

Keystone wins supplier of the year!

The Keystone Group is on a winning streak having won a host of industry awards so far in 2018.

The satisfaction is in knowing that these awards are judged by expert panels of industry leaders who recognise genuinely outstanding performance.

The business is 100% focused on delivering world class service to our merchant partners along with innovative products which add value and streamline construction processes for the industry. By doing this the awards follow.

Commenting on the awards, Sean Coyle Keystone Founder & Chairman said "We are delighted that our hard work and efforts in supplying our industry have been recognised with awards for both service and product".

- ★ **Supplier of the Year 2018**
Keystone Lintels / IG Lintels
Fortis Group
- ★ **Best Building Fabric Product 2018**
Hi-therm+ Lintels
Housebuilder Product Awards
- ★ **Innovation of the Year 2018**
Keylite Roof Windows
Construction News Specialist Awards
- ★ **Supplier of the Year**
Keylite Roof Windows
Buildbase
- ★ **Roofing Brand 2018**
Keylite Roof Windows
BMJ Awards
- ★ **Best Health & Safety Product 2018**
Smartroof
Housebuilder Product Awards



More to Roar About

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Patrick Atkinson
CEO, Grafton Merchanting ROI

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If life teaches us anything, it has to be “expect the unexpected”, so we shouldn’t be too surprised that so far 2018 has presented a few challenges to the industry. However, with strong underlying demand there is a lot to be positive about for merchants and manufacturers.

As our industry seeks to analyse and implement improvements from Dame Judith Hackitt’s Building Regulations and Fire Safety report, commissioned in the wake of the Grenfell Tower tragedy, we reflect that certified structural products and solutions have never been under greater scrutiny. We welcome this scrutiny at the Keystone Group and suggest it promotes the importance of specifiers, merchants and manufacturers working together in partnership, with a common aim. As partners we commit to trade with you, not against you, invest in innovative products and solutions and insist on independent accreditation supporting their performance.

Who knows what Brexit means for the UK in coming months? But at the Keystone Group we are confident that the same innovative approach and dedication that has served us well in the past will enable us to engage positively with the opportunities arising as we manage the outcome of any changes.

One thing that is certain, is our celebration of 60 years of IG Lintels and as stewards of this trusted brand we shall be ensuring the occasion is well marked, ready for the next 60. So look out for details on all our planned celebrations.

I hope you enjoy this edition and if you are not already experiencing the Keystone Group’s approach to partnership then please get in touch and we can discuss how 2018 might become a memorable year for all the right reasons.

Adrian Forbes
Keystone Group Sales Director

Industry Indicators

BMBI Builders’ Merchants’ sales enjoy Q2 bounce

Sales through UK builders’ merchants bounced back in Q2 2018, with the Builders Merchant Building Index (BMBI) reporting 7.2% growth in sales value over Q2 2017.

There was one more trading day during Q2 this year, adjusting for this the average daily sales growth year-on-year was 5.5%. The strong performance in Q2 contrasts markedly to a weather-hindered performance in the first quarter of the year.



CPA

Construction activity is forecast to be flat this year and rise by 2.7% next year, primarily driven by infrastructure and private house building. Half of the activity lost in Q1 is expected to be regained during 2018.

Private housing starts are expected to rise 2.0% in both 2018 and 2019 in spite of the slowdown in the general housing market as Help to Buy is clearly sustaining demand for new build homes.



The passing of a great friend

Keystone remembers John Ward

It was with great sadness that we learnt of the passing of John Ward, founder of Stockgap Ltd. John was a great friend of Keystone, both professionally and privately in a relationship which started 21 years ago following an initial meeting with Keystone founder, Sean Coyle.

As Sean explains "This is what makes the merchant business so special, meeting great people and building an understanding of each other's needs. We founded a strong relationship at our first meeting and since then our businesses went on from strength to strength. John was a man true to his word and well-liked by all, gaining much respect from his staff and those in the industry who recognised his special character. We are proud to have known him and appreciate his support over all those years. He will be greatly missed."

John Ward was a past President and active committee member of the BMF and also a Liveryman of the Worshipful Company of Builders Merchants, reflecting his standing and contribution to the industry.



Merchant VOX POP Big brand manufacturers selling direct to end-users, what is your view?



Patrick Atkinson
CEO
Grafton Merchanting ROI

"We just wouldn't see them being 100% partners with us, we would see them as being committed to their product but not committed to the supply chain that we deliver on. We have suppliers that do sell direct, very few but its suppliers who use the supply chain that we are integrating."



Paul Bullivant
Commercial Director
Howarth Timber

"For me this question is increasingly difficult to answer. With my builders merchants hat on, of course we wouldn't expect to support any supplier who sells directly to our customers. We buy in bulk, and distribute smaller volumes in a proven model of supply partnership.

Having said that, the reality is the biggest challenge we face is not suppliers wanting to sell direct, it's the fact that our customers are wanting different ways to buy – the traditional merchant channel is not a modern one - 24/7 omnichannel is not a fantasy it's reality, look at how the internet is decimating the high street retailers.

The best thing for us to do, is not to worry about manufacturers selling direct but to take responsibility for our own destiny and not give them a reason to even consider it. We do that by focusing on being the best version of a traditional merchant we've ever been - leveraging the best parts of "traditional" whilst embracing new technology – we add value to the customer by offering the best service we've ever offered, by training our people to be more knowledgeable than ever, by digitising and by surrounding ourselves with like-minded suppliers who value what we do and want to work pro-actively with us."



Matthew King
Sales Director
Keylite Roof Windows

"The traditional builders' merchant industry is dominated by four large national merchants along with three nationwide buying groups that represent the vast majority of independent merchants.

Individually, each of these 'Magnificent Seven' has the purchasing power to stand up and stop manufacturers from selling direct, and to shape the future of the builders' merchant industry as it reacts or fails to react – to these changing trends."

Browns

NBG serving Independents from 2003

We ask Nick Oates and Jim Parlato from NBG for an insight on the buying group in 2018

What does an independent merchant gain from its NBG membership?

NO: Primarily we are a buying group so they will gain excellent buying terms but also we are a partnership of 83 independents, so you are joining a very knowledgeable community.



We are very open and it's actually a requirement that members share information. For example Jim is a heavy site specialist and he brings that expert knowledge to NBG by sitting on both the brick and our general build team. Lots of our other partners bring similar sets of expert knowledge, so we have plumbing, roofing, civils specialists etc and that enables us to learn from each other and grow their business.

