

Entrepreneur in focus: Royden Evans of PlumbNation

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ENTREPRENEUR Royden Evans has built a £14m turnover business in just six years and is now targeting sales of £50m over the next four years.

The Chester-born, Wirral-based businessman, who set up PlumbNation in 2007 after working in the building supply sector for Plumb Center and latterly Travis Perkins, says 2013-14 will be a year of exciting growth.

"As a young business in an online market we have always to be innovating, adding new products and also a new platform. It's an exciting time for the business – growth is literally coming from all angles."

In growing PlumbNation from scratch to a 20-strong operation based in Bromborough, Mr Evans admits there have been challenging times, but says the long hours and inherent pressure of leadership have been worth it.

"I love what I do, probably too much sometimes! But seriously, I have had jobs before where I have dreaded going in to work on a Monday morning, but that's never been the case with PlumbNation."

Central to this year's growth plan is the launch of ElecNation - an ambitious step away from the core plumbing, heating and bathroom product offering.

The new ElecNation brand will sell electrical parts and unit ranging from domestic and commercial lighting to security and ventilation.

It has been launched after weeks of testing after with thousands of products were added daily by the company's small in-house technical team.

Sales last year grew by around 20% from £11.8m to £14m and are forecast to reach £17m this year.

Mr Evans, who was last year shortlisted in the prestigious Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year programme, says the more challenging consumer environment has been a driver for growth.

"The economic climate has, I think, been kind to us. People have had less money in either their pockets or equity in their homes. They have also become used to shopping around for good deals online, and now don't think twice about checking prices online, when previously they probably would have just paid

for their new bathroom without question.”

He concedes that the online home improvements market place has become ultra-competitive and price conscious, hence the need for it to be innovating, selling more products to new and existing customers and developing new products and services to set PlumbNation apart from its competitors.

“When we started the business we didn't really have much competition, but now it's huge and this means that to continue to grow and increase market share we have to innovate.

“Launching ElecNation forms a key part of our plan to be able to provide customers with the vast majority of their requirements for the home. Our goal is to become the one-stop shop for home improvement.”

The medium-term plan after ElecNation is to launch a third e-commerce brand, called BuildNation, which will sell building products from bricks and cement to lintels.

With two million unique visitors to its website over the past 12 months PlumbNation is now of sufficient scale and significance to gaining credibility with larger suppliers, which tend to favour dealing with a limited number of stockists.

Mr Evans explains: “Margins on some products can't get lower than they are now, so for us to improve margins we have to think outside the box in terms of developing our own branded products and also buying wizards to help customers buy more easily.”

Another differentiator for PlumbNation was to bring its web development work in house, giving it tight control of cost, and also flexibility to add new products or enhance the user experience.

Chris Bullock, the company's e-commerce director, originally built the website when he was working for an agency.

After then leaving to set up his own business he eventually joined Mr Evans and the business full-time.

“In terms of key milestones for the business, it has been an important one. His technical know-how has been invaluable and it has allowed us to move more quickly than our competitors.”

Victoria Price, senior manager at Ernst & Young in Liverpool said: “Plumbnation is an example of a business that is differentiating itself to get ahead of the competition. Royden has taken his vast industry experience and set up a business model that is agile enough to respond quickly to market demand.

“They continue to invest in their customers; using technology to understand them better and improve service. Plus they have a strong people culture and an extremely high retention rate. Both pillars will stand them in good stead for future growth.”

Link: www.thebusinessdesk.com/northwest/news/470120-entrepreneur-in-focus-royden-evans-of-plumbnation.html