

cleaning **specialist**

news and information from Prochem Europe for the carpet, fabric and floor care professional

Summer 2003
Issue 10



The French connection

Looking after the jet-set on the Riviera

Everest conquest

More power in a simpler package

Special 10th edition

Your success stories



welcome

Welcome to the 10th issue

WE ARE not usually given to writing 'Welcome' articles in Cleaning Specialist, but this one is different, as it's our 10th issue.

So, in addition to the usual topical material on market trends, Prochem Europe product development, technical help, plus of course news from our distributors and customers, we are celebrating with a round-up of what's happened to some of the people and businesses we have featured over the past five years.

Five years! It doesn't seem like it. It's a measure of how much has happened since we were just plain Prochem back in 1998.

Business has grown at a steady and strong rate, I am pleased to relate. Our company has been consolidating on its success in the UK with new ventures into other European sales territories (you can read about some of these in this issue).

We have been able to strengthen our links with existing and potential business partners through new media such as online. Prochem was an early entrant into the World Wide Web – I remember, because I designed our first website! – and our use of the 'net has grown expediently.

We are about to enter our 30th year as a company and I – this is the bit that reminds me I am getting older – have passed my 25th with the business!

The cleaning market has changed in so many ways since the Professional Chemical and Equipment Company Ltd was set up in 1974 and I am pleased to say that these have been in the main for the better.

Standards are much improved and working conditions much safer. We still have some way to go as an industry with the training of cleaning operatives – but as the UK's largest commercial provider of training to cleaners, our company has the distinction of being active more than most in helping to improve this situation.

Of course, we have been banging away on these topics in Cleaning Specialist, a magazine which seems to have got its editorial formula right if feedback from the Communicators In Business (CIB) is anything to go by.

Cleaning Specialist was commended by the CIB in its 2003 Magazine Awards. "All concerned are to be congratulated on a first-class job," summed up the judges.

Alan Tilley, managing director, Prochem Europe Ltd.



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cleaning
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Good clean fun?

CHANNEL 4's new show *How Clean is Your House?*, won four million viewers in its second week. But is it all good, clean fun? Peter Hargreaves comments...

It had to happen. We have had shows about moving, building, landscaping – so it was inevitable that cleaning would be next to come under the beady glare of TV-land.

So would cleaners be getting the pasting that 'cowboy' builders have been having? Apparently not.

How Clean is Your House?, the house cleaning reality show that was a surprise ratings hit when it was launched, continued its strong performance in week two, watched by four million viewers.

Public scrutiny

"Do your housekeeping techniques leave a lot to be desired? Do your friends despair of the dust and dirt in your home? Have you got so much on your plate you've no time for housework?" These were the questions the show researchers were asking of grubby folk prepared to have their muck subjected to public scrutiny.

How Clean is Your House? tackles a range of issues from handy hints to cost-cutting tips



and sure-fire short cuts. With the aid of the trusty team of cleaning experts Aggie MacKenzie and Kim Woodburn, houses have been transformed – and we are not just talking shiny taps.

They scrubbed the grime, scraped the mould and delved into the deepest nooks and crannies.

Kim's the one to watch really. When one hapless victim recently choked on a blast of dust, Kim didn't mince her words. 'You may choke dear, but it's your dust.' Ouch! But it was all good clean fun and not a poke at the cleaning industry. But then things changed.

The next thing we knew, the girls were appearing everywhere from outrageous chat host Graham Norton's show – where they mucked about (so to speak) – to Radio 2, where a rather more cerebral discussion took place. That's where a little warning bell rang for me. A debate got under way between Aggie and John Pickup, a guest representing the scientific community on the effectiveness of anti-bacterial solutions.

"You don't need them," she announced. "Elbow grease, soap, hot water – that's what's required." In fact, she gave the impression that anti-bacterial products were not good for us. Of course, Mr Pickup tackled this one promptly, defending the role of chemical solutions and suggesting in turn that the answer to a clean home lies in applying cleaning compounds firmly and appropriately and not using the washing-up cloth!

The matter was not resolved on air – maybe off. It just got me realising that there is no room for complacency in any industry.

In the last episode I saw, milk and vinegar were on the cleaning solutions menu. We had better keep watching for the next series.



Paul Robinson (right) presents Clean Solutions with an award.

Going east

EXPANSION into the north-east is on the cards at Prochem Europe distributor Clean Solutions, the largest independent janitorial house based in Greater Manchester.

"We already serve the whole of the north-west of England, with a broad range of quality cleaning materials and equipment supplied to a large customer base in the region," says operations manager Mike Ash.

Clean Solutions has all the hallmarks of success: the company has previously been a winner of Prochem Europe Distributor of the Year Awards.

It specialises in supplying schools, hotels, contract cleaners and nursing homes and has one of the largest and most comprehensive showrooms in the UK, according to Mike. The company operates a fleet of four vehicles, a trade counter and warehousing at Stockport, providing either same-day or 24-hour delivery. In addition, it also gives free technical support to help customers resolve their cleaning problems. "We already have five to ten per cent growth per annum, and now have three of our 17 staff are on the way to get the new operation going," says Mike. "Providing the best service first works."

Good health

HEALTHCARE specialist distributor Nursing & Hygiene Supplies, of Worthing, West Sussex, are in good health if this picture is anything to go by. The company's Jim Andrews is getting to grips with Prochem's Roy Pardoe and an Award for Outstanding Sales.



Jim Andrews (right) with Prochem's Roy Pardoe.



Irish market still strong



William Jones (left) receives Cleancare Services' award for Exceptional Sales.

THERE has been talk that the so-called 'Celtic Tiger' economy of Ireland has lost some of its 'roooaaarr'. Not so, if Prochem Europe's experience of the market to date is anything to go by.

Ireland has been enjoying a boom of late and the building sector has profited from it with new businesses entering the market and new domestic build on the increase. Clearly this has benefited the cleaning sector, as Prochem found out when the company shared a stand with distributor Chemical Direct at May's Clean Expo show in Dublin. "It was all very positive," says Prochem's newly-appointed national sales manager, Paul Robinson. "The show went well and we had a good turnout on the stand."

Dublin-based Chemical Direct sold a Steempro Powermax from the show, where much interest was also expressed in Prochem's Cherokee portable.

Said director Ken Neilson: "There's still a lot of money in Ireland and plenty of new building. We've been in business for seven years and are a distributor for major brands including Prochem. The Steempro 2000 is probably the most popular machine on the Irish market." Prochem has enjoyed a positive response to its product range in Ireland, where it has five dealers in the Republic – including names such as Cork Hygiene, Clarence O'Flaherty & Co, Chemical Direct and King Ireland – in addition to two further distributors in Northern Ireland.

William Jones at Cleancare Services, Belfast, was recently presented with a Distributor of the Year award for Exceptional Sales.