JP: The best decision we have ever made was to join NBG. Obviously we joined to buy more competitively, but it's not just about the buying. If I'm looking for an ICT system I'll lift the phone to 4 or 5 partners and ask, what are you running? Invariably one of them will invite me over to come and have a look and spend the day with them, it's that sort of stuff that is invaluable.

NO: We also get access to a very strong set of brands and we have built long relationships with these suppliers, so when the going gets tough, they support us. NBG have a very good track record of performing for its suppliers, on volume and supporting deals. That loyalty is reflected when there are shortages; bricks and block etc. we get more than our fair share.

What has changed in the independent sector since NBG started in 2003?

NO: Online trading is the obvious answer and I think that's going to accelerate further, but on the other hand merchandising is still about doing the basics really well. It is still all about having stock on the ground, servicing customers with good quality, knowledgeable staff.

A recent customer survey by an NBG member revealed that the quality of their counter staff was the main differentiator for their business. Customers often rely on counter staff to get them out of a hole and it's at times like this when you make a difference. Independents have that flexibility and speed of response, they have the creativity to find the solutions where other national businesses don't.

What are the key challenges that independent merchants will face in the next 15 years?

JP: We can't ignore online trading and e-commerce, which is definitely going to be an issue because the likes of amazon will find a way to sell building products.

NO: Merchants are going to have to take costs out and the use of electronic ordering, electronic trading of all sorts is going to be the norm rather than the exception. Manufacturers also need to invest to meet the expected growth in demand and ensure they have enough capacity to enable merchants to supply the market because we are having issues with supply on things like bricks, blocks, roof tiles and timber.

Along with other NBG Merchants, Browns forged a highly successful partnership with the Keystone Group. Why is this partnership particularly successful?

JP: Working with Keystone has been very positive for our business, it's a brand we can rely on and it's very easy to work with you guys because we understand each other.

On the sales side, any problems are resolved very quickly and we take advantage of turning your sales leads into orders from the national housebuilders down. Technical support is excellent and you employ the right people, we are just converting some housebuilders to Hi-therm+ lintels and it's all pretty seamless.

NO: NBG has always been strong on sales with Keystone and I would say we have always been well ahead of the market with you, so it works and you have a good brand and are always bringing new products to the market.



The theme for this year's NBG conference is 'building strong brands', explain what this means to members and suppliers.

We wanted this theme because it covers both suppliers and the merchant. The great benefit of an independent merchant is the strength of their own brand in their local community. They have to provide great support if they want a good name and the brand value that you get from that is incredibly important. Equally we recognise that manufacturers invest huge amount of money in their products, branding and innovation and we think that it is really important that we are together in that journey in bringing new products to the market, so we are all brand ambassadors.

Is online trading a threat to the traditional merchant and do the NBG intend to capitalise on it?

Obviously you need to have a website to give yourself a presence so I think we need to embrace online sales, but equally we don't want to use it to drive down our pricing and margins to nothing. So I think it is a vehicle for advertising, improving sales and reaching an audience that will probably only buy online and maybe won't go and visit branches and stores.

There are a growing number of manufacturers who are selling direct to builders; is this a concern to the NBG?

Yes, you're either on the same team or you're not! I think manufacturers need to build online models that support their merchants to be successful in every market place. If manufacturers set themselves up to cut merchants out by going direct then I'm sorry but I can see NBG taking a really tough view on that.



NBG members came close to a merge with another buying group in 2017. Do you think a similar opportunity will rise in the near future?

NO: I think the board of NBG will always be looking at potential new opportunities, we want to be innovative and to remain at the leading edge of the industry. We regard ourselves as the premier buying group for independent builder's and plumber's merchants so it is important that we are always open to new ideas.

Two things set NBG apart. Firstly, we have a strong culture of supporting our supplier deals, so any partnership needs to have that at its core. Secondly, we have very high quality merchants so it's important that we maintain and build on that.

What is different about NBG?

NO: We have a real focus on internal systems and at our core is our new intranet, which we call The Hub. We believe it is industry leading and ensures efficiency in our communication with our partners and suppliers. It is also how we manage our rebate and distribute our payments so we invest a lot of time ensuring that the system is outstanding.

What's next for the NBG?

NO: We are working on the roll out of the account management system. It requires suppliers to submit sales plans so that's a change not just in terms of writing the plans but also a change culturally. We want to move forward on joint plans that will help us both to achieve greater success. There is still plenty of opportunity for NBG going forward and we have an aspiration to be the premier buying group so we need to make sure we keep doing the basics well.

A Roaring Success for Keylite solus merchants

More and more merchants are converting branches to become solus Keylite stockists based on the excellent margin opportunities this represents in the roof window category. With more products than ever in 2018, Keylite is proving to be the brand with real bite.

Solus Keylite Merchants confirm their success.

Here are just a few of the success stories from merchants who have made the switch.



Andy Griffiths
Purchase Manager
Boys & Boden

“Becoming a solus Keylite stockist has had a really positive impact on our business. With this one decision, we have increased our sales and margin and we are delighted with the results we have achieved.

The service we get from Keylite is far beyond that of competitors so for us it was a natural choice and one which has had noticeable results.”



Ross Marshall
Director
Beatson's Building Supplies

“Beatsons chose to go solus with Keylite due to the dynamic forward thinking sales package they had to offer. Not only are they extremely competitive in a difficult sector, they offer a far superior service over competitors. I feel Keylite is looking to the future, bringing out market leading products, while others are standing still. Keylite understands the value of trading relationships, building business together, which was key in our overall decision.”



Richard Boulton
Purchasing Director
Carvers Building Supplies

“It's been phenomenal, we converted all of our roof window business to Keylite. Without a shadow of a doubt it's the best thing we've done. Sales and margins are up.”

Great Service



Keylite's service credentials are impeccable, with a track record of multiple merchant awards including BMN Supplier of the Year. It takes a lot more than just delivering on time, to win merchant awards and the strength in Keylite's market leading service extends to commercial support, back selling and lead generation. Only Keylite has invested in a 100% merchant focus which includes online sales

generated solely on the merchant's behalf, such is this company's dedicated approach to merchant support.

Great Product



While other roof windows have entered the UK market, Keylite stands apart by having consistently upgraded the specifications with unique performance features available on every window. These innovations

are enticing ever more installers to switch to the Keylite brand as they discover the impact of added value and ease of installation to their daily business. This approach has made it easy for merchants to sell the qualities of the Keylite window to customers, regardless of their past preferences.

