance in 25 key criteria of primary interest to the stockist, specifier, and installer.

The benefits of participating in such a study are that we receive direct feedback from our customer base through an independent source, and we get an idea of our overall standing within the industry through perceptions of non-customers. It highlights what we are doing right and even more importantly, it draws attention to what we're not.

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BBA ACCREDITATION



Paul Diment, Freefoam Sales Director (right), receives BBA certificate from Alan Thomas of the BBA

Following recent accreditation for our roofline system, Freefoam are now one of only two PVC-UE companies to offer both BBA and IAB (Irish Agrément Board) certification. Having grown quickly in the domestic market by providing installers with the product range and service they demand, the BBA approval will help our customers to sell to the specification sector and fast growing new build roofline market.



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Ireland, south of the border, has a bit of a reputation. Easy going, slow moving, hospitable and relaxing, fond of racing and the drink are phrases that spring to mind. Stereotypes they might be, but these are descriptions that still feature in Irish travel brochures.

But all that's changing. The Irish economy, fuelled by a concentration of call centres, pharmaceutical, financial, computer hardware and software industries, is booming. Once famous for traditional Guinness, Irish Whiskey and horses, names like Hewlett Packard, Apple Computers and the drug Viagra are making headlines. Economists call it The Celtic Tiger. Housing starts have risen by nearly 50% since 1994, and house prices in Dublin and Cork have rocketed. Signs of building, infrastructure development and EU investment are everywhere. The windows and building plastics markets have been transformed.

Word is filtering through, but it still comes as a bit of a surprise to many in the UK that there are window systems and cellular foam extruders in the Republic, let alone substantial

ones. Yet in both window profile and cellular foam substantial Irish extruders, with significant investment in state of the art equipment and tooling, are now making their presence felt in the UK having achieved leading positions in Ireland.

Cork based, Freefoam Plastics Ltd. was founded in 1990 to manufacture cellular foam fascias and soffits exclusively for the Irish market. Two of the original founders, Tony Walsh, Managing Director, and George Cronin, Chairman, were joined by Aidan Harte, Finance Director and Paul Diment, the UK based Sales Director. Profits have been good and growth fast, with sales growing at over 20% per annum in the last three years. Turnover last year was just short of £11 million and there are no signs of a slowdown. The product range has also expanded and now includes rigid trims and mouldings, special plastic headed fixing pins for roofline and cladding, and plastic rainwater goods (gutters and down pipes).

From its first foray into the UK in 1993 Freefoam has steadily

PUTTING DOWN R



From left to right: Aidan H

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and ranked us 2nd for

- Competitive prices
- Order processing efficiency
- Effective sales representation
- Credit facilities
- Complete deliveries
- Product appearance
- Approachable and responsive management

Supporting these high ratings, actual comments from customers throw a more personal light on the findings:

"Value for money and diverse product range."

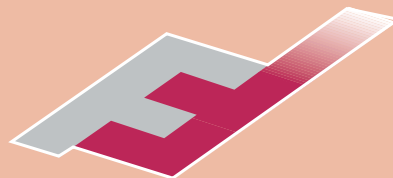
"The right products at the right price."

"Good quality materials, good distribution and good relationships with customers."

"Good price and good quality."

Tony Walsh, Managing Director of Freefoam, comments: "The results of this Benchmarks report are very encouraging. It's good to know that the effort we've put into our products, marketing and technical support is working for our customers. But we won't be resting on our laurels. As well as focusing on any areas where we haven't quite met our customers' high expectations, we will be working hard to maintain the high levels we've achieved over the last year."

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FREEFOAM O

All the indications are there not afford to do, is to ignore many in the mid 90s, the e ing fad now has an estima of the UK population, at ho E-Commerce, to British cor billion by the end of 2001.

