

August 2005

inside

All in the same boat  
page 2

House-builders  
build houses...  
And relationships  
page 2

Halvin' the Work,  
Dublin the Reward  
page 3

Size isn't everything  
page 3

Attention, old rope  
manufacturers  
page 4

Website presence?  
Or website absence?  
page 4



# It's like Microsoft and Windows

**W**INDOWBASE was started by a small group of people who had extensive experience in the Building industry and the sales channels used by suppliers to the industry. The first market sector tackled was the window industry, because that's where the need - and demand - was greatest.

In other words, it's a bit like Microsoft starting out with "Windows", progressing to Word, Excel, Access and all the rest. Windowbase broadened its activities, too.

At the time, sources of information used to target potential customers were woefully inadequate for suppliers' use. The major directories often used SIC codes - as used by Governments, relating to the raw materials etc. Using these is a bit like saying that Building Contractors are 'Brick Convertors' - and of little use to someone trying to sell, say, roof trusses. The building industry has always seemed to be 'material oriented', rather than customer-centred.

The other main sources are classified telephone directories, like Yell or Thomsons. Their aim is to put customers in touch with suppliers. Windowbase set out in 1989 to do the market research that allowed suppliers to reach new customers . . . the other way round, the **RIGHT** way round. Finding what your Sales Department needs, from a phone book, is a matter of luck but what's needed is a bit more science. Ask the right questions and you have a better chance of getting the right answers. Ask Windowbase, in other words.

Everyone needed a professional market research approach - simple, but relevant questions asked of businesses to identify the main distinctions that suppliers need to know. Such as 'is this the Head Office or a branch?' [nobody's interested in contacting a showroom!]

or 'do you make or just install?' [an installer - of anything - might be a customer for a manufacturer], 'what materials do you use?' [because that provides an outlet for a supplier of related products].

So the question: 'What does Windowbase do?' is best answered as: "Windowbase aims to be your professional research department", asking the questions you want answered, so that your own sales staff can focus on asking and following up the key questions that distinguish your products from your competitors.

Windowbase, having this data, can supply it to those who are looking for suppliers, too, while Yellow Pages might not claim to direct traffic in both directions. Hand signals? Windowbase works both ways but, turn Yellow Pages upside down and what do you get?



**LET YOUR FINGERS DO THE TALKING?**

"Windowbase aims to be your professional research department."



# ALL IN THE SAME BOAT

**HIGH STREET RETAILERS are feeling the pinch. When Asda start laying staff off, something's definitely happening.**

People aren't buying so, if your business has relied on ordinary domestic consumers, it can't come as a surprise to find that things are slowing down a bit. Instead of shutting up shop, someone has to find new ways of drumming up some business and they're certainly there. Window companies [something we know a bit about] sometimes imagine that, instead of selling to the retail market, they can turn to the trade . . . except that trade customers are in the same boat.

Anyone who's tried to get an extension to the house built knows that small builders have full order books, often for the next three or four months. The problem is that those operations require small quantities of materials, all ordered from the local builders' merchants. Not much point chasing after them, then.

Contractors, working for housing associations, carry on as if nothing has changed. For them it hasn't, apart from pencils needing to be a bit sharper at the tendering stage. Borrowing capacity, for investment in houses, is still what seems like a bottomless pit. But, unless they're also very good at building Olympic stadiums, contractors have to find ways of cutting costs to stay competitive and that means always being on the look-out for new suppliers.

As often as not, there's not a lot of point in trying to get your feet under a contractor's table, because his hands are tied by who's on the Select Tender List. You have to reach the decision-

makers, and that's easier said than done because there are more and more of them. Local authorities, who used to be major landlords [with major budgets] have privatised their housing stock, one way or another. What used to be the Housing Department has become an ALMO or an LSVT. Whilst you don't always need to know the difference between one and the other, it makes sense to understand the principle . . . the specifiers have moved out of the Town Hall.

Windowbase offers a database of who's gone where - complete with regional maps - telling you who the new social landlords are and where they're based. Directories and yearbooks don't. If you think spending a few quid on a couple of books is going to open up some new markets, think again, because the names they offer are a mixture of Chief Officers and people who've moved on. It's no use getting annoyed when a rep says the name you gave him was useless - if you got it out of a directory or you bought him the directory. What you need are the names of real people, doing real jobs in real offices. Unlike directory compilation, your reps and Windowbase are searching for the actual people all the time. They might be based in Head Office, a Regional Office, an Area or Neighbourhood Office, if it's one of the national associations - some of them work from home - so they take some tracking down.

So Windowbase tracks them down, and always tells you the date those names were



validated, from the Shetland Isles at one end of the country to the Scilly Isles at the other. In other words, if they're a Social Landlord in the UK, Windowbase tells you what you need to know.

Your brand-new Windowbase database, used in Excel, with a mail merge letter in Word, can put you in touch with every local authority and housing association in the country, if that's what you want - the

same day. In this day and age, when it might be your customers who need a bit of a leg up, marketing assistance is an essential part of your customer care package. Point them in the right direction and tell them to get off their fat assets. It might still feel like what passes for summer but there's a lot of money to be spent by the end of the Financial Year, and the clock's ticking.