Great Commercial Package



The attraction to a solus deal for the merchant lies in the commercial package which enables them to maximise their margins from roof window sales. The comprehensive Keylite

range enables the merchant to offer competitive pricing to customers while still growing margin. The expansion of the range in 2018 now offers the merchant even more margin making opportunities with award winning products, including the maintenance free Polar White PVC range. Keylite's sales support also makes an impact with important factors such as merchant training to ensure that everyone involved at branch level is equipped to take advantage of the commercial benefits on offer.





Family values fuelling growth

Independent merchant Sydenhams are pushing ahead. Purchasing Director, Chris Carter explains.

Sydenhams is a great example of independent success, now in its 144th year and 4th generation of owner management. Founded in Poole as a timber merchant, Sydenhams still operates at the original site but has since grown to a 31 branch business. While still retaining timber and building materials as their core business, Sydenhams has diversified into timber engineering and timber framed housing. Other more mainstream merchant activities now include hire centres plus showrooms for kitchens, bathrooms and flooring.

What makes Sydenhams such a success?

For me it's all about the service we offer, based around traditional family values of how we treat people. It's about the relationships we build with our staff by creating a good culture to work in, which results in excellent loyalty. This mood then extends to the customers as we want to make them feel part of the family also.

Investment has been vital of course. During my 8 years here I have seen the business open 6 new merchant branches, 2 timber centres, 4 additional hire centres and 3 new kitchen and bathroom showrooms, plus we are constantly looking at new opportunities.

Are you doing anything different from other merchants?

I think the main difference is that we really empower our staff and that extends to making them responsible for their own profit and loss. We want the managers to run their branch as if it was their own business, so we encourage them to go out, take risks and try new things, even if that means they make a few mistakes along the way.

So unlike many other merchants we don't dictate every detail to them from head office and as a result we have empowered them to generate good success for their branches and of course the business.

How important is your relationship with the Keystone Group?

It's a very, very strong relationship and has been for a number of years. Keystone's brands are now an integral part of our business and it's working really well for us. I reintroduced Keylite Roof Windows into Sydenhams about 6 years ago and we have now converted half of our branches to a solus stocking position, while most of the rest are dual stocking Keylite.

Since we've introduced Keylite we have seen it grow the category with additional turnover and profit, so we haven't just switched sales from a competing brand. It has been a big success for us.



Would you say you are a people business?

It's massively important to have strong relationships with suppliers. In this industry the strength and specification of products does have an impact but ultimately it is a people business and people buy from people.

We see that at the counter, a huge percentage of our customer base is the white van man. They want to see a friendly face and likewise I think it's the same for us and our suppliers, we need that relationship in place.

This also means the role of the counter and sales staff in selling the product is huge for us. They are the real face of the business and probably have the hardest job in the industry, talking to customers all day. So it's vital to get the right people to build customer relationships.

Have the solus Keylite stock branches worked out?

They have been a big financial success for the business and staff have really bought into it. We took a lot of our solus branch staff to the Keylite factory in Poland for training and to see the size and scale of the operation.

We can make a lot more money by selling a Keylite window compared to other roof windows, so this is a big bonus for us.

As expected we have to sell the benefits to some people who are maybe reluctant to change, however once they try a Keylite product they are hooked. I personally think Keylite's features and benefits far outstrip the competitors' products.



Does Sydenhams engage with staff training?

As I mentioned earlier we don't dictate from head office but we expect every branch to do their own individual training. We also value refresher training with suppliers to keep our staff up to date regularly with all the latest products.

What is your experience in selling Keystone Group products?

My experience of selling Keystone products is very positive as they are very well known brands and in particular the lintels side. Keystone is a very well established brand and the Keylite brand is growing, more and more, every year with increased awareness of the product from our customers. The brands are very respected now, very well trusted and liked by our staff and customers.



The Keystone Group have got to be our number one supplier in terms of support, breaking specs and bringing us business.

We don't have many other suppliers like the Keystone Group who bring us business on a plate with real orders ready to place, so from that point of view it's absolutely fantastic.

What is next for Sydenhams?

We have a lot more growth planned, with a new merchant branch and a new kitchen and bathroom centre just opened in the last month. We are always looking for opportunities to expand further and currently have other irons in the fire that we are confident will come to fruition in the next 12-18 months.

The strategy is to continue to expand whilst still maintaining our family values. How we treat our staff and customers is vital to our success. Obviously that is more challenging the bigger you get but we are not a top heavy organisation. We have 6 directors including the two owners and that's it, the branch managers report straight into us and it works very well. This latest expansion takes us to 31 branches but our ambitions will take us a lot further still.

IG Lintels hits 60

IG didn't just invent the steel lintel, **it defined the way we build today!**



Few manufacturers can claim such a role in modern construction but 2018 marks 60 years from IG's formation which led to its visionary founders developing the first lightweight steel lintel.

Millions of UK homes have been built using steel lintels as a result of IG's innovation, now adopted as the standard for building. But like all great companies, IG didn't rest on its success and now IG is leading the way in the quest for ever more energy efficient homes with its range of Hi-therm lintels.

IG was also at the forefront of third party certified quality and performance and has been liaising with the BBA as far back as 1976! Today, Hi-therm remains the only one piece BBA approved thermally broken lintel and our new Hi-therm+ lintel, launched earlier this year has already gained recognition by winning Best Building Fabric Product at the 2018 Housebuilder Product Awards.



Innovation

IG has always led the way in the steel lintel industry with a history of firsts and a real culture of innovation which was the inspiration behind our Better By Design advertising. Having originated as IG Engineering specialising in steel bridges, IG went on to introduce the first steel lintel to the market in 1967 as an alternative to the heavy concrete lintels used at that time.

Committed To Merchants

Derrick McFarland, Managing Director, IG Lintels, explains "the one thing that has remained consistent over the past 60 years, is our passion and commitment.



Geoff Griffiths, IG Senior Technical Engineer



IG employees have a real pride in the customer service we offer. We have a very experienced team; our longest serving employee has been with the company for 45 years with 30% of IG employees now having more than 10 years service. This passion and the fact that we care about our brand is something that our merchant partners pick up on and this drives our commitment

to excellent customer service. The success over 60 years has only been possible with the assistance of our loyal merchant customers and we look forward to supporting them in the next part of the journey".