Chemical Direct has moved to new 5,000 sq ft premises with a cash-and-carry showroom. Paudie Griffin, at Cork Hygiene, sums it all up: "Business is going well, alright!"

Web watch:
www.chemdir.ie



Winning team

CONGRATULATIONS to Southampton-based Wessex Cleaning.

The company has won a Prochem Distributor Award for Exceptional Sales for the third time!

From Oxford to the coast and the same distance west to east, that's the catchment area for this thriving family business. Formed in 1988, it draws a strong response from contractors and end users to its 5,000 square foot warehouse with trade counter and showroom.

"Business is going well with a good foundation to the company," reports sales director Mark Powell, who shares management duties with brother Luke, sister Sarah and their mum! A staff of six now includes three mobile engineers, all fully stocked with Prochem parts to repair contractors' machines either in-house or on



Mark Powell (right) receives a third award for Wessex Cleaning.

callout. "We used to have just one engineer in-house," says Mark, "but contractors don't want to pay cleaners to drop machines into us, and we are changing to meet their needs."

Wessex stocks an extensive range of carpet and hard floor cleaning solutions from Prochem Europe, in addition to portable machines such as the top-selling Polaris, Fivestar and Steempro hot water extraction ranges.

"They are great products," says Mark. "Really, they sell themselves because customers know about the range and ask for it by name."

Web watch:
www.wessexcleaning.com



Simply successful!

THEY say you can't have too much of a good thing. Certainly, you cannot keep Laurence Hollis away from the cleaning business.

When the Liverpool-based contractor sold his successful business in 2000 it had racked up 10 years' experience in domestic cleaning with a client base of over 250 loyal and regular customers. The company had offices at Mossley Hill in South Liverpool and at Wirral and Crosby.

When the purchaser moved away from domestic cleaning to commercial, Laurence saw the opportunity to return to the market and was quick to set up a new pitch in his Simply Services concept.

"It's a family of niche divisions rather than one company that embraces everything," explains Laurence, adding: "business has taken off very nicely."

The new businesses are Simply Housework and Simply Carpet Cleaning and both are now operating in Mossley Hill.

"As we point out at our website, Prochem provides over 60 products for

carpet cleaning alone," says Laurence. "We have invested many thousands of pounds in equipment to give customers the best machinery and materials around."

He is not hanging around at promotion either; 50,000 colour leaflets have been printed and the drops are bearing fruit already.

"The aim ultimately is to take customers into regular cleaning contracts. We don't want this to be seen just as a cleaning company but as a service.

"I'm back setting up a new cleaning business – only faster," comments Laurence. How much faster? "Put it this way, last time it took me four years to get three vans on the road. This time round, it's taken 12 weeks. That comes from experience, having previous client contacts, and having the right equipment."

Web watch:
www.simplycarpetcleaning.com



Plane sailing

IT'S A tough life, isn't it? Moving with the jet-set crowd, cleaning private charter yachts and aircraft on the sunny French Riviera. Well – yes – according to one Brit who's doing just that.

Should you ever be in the happy position of chartering a yacht with crew in the Mediterranean, consider this. You are on a clean vessel, because it is most likely to be cleaned by Prochem truckmount technology, operated by Limpiezas Coronet in Palma, Majorca, or Inter-Nett Cleaning on the French Riviera.

Luxury items

We caught up with our French Connection man, ex-pat Yorkshireman Adrian Long (our cover star), who was quick to point out that successful cleaning is hard work, wherever you are.

"Of course it's nice to be cleaning luxury items but you don't get and keep the business by swanning off for a swim and a cocktail," says Adrian, a veteran of the cleaning scene on the famous French coast.

Established in 1988, Inter-Nett Cleaning specialises in yachts and private aircraft. Adrian is the proud owner of five Prochem Performer truckmount cleaning extractors.

"With these, we provide a cleaning, maintenance and protection system which is safe and effective on all ultra-fine fabrics, wool and other natural fibres and has kept interiors of yachts looking their best season after season," says Adrian. "Owners, captains and crew have come to rely on our



The Inter-Nett yacht cleaning team.

service and we now cater for yachts not only on the French Riviera but also Italy, Germany, Holland and Spain.

Most of the company's work is in the marinas. "The industry has grown and grown and so have the yachts," says Adrian. "When I first came down here, the biggest boat was 30 metres long. Now that's their width and they can be 128 metres long."

International market

Inter-Nett has cornered this substantial, international market. Customers come to them from Florida and the Caribbean when the charter season has finished there.

"There are plenty of cleaning businesses in the US but they still hold out until they get here," says Adrian. "The yachting industry is small – people travel worldwide within it and word travels with them about us.

"There are other companies cleaning here but we are on it seven days a week and they pick up what's left."

King of Cleaning

Adrian is keen to exploit the potential of aircraft cleaning more. "We are aiming to become first choice at the airports next. Holiday – what's that?" He grins. So how did the Yorkshire lad come to be King of Cleaning on the Côte d'Azur?

"When I finished college to study building with all the diplomas, I found trade in the UK at a low ebb," Adrian tells us.

"I knew a friend here working for a French company. I came down on a Saturday and on the Monday I was working for the same outfit. I stayed for 18 months and realised that there was a good business in carpet cleaning.

"Now we're eight-strong in the business including me – I do everything including invoicing and admin – and we are having fun doing something we're good at."

Adrian has a high regard for Prochem truckmounts. "A superb technology," he sums up. "You come to know them well when you are using them week round." Inter-Nett also uses Prochem portable machines and all of its chemicals. "I like all the products Prochem sells. I stick to



certain ones like S800 Carpetclean XL, S888 Ultraprep TLC, B144 Stain Pro, B198 Rust Remover, and B123 Solvall Spotter." Occasionally, the company comes down to earth (so to speak) and looks after apartment contracts and a hotel.

Never one to rest on his laurels, Adrian is considering a possible merger with another larger company based at the airport that will strengthen his hand in winning more lucrative business there.

And he has his sights set on dramatically further horizons. "I'm going out to St Martin in the Caribbean to have a look around. It's where the boats leave from on their way to the Med, and we are going to set up there."

It's a tough life ... sigh.

Web watch:

www.inter-nettcleaning.com



Introducing a new breed of scuff-resistant cleaners



The new grade offer scuff resistant finish on our SteemPro range means they'll always look as good as the day you bought them, making you no longer a high professional image to your customers.

Adding our steel and brass whips over vacuum motors, the new SteemPro range is the ideal partner for demanding professionals. Contact your nearest Authorized Franchise Dealer for further details.

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Steempro's a grower...

IT'S been one of Prochem's most successful product introductions.

Powerful and super-quiet (a big plus for care homes and hotels), the Steempro portable extractor is getting a big brother this autumn in the shape of the **Steempro 2000 Powerplus**.

Previously, the Steempro came in two packages: the Powerflo with a single three-stage vacuum, 70psi pump and single-jet stainless steel wand and five-metre hose assembly; and the Powermax with two three-stage vacuum motors, a 100psi pump, two-jet stainless steel wand, and a 7.5-metre hose assembly.

