

A firmly cemented relationship

Lancashire-based Innova Solutions has built its success on combining the right products with the right working relationship with its clients. Sign World went to its head office to find out more.



Adhesive and adhesive tape solutions may well never become the basis of a heated debate on prime-time television, but if the technology is used properly it can help any manufacturing business save both time and money. The uses of tape are many and varied offering solutions for almost any application, especially in the sign industry. The issue with this quick and easy-to-use method of bonding things together is that some signmakers have had a bad result from tape, and a client will not easily forgive their “specialist” supplier when a wall mounted display falls off or a carefully built POS graphic becomes a collapsing pile of substrate.

When an adhesive tape fails the chances are that it has been misused, the wrong tape for the wrong application applied by a misinformed installer is a recipe for disaster. The only reliable way to ensure that tape will work perfectly every time is to take the right advice from your supplier, and to do that you have to be confident that they know more about the subject than you do.

A nice working environment

Which brings us to the Lancashire village of Trawden near Colne and an artfully designed farm that is now the home of one of the leading adhesive solution suppliers to the UK.

Managing director Glenn Dunleavy and sales director Spencer Kelly set up Innova Solutions some eight years ago in June 2001. Local boy Glenn wanted to avoid the usual scenario for an OEM product designer and end up being housed in an industrial unit

stuck somewhere on an estate. He wanted a: “Nice working environment for the staff and somewhere visitors could appreciate the beauty of his homeland.” When Lower Draught Gates Farm came onto his radar it suited perfectly, good access, outbuildings for warehousing and a big dairy that was just right for conversion to offices and demonstration rooms.



Its position, silhouetted high on a hill in the centre of 22 acres of agricultural land means that the building’s windows let out onto views across moorlands, hills and valleys but the carefully selected team at Innova get little time to appreciate the lure of nature, they have work to do.

In just eight years Glenn and Spencer have built their business from scratch to a projected annual turnover of £1.3million, and they have carefully handpicked their team to suit their business model of a highly responsive, insightful working partner that can be flexible to a client’s needs and help simplify the work process. We met people

like Roy Bright, purchasing and logistics manager, Mike (Tommy) Thompson, business development manager, and Linda Barrowclough, who wears many hats, being office, finance and customer relationship manager. All admitted to us that when it came to getting the job done right for the customer their job titles come second to practical efficiency.

Selling sticky tape

Glenn has 24 years of “selling sticky tape” under his belt and Spencer 22. They were friends and colleagues before becoming business partners and have learned a lot of “don’ts” during their careers as well as a lot of “dos”, especially how to avoid that wrong specification which could bring their customers to grief. They wanted to break away from the general adhesives market in which the same double-sided tape could either be used for a light box or in the construction of a car and focus on creating products for a specific niche area. As a result, 80% of Innova’s business is in the sign trade and it supplies to not just the top 20 sign companies in the UK but also signmakers with smaller, one-off projects.

Glenn explains: “We wanted to become a consultancy supplier, so we spent a lot of time on the shop floor of some very busy signmakers in order to get an idea of their breadth of need when it came to bonding. What kinds of materials were being used? What kind of strength was called for? We looked at the speed of application and the process of sign manufacture so that we could see where our products could make savings in time and cost.



Mike (Tommy) Thompson

“Then we spoke with signmakers to find out what they were looking for in an ideal world, and that gave us the basis for building our product portfolio and set strong foundations for building genuine partnerships with the trade.”

Innova now enjoys a highly creditable reputation as an adhesives designer and specifier, working with its specialist manufacturing team to give sign workshops what they need, or to use its own strap line “Making life easier.” Its products are used to produce an incredible array of signage, from large rollouts and architectural projects for major retailers and chains to providing the base material and bonding media for a single fire exit sign. Developing the adhesive tapes with input from its client base has helped avoid the kind of “blue sky” projects that leave the supplier with a problem material that must be found a use for and so helps keep the manufacturing chain short, sweet and cost-effective, a saving that can be passed on to the customer.



Roy Bright packaging product

Flexibility

As a material developer and OEM Innova can also be very flexible when it comes to meeting the needs of its clients, a good proportion of its portfolio has grown from the question: “Have you got something that does this?” which is usually quickly followed by the answer “We have now.”

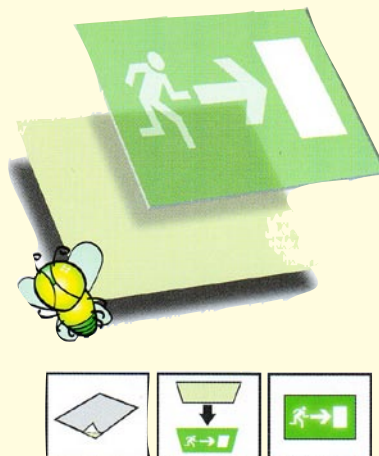
The products include such well-known brands as NovaBond SignFix high strength bonding tapes that can be used for bonding diverse substrates to each other, following a clear and easy-to-use advisory table. So: in order to fix glass to clear plastic the signmaker can use SignFix Crystal, for bonding painted metals to opaque plastics choose SignFix plastic. We are advised that prior to bonding bare metals before powder coating or for very high temperature applications you must abrade the surface, clean it, then use NovaBond SignFix Metal in conjunction with NovaBond surface primer. For fixing a sign to primed concrete, stone or timber the range includes the incredibly strong (the literature claims it to be aggressive) and versatile tape, NovaBond SG (Shear Grip). This will bond practically anything, however an alternative for bonding small signage or substrates that experience little expansion or contraction can be found in the very thin and clear NovaFix ‘SignMate HP’, which is highly resistant to UV, water and most solvents.



