

Brilliant Businesses

Dale Stores, Birstwith



High quality food is recipe for success for Dale Stores

Since taking over the Dale Stores at Birstwith in 2006, Matthew and Andrea Walwyn have turned a business that was ticking over into one that is thriving. Turnover is up by 75 per cent and in 2011 they were judged Best Yorkshire Village Store with a Post Office in the Countryside Alliance Awards.

How they have built such a sustainable business so quickly is an intriguing question but equally fascinating is why they did it in the first place.

Matthew says: "Both Andrea and I were living in Harrogate and working for employers in the food industry. We both decided it was time to quit the rat race and buy a shop where we could put into practice our philosophy of buying good quality, local food, helping to sustain the local economy while making some money.

"Our daughter had gone to the primary school at Birstwith and when we read the village shop literally around the corner was for sale we realised at once there was more potential we could exploit, for example by staying open over lunchtime and selling newspapers."

They felt that sales of ordinary groceries alone, even when topped up by a Post Office income, were not enough to sustain the business. Part of the answer was to ensure that the food sold was of the highest quality and sourced as locally as possible.

Daily deliveries from award-winning butchers

They switched butchers to Weatherheads of Pateley Bridge, Yorkshire's Butcher of the Year in the Countryside Alliance Awards in 2012. Each day they have deliveries of fresh meat and pies including steak, mince, sausages and burgers. If a customer wants something special, they order it for delivery the next day.



Park View Bakery, also at Pateley Bridge, provides bread, bread rolls, Danish pastries and fruit pies. Cheeses include Harrogate Blue, Yorkshire Blue, Yorkshire Fettle and Shepherds Purse, all of which come from Thirsk. Potatoes have even less distance to travel – just half a food mile from the village’s Bungalow Farm.

All this has helped the store to grow its customer base but the other part of the success story is the couple’s development of a roaring trade in mouthwatering sandwiches and hot food. From breakfast bap to homemade soup and jacket potatoes, wrap of the day, panini of the day and hot dish of the day, the couple have gone for quality and variety.

Clever marketing

In a clever piece of marketing, they email local businesses each Sunday with a list of their specials of the day for the following week. One of the best sellers is Wetherheads meatballs cooked in Italian tomato sauce, halved in a panini, topped with grated cheese and cooked in the oven. A snip at £3.25!

A mark of their success is that they now order 140 bread rolls a day compared with 40 when they took over the business.

“We have become the biggest customer of Park View Bakery, which is excellent for them and us. A Leeds baker asked us to switch to them but we refused because we believe in supporting the local economy. As the saying goes, ‘The pound goes around’,” says Matthew.

The shop’s growth has led to three new jobs – one assistant and two apprentices – further evidence of how brilliant businesses sustain the local economy.

Like Matthew and Andrea, staff are conscious of the need to conserve energy. Electricity bills have fallen by 10 per cent following everyone turning off lights, the installation of a smart meter and reinsulating the building.

Smart thinking from a smart couple whose spirit of enterprise has built them a truly sustainable business.



Contact Matthew and Andrea Walwyn on 01423 770271 or visit www.dalestores.co.uk