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In response to changing customer needs and the fact that 85% of all car-buying consumers now visit the web at some point during the buying cycle, Elms launched their new online retail shopping experience for BMW and MINI customers in December. Once customers are on the Elms DIRECT website they can search for a new BMW or MINI according to their personal requirement or access details of non-franchised used cars for sale at any of the three Elms BMW or MINI dealerships in Bedford, Cambridge or Stansted. The website also has details on servicing and parts, an online ‘live chat’ feature with a sales advisor and testimonials from other customers.

Anson Moniz, Group Online Operations Manager said "We’ve had a great start to the year, where we achieved our five car sales target by the end of January. In February we sold 12 vehicles against a target of 6 and March is looking very good too. Since the launch we have been able to grow the business each month in line with our plan which is very encouraging."

Results from the Best Companies survey, completed by a staggering 81% of staff last November have now been published.

The questions were all based around 8 workplace factors: My Manager, Leadership, My Company, Personal Growth, My Team, Fair Deal, Giving Something Back and Wellbeing. Positive improvements have been made across the first 7 of these factors listed above and in the area of Wellbeing we have maintained the same position as the previous year.

This is a great result and whilst we are not yet in the 1* category we remain a strong contender. John Ibbett, Chairman Bedfordia Group said, "I am determined that this should not just be a box ticking exercise, but a tool to guide us in making positive changes. The business heads are discussing the results now and deciding what actions and changes need to be implemented during 2012 as a result of the feedback. The aim is for all of Bedfordia’s people to feel fully engaged with the business and enjoy coming to work."
Richard Smith retired from his position as Bedfordia Farms’ Livestock Manager in January this year after 50 years working for Bedfordia and the Ibbett family.

Richard joined Bedfordia Farms in 1972 as Pig Stockman to run the unit at Highfields Farm. Eight years later Richard progressed to running an additional 3 sites Village Farms, Longfield Farm and Arnoe Farm and in 2000 Richard was appointed Livestock Manager. Over the years Richard has been involved in the complete transformation of the pig units and the birth of BiogenGreenfinch’s first anaerobic digestion plant at Twinwoods. He has also proudly carried the Bedfordia flag as a finalist in the Farmers Weekly Pig Farmer of the Year award in 2010.

Richard says, “Things in the pig business have changed considerably over the years. When I first started it took 30 men to manage a pig herd, now it can be achieved with just 8. Not many people can say they have worked for the same employer for 50 years and worked with the 4 generations of the owner’s family - I feel very proud to have been instrumental in the many changes in the livestock business over the years.”

Without the pigs to take care of Richard plans to switch his attention to slightly smaller creatures and become a bee farmer. With 35 hives already up and buzzing, Richard is aiming to have a total of 50 by the summer which will produce around 6,000 jars of local honey. Sounds like a sweet life! We wish Richard and his wife Maureen a very happy retirement and a well earned rest! 

Elms Stansted Smash Targets!

The sales team at Elms BMW Stansted, pictured left, recently sold an astonishing fourteen 6 series vehicles over just one weekend.
A pretty amazing result when you consider that this represents nearly 90% of the total amount of 6 series cars BMW UK require the dealership to sell in an entire year! So how did they achieve it?

BMW Financial services launched a “business user” contract hire initiative in mid January which meant a new 6 series coupe or convertible, worth around £60,000 could be sold on a two year finance deal for as little as £399 per month.

Rob Stocking, Business Development Manager at Elms Stansted presented the exciting deal to the sales team on Wednesday 18th January and all agreed that with such a good proposition and the potential interest it could generate, the key was to strike while the iron was hot. Rather than waste valuable time arranging a mail shot, the sales team picked up the phones and started calling potential customers straight away.

Customers immediately showed very strong interest and 15 appointments were made for the coming weekend. By Saturday nine cars had been sold, 50% of the target set by BMW UK for the entire year. By the following Monday a total of fourteen vehicles had been sold!

Paul Walton, DP at Elms Stansted said, “The team were extremely focused. We had a very small window to make something happen and the team pulled it off brilliantly. I am very proud of their achievement.”

Richard Barker, CEO of BiogenGreenfinch said, “We are proud and delighted to have been selected to build what will be the first anaerobic digestion facility in Wales specifically designed to take food waste from local homes.”

**Awards** - The company’s most recently completed plant built for Harper Adams University College in Shropshire has scooped two major awards – the Times Higher Education Award for Outstanding Contribution to Sustainable Development and also the Renewable Energy Infrastructure Awards for Renewable Electrical Facility of The Year.

