

From oily rags to riches. **Marc Mullen** finds out how a Volkswagen workshop became the world's largest supplier of camper van parts

The Full Report

The biggest supplier in the world of spare parts for VW camper vans is not a run-of-the-mill business. It is a business that needs the personal touch from its advisers and a close eye for detail to identify the very specific business issues it faces.

Just Kampers is based in Odiham, Hampshire, 15 miles from Farnborough. Managing director Mark Reynolds has been using Haines Watts since receiving a mailshot five years ago. As the business has gone from strength to strength, so too has the relationship.

Barry Potter is a partner at Haines Watts and the key client contact. "We sent an outsourcing mailer to Just Kampers in 1999. Since then we have developed a very strong close relationship. What attracted him to us was our ability to provide a full range of services. Now we do the accounts, audit, tax and provide assistance with the management accounts. Our outsourcing specialist is in every month."

Just Kampers are essentially a mail-order business, selling parts and camping equipment over the internet and through a catalogue. In the past five years the business has rapidly grown, with turnover tripling to £3m. "When you look around it is surprising how many VW

camper vans there are on the road. Camper van owners are loyal customers and Just Kampers provides the specialist service they need," says Barry Potter.

Mark Reynolds set the company up as a workshop in 1989. After six years, he closed the workshop and began selling parts to restore VW camper vans. Five years ago, they went purely mail order. "That was the point when we got involved with Haines Watts. Between 1989 and 1999, we turned over a lot, but never made much profit."

As many businesses shifted to a just-in-time model – or 'just-too-late' as Mark calls it – Just Kampers began dealing with the manufacturers direct. Only five per cent of Just Kampers' purchases are now from wholesalers. "Haines Watts were quite instrumental in that move. Previously we had relied on the wholesalers carrying the stock. Now we sell like retailers, but buy like wholesalers," says Mark Reynolds.

Whilst not taking credit directly for the growth, Haines Watts has been central to the ongoing improvements. "The stock system is crucial to the business and that is where we help. We help Just Kampers look at it from a management accounts point-of-view," says Barry Potter.

Just Kampers' exports are at about 15 per cent and growing. Haines Watts is helping with the issues surrounding that. Mark Reynolds has found the advice on

setting up a reliable VAT system particularly valuable. "Traditionally, you chew your nails on a VAT visit, but our last visit took just half a day, even though he'd pencilled in two. This is where they have helped us too. It's worth good money in its own right to know you have no skeletons in the cupboard or sudden shocks."

The close relationship the two companies have fostered means Haines Watts is always best placed to advise Just Kampers on a range of issues. "We have been on hand, giving quality advice as they have grown," says Barry Potter. "We tailor the services to a degree, but with regular contact it tends to happen naturally. If they need corporate finance advice we are on hand to arrange it. We have reviewed business plans for banks and funding."

Mark Reynolds is far from likely to change his accountants. "Compare it with our previous bank – we had seven contacts in five years, so we had no relationship. We've had the same staff from Haines Watts for five years. I really appreciate the continuity."

"We are often approached by other accountants, but we have no reason to change. Haines Watts is an integral part of the business. Because of their effort, the relationship works well. They understand the company's philosophy and the concept of what we are trying to sell." ■

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