Your brand-new Windowbase database, used in Excel, with a mail merge letter in Word, can put you in touch with every local authority and housing association in the country

## Halvin' the Work, Dublin the Reward

**UK companies that invested in Ireland 20 years ago tended to be seen as either brave or foolish. There was not much about the economy or its prospects to set pulses racing.**

Ireland had its entrepreneurs, but opportunities were limited. UK companies often saw the country as an export dumping ground - somewhere to pick up extra volume at low prices with minimal service. If you were young, talented and ambitious you headed for the US or the UK, following in the steps of generations before you. But change was just around the corner.

Pump primed by EU money, the economy took off in the 1990s, and the Celtic Tiger was born. Pharmaceuticals, IT and construction boomed, and a stream of talented, ambitious Irish men and women returned to make their fortunes. House prices rose to dizzying heights, stimulating a long running boom in property and house-building. In the process a large number of companies connected with building, property, building materials and building products distribution grew fast. It wasn't long before companies like CRH and Grafton Group began to make head roads in the UK too.

Belatedly, with a standard of living

that's among the highest in Europe, and a market that is still one of the fastest growing in Europe, the UK has woken up to the potential of the Irish market. But, divided by a common language and a hundred thousand welcomes, UK manufacturers who are serious about winning long term profitable business need more than a willingness to send a sales rep to Ireland for a couple of weeks on spec. The language may be common, but markets, market structure and terminology are subtly - and sometimes distinctly - different from the UK. Builders' merchants are known as merchant hardwares, for example.

Windowbase's database of Irish window, door and conservatories companies ensures you target the relevant companies with the minimum of time and hassle. To sell effectively, you need a minimum of the company name and address, a contact name and a telephone number. In a fast changing market you need up-to-date and accurate details. Information is available on materials and systems used, whether they fabricate or install, and number of employees as an indicator of company size. There are over 1100 companies on the database, and many of them could be waiting for your call, right now.

## Size isn't everything

**Bigger isn't always better, especially when you are trying to make a quick sale and have to wade through layers of bureaucracy to get a decision.**

In every single Windowbase database, whatever the subject, there has to be some measure of company size: the number of houses built per annum for house builders; stock of dwellings under management for Public Sector Housing Specifiers; the number of teams for installers and, for most of these, a guide to the number of employees as well.

Most window companies are small, with less than ten employees, but some of these are very, very effective and profitable. Selling to small companies isn't the same as selling to big ones. Indeed, there are plenty of suppliers who concentrate solely on the little guys - focus, do more of what you do best - that sort of thing. What matters is how many frames are made each week, because that's the only indicator of actual activity levels.

Windowbase offer 'frames per week' as a useful measure of throughput. Of course, the number can vary depending on the season but, over a period of time, the figures tend to prove remarkably stable. To check this, Windowbase also ask for the actual number made the previous week. These are mostly very close to the 'average' number quoted.

This data is available to 22-carat subscribers taking the window & door fabricators database, now for the majority of PVC-U fabricators, and being built up during the rest of the year for the aluminium and wood product manufacturers.

Now you can choose between the big 'uns and the good little 'uns.

## House-builders build houses... And relationships

**House building has had a pretty good run in the last ten years. Worries of a hard landing for housing or a return to a boom-and-bust cycle have eased.**

Although house prices have slowed and demand has been dampened there is no talk of panic or collapse. Indeed, careful management of their land banks and pricing have seen a succession of builders including Persimmon, the largest, put out confident forecasts in May and June. Public sector affordable housing is on the rise and set for a more sustained recovery under the patronage of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Not a collapse then. But the Construction Products Association has cut its forecasts and warned of two slow years. Private housing will be hit harder with a modest fall in output this year and a sharper fall of 7% next year, compared with growth of around 13% in 2003 and 2004. Public sector housing is forecast to grow 22% in 2005, 16% in 2006 and 8% in 2007, although from a much smaller base.

Despite the current slowdown, house-builders continue to operate in a highly competitive environment. They are constantly looking for new ways to reduce building costs through new materials and building methods or through service and supply. Whatever route they take, house-builders are keen to develop long-term partnerships with suppliers that will enable them to reduce costs and lead times.



Partnership with house-builders can be rewarding, but finding suitable partners is no easy task. The structure of house-builders is varied and complex. Reaching decision-makers for buying the materials you produce can be frustrating and time consuming. To sell, you first need to know who to sell to.

We know that you will probably want to target your sales and, to do this, you need more than just basic contact details. How big is the house builder? How many houses do they build? What house price range do they build for? Is this a Head Office or Regional Office? Who are the decision-makers, and where are they, the managing directors, the buyers... and their titles? What are their phone numbers?