**TV News** - BiogenGreenfinch were featured on international news channel Euronews during December. The channel covered the company’s partnership with Southampton University and participation in an exciting European research project, Valorgas, looking at ways to maximise biogas production from food waste.

In January this year Northamptonshire County Council’s Planning Committee unanimously voted to grant BiogenGreenfinch permission to increase the capacity of food waste being processed at their Westwood plant from 41,000 to 49,000 tonnes per year. Permission was also granted for extended and bank holiday opening hours and for the transport of biofertiliser to neighbouring farmers.

Richard Barker, CEO said, “This is excellent news for our customers who have been requesting extended and bank holiday opening hours. We will now be able to fully satisfy their requirements.” The Planning Committee meeting was attended by Nick Chapman, Director of Property and Developments for Bedfordia Group and represented a new milestone as the Council’s first ever planning meeting to be streamed live over the web.
up close and personal
with
Norman Buck
Courier,
Bedfordia Group

Norman is a familiar face around Bedfordia Group’s Milton Parc Head Office and at the age of 85 is our oldest serving employee. Norman has worked for the company for 44 years.

How did your career with Bedfordia Group start?
I began working in 1967 as a technician for Alec Norman Garages, which was subsequently bought by Bedfordia when it became Elms Bedford. In 1987 I took on the role of general handyman at Elms Bedford which involved collecting & delivering cars, looking after the security of the garage, and even cleaning the office at night! In 2005 I moved across to the Bedfordia Group Head Office to assist with courier and banking duties.

Wouldn’t you like to put your feet up now and take things easy?!
I don’t like to sit still for long, I prefer to keep busy and I’m looking forward to achieving my 50 years service with Bedfordia!

Tell us a bit about your early life Norman
I was born in Bihar province, eastern India, in 1926. My father worked as an assistant to the Governor of Bihar so my childhood and teenage years were very different to the childhood I might have had in England. For example at the age of 9 I owned a gun and even went tiger hunting on a few occasions, although thankfully I didn’t actually shoot one. I served as a technician with the Royal Indian Air Force from 1944 -1946 working on Harvard aircraft, and the Mark 14 Spitfire. After leaving the air force I briefly worked as an oil well driller for the Assam Oil Company before taking a position in the research and development division at ICI which involved travelling all over India and Ceylon.

How did you meet your wife?
I had a passion for motorbikes while in India and owned a Harley Davidson, an Ariel, a Matchless and a BSA. One day I had an accident while riding and was taken to hospital and that’s where I met my wife Hazel who was working as a nurse. We were married in 1957 and have one daughter but my wife sadly passed away three years ago.

What changes have you seen in the world for better or worse?
No respect for authority is definitely one change for the worse that I’ve seen also nowadays people tend to throw things away too easily. In my day we were taught to repair things first.

When I am not at work...
I like to spend time with my 3 grandchildren and tend my garden especially the roses which my wife loved. When I am able I also shoot on the Bedfordia Estate.

Bedfordia Group is the best company I have worked for; my colleagues have been so helpful and given me a lot of encouragement throughout the years. It’s been a privilege to work for the company.
Giving Something Back

In keeping with its company values, Bedfordia Group wants to support the communities it operates in and give something back to people in those communities. Here are just two recent initiatives which you may find of interest.

Christmas Cards
Each year Bedfordia Group makes donations to charity instead of sending corporate Christmas cards. The charities are recommended by Bedfordia employees often with touching personal stories of their own experience with their recommended charity. In 2011, as in previous years many worthy causes were nominated which made it difficult to choose between them but it was finally decided to donate £250 to each of the following four charities:

- East Anglian Childrens Hospice recommended by Emma Speechly, Service Receptionist at Elms Cambridge who fundraises for the hospice;
- Brain Research Trust suggested by Mark Marshall, Bodyshop Supervisor at Elms Stansted, in memory of his Dad;
- Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital, Stanmore suggested by Kim Barron HR Training Administrator, whose son Kyle has developmental dysplasia of the hip and has attended the hospital since he was 20 months old;
- and CRY (Cardiac Risk in the Young) in memory of our colleague Robert Smith of Bedfordia Farms who died suddenly this year from an undetected heart condition.