IG was also the first steel lintel manufacturer to insulate a lintel and as market leader revolutionised the lintel industry in 2011 with the introduction of the Hi-therm lintel, the first one piece lintel designed to combat thermal bridging.

60 Years of Innovation

1958

IG was founded and named IG Engineering

1967

IG invented the original open back lintel which has now become the industry standard

1975

IG Engineering became IG Lintels

1976

IG received BBA approval for the L1 lintel range

1984

IG introduced the first insulated lintel



Specibuild



Installing an IG Lintel, c.1980



Building Centre, Birmingham, 1974



National Housing & Town Planning Exhibition, c.1970's

“
Millions of UK homes
have been built using
steel lintels as a result
of IG's innovation.
”



Graham Expo, Blackpool, Nov 1980



Interbuild, 1981



Building Centre, Birmingham, 1974



Western Building Exhibition, February 1980

IG became part of the Keystone Group and the market leader for steel lintels

2006

2010

1st steel lintel company to be awarded ISO 14001 environmental certification

Hi-therm lintel launched

2011

IG invented the first one piece thermally efficient steel lintel to reduce thermal bridging

Housebuilder Product Award

2013

& overall Housebuilder Product of the Year Hi-therm Lintels

Housebuilder Product Award Hi-therm Lintels

2014

2018

Hi-therm* lintel is launched and wins Best Building Fabric Product 2018 at the Housebuilder Product Awards

Spotlight on

Women in Construction

Women make up around 11% of construction industry professionals, but with considerable debate and promotion currently on the subject this number can only be set to rise, with more and more women choosing construction related jobs.

Misconceptions about gender specific roles are gradually diminishing and while the initial image is always one of a hard hat on a building site, the industry is full of diverse opportunities for woman.

To highlight the case, this month we are speaking with some women who have risen to the top of their organisations to get their views on the industry and find out why more women should follow their example.

Views from Leading Ladies in Construction



Dr Diana Montgomery

Chief Executive
CPA - Construction Products Association



What is the role of the CPA?

The CPA represents the £56 billion construction products market and our membership covers around 85% of the relevant manufacturers and distributors, so we really can speak on behalf of this huge sector. We are an umbrella organisation, so in addition to major companies, we represent all sizes through the membership of over thirty trade associations.

Our role includes economic forecasting for the sector, providing analysis of the way the sector is changing, the impact of government policies and commenting on the national infrastructure plan. Our quarterly Forecasts, Construction Trade Surveys and State of Trade Surveys, are primarily used for business planning by multinationals and SMEs alike from across the construction supply chain, including contractors, consultants and manufacturers. We do a lot of work around building product standards

and testing, digital impact and sustainability. Following the Grenfell Tower fire, last year the CPA was asked by government to join an Industry Response Group alongside two other construction trade associations, to provide a cross-industry response, drawing in expertise and data, that would help meet the challenges arising from fire. We were subsequently heavily involved in Dame Judith Hackitt's Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety, having chaired her working group for regulations and guidance. Additionally contributing to two other working groups looking at maintaining the 'golden thread' of information that ensures a building can be managed safely, and a working group on quality assurance and products.

Another area of work focuses on Industrial Strategy. I am chairing for Innovate UK, a business board, which has pulled together business people and academics to help steer the investment of £170 million that Innovate UK are putting into the Construction Challenge Fund. We are also interested in future efficiencies for the industry such as; integrated supply chains, off site manufacturing, using digital technology and modern methods of manufacturing and production.

What attracted you to the CPA?

My background is manufacturing and sustainability, initially in academia, then across lots of different sectors including FMCG, transport, energy, chemicals and now construction. I came to CPA because it looked like an interesting area and an opportunity to really promote manufacturing. I was soon struck by the fact that Government had a relatively low awareness of the importance of construction products in the built environment, and the good things that manufacturers were doing were not being heard at this level.

We still face that challenge now. We do have two manufacturers on the Construction Leadership Council but more needs to be done to get this message to Government.

This job is all about bringing people together to find solutions to interesting challenges such as; making the sector more profitable, making the market more stable and sustainable in terms of carbon and energy, and how manufacturers and distributors get their voices heard better.



What is the favourite part of your job?

I love getting out and visiting manufacturing sites and hearing from people who are working on the products day to day. Also, when we get to take CEO's from our companies to meet MP's it is always very interesting to hear the conversations they have and help raise awareness of the sector. Being invited to chair the Innovate UK advisory board is really rewarding because they have effectively recognised that products and CPA have a lot to offer.

“ I love getting out and visiting manufacturing sites and hearing from people who are working on the products day to day. ”

Where are the opportunities for women in construction?

There is a huge opportunity and I would say, go for it. I think construction is at a real tipping point and it's exciting. There is a large increase in the opportunities coming through, particularly for young people. The way technology is changing there is no reason why diversity is an issue still. There is absolutely no reason why out on manufacturing sites, particularly if we are looking at offsite manufacturing or digital, that you can't have both gender and ethnic diversity. I believe that the projects would be so much richer because of that.

I guess it's quite hard for women not to try and fit in and be the same as everybody else when starting out in a job, but I think the real value in diversity is that people bring their own unique skills and that mix will make us a much richer industry. The challenge is, how can we help people to demonstrate their skills, so we don't try to fit people into the corporate norms, but instead, help to let people fly.

What's next for the CPA?

We have some major opportunities for the CPA to show leadership. On Industrial Strategy, the Sector Deal is a very good document that clearly positions products at its heart. The government is saying, here's your opportunity, so now we need to step up and take it. It is early days, but the Challenge Fund has £170 million to be invested in construction, this is a massive opportunity. Construction has never had that offer before, so how do we seize that?

CPA is also continuing to work with government and industry to address the challenges in the Dame Judith Hackitt Review, so that the built environment performs for people, who can enjoy it and feel safe in it.





Ann Morgan

Chief Executive
Murdock's Builders Merchants



How important are supplier partnerships?

I think that a solid partnership based on mutual trust and confidence is hugely beneficial to both parties and also to the customer. It should be our joint aim to offer the customer a quality product plus the relevant level of support, and this is best delivered when the merchant and the manufacturer have a good relationship.

We value suppliers who share our pride in a "customer first" ethos and we need suppliers to be very accessible during and after the sale, particularly with technical products. We want to work with suppliers who join with us to go the extra mile to deliver excellent customer service because it's a win-win situation for everyone, including the customer, when the partnership works.

