

Case Study



“*ActionCOACH helps Polythene UK pack a punch*”

James Woollard, managing director of Polythene UK, believes that business owners, like sportsmen, should have coaches. “Even if you’re good, there’s always room for improvement. Even Manchester United has a coach. Why should an entrepreneur be any different?”

James took over the reins of Polythene UK, the Witney-based polythene broker, in July 2007 and quickly saw its potential. “I’ve been in the packaging industry all my working life. I could see it had the right ingredients but I also knew I didn’t have all the answers myself. I’d need a coach if I was going to really make this business take off.”

He started working with his Action Coach in October 2008 and hasn’t looked back since.

Action Coach has worked with James and his wife, Kylie, on every aspect of the business, but perhaps most important has been his work helping identify Polythene UK’s unique selling point (USP). James explains:

“Before, we were just another polythene company, but Action Coach helped us find and exploit our USP. As a polythene distributor we could supply anything. But our thinner polythene products save customers at least 20% on their packaging costs and reduce the carbon footprint of their packaging by 20% too. So we decided to concentrate on these products, but promote them under our own brand called Poly-Lite.”

“We now have a fantastic, very clear offer that really catches peoples’ attention and my sales team can push it to the max.”

James is a natural salesman, but even in this area of his business Action Coach has made a huge difference.

“My coach asked me questions I just didn’t have the answers to, like how long my sales people spend on the phone selling. I was embarrassed that I didn’t know.”

In response James put in a phone system and call duration is now one of the many things he closely monitors. He saw that many in his sales team were on the phone for about 42 seconds, time to give the prospective customer a price but little more. In contrast those speaking for 3.5 minutes were forming a relationship with the prospect, and consequently selling ten times as much.

“I have been able to show the team that spending time on the calls delivers more sales – this has really helped me change the way they work.”

In addition to time on calls, his coach has helped James and Kylie Woollard become far more systemised and structured in the way they run Polythene UK. Kylie has created a huge reporting system which gives them all the key numbers they need to measure and monitor the business.

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For instance all customers have been graded A to D in terms of their payment record. As a result, the company has been able to apply a pricing strategy, offering less favourable prices to the really slow payers.

“We should reward our prompt paying customers with more favourable prices, adds James. “Some poor payers were taking liberties, taking 90 days. The additional revenue we’re getting

by charging these customers a higher price is more than covering any loss from those who have taken their business elsewhere.”

“The approach has also encouraged our middle of the road customers to improve their payment performance as we can reward them with even better prices. Everyone ends up a winner.”

Their Action Coach is now helping the company turn its attention to its marketing. James again:

“The manual you get from your Action Coach is absolutely packed with hundreds of marketing ideas. Before I only had telesales and that wasn’t operating to its maximum. Now I have ten marketing strategies all driving sales.”

These include Google adwords, a website, exhibitions, a newsletter, sponsorship and James is also looking at PR. “If I implement all their suggestions I can’t help but succeed,” says James.

James not only sees his coach every two weeks, he also attends a quarterly growth club run by ActionCOACH. Here he and other business owners review what they are doing, discuss challenges, refresh their knowledge and plan for the next quarter. “This is a great way to set goals and clear action plans for the time ahead. If I achieve 70% of what I set myself each time, I know I’m getting there.”

So is ActionCOACH working for Polythene UK?

The numbers say it all. In the year that James and Kylie Woollard have been working with their Action Coach, the company has achieved a turnover of £3.7 million, gross margins have improved from 23% to 28% and it’s achieving 7% net profit consistently. The company is hitting profitability earlier each month, and its 1200 customers include 412 companies that it has added to its roster in the past year alone.

“We didn’t even know who these businesses were a year ago, now they are customers,” adds James, clearly excited about where his business is heading.

The business’ success hasn’t gone unnoticed. It recently won Shaw Gibbs Young Entrepreneur of the Year Award and is looking to achieve a £20 million turnover by year five, with a net profit of £1million.

It’s not just business goals that James and Kylie are achieving. When they began working with their Action Coach they put down personal goals of driving an Aston Martin and moving house.

“We now have the car and the house - life is superb and my team also feel part of this success. They can see they’re working for a company that’s going somewhere and that’s good for their morale and their futures.”

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