One of the particular difficulties with house-builders is that the sands are constantly shifting. Knowing how fresh the data is really matters, so we let you check when the information was collected and validated. If your business is selling to house-builders, there's no shortage of lists to choose from. Some sound like they're more official and apparently authoritative than others, although they vary in the numbers of builders listed and what they cost. Some are cheap - and deservedly so. If you've used any of them the chances are that, like us, you'll have been disappointed, however prestigious the source of information. This is an all-too-familiar problem to Windowbase. Information that is presented as 'straight from the horse's mouth' is often riddled with inaccuracies and largely out of date.

Windowbase has done the hard work for you - in effect our database of over 5,000 named decision maker contacts in nearly 4,000 house-builders will act as your dating agency. It's up to you to make the first move but, if you delay, you may find everyone's already found their partners.

# Attention, old rope manufacturers!

**MAINTENANCE AND REPAIRS, where a vast amount of rent is spent every year, is a never-ending job.**

By the time they've finished painting the last house, it's time to start on the first one again. That's why it's called Cyclical - it just goes round and round, for ever. Painters cost a lot of money, these days, especially if they have to work any height above the ground. Thanks to the Health & Safety guys for that. Little wonder, then, that things like soffits and fascias are becoming too expensive to maintain. Roofline, especially for blocks of flats, needs to be as near as dammit maintenance-free. Et cetera, et cetera.

And who's doing all this work? As often as not, that'll be the DLO. There's all sorts of names for Direct Labour Organisations these days but one thing they have in common is the need to keep their costs down, in case they can't continue to compete with financial pressure from hungry external contractors. Now, doesn't that sound like a market to you?

Hundreds of guys, with someone else's money to spend, permanently on the look-out for new suppliers. And you're going to wait for them to get in touch?

Course not, stupid - we go to all those housing exhibitions, up and down the land. Hotel rooms, exhibition space rental, entertainment costs that don't stop until three in the morning. Reps that can't be contacted because they always seem to be on the verge of tying up a good deal, that sort of thing.

## Sound familiar?

A DLO database sounds like a good idea, then. [As Windowbase sees it, it's just one more good idea.] You know how it works, because we've told you often enough: water on stone. Tactical mailshots at regular intervals, with follow-up phone calls to make some appointments with people who genuinely might be prospects for some very serious - and very much ongoing - business. If all you want to do is shift your product off the shelves, you couldn't do better than pick up two or three DLO customers. It's like selling to the trade with one very important difference . . . they're not in the habit of going bust.

Hundreds of guys,  
with someone else's  
money to spend,  
permanently on the  
look-out for new  
suppliers. And you're  
going to wait for  
them to get in touch?

The page cannot be displayed  
The page you are viewing has temporarily disappeared. You may wish to check the spelling of the address or URL. It may also need to be updated from the server software.

Please try the following:

- Check that you have entered the correct address.
- Check that you have entered the correct address in the address bar.
- The server software may have been updated and the page may have moved to a different location.
- The server software may have been updated and the page may have moved to a different location.

www.whoknows?

"...architects wouldn't use it and builders are too thick."

## Website presence? Or website absence?

**DO YOU BOOK hotels or airport car parking online? There are other ways but we pretty much take some websites for granted, these days.**

One of our users described the Windowbase website as "silly simple to use", saying: "it will certainly make life easier for us to get our customers to buy your product." Has anyone said that about your website [assuming you have one]?

In a recently completed survey of over 600 window companies, we found that 224 don't have a website at all but the real eye-opener comes next...

24 didn't know whether their company had a website or not, which might, of course, be a way of not admitting they hadn't. 17 respondents confirmed they definitely had a website but didn't know the address and couldn't find anyone who did. 27 said their website wasn't working and 14 rather kindly offered their e-mail address as the next best thing. Could one of these people be working on your Reception?

Statistics are supposed to be boring but 3 people actually said their company didn't have a website . . . when it did! Last of all, 15 gave incorrect details. In other words, nearly a third of all companies failed to direct what could have been a serious enquiry.

The owners of over 300 companies have invested money in a website presence and, for a third of them, it was a complete waste of money. One young

receptionist actually said a website would be a waste of time because architects wouldn't use it and builders are too thick.

Many of us, builders included, now take websites for granted as a way of browsing for products and services, and even the preferred way of ordering, so it might be time to consider where [or how] your company stands. What sort of a job is your website doing for you, because it doesn't come cheap. If it's a shop window, people can take a look and walk on by, possibly never to return, so at least your phone number had better be prominent. Features, advantages and benefits are one thing in an over-crowded market but, as often as not, winning an order comes down to money, so a website without a price matrix could be as much use as a car without a steering wheel.

Add the steering wheel but, without an order form, you don't have an accelerator pedal - there's nothing worse than having shoppers and not knowing why they left without buying. If you don't treat your web presence seriously, how can you expect anyone else to? For Windowbase, it's not a fashion statement. It's not a status symbol. It's a means of showing every potential customer what s/he can have, and then making it as easy as possible to order - and that's including in the evening or at weekends, 24/7, when there's nobody there to answer the phone.

For further information,

please fill in your details and tick your area of interest below and return to:

Reader's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Company: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

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