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Elwyns
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Providing Beautiful Windows and Doors for More Than Half a Century

Elwyns was originally started by Chris Blanks father in 1963. He was then in his early thirties and moved into Surrey from South London. Taking time to profile the family grown company is Managing Director, Chris Blanks who reveals more about the innovative business.

 Elwyns was originally started by my father in 1963. He was then in his early thirties and moved into Surrey from South London. His experience in the glass industry gave him the confidence to open a DIY store that would sell cut glass and timber. The name, Elwyns, was inherited from the shop that he purchased, which was the original village post office.

In the 60's, double glazing didn't exist, however secondary glazing was becoming a popular way of providing insulation against noise from a growing car industry, and heat loss as central heating was becoming more common.

In the years that followed, the company saw the residential market change rapidly with the introduction of the double glazed sealed units, aluminium frames and more recently PVCu. To keep at the forefront of such a fast-paced market, Elwyns started

manufacturing our own windows and doors in all materials.

In the early 80's, the business began to focus more on the installation of windows and doors, and it was decided to close the DIY shop in favour of additional workshop and storage space.

Growing up, Elwyns was very much a part of our family life. I studied at two local schools, but found academic work not something I took to very easily. The subjects I enjoyed most were music and the creative topics, areas where I could produce something myself. After many years working Saturdays and school holidays in our shop, I joined my father's business as a full time junior installer in 1989. I found satisfaction in transforming the look of our customers' homes with new windows and doors. Whilst gaining experience in the practical side of business, I also spent time learning manual bookkeeping and payroll.

Subsequently, I took roles in sales and then surveying to build a knowledge in all aspects of the business. In 2000, following my father's decision to retire, I took over the company with my new business partner and fellow long-term employee, Mr Mark Chadwick. It was at this time that we changed from a private partnership to a limited company.

Shortly after taking the reins, we opened our first showroom in the next-door shop to where my father had originally started. We were a new breed of glazing company, that was determined to shake off the bad reputation the industry had gained through in house high pressure selling, from some of the National companies of the 80's. Showrooms gave the consumer the opportunity to view products and make decisions in a more relaxed and professional way. This certainly proved itself very quickly as our business began to grow by 25% each year. Since then, we have

open two more showrooms which has enabled us to serve an area covering Surrey, South London and the South East.

Growth of the business has not come from large sums of borrowed money or hefty overdrafts. In fact, all growth has come from reinvestment of profits. Although this may not have enabled us to grow quickly, it has provided great stability in the business. It also provides a drive to succeed, so that we can take the business forward with our plans to continually improve. Our expansion plans are quite modular. One showroom equals two fitting teams, a sales team, a surveyor and so on. This makes it easier to budget and plan for when the business is ready to take that step forward.

Success of any company is largely down to relationships that are built between the businesses it deals with on a daily basis. We have spent

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many years working with many of the market leading and award-winning manufacturers. The support we now get from these extremely successful companies has enabled us to grow with confidence. These partnerships set us aside from most of the competition as we are not affiliated to any one particular supplier. This gives us stability by not having all our eggs in one basket, and means our approach with our customers can be more of an advisory role, explaining the differences between different products. Our sales team therefore become design consultants and work more closely to the client's needs, rather than salespeople pushing a particular product.

The residential market for double glazing has changed considerably in recent years, driven largely by environmental issues to lower emissions and increase energy efficiency. This has focused the industry to develop some impressive new products. Our focus has been very much on traditional principals using the latest innovations in product development.

As CEO of Elwyns, I have always felt a duty and responsibility to understand every role undertaken within the business. My years of experience in the different fields have enabled me to understand our staff and appreciate their roles in a way that many bosses struggle. This, I believe, is testimony to why so many of our staff have remained with us for so long. Sharing information on the condition of the business, including our financial position, with all members of staff has always been a key part of expressing openness and trust in our workforce. This has a positive effect with staff who feel they can bring ideas and concerns to management, and be listened to.

Currently, we have a small workforce of 30 staff. Adopting the family feel to our business, is a key factor to everyone working well together and supporting each other. We have three father and son teams working within the business. Many of the current staff I have known for many years before joining Elwyns, and we will recruit on an individual's merits rather than industry knowledge. A robust in-house training program guides new staff into the role they often assume for many years to follow.



Success is measured by results, and results can come through many different channels. I take particular attention in monitoring our marketing streams in order to understand strengths and weaknesses. Utilising existing customer feedback is a major factor, and we make ourselves as accessible as possible for our clients to provide their comments on how we perform. Which? Trusted trader and Checkatrade have proved valuable tools and we have many hundreds of positive responses.

Our clients are guided through the complete experience they can expect when choosing us to carry out their work. A full consultation takes place with one of our designers, initially to establish the client's requirements. They are then taken through the options in order for us to provide them a full written quotation, with accompanying drawings. The quotation includes a family tree, which lists the members of staff they are likely to meet during our time completing their work. On acceptance of a quotation, a client is allocated a survey, installation team and an installation manager. This gives piece of mind in knowing all staff involved in their job.

Winning this award is a great achievement, and something I am immensely proud to receive. I have spent all my working life building the reputation of Elwyns in the demographic that we serve, and to be recognised for this hard work is a great moral boost for myself and those who work at Elwyns. It also provides that extra reassurance to our potential customers that they are in safe hands.

In 2012 and 2013, we received runner up award for 'Best Installation Company' at the prestigious G awards, hosted by our industry trade organisation. In 2014, we again came runner up in our local council awards for 'Best SME'. In 2015, we won!

On a personal level, I have always been keen to support the local community in which I live, both as a homeowner and a businessman. I founded the local traders' association to enable the business community to host a Christmas event, which now attracts many hundreds of people from the local area. I received a community award for my efforts.

I am very lucky to have the support of a wonderful family. My main inspiration has been my

father. Through the years he gave me a lot of his time teaching me the skills, not just in business, to be the person I am today. He sadly passed away last year at 88 years old.

For anyone starting out in business, it can seem a very daunting time. My advice is that, if you do your job to the best of your ability, take any support offered to you, respect those that work with you then you are far more likely to achieve your goals. Stability is key, and taking measured steps that you can control will keep your business going in the right direction.

The country is entering into uncharted waters, with all businesses trying to work out how they will be affected by some big changes over the coming years. We are confident that the future will be good, and have plans to continue to expand our business through a new showroom in South East London, which is due to open in November. Consumers need confidence in what they buy and who they buy from. With the backing of the best products from industry leading manufacturers, and 54 years as an award-winning business ourselves, puts us in good shape for the future.