A Heat 'n' Run 3kW clip-on in-line heater assembly is available and is an option taken up by 60 per cent of buyers.

Prochem's John Taylor said: "The standard Steempros are for everyday use. The 'new boy' is for large offices, pubs, restaurants and the like. It has a greater capacity for commercial work."

The new **Steempro 2000 Powerplus** has a 65-litre capacity solution tank and 58-litre recovery tank. All the features of the Steempro are here with the added benefit of a new 100psi solution pump with dual high-performance three-stage vacuum motors.

With dual-jet stainless steel wand and eight-metre hose assembly, this looks set to be the big seller for commercial cleaning

jobs in 2004. The new machine is available with an optional heat and run system, that can deliver 180 degrees Fahrenheit in only 90 seconds.

■ **The Steempro Powerplus is available from September; further details and prices from Prochem sales on 020 8974 1515.**

A YEAR in development, the Everest is the latest entrant to Prochem Europe's largest truckmount extractor range and it brings even more power in a simpler, easy-to-maintain package.

"We threw out any preconceived notions about what a truckmount should be," says Prochem Europe MD Alan Tilley. "Market

research among users revealed a demand for high performance coupled to ease of maintenance. Durability and quality were never very far away."

The result is a high-performing machine within a simpler design. The basis for this achievement is a heat exchange system that captures heat from the blower exhaust, engine exhaust and engine coolant.

"The innovative bit is that it produces heat on demand," explains Alan. "During operation, it develops plenty of heat. When the wand is set down, it cools, eliminating the need to bypass water to the water tank."

The Everest's design is further improved by the use of a

new tri-lobe blower, specially co-developed by Prochem and Sutorbilt to make for an unusually smooth and quiet operation.

The Everest comes in two specification packages, from the base Everest 1200psi units for carpet and upholstery cleaning to the Everest HP model providing up to 3000psi for pressure washing and hard floor cleaning as well as carpet and upholstery operation.

The Everest is available from July 2003; further details and prices from Prochem sales on 020 8974 1515.

■ **Special Introductory price July–December 2003 and FREE heavy duty**

show review

Show time!

“B EING in the right place at the right time can pay dividends. Being there in the right way, too, meant we had the recipe for success.”

That's how newly-appointed national sales manager, Paul Robinson, summed up March's UK Cleaning Show for Prochem Europe.

The event scored a 23 per cent increase in attendance in defiance of the perceived wisdom that exhibitions are losing their visitors. Prochem's stand saw an 18 per cent increase in visitors.

“We've always had a good response to new products at this show but this one was particularly strong thanks to the stand and its position,” says Paul.

This was the first UK show for the new, large stand and its stylish, open-plan layout coupled to strong branding drew the crowds.

“We saw a tremendous number of our distributors and end users and everybody

was complimentary about the stand and the new products,” said Paul. The new Cherokee and Bravo extraction machines were exhibited with huge success – so much so that stock was all but completely exhausted within a few days of the show closing: “Stocks, of course, are now replenished!” jokes Paul.

Truckmounts continued to attract much interest, together with news of price reductions on selected machines and accessories.

Visitors welcomed a new feature of Prochem exhibitions: technical advice days. For each day of the show the company hosted on-stand advice and sessions on truckmounts kept the company especially busy.

The next chance to see Prochem Europe exhibiting will be at CMS Berlin and The Carpet and Upholstery Cleaning and Restoration Show in Wolverhampton in September 2003 and in May 2004 at Interclean in Amsterdam.



Visitors flocked to the Prochem stand at the UK Cleaning Show.



A&M receiving its award at the show.

Anti-soiling for
easy carpet maintenance



Bumper catalogue

VISITORS to this year's Cleaning Show in Birmingham have scored the 2003 Prochem Europe's bumper catalogue of cleaning technology innovation the best yet; it is packed with information on Prochem Europe products and training courses.

New lightweight machines and accessories have been added to the company's cleaning technology range. Some chemical products have been subject to a formulation change thanks to improved technology. Further changes to Prochem Europe's chemical range include a number of packaging size revisions and the final stage of re-branding the range to the Prochem Europe logo.

Have you received your FREE COPY yet? If not, call: 020 8974 1515 or email: sales@prochem.co.uk

National man

CONTINUED business growth at Prochem Europe sees the appointment of Paul Robinson as the company's national sales manager.

Paul, 42, becomes responsible for all Prochem UK and Republic of Ireland business. He was formerly sales and training executive and has been with the company since 1997.

Prochem Europe MD Alan Tilley says: "I am delighted to see Paul take on this exciting new challenge. His background in retailing and marketing sees his remit here extended to take on greater responsibility for major customer support. Many readers will know Paul from his role in Prochem's training business. Paul has played an important role in our training service provision and the skills he has gained in this area will be fully utilised in his new management role."

Special 10 issue

Cleaning Specialist takes a look at your success stories over the last nine issues.



All shipshape

BUSINESS is booming for Wigan-based contract cleaner Gerrards. To say that business is well and truly ship-shape would be no understatement.

Because Gerrards has been specialising in cleaning cruise ships for the past 12 years. Since we reported on the company ([Spring 2001, CS4](#)), Simon Gerrard has grown his business further.

Gerrards cleans the main public areas on the cruise ships Arcadia, Oriana, Victoria and Aurora, operated by the world famous P&O Line out of Southampton. Now, the contract has been extended to include the Ocean Village and new arrivals to the fleet in the 77,000-ton Oceana and Adonia.

The work takes Simon all over Europe. Marseilles, Bremen and Lisbon are just some of the ports he has worked in of late. When we caught up with him, he had just returned from Malta from training the Ocean Village's crew to clean carpets and upholstery.

"On one job we lifted the van on board and went to Majorca," he says with satisfaction. "We have also cleaned a ship for the TV show *Cruise Ship*."

In case you had not guessed, Simon enjoys cruise ships. "I love working on them – I love the pressure, the responsibility, the environment. Most of my colleagues say, you're welcome to it, mate." Simon had just



The way they were: Cleaning Specialist 4 Spring 2001.

returned from France where he had been cleaning Swan Hellenic's liner, Minerva II.

He is still running his trusty, eight-year old Prochem Bearcat, the forerunner of Prochem's Performer Catalytic unit. "It's done 7,000 hours and is a super, super reliable machine," says Simon.

"I treat every job on a ship as if it may be my last – that's how you keep business. It's vital to turn a job around within a given time slot because a ship is working to a schedule. You can't pop back the next day.

"The Prochem Bearcat, has never let me down – that's the mark of a class machine."

Reliability is the key to his success in a demanding and competitive market.

Web watch:

www.gerrards-cleaning.co.uk



Ace Janitorial staff are looking forward to moving to larger premises.

Ace's high!