Our relationship with the Keystone Group would be a good example of a successful supplier partnership and over a long period we have developed strong, professional, working relationships at all levels between our two businesses.

Tell me a bit about Murdock Builder's Merchants?

We are an independent family owned Merchant Group and have been trading for over 35 years. We have 10 branches in Northern Ireland and 3 in the Greater Dublin region, and we have plans to open at least another two branches in 2019. We also have a sizeable timber division which manufactures / processes roof trusses, bespoke machined timber and rough sawn timbers.

We are traditionally known as a general merchant to the house-builder but in actual fact we offer a comprehensive range of below ground and specialist products combined with a top class level of in-house expertise across these non-commodity areas. Our new civils branch in Kennedy Way in Belfast has really taken off and we are in the process of developing a similar civils offering from our Kilbarrack branch in Dublin. Our business is built on the provision of excellent customer service by a well-trained and knowledgeable workforce. Health and Safety is also



Julie Chandler

Managing Director
Chandler Material Supplies Ltd



Tell me a bit about Chandler Material Supplies Ltd?

We are a family business, my grandfather moved to the site in the 1950's to operate his building business. It was a large yard and in addition to storing his excess building materials he rented out space to some smaller builders, they saw all the extra materials they wanted to buy from him and that's how he started selling.

That business grew, eventually we formed a limited company in 1980 which I joined from school in 1981 and progressed from there. We now have just under 50 employees on a 3 acre site and we are doing well.

How important have supplier relationships been to your growth?

Working with major brands like Keystone has been paramount to us because our customers know which brand they are looking for. We also like to offer customers brand consistency, so our relationships with companies such as Keystone is really important to us. Our ideal supplier profile includes; reliability, integrity and good support, where we know they will support us if something goes wrong.

Tell us a bit about yourself?

I am Chandlers through and through and as I now have 2 children who also work in the company, it really is the focus of family life. I am quite a hard task master and I expect a lot from the people who work for me, but we have a great team, so long as they are doing what they are supposed to do then I'm a happy person. For time outside of work I love to get involved in volunteering for good causes through my involvement in Chelmsford Lions Club, which is part of the world's largest service organisation.

of paramount importance within Murdock's and we put a lot of time and effort into making sure that our employees and our customers operate within a safe working environment.

Tell me a bit about yourself?

I am a wife and mum first and foremost, but after that work plays a huge part in my life. I have been with Murdock's for over 18 years, joining initially as the Group's Human Resource Manager and then progressing as opportunities arose into sales and operational roles before taking up the Chief Executive role about 9 years ago. I work alongside a hugely committed team of men and women who are all passionate about making Murdock's Branches the best in their areas. The Management Team plays a huge role in the success of our business.

What advice would you give to any woman considering a career in construction?

I would recommend a career in merchandising to any man or woman who enjoys serving the public and wants to work in a progressive industry. Our sector is traditionally viewed as male dominated but this does not preclude women from developing an excellent career there as well.

This year we appointed our first female Branch Manager which we were delighted about and we have many great women working in commercially-based roles across our Group in areas such as sales, finance, credit control, purchasing, human resources and trading. I think merchandising can also provide a super career for both male

or female graduates, or for young people who have decided to enter the world of work instead of pursuing third level education.

What's next for Murdock Builder's Merchants?

We will continue to put customers and staff at the heart of our business as we expand our branch network and we are always looking at new construction related areas which will allow us to broaden our customer offering. Our future relies heavily on the quality of our staff, so our Board has recently prioritised even more resources for training and development so that we can continue to recruit the best people available, and then enable them to stay and progress with us, in the knowledge that there are real career prospects for them here.



How did your career in merchandising develop?

Totally accidentally, but a very fortunate one for me! When I left school I didn't know what I wanted to do. At that time, we had 6 million unemployed in Britain which was horrendously scary but my uncle had just set up Chandler Materials, and needed a typist and asked if I would be interested in working in the business.

It all started from there and I quickly grew to love the interaction with customers on a day to day basis which gave me a great grounding in the products. I had been in the business for around 25 years before my appointment as MD, so over that time, I had gained first hand experience of most things.

I still get the same fundamental satisfaction seeing a sale from start to finish and knowing that at the end of the day, the customers get what they want, when they want it.

My role is now all about improving the experience for the customers. Many of them have been with us since I first started, so it is re-assuring to see them stay with us as we make changes. For example we recently invested in new yard logistics and improvements in the shop floor layouts.

What advice would you give to anybody considering a career in construction?

It's an amazing industry, not one that women automatically think about, but it's so interesting.

If you can look beyond the dust and look at the products and the people, then if like me, you fall in love with it, you'll be hooked even more. Unfortunately, I think it's still true that as women we need to work harder than men, we probably need to prove ourselves rather than just being accepted.

At the minute there is a big drive to encourage more women into our industry which I think is a terrific thing. About 20% of the workforce at Chandler Materials are women, which is higher than the norm and I'm very pleased about that.

What is next for Chandler Material Supplies?

To carry on as we are and get even better. Will there be a Chandler 2? Yes I hope so. It's not on our fixed timeline but it is something I would love to see. The next generation of the family are already working here so we are here to stay, and we are here to grow.



Ireland focus

Grafton Merchanting ROI

with CEO Patrick Atkinson



“Back selling adds an important dimension to the demand creation process”

Tell me a bit about Grafton Merchanting ROI?

Grafton Merchanting ROI's impact is felt in nearly every county in the Republic of Ireland with a total of 49 Chadwicks and Heiton Buckleys branches. This makes us the biggest merchant business in the country and as we celebrate 200 years of Heitons in 2018 it reinforces our position as the go to source for everything from structural steel to kitchens and bathrooms.

What's the secret of the business's success?

It is all about the people, we've quite a low staff turnover among the 1350 strong workforce, demonstrating that our people are obviously quite engaged in the business. This enables us to build experience and with 60% having more than 5 years service, it provides a good base for new younger people coming in and mixing with the older experienced employees. That gives us a nice blend of freshness that is coming in post-recession and the highly valuable retained experience.

Nobody else can match our geographic coverage across the country, so that's a major factor. Everyone talks about service and quality, but these days if you're not supplying your customers with what they need, when and how they need it, you shouldn't even be at the game. The thing that really ranks us, is our people and our locations.

