

# Dedicated to the distributor



**Graham Joyce**  
UK Managing Director  
FASTBOLT UK

In 2003 the UK division of Fastbolt celebrates 21 years of trading. The business today is a far cry from the origins when Heinz Storch, with a sales office in his house and rented warehouse space, set about convincing the UK market his range of unified bolts would only ever be supplied to distributors.

Now there are custom built warehouses, in both UK and Germany, and an integrated computer system - that would set standards in any distribution sector. That exclusive commitment to distributors, though, is still the bedrock on which the business operates. Other key principles have been refined and honed over the years.

Fastbolt has always been a specialist - selecting product ranges that will provide the profitability to justify putting real stocks on the shelf, in depth and across full ranges. Supplier selection has been equally scrupulous with Graham Joyce, now UK Managing Director, clocking up hundreds of thousands of air miles, over the last 13 years, to personally assess manufacturers and meticulously negotiate supplier relationships.

Like all quality processes the real measure of the stringency with which Fastbolt applies these core tenets is the "rejection rate" - the number of times the company has "positively" chosen not to introduce a range or go with a particular supplier. On this subject Graham Joyce is clear there is no substitute for "seeing for yourself". He recalls

one purchasing trip where he went to evaluate new potential manufacturing sources. On day one he met a new manufacturer contact and was taken to see his factory.

On day two he met another new contact and was, again, taken to his factory, to be greeted, with a sheepish grin, by the same head of production, at the same factory door. "It's not the only time it's happened," he says, and stresses there are no short cuts to assuring quality and supply continuity. Typically, Fastbolt resisted for many years a "superficial" approach to quality management simply to achieve quality system accreditation. Instead they invested in the practical mechanisms to assure product quality - a comprehensive suite of computer co-ordinated inspection equipment underpinned by a rigorous methodology to demonstrate to all suppliers the reality of the quality requirement.

Twenty-one years on and Fastbolt enjoy an international position, with global supply chains and distribution customers in all corners of the European fastener arena. Once, perhaps, defensive on the subject, the company is proud to market itself as a specialist supplier, choosing to concentrate their efforts in areas where they have developed real levels of expertise.

In a UK market increasingly dominated by large-scale generalists, Fastbolt says, they are clear that the support of a specialist has become all the more important for the

distributor. The company believes the concept is a straightforward one. The specialist offers far greater range and opportunity within a product group because it has considerably more control over the manufacturer.

Sales Director, Richard Blythe says, "It has been said that on many products, especially within the bolting market, Fastbolt has become a 'surrogate manufacturer', that can also offer the flexibility of a first tier stockist." Today this capability is utilised by major distributors, who import themselves but also, critically, require reliable support on a local basis.

"The choice," says Richard Blythe, "is whether they wish to forge a strategic alliance with an organisation that offers far more than a short-term 'gap filling' arrangement." He sees such strategic alliances at the heart of Fastbolt's continual development. As a result the company's emphasis has continued to change away from the more traditional price and delivery sales operation to one that recognises the need to offer long-term commercial solutions. Customers now have the opportunity to develop initiatives with Fastbolt, including a whole range of logistical possibilities, tailored to meet their specific requirements.

In both German and UK companies, Fastbolt has already committed to a variety of contractual obligations, which

range from consignment stocking and the direct import of specials to offering secondary operations, such as plating and patching, and re-packaging to customer specific requirements.

Weaving the original ideology of "distributors only" with commercial flexibility, Fastbolt has committed to achieving what they call a philosophy of "logistical excellence". The introduction of SAP, the world's most advanced computer system, combined with the adoption of an efficient narrow aisle system in our UK warehouse, has enabled Fastbolt to deliver the new strategy," asserts Richard Blythe. "The most noticeable change over the last 21 years," he adds, "is the devaluation of the product. It seems the desire of many importer/stockists to do more of what they do badly, rather than focusing on what they can do well."

Fastbolt's birthday message is straightforward - "We aspire to support the established distributor as a specialist, not just another supplier. The last twenty-one years," says Richard Blythe, "would suggest there is a crucial difference."