REMEMBER Ace Janitorial? This thriving Sheffield distributor was profiled back in [Spring 2001 \(CS4\)](#). It's a family business run by founder Alf and sons Phil, Mark and Paul Cullumbine.

Ace is a JANGRO member, a one-stop shop for all cleaning and hygiene products and machinery. And it's still growing. It also offers full and comprehensive maintenance contracts for all machinery, including regular servicing, PAT (Portable Appliance Testing) checks and a general repair service. Machine hire is offered for both short and long term, across a full range of machinery, from carpet cleaners to ride-on sweepers. Ace gives free advice on all aspects of product use and suitability, and hosts and conducts various training courses in its own on-site training facility.

These courses include carpet and upholstery cleaning, floor maintenance, specialist computer and peripheral cleaning, kitchen and hygiene and also general cleaning. All courses are run by Ace staff qualified to the BICSc level. Free staff training for customers in the correct and safe use of all our products is another facet to the Ace service.

Says Paul: "We're doing well with Prochem. The machines are good. Right now we are selling Steempro Powermax's. We keep these on stock because there's nothing else like them on the market for performance value. The Fivestar is doing well, too. One care home group ordered ten and Sheffield Council took some with training."

Looking ahead, Ace is re-arranging its showroom in readiness for a move to larger premises. Ace stuff!

Web watch:

www.acejanitorial.co.uk



Simon Gerrard is proud of his booming business.

Divine work

WE know one man who's not praying for work at the moment. Since we spoke last (Spring 2001 CS4) to Tom Sultana of All Gleaming Clean, he reports business is going great guns and it's getting him to church. While 60 per cent of his business comes from the domestic market in the Kent and London areas, he packs in plenty of offices as well as the magnificent Salvation Army headquarters – William Brook College – in Denmark Hill.

"I'm cleaning their churches, too," says Tom. He has about 10 of these in his area and they get a deep clean once or twice a year using Tom's Prochem Performer Catalytic housed in a really clean Ford Transit. "Once you've got a truckmount, you'll get more business. I get a lot of referrals and repeat business from previous customers."

On a roll!

WE took our hats off to Milner Carpets of Ashted back in Winter 1999 (CS3). The family flooring retail business spotted the potential in cleaning as an add-on to the service it provides customers. The Milners have extended their shop into a former Rolls-Royce building and acquired further premises in Banstead. Founded in 1993, Milners has contracted its cleaning business to independents Brian and Karen Wilson in Reigate. "It's going very well," says Karen. "We do both commercial and domestic work using a Prochem truckmount. We have plenty of work on carpets and curtains for the home, with commercial work accounting for about twenty five per cent of our business." With business steadily expanding, the Milner investment in cleaning is paying off.

Web watch:
www.milner-carpets.co.uk



Winning again



LAURENCE Barton (right) of Barton Electrical has every reason to look pleased. He's just found out he is Prochem Europe's Independent Distributor Of The Year for the second year running. That gives him a total of ten awards. Top marks to Laurence – back in 2001 (CS6) we reported his company being the first to win the award five years in succession.

Laurence is being presented here with his award by Prochem sales executive Roy Pardoe.

Fourth unit

REMEMBER distributor A&M? It is opening up a fourth unit now. And boss Alan McKane is a big buddy with Vinnie Jones, so don't mess with him!

Following our article in Cleaning Specialist (Distributor in Focus, CS2 Spring/Summer 1999), Alan's company has continued to go from strength to strength – reflected in its winning distributor sales awards from Prochem. "We have built foundations over a number of years which are now allowing us to develop A&M, while always keeping the principles of the family business. The key players within our business adopt the very same mentality as the family themselves – and that's a recipe for success in itself!"

A&M's site has more than trebled from its original size and since 2001 the company has had its own training facility. This has allowed A&M to give customer satisfaction in demonstrating machinery, in addition to opening the door to other



Distributor in Focus, Spring/Summer 1999.

opportunities. A variety of businesses send staff for training and some larger companies outsource the training totally to A&M now. The company has been chosen by proCLEAN®, the professional cleaners organisation, to host a proCLEAN Discovery Day. "Carpet and upholstery cleaners from all over the country have visited A&M," says

Stewart makes

WHEN Stewart Kerr of Swift Cleaning Services decided he was going to be the first cleaning contractor with a truckmount machine in his area, he did not hang about.

In our launch issue (Spring 1998 CS1), we reported Stewart's move into truckmount cleaning to the tune of £45,000 for a Performer Catalytic in a fabulous custom signwritten Ford Transit.

Revisiting Stewart, it does not take long to see that major strides have been made in developing his business. "Well, we've moved into a business unit with offices and storage at Yateley, in Hampshire, where we specialise in carpets, curtains and fine fabrics.

"We have three Prochem Legends and the Performer you reported on," he says. All of Stewart's



A more unusual cleaning assignment.

truckmounts are in Transits, while he runs some small vans with portables. Stewart outlines the Swift Clean philosophy. "We never turn a job down and always go for the best materials and back-up, which is why we use Prochem machines and chemicals. All of our staff are truckmount-trained by Prochem and all wear uniform." The last time we reported on the company, they were cleaning a Windsor hotel.



for A&M



Express web

WHEN we looked at the emerging role of the web in cleaning product sales (*Autumn 2001; CS6*), MD Mike Boxall at Express Cleaning Supplies cited e-commerce's contribution to sales as 'significant'.

Investment in this field certainly seems to have paid dividends for the Malvern-based distributor.

Formed in 1991 with a staff of five, Express now fields a staff of 14, has expanded into adjoining premises, opened a new showroom and is already looking for larger new premises to meet increased stockholding.

"We are enjoying plenty of reactive business from all over the world thanks to the website. We have integrated our sales effort into a multi-channel approach, coupling e-commerce with direct mail and catalogue sales," says Mike.

"However, our target market continues to be regional contract cleaners," he stresses. "There are more players in the market than ever before."

"Ultimately we want to be the company that does everything to do with cleaning but cleaning itself."

Service support wins customers over from cheap mail order houses and wholesalers. Cleaners like to pop in when they're running out of chemicals and they like a hands-on response."

Express customers range from domestic and commercial contractors to local authorities. Last year was the company's 10th anniversary.

To support continued growth, it has introduced a service department with facilities to repair and service most makes of cleaning equipment. This includes breakdown coverage as well as servicing and maintenance contracts.

Express puts plenty of store in Prochem. "It's a strong brand and easy to sell. The training courses run by Prochem are very good; that's an area we would like to get into."

Mike has spotted the potential of truckmounted cleaning.

"We held an open day with a Prochem Performer on site and that went very well. Sell truckmounts and you get to meet some serious players."



Guests at Nigel Gibbs' (Watford FC) testimonial dinner, at which A&M was the main sponsor. In the photo with Alan McKane (centre), Lee McKane to the right and Robert McKane just behind Lee are some famous faces including Vinnie Jones, Andy Hessenthaler, Mike Osman, Luther Blissett, Jim Davidson, Ray Lewington and Nigel Gibbs.