Freefoam Plastics have rece trade and specifier referenc The site consists of 39 tech & graphics) detailing the e "We designed the content a Walsh, Freefoam Managing didn't compromise the gra Freefoam will be updating will also be introducing an



ROOTS IN THE UK



Freefoam extrude both hollow board PVC-U and PVC-UE cellular foam profile on two Krauss Maffei and seven Battenfeld extruders in a 73,000 square feet factory in Cork. An additional 20,000 square feet is available for expansion.

enlarged its stockist base and climbed the ranks of cellular foam systems companies.

"Although we're market leaders in cellular foam here in Ireland, we're still a relatively minor player in the UK," explains Managing Director, Tony Walsh. "We knew that if we were to continue to grow we'd have to put down roots in the UK. So last year we set up a distributor, Nat-Plas, to expand in Scotland, and currently we're investing in a distribution centre in a central location to service customers in England and Wales."

Freefoam are an ISO 9002 firm, and hold both Irish Agrément Board Certification and BBA approval in the UK. *"As the economy develops," continued Walsh, "more firms are working across borders. They want to use approved products wherever they work. Freefoam are the only cellular foam company with both approvals on a*

roofline system."

"Our Plastops range of plastic topped stainless steel fixing pins for roofline and cladding installations is now leader in Ireland and second in the UK," claims Walsh. "They're popular with installers who like the more robust design. Plastic heads that split or break under the hammer can be a real problem when you're up a ladder. And they've achieved BBA approval. The Plastops pins are made on two high output, insert injection moulding machines."

Three Battenfeld injection moulders produce fittings for roofline, cladding, and the new Freeflow range of rainwater goods. *"We aim to control as much as possible of the manufacturing process to achieve the highest quality," explains Walsh. "And we have a close relationship with a tooling company on the same site so product development is faster too."*

"Cellular foam is an exciting market," Tony Walsh insists. "Roofline is expanding fast, and it's got big potential. We're working on a number of new developments to help installers exploit those opportunities profitably. So watch this space."



arte, Tony Walsh, Paul Diment

-LINE - www.freefoam.com

. Get on-line or be left behind. Like it or hate it, one thing businesses can't deny is the impact of the World Wide Web. The Internet was condemned by many in the early days, as nothing more than a passing fad. Several years on, this passed into the mainstream with over 150 million users, attracting more than a quarter of the USA and 14% of the UK population at work. According to BT Internet, the value of online business, or e-commerce, for companies over the past 12 months was £400 million. This will grow to £12.9 billion by 2000.

Freefoam has recently launched their brand new web-site designed specifically for end-user, to help them get on-line. The site is not only visually and graphically charged pages, and 348 images (including photos of the Freefoam range of PVC-UE fascia, cladding and rainwater systems. The new layout of our site with the end-user firmly in mind", comments Tony Walsh, Managing Director. "We wanted a site that downloaded quickly, was user-active and contained high quality technical or informative content. Our developers delivered exactly that." Freefoam will update the site on a regular basis in order to keep it active and working, and they will be introducing an on-line ordering facility in the near-future.



BC Profiles get switched on

Barnsley based BC Profiles, installers and stockists of the Freefoam PVC-UE roofline and cladding system, believe that switching to Freefoam three years ago switched on sales in an increasingly competitive market.



ALAN BROWN, BC PROFILES IN BARNLSLEY

Alan Brown who runs distribution, together with co-director Ian Cooper who is responsible for roofline and window installations, comments: "Since changing over to Freefoam for our roofline and cladding supplies, our business has increased considerably. The products are equivalent to the leading brands we were using before, but their reliable service and competitive pricing has helped us capture a greater bite of our regional market. We plan to open a new depot in Sheffield soon."

NEW PRODUCT NEWS

FOXI is an Internal Corner

which saves time & trouble mitring corners



FOXI has Ogee mould

for a continuous ogee roofline effect

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Company: _____

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MEET THE FREEFOAM TEAM



EXECUTIVE TEAM



SALES DEPARTMENT

NEW APPOINTMENTS



KEN RHODES
Area = UK East Midlands



RALPH MITCHEL
Area = N.Ireland & Donegal



TRACEY STAFFORD
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