

## Case Study

### **A specialist, growing manufacturer is reinvigorated by the arrival of an interim marketing director**

**When the marketing director at this fast-growing manufacturing business resigned, its chief executive wasted no time in calling in an interim director to pick up the baton**

It's one of the recurrent frustrations of senior management everywhere; a key executive leaves the business at a critical moment, placing at risk a strategic project. Such was the case with Andy Ducker, chief executive of Farécla, a family-owned manufacturer of vehicle body re-finishing products based for more than 50 years in Ware, Hertfordshire. As he explains, in the first quarter of 2010 the company was part-way through a strategic marketing review designed to position the company for its next growth phase. Then, the unexpected happened:

"We're a growing business, having doubled in size in the last five years. Back in 2009, after a nine-month search, I finally hired a really top-flight marketing director to help take us to the next growth level. But eight months later he resigned for personal reasons. Although he'd done a lot of good work the job was unfinished; we needed to operationalise the marketing plans and get deeper into some aspects like product positioning, market insight and branding. I knew from experience it might take many months to hire a permanent replacement, so I looked for an interim to overlap the outgoing director's notice period and then bridge the gap."

Ducker, chief executive of Farécla since 2004, has held several other executive positions and describes himself as an experienced user of interim managers.

"With an interim you get a high quality person very quickly. They aren't distracted by politics and company culture. They come in, do the job and then leave; it's clean and simple," he says. Ducker has known Steve Dengel of BIE Interim Executive for fifteen years.

"Steve has always been very responsive in my experience, plus he understands us as individuals. BIE provides very high calibre people and in this case identified six quality candidates. I met four of them and it was Chris Pass, in terms of both personality and experience, who stood out."

For Pass, this was his first toehold in interim management. A classic FMCG marketing professional, he earned his marketing spurs working for the likes of United Biscuits, Boots and latterly Danone, a Fortune 500 company, where he led innovation in its high-growth, global medical nutrition business. After three years, when that unit relocated overseas, Pass decided to take a different career path.

"I wanted to apply what I'd learned working at large companies in smaller firms, where I could work on more fulfilling, transformational-style projects. I have some ex-colleagues who became interims and they always seem to be 'buzzing' about their work, so that's what first led me to contact Steve Dengel at BIE," he explains.

Pass started at Farécla at the end of May 2010. He had three working days to overlap with the outgoing marketing director.

"Those three days were full-on, twelve-hour days. I had this short space of time to ask every single question I could think of that would help me over the coming months; it was hectic but very useful.

Naturally, this wasn't just a new job with all that that entails, it was a completely new way of working; a business-to-business supplier relationship," he points out.

"From the outset I had a good level of trust with Steve and quickly built a rapport. He was confident I was right for this role and very supportive. One month in, I knew he was right and I'd made the right move."

The role, as originally outlined, was to join Farécla's senior management team as head of global marketing and business development, leading a small team through a strategic marketing review. Farécla exports 70% of its products overseas, selling through distributors and licensing arrangements in more than 100 countries. Its products are used in the repair and maintenance of vehicle paintwork. Although today it has a broader range of customers in other sectors, its core market is still commercial garages with body repair workshops, or 'body shops', as they're known.

"What soon became apparent was that Farécla needed a much deeper level of objective insight if it was to successfully reach its next level of growth; information that would give management the confidence to swiftly move through the many decisions that lay ahead. Within weeks we'd commissioned an extensive market research programme – simultaneously across UK, European and Asian territories – and including the management team. This gave us a shared understanding that would drive and underpin future decisions," Pass explains.

This turned out to be what he describes as a real 'eye-opening device' for winning senior management support:

"Ten years ago most body shops were owner-run. But acquisition and consolidation into larger groups has been happening steadily in recent years. Insurers want to lower their repair costs and they do this by standardising and streamlining body shop operations. The market had moved on and Farécla was well-positioned to take advantage."

"Although they had huge affinity with the brand, customers were looking for more from Farécla in today's more demanding bodyshop environment. These and other insights pointed towards brand modernisation: from the product line, through identity, positioning, messaging, even how we talked about Farécla and its products to customers. We also needed some entirely new products."

As well as managing the resulting brand relaunch, Pass had been briefed by Ducker to carry out two other tasks: secure a foothold for Farécla in the consumer automotive aftercare market; lead and motivate a team of ten people engaged in marketing and business development activities.

The first was secured with a début listing with Halfords, the leading UK retailer. Consumer markets and the retail trade were new territory for Farécla so a newly hired retail manager, plus the experience Pass brought, helped the team navigate uncharted waters. The team created a market-leading offer and positioned Farécla as a key strategic partner with the top UK retailer.

Farécla's marketing team had a huge amount of industry knowledge between them but less experience in driving a strategic plan and making it reality, explains Farécla's Andy Ducker:

"We needed them to recognise their own importance in realising the plans we had and become more confident, more ambitious. I felt this would happen quite naturally with Chris leading the team and to a large degree it did. But Chris also recommended we introduce personal career development plans for

everyone. This helped us enormously to create the levels of energy, commitment and motivation we were seeking," he says.

By October 2010, Farécla had found a permanent replacement for Chris Pass so his final weeks were spent preparing his exit and the all important legacy - the hallmark of any professional interim executive. This involved helping define the job specification for the incomer, completing the team's personal development plans and preparing a very detailed 'roadmap' activity plan to allow Andy Ducker oversight of all marketing activities, responsibilities and timelines. The final task was to carry out a comprehensive induction for the new marketing director.

"This turned out to be an assignment that was considerably more transformational, much richer than it looked on paper from the outset. It was a great first interim assignment for me because there was a real appetite to take onboard new thinking and numerous opportunities for me to make my contribution to move the business forward," he reflects.

Andy Ducker is in no doubt about the value of that contribution.

"The strengths in strategic marketing and brand building that Chris brought inspired the team and created an excitement and energy to the journey. In particular, his broad sector experience enabled us to benefit from the cross-fertilisation of business building approaches proven elsewhere. He has strengthened how we compete in a rapidly changing market. Chris made a significant and lasting contribution to our business – one which strongly positions the company for its next growth phase," he concludes.