Alan. The company's profile has grown through 'positive marketing,' he explains.

"Our friend Vinnie Jones has opened two of our premises and recently we have done a lot of work alongside our local football team, Watford FC. That's been fun!" As more businesses discover A&M, the company extends its catchment to clients from all areas of the cleaning industry outside London and the Home Counties.

"Our aim is to give our customers the best in the industry. We open our fourth unit later this month allowing us to take another step forward in our development.

"With the blend of experience and youth our team at A&M has, we have the structure to carry out our plans and do just that.

"We might not have reached Hollywood like Vinnie, but we are moving in the right direction," laughs Alan.

swift progress



The Swift fleet of truckmounts.

"Now we're cleaning public and reception areas at Windsor Castle over the road," laughs Stewart. The company has been working at broaching the commercial market with some success. From a business previously in domestic alone, Swift Clean now works a 80/20 domestic/commercial split and Stewart is aiming for a 50/50 by taking on more offices, clubs, restaurants and nurseries.

Of the more unusual contracts he has, one is cleaning river boats at Henley for operator Hobbs of Henley, including a star turn in a reproduction New Orleans paddle-boat.

Stewart keeps the flag waving over his new offices via a substantial leaflet drop of about 1,000 a week. "We get around three to four quotes a day from this activity out of which we secure nine out of ten." The clincher? "Truckmounts. We do lots of American-owned homes and they love them.

"We had a truckmount in for service and took a portable to one site where the lady said she'd prefer to wait for us to bring back a truckmount!"

And that's why Stewart is off next to Prochem. "I am going to get another Legend – these machines are the way forward."

Web watch:
www.expresscleaning.co.uk



Good growth

AMERICAN Community Schools – featured in CS2 – Spring/Summer 1999 – continues to expand the scope of its operations in the Greater London area with the opening of a new running track and a £10m swimming pool complex at its flagship campus at Cobham, Surrey.



Cleaning Manager Ben Bryant (above) advocates the use of Prochem products: "We have hard surface and carpet cleaning solutions in use here," says Ben, who buys from distributor Clean Connections. Earlier this year, 30 ACS cleaning staff enjoyed a day's in-house training with Prochem's Peter Hargreaves and Spencer Young, tackling hard floor and carpet cleaning methods. The largest campus, ACS Cobham, is no small cleaning task with a 129-acre site accommodating 1,350 pupils. ACS Egham is the campus west of London near Virginia Water and has over 550 students; the ACS Hillingdon campus, north-west of London, provides the educational environment for over 650 students.

Says Ben: "Prochem makes good cleaning products and we continue to specify them to meet the growing and changing needs of ACS."



AB Cleaning Equipment's visit to Prochem.

NL distribution

ROADS to developing the Prochem Europe brand on the continent are bearing fruit. The company's Netherlands distributor (featured in CS7 Spring 2002) reports growing interest in the catalogue.

"Business is going well in the face of a slow economy," says Sjaak Bouma at Heteren-based AB Cleaning. "We have picked up new customers and are now working on developing four to five sub-dealerships in the regions."

Sjaak, in common with many Prochem distributors, finds the company's truckmounts to be the attention-grabbers. "Cleaners are interested in these machines," he says. "There are only around 30 truckmounts working in the Netherlands at the moment so the potential is great."

There is much interest, also, in the extensive range of extraction detergents and presprays. AB has experienced a steady increase in sales of the Comanche and other portables. "There is not much competition for these machines, particularly ones like the Polaris – Prochem holds up well in terms of quality and price," comments Sjaak. "The way ahead for AB and Prochem is to get more business from larger cleaning companies. That's our target."

Martin's marketing pays off

BACK in winter 1999 we reported on how important image and marketing were to contract cleaner Martin King at Xtraclean in Norfolk. We are pleased to say that it's all paid off.

The company has moved from Martin's home to business premises near Kings Lynn. In addition to its very smart Mercedes Vito, with a Prochem Blazer truckmount on board, the company now has a Prochem Legend in a new Mercedes Sprinter. "Yes, it's gone very well," reflects Martin.

Experience

It is ten years since Xtraclean was set up as a carpet and upholstery cleaning specialist covering Norfolk, Cambridgeshire, Lincolnshire and Suffolk. Those years of experience and the reputation it has gained for prompt and professional service have helped the company go from strength to strength.

When the company started, Martin was working on his own, but now he has five members of staff. Xtraclean is also a member

of professional organisations, including the Association of Cleaning and Restoration, the National Carpet Cleaners' Association, the Professional Cleaners' Organisation – and the Chamber of Commerce.

Xtraclean staff are experts at all aspects of domestic and commercial cleaning, including carpet and fine fabric cleaning, rug cleaning, hard and resilient floor cleaning and maintenance, leather renovation and odour control, and stain protection.

The team uses a combination of Prochem chemicals manufactured to ISO 9002 standards, which are formulated exclusively for carpets and fabrics, sanitising, deodorising and providing protection against bacteria and odours caused by floods, moulds and mildews and also removing dust mites.

"The Prochem Blazer and Legend SE truckmounts clean in a third of the time taken by portable machines and also leave the exhaust fumes and heat outside the building, creating a cleaner and healthier indoor environment."

The business includes homes, offices

and even fire stations. "One bunch of guys with hoses going one way, and another going the other," laughs Martin. The company cleverly packages its services in different cleaning ranges, from budget to total clean. "It provides most customers with a chance to buy into professional cleaning," he says.

Recovery services

The second arm of the business, set up five years ago, is a franchise of Disaster Restoration Ltd, offering round-the-clock recovery services through insurance claim work for fire and flood restoration.

"With our expertise and knowledge of the restoration business we can help clients back to normality effectively and efficiently. We appreciate the damage caused by fire and flood can be distressing, which is why we have trained technicians to make sure the least amount of inconvenience is caused."

It's all change at Xtraclean – change for the better.

Insuring a future



WITH insurers chasing best practice and value from suppliers, the fire and flood restoration market is lucrative but demanding. **Brian Armstrong**, managing director of Disaster Restoration (DRL), outlines the issues.

Fire and flood recovery has escalated into a major claims-based business in recent years. Increasingly, insurers have turned to professional recovery organisations to deal with the aftermath of disasters, acknowledging the special skills required to restore and recover an environment immediately following an incident and prior to building reinstatement.

Whilst the great debate of when dry really is dry continues, what is clear is that effective removal of moisture requires specific expertise and cannot be left to chance. The same can also be applied to the removal of smoke odours and residues and decontamination following fire or flood.

Professionals

DRL is a specialist fire and flood recovery organisation operating a nationwide network of professionals qualified in all of the above areas. Professional is the key word here. The industry has, of necessity, become more sophisticated as insurers have focused on the real value and benefits offered by restoration and recovery vs replacement.

