



SPARKLING GROWTH: Roger Green

Changing course to a successful cleaning business

HAVING come to Edinburgh University to study Spanish, Roger Green decided to start his own cleaning business in 1988.

As a result, he changed course to study metaphysics and Swedish, which meant he only had to spend two days a week at university and spend the rest of the time running Spotless Cleaning.

By the end of his university course, he had more than 30 staff working for him.

Initially, Green had intended to only keep the business for a few years before selling and it and heading off to do something else.

But it kept growing and in 1996, sister company Daisy was formed to provide cleaning and hygiene supplies.

Both businesses operate out of five regional centres – Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen, Newcastle and London – with headquarter functions located in the Scottish capital.

Most recent turnover figures had Spotless at around £7.2million with Daisy at £1.25m.

Spotless services more than 800 contracts in the public and private sector around the UK, from blue-chip companies and commercial space to retail outlets and industrial premises.

Green is an experienced marathon runner and last year completed a Sahara Trek spanning 100 kilometres to raise money for Parkinson's Disease Society.

He lives in East Lothian with his wife and children.

There are contracts out there so often, that things are the for the taking, if you have an excellent product and are marketing yourself well

Roger Green aims to turn Spotless into a national player with a turnover of £100m

By Greig Cameron

IT'S probably better to have an epiphany in the back of an ambulance than to never have one at all.

Things had simply gotten out of hand for Roger Green. With his wife and children following in a car behind the flashing blue lights, he suspected he was having a heart attack.

Fortunately it wasn't, but he decided something had to change. For years he had been up at 4.30am and

sitting behind his desk an hour later, working as many hours as he could.

There were a dozen people reporting directly in to him flooding him with information, ideas and problems to solve.

The main problem was he enjoyed it too much. The thrill of building Spotless Commercial Cleaning and its sister company Daisy, which provides cleaning and hygiene supplies, was intoxicating.

So when his health began to suffer he didn't want to notice.

Now four years on from that frightening day, he is quite strict about his working hours with the school run generally followed by a normal 9am to 5.30pm day.

An executive reshuffle and some key appointments mean he has just four people updating him on various aspects of the business. Fitness was never really a problem – Green has 14 marathons and one Sahara Trek under his belt, plus is in training for the Edinburgh Marathon later this year – but he will never again let the business impinge on his health.

Sitting in the firm's Edinburgh headquarters and warehouse, he smiles about the incident now.

He said: "I have always been an early morning sort and love getting up early, but it got to the stage where my health was deteriorating.

"It was a frightening moment and a bit of wake up call for me. Fortunately I was in the position to

appoint a managing director and that has taken a lot of heat off me.

"Now if I do wake up early, I tip-toe downstairs and do an hour of emails at the kitchen table before everyone gets up."

That episode certainly hasn't blunted Green's ambition for the company he started while still at university.

The long-term aim is to turn Spotless, currently with revenues of £7.2million, into a proper national player with a £100m turnover.

He said: "With a fair wind behind me, I would love to take it to that turnover in the fullness of time.

"In order to do that we will need to reinvent ourselves with a national sales team but we are moving in that direction. I can see the possibilities out there. The sector is dominated by big players – Mitie, Initial, ISS OCS or lots of more regionalised companies.

"Companies tend to hit a platform or ceiling of the competence and stick there.

"They either die out or try to reinvent themselves but generally cleaning companies don't get above £100m turnover."

With three offices in Scotland plus operations in Newcastle and London, Spotless is already operating nationally for some customers.

However, Green knows there will be a need to scale up if he is to realise his ambition. While acquisitions a

ts
ere

g

AMBITIOUS:
Founder of Spotless Commercial Cleaning Roger Green hopes to turn the firm into a national player with a £100 million turnover



on his radar he isn't looking for stock market flotation or equity investment to raise funds.

He said: "I would love to get there organically although I wouldn't mind an acquisition or two along the way. The contract cleaning market is huge and the average length of tenure is nine months - we are averaging three and a half years so are well up on the national average.

"There are contracts out there so frequently, that things are there for the taking if you have an excellent product and are marketing yourself well."

Having come to the end of a £1m contract last year, the business experienced a drop in turnover. Certainly



Green believes the reduction was a one-off and is targeting a double digit rise in 2010.

He said: "We want a 20 per cent growth in topline and are well placed for that.

"Last year it was endemic - all our clients seemed to want to cut costs. About 100 clients said we need to cut costs so we helped them do that.

"We actually positioned ourselves to cut costs by saying we would help them by doing things like reducing window cleaning frequency, doing more recycling, reducing cleaning spec.

"Now people are feeling more confident and there are more opportunities for us.

"We have a feeling it will be a good year for us. We have a senior business development manager in place and a telemarketing department in place so we are set to go."

With 1,000 staff working in the business, Green admits it is getting more difficult to maintain the "family feel" he craves.

Although there is still a high churn rate in cleaning, Spotless has implemented a number of little touches to encourage people to stay. All employees get a welcome letter, birthday card, monthly newsletter and Christmas present.

The company has Investors in People status, something which Green says has been of "huge benefit" to the business, while long-serving senior

managers were given the chance to buy shares at balance sheet value to give them a further connection to the company.

And Green also has a track record of promoting from within when he has been able.

He said: "We do everything we can to be as friendly and co-operative with our cleaners as we can.

"People have come through from cleaners to directors. Our Glasgow director runs a £2m business and started as a cleaner.

"Our operations manager in Edinburgh looks after £4.5m of cleaning and started as a cleaner.

"I love the fact people can move up the ranks and wish there were more opportunities we could offer."

While Green is an advocate of the simplicity of the business he runs, there is no doubt it is underpinned by proper corporate structures and sophisticated monitoring techniques.

To look after customers and staff, several tools are used, while the founder is even known to check in on the handiwork of cleaners on the ground.

He said: "We have reporting throughout the company. Every single contract has a performance score given by the client every month.

"On the basis of that, we can create tables to see which city is performing the best and which manager is performing the best. Our HR director gives us plenty

of feedback on risk. We are constantly assessing our health and safety operations to minimise risk.

"We have a CRM system so we can see what our sales pipeline is like at any moment in time.

"That helps us succeed, as we have visibility of what is happening in the company through all that activity.

"We are always looking to get the edge in everything we do.

"For example, we win a contract and have an acceptance form. We are looking at an online opportunity to accept quotations almost like an airline booking, to make it easier for customers and automate things so they can click to accept contracts.

"It is those little edges which differentiates us from the competition."

Monitoring can even come down to things such as making sure staff are clean-shaven.

Green adds: "Anything to do with presentation and business etiquette we are quite strong on.

"We have an in house video which goes in to that deeply - when to stand up, come prepared for meetings, have a notepad available, not to chew gum, be clean-shaven.

"The whole presentation of the company is very important in every aspect.

"It is just common sense and courtesy but clients appreciate it and it is the way I like business to be done."