We are also the biggest steel stockist in the country, as well as the biggest builder's merchant and the biggest plumbing and heating merchant. This all differentiates us across the country and although we are a national company we focus on getting our local offering right. Our staff very much live and work in the community they are in, so that creates a local feel to the business.

Is training important for you?

Training is very important because good merchant staff need in-depth knowledge to provide great customer service. If you take a supplier like Keystone or Keylite, always bringing in new products, they need to train our guys so we can best represent those products, so I think this kind of supplier training partnership works really well.

Tell us about your relationship with Keystone Group?

It is one of our core suppliers and there is a long history of partnership with the two companies. My predecessor Eddie Kelly would have given Keylite Roof Windows its first entry into the Irish market based on our success with the lintel business. So it goes back quite a few years and has developed into good co-operation.

Do supplier partnerships deliver value?

I think it's a fundamental need for a good builder's merchant. If I look at our top 40/50 suppliers I can say that every one of them is really acting as a business partner. We take a longer term view of business, it's not short term. We don't spot buy on our core ranges, we look for long-term relationships and we pick the partners who are best going to fit us. We also want to see mutuality, so we want our suppliers to get a benefit out of doing business with Grafton and we need to see the benefit doing business with them.

We value suppliers who deliver loyalty and professionalism with a commitment to their own product and a clear view about where they want to go.

We also want their marketing to reflect a good understanding of the sector they are operating in.

Their interaction at branch level is really important because it's not all about CEO talking to CEO or Sales Director talking to our Category Director. I think that a partnership needs to work at a grass roots level because this is how the support filters right down the business.

Does manufacturer back selling add value to merchants?

Absolutely, for example, if you take Keylite who came into the market against a strong competitor, the impact Keylite makes by back selling its product makes it much easier to convert those sales at branch level. Back selling adds an important dimension to the whole demand creation process.

What does a "100% merchant focus" from a supplier mean to you?

Well if you're going to have this partnership we talked about, you have to have faith in us delivering the sales. It gets very confusing for the customer if they don't know if they are buying from the supplier or the merchant. So it's important to make it very clear what the supply chain is. We offer a local route into the local market and if that's not what the supplier wants then they shouldn't try to ride that horse. If suppliers are not 100% committed to the supply chain we offer, or if they sell direct, then we don't see them as partners to our business.



What is your view on supply agreements?

It provides clarity for both the supplier and the merchant. From a supplier's point of view we always deliver what we say we are going to deliver. If it's about volumes or they have new products they want to present, we take that on board and agree what we can do with it. This process creates clarity, removes obscurity from the relationship and again adds in the mutuality required in a true supplier partnership agreement.

How do you rate the support from Keystone and Keylite?

I think it's good, the Keystone Group sales team spend a long time on the ground in branches. When I read the reports of all the time they spend talking to our branch guys with training it is impressive.

What next for Grafton?

Our job as market leaders is to lead the market but also we need to be our own market disrupter, so we can stay ahead of the others. If it's about new branches, we have moved to small box format in the last couple of years, we introduced three of these in Dublin last year, so we will probably see a bit more of that. We have also started a digital journey because it is really important that we are prepared as the market gets more digitised, we are also launching new categories because there are lots of new products and new technologies out there to consider.



Do you see any threat with Brexit?

The biggest threat is the lack of confidence and the uncertainty it brings. Personally, I think common sense will prevail at the end of the day between the two islands, we traded very successfully as two independent countries for decades or even before that.

How long will it be before robots will 'man' trade counters and driverless forklifts load deliveries?

We've already had discussions here about doing small deliveries using drones, weight is a big issue. In terms of driverless forklifts, there's a massive investment needed, is that the thing that will add the best value to this business? I'm not sure. Probably some form of picking and packing will happen eventually. A robot on trade counters? As long as they help the customer understand what it is that they need and are trying to do, yeah maybe. I think we are far away from that.

We are in a people industry, where people buy off people. It's interesting that the white van man is bread and butter to us. We spend a lot of time understanding his journey, his day to day operations and what he does.

There are 49,000 construction companies in ROI, more than 70% is one man with another 15% as two men or less, there's only 2% with more than 10 people working for them. It's a pretty insular job and I think they enjoy the interaction they have in trade centres and trade counters with their colleagues, having a cup of coffee. Quite a bit of banter goes on there!

Industry voice

View from the BMF

with John Newcomb, Chief Executive



What are the latest developments at the BMF?

2018 has been an important year as our new Board of Directors approach 12 months in office and have now completed a strategic review which will be unveiled at our Members' Day Event in September. We have also recently announced the details of our bi-annual conference, to be held in Dubrovnik in June 2019.

Where does the BMF stand on Brexit?

Firstly, because we represent members who voted for each outcome, leave and remain, we have adopted a completely apolitical stance on Brexit. Our role now is to look for positive outcomes and protect our members from any negative effects that might arise post-Brexit. Advising members is obviously difficult until the trade arrangements are agreed but, in the meantime, we think it's important for merchants to focus on developing what they do best, which is excellence in the supply and distribution of building materials. A really interesting development however is our new link with The European Association of National Builders Associations and Manufacturers (Ufemat). I was asked to take on the presidency for two years, a role which helps shape the strategy of the European Association.

There is a fear from Ufemat members of what will happen post-brexit and I think that's why they feel having a British guy heading up the organisation is a statement of their intent that they don't want to lose those connections and relationships with our European partners. Chris Hayward who runs NMBS is currently heading up Euro-Mat which is the European buying organisation, so the irony is you'll have two heads of the two big European organisations both Brits, during Brexit. My first conference as Ufemat President will be in Lisbon this October, and the exciting thing as President is that I get to run the 2020 Conference in the UK which is a really positive link to our European partners.

What led to your success and drives your enthusiasm in the industry?

I've always been driven by a desire to succeed in whatever role I've been in, starting originally as a graduate trainee in JCB. My roles have naturally progressed, right up from Product Manager and eventually to Managing Director, I think you're shaped by your childhood, so I guess it's partly my working class background that's driven me to succeed. I guess I've come full circle, starting with JCB, before moving into consumer marketing where I worked for Kingfisher in retail before moving on to marketing product brands like Russell Hobbs. Then 6 years ago the circle was completed, and I was back in the construction industry.