There are a number of key requirements to fulfilling the insurers' demands for professional, quality solutions. DRL offers the capability and resources to meet these head on by using modern technology and enhanced communications to work closely with insurance and loss-adjusting professionals to deliver the results required

to satisfy the discerning consumer market.

The current trend is for organisations like DRL to tender for fixed-term contracts with major insurers, fulfilling a range of demanding criteria. Frequently a major consideration is the ability to provide national coverage: DRL has risen to meet this challenge by moving its business to a franchise-based operation.

Commitment

Strong commitment to staff training has not been diluted by this latest commercial decision. In fact this particular model offers benefits to all parties: homeowners get the best possible remedy, insurers get national coverage by qualified technicians with the benefit of local knowledge and, in the case of major disasters, the resources to pool available manpower.

DRL's franchise network offers a substantial expectation of insurance-based work. The franchisee is required to demonstrate a serious level of commitment to the business with the absolute requirement to undergo training to the highest levels available – a proviso of operating a DRL franchise. A DRL franchise is also a flexible business solution as many franchisees continue to run their original carpet businesses alongside the franchise. It's a win-win if ever there was one.

DRL is also committed to using state-of-the-art equipment and has invested substantially in Prochem truckmounted water extractors. This equipment is the best available in the marketplace, with major advantages in its operational flexibility at times of major flooding.

Frequently there is no electrical power supply available; Prochem's self-sufficient petrol-engined equipment can be brought in close to the source, allowing effective water removal at the heart of the problem without the need for cumbersome generators.

Franchisees are actively encouraged



Insurance companies now recognise the importance of using professional recovery organisations.

to invest in market-leading products and equipment, and take their lead from the parent company's recommendations.

At the end of the day, DRL runs a business successfully by establishing relationships – relationships with their franchisees, insurance professionals and suppliers of quality equipment. These relationships are key to the successful operation of a leading professional fire and flood recovery organisation: in short, good relationships and reliable service delivery in terms of quality and response lead to first-class recovery again and again.

Web watch:
www.drl.net



Over the Moon!

Question: Who would be best suited to understanding the needs of cleaners?

Answer: Cleaners!

THAT ethos underpins the story of CCL Supplies, the Cambridgeshire-based Prochem distributor that grew out of a contractor called Come Clean.

Founded in 1988, Come Clean Ltd has built up and maintains a successful contract cleaning business in and around Cambridge. Its high street shop in Chesterton provides a handy first port of call for visiting cleaners and savvy consumers.

Says manager Sharon Moon: "Being cleaners, we know about what's quality in cleaning products. The fact is that this is a price-driven market, but good will out." She and company founder Benny Ramsey (an NCCA-qualified cleaner himself) mind the contracting business, while Sharon's husband Owen looks after finance, technical and sales for the company's distribution business, launched in 2000.

Hands-on

"With all our hands-on experience of cleaning, it just took off," says Owen. "We rapidly expanded from the shop in Chesterton to a warehousing unit at St Ives with its own trade counter and office, and business just took off. Every time you go into a new contract you will have a new line of something or other, and so we now have 550 different products in stock. This variety helps us win bigger contracts, whilst attracting cleaners from other counties to buy from us."

CCL Supplies is a main distributor for many leading manufacturers who, in turn, are able to provide detailed technical information and advice when necessary. Safety data sheets from companies like Prochem Europe are available for all chemical-based products and colour-coded hygiene systems ensure



Goods on display at Come Clean Ltd's popular supply shop in Chesterton and at the Eastern Hospitality Show.



full compliance with Health and Safety regulations. CCL Supplies endeavours to solve cleaning and maintenance issues, as well as source and distribute a range of hygiene and paper disposables to today's different working environments.

Individually tailored programmes can be developed to reflect customer needs, thus ensuring that a consistently high level of hygiene is achieved. "We're simply committed to the distribution of the best products at the best possible prices to achieve a quality and competitive service," says Owen.

Successful

That commitment manifests itself in related ways such as the highly successful Training, Info and Demo Day of last year, attended by 40 cleaners and four key suppliers, including Prochem. "Prochem came with a truckmount and a Steempro portable

and everybody had a go, asked questions, and enjoyed themselves," reports Owen. "I got some excellent feedback and made a few sales, so we were happy."

"Prochem offered excellent technical advice and did some training demonstrations. Cleaners have their preferred methods and preferred chemicals, but some were converted to new ways of working as a result of that event. It went really well. We are going to make it an annual event."

Looking ahead, CCL sees the need growing for another shop. Says Owen: "Cleaners like coming into the shop and talking on a subject we know about in every practical respect. The warehouse plays an important part in meeting our volume needs, but we are not neglecting the personal touch."

Web watch:
www.cclsupplies.co.uk



Training takes off in the regions

PROCHEM is gearing up for the rest of 2003's regional training courses. Prochem training manager Spencer Young anticipates growing demand.

"One-day courses in major provincial cities work best," he says. "This year we've held courses in Manchester and Bristol. Manchester was very heavily subscribed to."

One-day carpet and one-day upholstery courses attract a mixture of people, from distributors' reps, local councils, universities and prisons to contractors and owner-operators.

Looking ahead, regional courses are coming to Birmingham in September at the Ward Arms Hotel, Dudley, and to Manchester with a return visit this year to the Britannia Country House Hotel, Didsbury (see dates opposite).

"These are likely to be well attended," says Spencer. "Both are good catchment areas with high-density populations." A fully-subscribed course would comprise 30 people. "That's tops because any more can become difficult to manage on the more personal basis that we

favour," says Spencer. Attendees come away with an understanding of the potential problems they may encounter. "We find that people who have been cleaning for years learn something from the courses," he adds. "They get knowledge that they can sell as a service to customers and so add value to what they do and justify cost. It takes cleaners out of the trap of competing on cost alone."

Meanwhile, with in-house and regional training courses now well established, Prochem Europe is inviting its full service distributors to host one-day seminars for their own customers (see article *Over the Moon about Come Clean Ltd on Page 14*).

"More and more distributors are getting interested in training," says Spencer. "It is clear that the word is out that training is not only good for customer relations, it's good for sales."

Courses can be booked online at www.prochem.co.uk or by completing training course registration forms or calling 020 8974 1515.

Clean start?

A TRAINING course on cleaning for prisoners is reducing prison costs and helping inmates reintegrate into society on their release.

The course, at south-east London's modern Belmarsh prison, has been in place since 1991. Trainers have attended Prochem training at Chessington and the prison specifies Prochem chemicals.

"We provide a basic one-week course to a basic preliminary BICSc certification with up to 12 inmates attending each week," says a prison spokesman. "Attendees get trained in using machinery and understanding how to mop and brush. Prochem simply makes good products." Once they have passed the course, inmates can get started right away on cleaning their own communal areas of Belmarsh.

"The course pays for itself and gives them a skill and everyone who does the course is registered with BICSc," adds the spokesman.