Spencer and Linda with NovActive

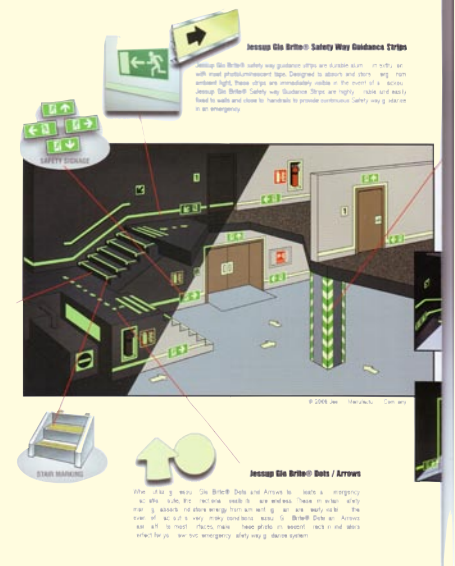
The NovaWeld series offers a range of two-part structural adhesives, an ‘invisible’ laminating compound, while NovaSol complements the range with a plastic welding cement that has been specially designed for internal or external uses when bonding or sealing plastics or acrylics.

that should be kept in every signmaking workshop, and for more information about that you should contact him on: spencer@innovasolutionsonline.com



Time saving solutions

One of Innova’s client/partners has found a real time saving solution using its double-sided tape as a kind of masking tape, both through the pre-treatment bath and then to avoid overspray during powder coating. Thanks to the fact that the backing paper and tape are resistant to temperatures up to 250°C the units can be assembled both pre or post-powder coating with no need for abrading or cleaning, and eliminating welding which can ruin the aesthetic face of the sign or panel. Cutting the process down from five or six stages to just two or three saves a significant amount of time and money. As an associate member of the BSGA Innova has become very immersed in advising and educating its members, and with Spencer on the technical advisory panel it has been active in addressing the problem of “tape phobia”. In fact Spencer has even produced a comprehensive and informative document about tapes and adhesives



Beyond its core portfolio of products Innova provides an excellent range of photoluminescent materials, and Glenn is one of the people that helps set the global product standards with the Photoluminescent Safety Products Association (PSPA) an international organisation set up to develop the market for such products. (Check out www.pspa.org if you would like to find out more). With a specifically designed collection of “glow in the dark” tapes, die-cuts, films, rigid sheets and anti-slip products from their American partner, Jessup Manufacturing Company, the GloBrite range provides just about every raw material a signmaker might need to produce safety signage for any application from code compliance to passenger rail to military to domestic or office use. The Jessup Safety Track portfolio, also from Innova, offers a wide selection of anti-slip products for architectural and industrial use.



Glenn Dunleavy

The latest additions to the Innova range include:

- *NovaDura, a separate sign trade supply company set up by Innova produces extra durable signage combining a patented high quality print process with a water clear anti-graffiti and anti-bacterial coating, which offers the added benefit of protected graphics. This process remains anti-bacterial for up to 10 years and the graphics offer 10-years outdoor UV resistance for colour fastness and gloss retention.*
- *NovActive, a custom-fit solution for making signs talk in a pleasing slim-line format using the very latest micro-engineering technology. Glenn explained: "I feel there is a very strong demand for a sensibly priced interactive sign." The model we saw had a spoken message downloaded onto an SD card, which is then inserted into a reader at the back of the sign. A number of very clever triggers have been devised to catch a passing person's attention and share the marketing message. This is very much technology of the present and should help create some highly imaginative solutions.*



Much more can be found by visiting the Innova website: www.innovasolutionsonline.com, which has just been refreshed as a brighter, and even more user-friendly site. Later this year an on-line shop will become active to further simplify the buying process. Innova is a truly UK-wide supplier. The head office is just minutes from motorway connections to all areas of the North and Scotland as well as North Wales and the Midlands. Spencer is based in the West Midlands at the heart of the country and he can cover the sign industry nationwide. Anyone that asks for a demonstration of products or wants to take advantage of the company's free-of-charge consultation will always find themselves dealing with one of the directors. Spencer advised us: "We have saved our client partners a lot of money by auditing their production processes during a free on-site survey. We speed up the working process and help improve performance by making recommendations about more cost-effective materials. Tapes can improve the aesthetics of signage, facilitate the move to lighter-weight materials, prove more economic and will even help reduce a signmaker's inventory. It makes sense to get in touch."



Spencer Kelly

Innova has thrown down a friendly gauntlet to Sign World's readers; the team will be at Sign and Digital UK this April and are asking for you to "bring your bonding issues" to stand B44. Come along with a sign problem and they will offer you a solution that will fit the bill, but if you want to get in touch before then why not visit the website or give them a ring: 01282 867390. This is a UK manufacturer servicing a UK marketplace, surely it is worth your support and maybe the team really could "Make Your Life Easier!"



Going.....



Going.....



GONE!

