

Quality at the heart in Hertfordshire

What does it take to grow a business and keep customers happy? According to KTH Services, the winning formula is a combination of using top quality products and installing them to the highest standards. Carol Hitchcock talked with Stevan Lewis to find out more.

KTH Services Ltd, a domestic plumbing and heating firm based in Harpenden, Hertfordshire, is an example of a company that started out as a one man band and expanded over the years to become a thriving, established community business. Kevin Terry founded his enterprise in 1985, having previously worked for the Gas Board, with the aim of taking advantage of the opportunities afforded by being his own boss. His ambitions were well founded, as he is now Director of a respected installation company employing 18 people.

One of the key members of staff is Stevan Lewis whose main function is visiting prospective customers and drawing up quotes. As a plumber with experience of having run his own business, Stevan found that he had the talent of building good customer relationships and finding out exactly what they required.

"KTH serves an affluent area, so many of our clients expect high quality equipment and the best standards of installation," explains Stevan. "I have to quote on that basis, but knowing that there are rival firms out there willing to put in cheap kit and cut corners on installation. My job is to offer competitive quotes that give the customer long term value."

Boiler installation and servicing is the main source of business for KTH's engineers, so the firm is committed to excellence in this area of operation. With this in mind, Stevan says they have selected just a few manufacturers to work very closely with, the goal being to continually step up service.

"The better the relationship we as a company have with the manufacturer, the more we can offer the customer. Worcester is our brand of choice, not only because they produce a fantastic boiler, but because they are proactive in improving it and backing it up with better and better service."

KTH is a Gold Accredited Installer for Worcester, meaning it can give customers longer warranty periods and other value added services. "We couldn't do this if we installed just any type of boiler. You have to pick a side. We are committed to installing Worcester boilers correctly, and they support us with better deals for our customers."



Kevin Terry, founder and Director of KTH Services Ltd

When it comes to hot water cylinders, Heatrae Sadia's Megafluo is first choice for KTH engineers. "Megafluo opens up so many installation possibilities. You can put them in the loft or garage, basically anywhere, because it doesn't depend on the laws of gravity to work. And you get a powerful flow of hot water," says Stevan.

He adds that one of the best features of Megafluo is its efficiency at heating the water quickly and the very low levels of heat loss. "The hot water recovery rates and performance are unsurpassed," says Stevan. "And when you install one together with a high efficiency boiler, you can get even better energy savings."

System performance

When Stevan is quoting for heating system upgrades, system performance is uppermost in his mind. "For example," he says, "I advise customers that if they are putting in a new high efficiency boiler, it's important to consider the radiators, too. After all, they are the components that are putting the heat directly into the room. If they aren't doing their job properly, it doesn't matter how good the boiler is."

In most cases, Stevan specifies Wolsley radiators. They're good value, he says, and there isn't a compelling reason to spend more on higher priced, branded varieties. "The modern radiator is already a fantastic item created by a sophisticated production process, so there



Stevan Lewis is an expert at producing competitive quotes

is no cutting corners there. A high quality of manufacturer is standard across most options, so why direct the customer's budget to a high priced radiator when it would be better invested in a top-of-the-line boiler?"

Stevan also urges customers to engage in regular radiator maintenance. "Obviously, when we put in a new boiler we will flush the system to knock out as much debris as possible. But a year after the boiler goes in, the water will be dirty again."

When it comes to system maintenance, Sentinel is the favourite at KTH. "They have a solution for every conceivable water treatment issue," says Stevan. "The X-range has products that can really make a difference in system efficiency. If you use the X800 cleaner and then add the X100 inhibitor, you can boost the system performance and cut down on energy use."

Keeping the emphasis on system efficiency, KTH encourages the inclusion of filters on boiler installations. "Making sure the system stays in top condition is vital for customer satisfaction, and there is no getting around the importance of reliable magnetic and non-magnetic filtration." That's why Stevan is a fan of Spirotech's SpiroTrap MB range. "Its compact size is a big selling point for me," says Stevan. "I don't like to quote for an item that, down the line, the engineer says won't fit because a space is too cramped. The SpiroTrap can be rotated to fit either horizontally or vertically, and is perfect for tight spaces. Robust and simple to fit, it's a big hit with our installers."

In control

Once an efficient heating system is established, it's going to need controls to bring out the best performance. According to Stevan, user-friendliness is by far the most important feature in this department. "If the customer is intimidated by the technology, he's not going to use it properly and, consequently, will be very unhappy with the installation. That's why straightforward controls are indispensable."

Most of the time, Stevan recommends using controls manufactured by the boiler maker. "Worcester combis come with excellent thermostats and controls," he says. However, when installing regular boilers and using external programmers, Drayton is first choice.

Bathroom installations are an important part of business for KTH Services, and with the large number of older properties in its territory, there is plenty of demand for their services. Stevan points out that bathrooms go out of date about every ten years, so there is no shortage of new designs and products to tempt customers into

going ahead with a bathroom makeover. Having a good relationship with a plumbers merchant is an advantage, too – KTH is located directly over Jackson's Plumbing & Heating Merchants on the high street in Harpenden, so it has a link with a well stocked bathroom showroom.

"Customers are motivated to make their own choices when it comes to creating a new bathroom" says Stevan, "so it's extremely useful to direct our customers to a well-appointed showroom."

For the customers who depend on Stevan's recommendations for bathroom products, he goes for established brands that are proud to display their name on the product. "There are a couple of reasons for this, not least of which is making sure the customer is comfortable with the choices we make for them."

Steven holds up Bristan as an excellent example of a company that strikes the balance between value and quality for the customer and ease-of-installation and product support for the installer. "You just can't go wrong with Bristan. They've been manufacturing for more than 35 years, so they have that heritage and experience of making a quality product. It's quick and easy to get parts, and they are very good at listening to feedback from installers. And with their Bristan Prime membership, we get extra benefits like sales leads and invitations to participate in focus groups."



A favourite installation combo: a high efficiency boiler from Worcester and the Megafluo from Heatrae Sadia

With 11 engineers and four trainees in the field every day, Stevan is faced with the challenge of managing their transportation. KTH relies on a fleet Ford vans, with both Transits and Connects counted among their numbers. "You can't beat them," insists Stevan. "They are so well made, and Ford has been around forever. Plus, they have excellent resale value."

On top, Rhino roof racks keep ladders and pipes securely attached for transport and easy access. "The engineers really like the tilt down ladder carriers," he adds. "It just makes the job that little bit easier and better organised." Inside the vans is custom made racking designed by one of KTH's staff.



Demanding quality: KTH relies on a fleet of Ford vans for transportation around its territory in Hertfordshire