Do staff hear again from their trainees? "Only if they come back in," is the answer!



T R A I N I N G

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UI	9	3	-	5	-
HFI	31	25	-	27	-
SI	-	-	15	-	-
PI	-	10	-	-	10

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V e n u e	CI	UI
The Midlands	16th September	17th September
North	21st October	22nd October

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Know your carpets

Think you know your carpets? Use the wrong cleaning method on a carpet and you have a recipe for disaster. In the first in a series of articles, **David Anderson**, product development manager at carpet manufacturer Stoddard, looks at the different types and constructions of carpet available.

THERE are a huge variety of carpet constructions and pile fibres available on the market.

Overall, it's a sound practice to view carpets as highly engineered products. Let's look first at the factors involved in the development of a new carpet product.

- **Construction:** Carpets are three-dimensional structures consisting of three interlocking components.
- **The Pile Surface:** This is what initially attracts end-users. It can be plain, or decorated with a design, or have a textural effect from either the yarns or the pile surface construction. It can be formed as a cut pile, a loop pile or a combination of cut and loop pile and even have tufts of different heights.
- **The Carpet Interior:** The carpet consumer never sees this component. It has two main functions: it gives the carpet stability and its structure is responsible for many of the carpet's physical performance characteristics.
- **Carpet Backing:** The back of the carpet plays only a minor role in product selection by the customer. However, it can

determine the optimum carpet installation and cleaning methods to be used.

- **Fibre and Yarn Types:** The pile surface is formed from the yarns and fibres used in the carpet manufacture process such as ...
- **Wool and Wool-rich Blends:** Wool is still viewed as the premium fibre for carpets, against which the other fibres tend to be assessed. It has a natural crimp and is a resilient fibre, which enables it to recover quickly from compression marks. A natural and inherent soil resistance plus an excellent response to vacuum and wet cleaning helps the carpet to retain its appearance for longer. It also masks cigarette scarring.
- **Nylon (Polyamide):** Nylon, or to give it its correct chemical name, polyamide, is a durable and versatile fibre, which can be easily dyed, but – unless treated – can be prone to soiling.
- **Polypropylene:** This fibre is durable, cleans well and is resistant to staining, but it is difficult to dye and has low resistance to abrasion. It is normally purchased in the solution-dyed format, wherein the fibre manufacturer colours the fibre at the production stage.
- **Other Fibre Types:** Other fibre types such as polyester and acrylics are used in carpet yarns, but the quantities involved are relatively small.
- **Blends:** The selection of a suitable fibre type or blend will be made on the basis of economy, physical properties and aesthetic appearance. The best known blend for carpets is 80 per cent wool/20 per cent nylon.
- **Hard Twist Yarn:** As the name implies, the level of twist applied in this yarn type is comparatively high, which results in a yarn with a knurled appearance. When this is used to manufacture carpets it gives the tufts a non-directional effect. The performance of a two-ply is generally better than that of a single ply.



- **Velvet Yarn:** The twist level applied in this yarn type is relatively low and during the finishing process the tips of the tufts burst, giving the resulting carpet a matted surface appearance.
- **BCF Yarn:** Synthetic fibres such as nylon are manufactured as continuous filaments; to improve its bulk and cover, the yarn is processed with a combination of twisting and texturing or air entangling.
- **Effect Yarns:** Heathers, stipples, space dyeing and other yarn effects are sometimes used to give the pile more surface interest. The only problem with using these yarns is achieving an effect that the customer actually perceives as representing value for the added cost that an effects yarn will normally add to the product.
- **Next month David continues this series with a look at carpet manufacturing.**



Web watch:

www.stoddardcontract.com



Mind your Qs and As!

From cleaning up the summer's suntan oil to dealing with soot marks, Prochem's Peter Hargreaves is back with answers to your tricky cleaning questions.

Q The end of summer is almost here and once again we will be busy removing suntan oil from all types of material. Can you suggest the best products and methods?

A This is an interesting one because there is such a variety of tanning products on the market. But, generally speaking, B123 Solvall Spotter or A277 Solvex will break suntan oil down; allowing the residue to be absorbed out with tissue. Finally, clean the upholstery using a prespray and extraction detergent or prespray and acidic rinse.

Q We have not had much success removing ice cream from carpets; we find that there is always a foul odour left. Can you help?

A I hate to say this but the reason the smell is there is because bacteria are living in the ice cream residues left deep down in the carpet. To remedy, prespray the area heavily with E836 Enzyme Prespray, agitate in with a brush, allow two to five minutes contact time, then rinse-extract with B109 Fibre and Fabric Rinse in the tank of the extraction machine. Finally, spray the area with B125 Clensan® solution which will inhibit the growth of any remaining bacteria and remove the odour.

Q Do you have a product that will remove Tipp-Ex and other correction fluids from carpets and upholstery?

A Go for either B123 Solvall Spotter or A277 Solvex. The reason you have a choice of products is really to do with the length of time that the correction fluid has been in the carpet and the type of fabric or fibre that is involved.

Q A bird came down a customer's chimney and he now has soot marks on the beige wool carpet. We vacuumed away as much soot as possible, but the marks still remain. Have you anything we can use?

A Fortunately, from your explanation of events, this took place recently, so the chances of removing the soot stains are good. I would suggest that you use Prochem A217 Ultrapac Renovate as a prespray. Leave it to dwell for two to five minutes, and then rinse extract out with B109 Fibre and Fabric Rinse.

Q Could you please suggest a product to remove engine oil from carpet tiles? I have used B123 Solvall Spotter, but it still leaves the carpet with a black mark.

A Having chatted with you further on this, the black mark that you describe is probably bitumen which has been loosened by the B123 Solvall Spotter and is now a permanent stain.

However, all remaining untreated oil deposits can safely be removed by using E836 Enzyme Prespray (mixed and used as per label instructions). Then rinse-extract the area with B109 Fibre and Fabric Rinse.

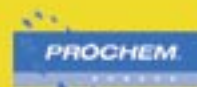
Problem upholstery soiling?



Our newly reformulated B108 Fabric Restorer is now even more powerful and removes greasy problem soils. It's a heavy duty pre-spray which tackles hair oil, sweat and body fat with ease.

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Banking on

Prochem

If something works for Jane Dunn, she tends to stick with it. That includes her choice of cleaning products and technology provider.

WHEN the contract manager for MacLellan Cleaning and Support Services specifies chemicals and machines for her clients, she cites Prochem Europe.

"I have grown up with Prochem in career terms," she says at her London-based site office. "I find the company and its staff to be particularly efficient, plus you get lots of help and support. So that makes me a bit of a fan of its products."

Jane has been using Prochem products since she entered the London cleaning services market in 1989, wherein she remains to this day. Her career started when she became a site manager with Initial, a role which introduced her to the day-to-day operation of a diversity of corporations and institutions. It also provided her with her first experience of Prochem.