Elms Stansted sponsors youth team
Elms Stansted is sponsoring Braintree Town Youth Football Club and is providing new football kits as part of this. The club consists of 17 teams of children ranging from 5 to 17 years old, both boys & girls teams. The sponsorship deal runs until 2014 although it is likely to continue beyond this.

Wear it Pink
Across the business we love getting into the spirit of national charity days and colleagues at Ludlow, pictured above, were no exception last October. The team sported pink outfits and made pink food on the day raising £45 for the charity.

So how are you finding Striving for Excellence? It’s been over a year since the performance management tool was introduced and we want to know how you are finding it. Quick and easy or time consuming and inconvenient? User friendly or fiddly forms? Pointless exercise or rewarding time spent giving and getting feedback from your manager or those you manage?

By now you will have completed the full yearly cycle culminating with the annual review. If you have been holding regular monthly reviews this should not have been too onerous a task and hopefully it provided the opportunity for you and your manager to plan for the year ahead. Why not set up dates in the diary now for your monthly reviews for 2012? And if your manager is too busy, take the initiative and set up the dates yourself – it’s your Striving for Excellence after all!

If you are still struggling with any elements, whether it’s finding the time or knowing what to include on the forms speak to Wendy Hart-Wilson, Alison Hirst or Molly Lutner for ideas to make it work for you.
Jimmie Newman, Apprentice Technician based at Elms Cambridge, was thrilled to receive the BMW UK national award for Technician of the Year in December. The award was presented by BMW UK’s Managing Director Tim Abbott at a ceremony held at The BMW Academy, Wokefield Park, Berkshire.

Jimmie who has worked at Elms for just over three years said “It was a great surprise to win the award and I am very grateful to Bedfordia for the time and effort they have invested in me.”

Jimmie Newman above left, receiving his award from BMW UK’s MD, Tim Abbott.

Rob Sawford, Service Manager and Jimmie’s line manager says he hopes Jimmie can eventually qualify to become the youngest ever qualified BMW senior technician.

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Baby News!
Congratulations to the following who have all had recent additions to their families:

- Jason Hasley, Used Car Sales Executive at Elms Bedford & his partner Donna who welcomed baby Arthur born 7th September 2011 and weighing in at 6lbs exactly.
- Christine Denbigh BMW Sales Executive at Elms Stansted & her partner Will on the birth of William James Anthony Parker who was born at 6.01am on 5th October 2011 and weighed 6lbs 3oz.
- Sarah Cole Edwards, Marketing Executive for Bedfordia Automotive and her husband Jon who are now the proud parents of twins Grace and Joel, born on 1st November 2011.
- Lucy Lewis, Innovations Manager at BiogenGreenfinch, Ludlow and her husband Jonathon on the birth of his daughter Gabriella who was born on 9th Dec 2011 weighing 8lbs 2oz.
- Suzanne Hodgiss, IT Manager for Bedfordia Group and her partner Mark now have another daughter Gabriella who was born on 14th Dec 2011 weighing in at 7lbs 6.5oz and is little sister to Sofia.
- Terry Wilding, Head Office Accountant at Elms Bedford and his wife Helen who are now proud parents of baby Jacob Friley Wilding born on 18th December and weighing in at an impressive 9lbs 2oz.
- Wayne Mason, Technician at Elms Cambridge and his partner Car who welcomed baby Riely on 10th Jan 2012.

Marriages
Congratulations to Emma Dodson, MINI Sales Executive at Elms Cambridge and to her husband Mohammad Kailati who were married on 1st October 2011 in Cambridge. It was a double celebration that month as Emma also graduated with a MPhil (Master of Philosophy) in Criminology from Cambridge University on October 22nd. Well done Emma!

Congratulations

- Stuart Jessop, Parts Sales Executive at Elms Stansted passed his ACU Motorcycle race licence with flying colours in December which means he can take part in certain official motorcycle racing series next year.
- Helen Harrison, Marketing Assistant at BiogenGreenfinch on passing her Chartered Institute of Marketing - Introductory Certificate in Marketing Level 3.
- …and finally to Lenka Watt, Cost Accountant for BiogenGreenfinch who has achieved her Financial Management Level 2 and Performance Operation Level 1 in the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants qualification.

Christmas Party at Elms Stansted

Christmas seems so long ago now but here’s a reminder of what some of your colleagues got up to at the annual Christmas bash.

At Elms Stansted a good time was had by all as they celebrated in the funky MINI show room. And despite being named Grumpy and Sleepy, they celebrated in the funky MINI show room.

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