The manufacture and distribution of building materials is worth around £56 billion, so BMF members are responsible for around a third of the estimated £150 billion UK construction market. It's a fantastic industry to work in and I think the Government are starting to understand that a strong construction industry is important for a strong economy, but it's still one of those industries where we can talk ourselves very easily into recession. Because it's obviously very male-orientated we need to be mindful of diversity and inclusion, which is currently a big topic within our sector.

What are the BMF doing to attract young people to the industry?

We are passionate about bringing young people into the industry and are taking an active approach to promote it. Firstly, we have our own dedicated website merchant-recruitment.co.uk, so this is a great resource for anyone considering a career. The site includes video clips, featuring a range of job roles and gives a flavour of what it's like to work in the industry. BMF also participate annually in Apprenticeship Week, so again we have lots of kids from schools and colleges that come along that can talk to people / members about what it's like to work within the industry.

It is also great to see larger merchants like Travis Perkins taking stands at career fairs. I think one of the things we do very well, is a group called 'Young Merchants,' it's open to both merchants and suppliers aged between 21-40. This is the age group who will be running the industry in 15-20 years' time. Currently about 80 strong, the group will have its first dedicated conference in October, where some senior figures in the industry, including David Kilburn from MKM, Peter Hindle and Andrew Harrison from Travis Perkins, will be talking about their careers.

We've got Sheri Hughes, Diversity and Inclusion Director of Page Group, the biggest recruitment consultant in the world, and our Keynote Speaker is Architect and TV Presenter, George Clarke who is passionate about developing young people in the construction industry. The Young Merchant Group meet twice a year, plus an overseas trip to broaden and develop their experience in the industry, by seeing what merchanting and manufacturing is like in other countries. There's a great social and networking element to it as well, going out for a meal, and having a few drinks in the evening as a group.



What role do industry events play for merchants?

I believe in them passionately and we now run around 60 events annually, with almost every event open to both suppliers and merchants, because we believe both parts of the supply chain are equally important. The events range in size, from a round table discussion of 15 people, to an all industry conference where we have 465 delegates. The most important thing is that we are providing networking opportunities for suppliers and merchants to talk about each other's businesses, share best practices and its particularly relevant now because we have a number of material shortages in the industry such as timber, roof tiles, insulation and it's very easy for one to blame the other.



What's next for the BMF?

We will shortly release our new five-year strategic road map, setting out very clearly where we want to go. We've come a long way over the last six years, doubling membership to 650 from 324, since I joined the BMF. The key now, is not to rest on our laurels, there is plenty of growth within the market and opportunities to add new suppliers and merchants. As the leading trade body in the sector we want to drive awareness of changes in areas such as technology and the need for diversity in the sector.

This year for example, we hosted our very first technology forum which was a big success. I think we've got a great future, but we are conscious of not being complacent, never being arrogant about where we are, but always looking to grow.

Do you believe in the role of an institute such as IOBM?

The IOBM haven't finally voted on the merger, but I absolutely believe in the role of this institute, if you look at professions like marketing, accountancy and plumbing and heating, there tends to be a chartered institute.

Part of my long term plan is to look for chartered status at the institute, but I think we have to get the basics right first of all, because the institute is a brand really without a physical presence in the market and it needs to be relooked at, reconstructed and remarketed to increasingly engage younger merchants and suppliers. I think this industry warrants having its own institute and I think it's right that it should be part of the trade association.

The progress at BMF has been impressive and a testament to your leadership.

It's all down to the support of our members at the end of the day, the organisation is built around that relationship. Too many trade associations forget that it's the membership that keeps them in a job, but hopefully my team don't have that view. We are also building a strong team by bringing quite a lot of young people into the organisation with new and fresh ideas, and it's obviously important we practice what we preach!

What's new ?



Eithne Kelly, CEO of the Keystone Group gives a round up of the latest margin opportunities for merchants.

Product innovation continues at pace within the Keystone Group. Featured below are just a few of the new products available for merchants to extend the margin making opportunities.

Innovation

Keylite Solar Operated Roof Window

NEW

Just because you can't reach a roof window doesn't mean you can't open it for fresh air.

The new Solar operated Polar PVC roof window is powered by solar energy and works independently of any mains electricity supply giving users fingertip control of the window.

Keylite Solar windows will close automatically in the event of rain and the solar cell stores up energy for use during day or night. Keylite Solar is just the latest part of the Polar White PVC range to be made available to merchants and shares the same maintenance free, moisture proof performance which is proving so popular with builders.



Keylite Roof Lantern

NEW

Merchants can now access the latest daylighting design with the Keylite Roof Lantern.

The Keylite Roof Lantern creates the ultimate daylighting experience, ideal for use in flat roof extensions, where it has the ability to convert a dull room into a vibrant living space. The Roof Lantern features many unique easy fitting features which enables it to be fitted without the need for specialist training.

The slimline thermally broken frame is just 57mm wide. Every component has been designed to maximise energy efficiency and light. Keylite's standard range is available up to 3m x 2m.



Keylite Brochure with prices

NEW

The new Keylite brochure now includes prices for easy reference across the entire range of roof windows, blinds, accessories and associated daylighting products.

The new brochure also contains sections on flat roof solutions, pitched roof solutions and the new Keylite Roof Lantern range.

Produced in response to requests from merchants for a single 'go-to' document, it has been designed to be user friendly on the counter top with easy indexing and clear pricing.



Hi-therm+ Lintel

NEW

Hi-therm+ offers a fabric first solution to reduced carbon emissions.

Keystone are keeping their merchants ahead in the race for thermally efficient lintels by investing heavily in R&D to re-engineer the Hi-therm lintel. The result is the new Hi-therm+ lintel, which, while still utilising a rigid polymer thermal insulator as an effective thermal break, now incorporates a steel inner and external leaf.

Launched in January this year, Hi-therm+ has already gained recognition having won **Best Building Fabric Product** at the **2018 Housebuilder Product Awards**.