Prestigious accounts

"We had a number of prestigious accounts. The largest was with the BBC at Portland Place, where I had 170 staff to manage," she recalls. "When we needed cleaning equipment and solutions, I just kept going back to Prochem."

Jane's next career move was to OCS, where she worked as a major account manager. "I looked after some of the company's blue-chip accounts in the City and West End of London, including Chemical Bank, the Old Bailey, 125 London Wall and the Institute of Electrical Engineers, to name but a few. All with varying business needs." Her most recent move took the ambitious Jane Dunn to MacLellan International Limited. MacLellan is one of the UK's most integrated facilities and support service providers, operating in retail, manufacturing, government, commercial office and airport environments. It delivers a range of



Jane Dunn and her team.

services encompassing building services maintenance; support services comprising cleaning, catering, security and landscaping; office services including mail-room, secretarial, reprographics and portering; and professional services such as project management, HSE and facilities services specification consultative advice.

The task of constantly maintaining facilities in peak, ready-for-service condition across a range of industries demands a high level of management expertise, proven systems and processes, and a commitment to service excellence. For MacLellan, this is core business and a routine day's work.

Department heads

Jane's latest contract, started in January of this year, is at a major banking organisation within the square mile. Jane commutes to her own office in the building each day along with the bank's 1,500 staff.

"It's much the best way to look after a client," she says. "I have my own office, which means I have easy access to site and to the department heads within the bank. It also means I can monitor cleaning performance on an ongoing basis. A staff

of 40 full-time cleaners are employed by McLellan on site. Most recently, Jane requested on-site carpet cleaning training for 10 of them. Prochem's Roy Pardoe and Spencer Young carried out a one-day course for the group. "Spencer had trained staff at Shell so I knew he would be very effective," says Jane.

On-site training

"In fact, they surpassed my expectations. They did a great job, not least because the staff were Portuguese and spoke little English. The team night manager translated for Spencer, who had tailor-made the course to meet our specific needs and was very concise and patient."

Jane uses Prochem carpet cleaning machines including the Steemeasy and plenty of chemicals, including S709 Multi Pro, S711 Traffic Lane Gold, B195 Coffee Stain Remover and B123 Solvall Spotter.

Jane hopes to get Prochem back in for more Prochem on-site training for her cleaning staff at the bank. "I've never had a problem with Prochem and that's why I would always be inclined to go back to it," says Jane.

Merger channels fast success

The Channel Islands' largest janitorial and catering distributor was created in 1998 by the merger of two major Jersey distributors, Romeril Agencies and Hawson Agencies.

PROCHEM distributor Mercury Distribution operates from both Jersey and Guernsey, offering daily deliveries from a total of 3,500 stock lines.

Key developments – particularly for the smaller operation in St Peter Port, Guernsey – include the company joining the Nationwide Group, while introducing medical disposables and equipment to its substantial lines offer.

“Joining Nationwide has been a huge success,” says purchasing director Howard Buesnel. “It’s meant we are more competitive in that we have more stable pricing, which has helped us grow our business. You have more of a voice when you are part of a group like this.” The company is also a member of the Countrywide Care Network.

Prochem products are a staple of the Mercury cleaning lines on offer. “Prochem is very good,” says Howard. “You put your order in and it is dealt with very quickly. There are very few out-of-stock lines with Prochem.”

Idyllic

For many of us, the Channel Islands conjure up dreamy images far removed from the nitty-gritty of cleaning. Working there sounds idyllic to a generation brought up on TV’s *Bergerac*; but there are logistical issues to consider, as Howard points out.

“Yes, there is a temptation to think we are always on holiday here,” he agrees. “*Bergerac* is still being screened and I actually spotted myself as a child in one episode recently!”

Howard continues: “Back when that was

being filmed, Jersey was all tourism with finance in second place. Now it’s finance with tourism in second place!”

The customer base is demanding. And, being confined geographically to two relatively small islands means that the Mercury service has to be exemplary.

“We have special factors to consider,” says Howard. “We always have to add two to three days lead time for anything coming to us because it’s coming across the water, plus there’s added expense in getting it here.

“We have 45 square miles on this island and because we are on an island, everyone expects what they ordered to be with them in a matter of a few hours.

“To cover 45 square miles we have six reps on the road – something you would never find in the UK – and five vans.”

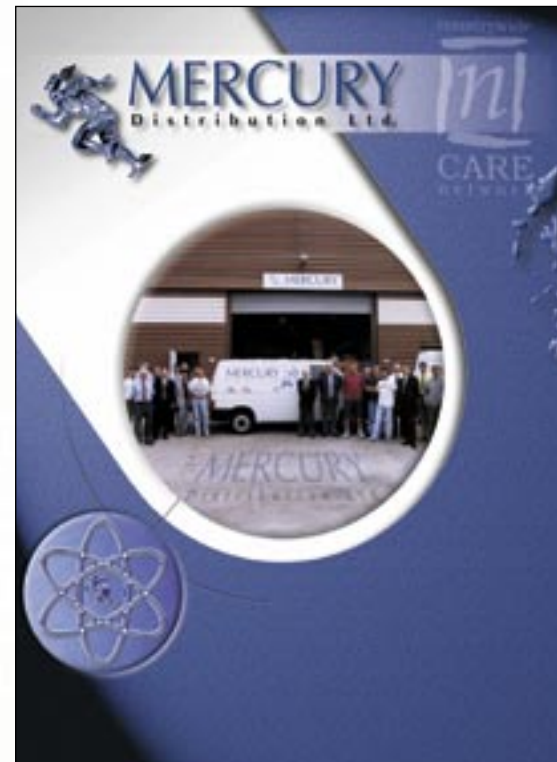
Technology

A staff of 33 look after the company’s interests, supplying a wide range of janitorial supplies and technology to the islands’ contractors. The majority of the staff are based on the larger 80,000-population island Jersey, where premises include offices and showrooms.

“The big business involves looking after the contract cleaners supplying the finance houses. Tourism is still important, but has inevitably been affected by cheaper European flights drawing tourists to the delights of Spain and other popular destinations,” says Howard.

“There is also local authority work in the chemicals sector. While authorities tend to buy direct for machinery, we do get business on medium-sized machines because they know they can get the service back-up locally.”

Tourism may be slow coming back



(some hotels are being converted into care homes), but there conferences and premium short breaks on the island still, says Howard.

He expects tourism to increase in Guernsey before Jersey and Mercury’s Guernsey operation is gearing up for it with a move to new premises at The Vale, near St Peter Port, from where it will continue to service the needs of tiny islands Sark and Alderney by sea.

Mercury sees future growth in the healthcare market. “That’s where the new demand is here and that’s why we are into medical disposables and equipment. You sell different cleaning products to the care home sector and Prochem scores by having solutions and systems, like its Odour Control Pack, specifically for that market.”

Mercury is living up to its name by going places quickly.

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