B.O.S.S.[®] Brick On Soffit System

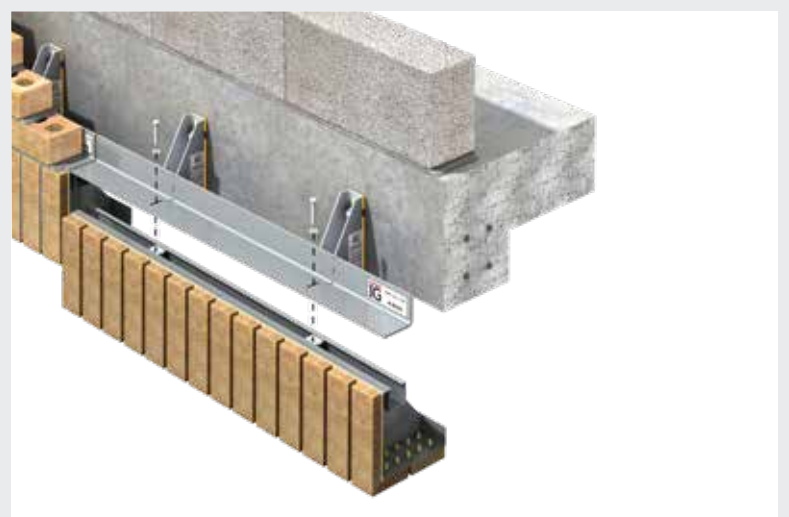
NEW

B.O.S.S.[®] opens the door to margin opportunities.

B.O.S.S.[®] is a clever masonry support system which makes achieving deep brick soffits and intricate brick patterns around window heads and openings quicker, easier and more cost efficient.

Merchants can work in conjunction with IG Masonry Support to meet the specialist needs of their customers onsite with these bespoke units.

B.O.S.S.[®] creates the illusion of floating beams of brickwork and blends seamlessly with surrounding brickwork.



Onsite with Keylite Roof Windows

Keylite on Grand Designs

This 'County Down Barn' was designed as a big shed to form a backdrop for ever changing family life. A house which could respond to family life in a playful and pragmatic manner but also fit the beautiful landscape it inhabits. Keylite provided a number of roof windows to help flood the shed with light and allow views of County Down's Mourne Mountains.



Lighting up the Church

Keylite Roof Windows helped to transform this once dilapidated Welsh Baptist Church into a bright and airy space. It was important that the redevelopment of the property remained sensitive to its historical heritage. The new layout allows existing windows to provide light into apartments below while Keylite Roof Windows provided light for those rooms in the roof.



Bringing Light in at Loch Lomond

A range of Keylite Roof Windows integrated seamlessly into this self build project on the banks of Loch Lomond, both externally and internally. A variety of single and combination windows were used, with the internal pine finish blending beautifully with wooden beams. The external frames and flashings integrating seamlessly into the slate roof.



Keylite Bi-lites provide a striking feature for Kingswood Homes

Kingswood Homes has recently launched its Green Hills development in Blackburn. Comprising of 61 properties specifically designed for the surroundings. The inclusion of Keylite's vertical bi-lites and double vertical bi-lites provides a striking feature in the development, allowing natural light to flood these impressive properties.



Onsite with IG & Keystone Lintels

Brick Feature Arch adds kerb appeal to Birmingham apartments

Built in the grounds of a Grade II Listed Victorian mansion, IG supplied a number of Brick Feature Lintels to this elegant residential development. IG designed impressive Brick Feature Arches to span the front and rear entrance to the main apartment building, in addition to flat gauge Brick Feature Lintels throughout each elevation.



Keystone's Apex Lintel adds light to sun room

Keystone's Apex Lintel accommodated a large glazed opening, flooding light into this beautiful sun lounge in Derby. The extension replaced the existing conservatory at the rear of the property. Our technical team visited the site to make sure the builders were happy with the design & installation and to ensure the process would go smoothly.



Bespoke Brick Feature Arch Lintels add character to an orangery

Keystone's bespoke single leaf Brick Feature Arch Lintels add character to this traditional Orangery in West Sussex. Keystone received the builder's drawings and developed an effective solution, incorporating a 102mm return soffit to accommodate the recessed window and door openings.



Bow Lintels create striking feature for Cheltenham apartments

IG developed Special Bow Lintels to accommodate the extra heavy duty loading requirements for this Cheltenham apartment's recessed window and balcony openings. IG engineers designed this Bow Lintel without any need for structural posts - ensuring greater daylight penetration to each room.



Investment in sales support

The Keystone Group has recently invested further in the Sales Team with a new Sales Director for Lintels. David Grace has joined the Group as Sales Director for Keystone Lintels and IG Lintels.

This key appointment is focused on providing our merchant customers with market leading service and effective sales support to the Keystone & IG Lintel brands.

David has over eighteen years' experience in the UK building sector; selling a diverse range of products to an equally varied customer base of stockists, builders, installers and specifiers across the building industry. His appointment reflects Keystone's ambitious plans to strengthen its reputation as a leading manufacturing partner to the UK building materials trade.

David Grace

What developments do you see in the supplier/merchant relationship?

I see it as a true partnership, especially as we enter a period where technology is changing

the way some industries and in particular some building products, are traded. We are seeing some online selling of materials potentially by-passing the merchant, so it is imperative that the partnership is as close as possible. At Keystone we pride ourselves on being a valued partner, offering innovative solutions to drive value for the merchant and their customers. We are proactive in the marketplace on behalf of our partners, supporting joint field days, site visits, technical support, generating schedules and ultimately tracking and securing those schedules on behalf of our merchant partners.

How can your role make a difference to merchant customers?

From an internal perspective, my role is to ensure our sales teams are providing excellent service, day in, day out and being the best representation of themselves and the Keystone Group to our merchant partners on a consistent basis. From a customer perspective, my role is to provide support for any commercial requirements, from deal negotiations through to project support and handling any service issues should they arise. Ultimately ensuring we as a business provide the market leading service our customers are used to.

Matthew King joined the team last year as Sales Director for Keylite Roof Windows.

Matthew King

What developments do you see in the supplier / merchant relationship?

As the industry adjusts to different routes to market, with some manufacturers promoting direct supply to builders and end users, the relationship between manufacturers and merchant partners becomes even more critical.



Matthew King, Sales Director, Keylite

How can your role make a difference to merchant customers?

I am less interested in what I can do and more interested in what the team can do. I am lucky to be part of a great team who work very hard and am very keen to move away from being a company of individuals and become more of a company with a strong team ethos. Within Keylite we are fortunate to have many fantastic people working tirelessly to provide the best products and service to our merchant customers that we possibly can. As Sales Director its part of my role to implement and develop a strong customer focus throughout the whole of Keylite and ensure we are all working together in a collaborative manner. The Keylite sales team are industrious and motivated and always go that extra mile, and we all help each other to continually grow, develop and strive for best practice, and ultimately build a strong, consistent sales team that are all equipped to drive sales through our stocking merchant partners.



David Grace, Sales Director, Keystone / IG Lintels

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