



# Polished to perfection

The worst house in the street usually belongs to a builder. A mechanic usually drives the most beat up old banger. And a cleaner's house is often the messiest. But would you trust them? Ed Humpreys, our special correspondent, reports

Getting your own house in order is probably the most important thing you can do when building a business, and one that Jade's Sean Mackey and Adam Jones (pictured above) were acutely aware of when they realised a couple of years back that things needed changing for them operationally.

Now, having gone through a period of transition, the company is ready to work more strategically with manufacturers, ensuring that their production lines are tuned to perfection.

"As we enter into this next stage of challenging economic times, when national insurance and tax hikes really begin to start biting, it is more important than ever to trim the fat without compromise," says Sean Mackey – an accountant by trade who has a passion for making the 'numbers' work. "It is tempting to cut back on indirect costs which might seem unnecessary when in fact they keep the wheels oiled. Cutting out those sorts of expenses can end up costing you far more in the longer term."

After nearly 20 years of running Jade, providing core engineering and tooling solutions specifically to the window and door industry, Mackey and Jones have been intricately involved in pretty much every stage of fabrication evolution, from the launch of new systems right through to onsite installation techniques. Their expertise has been poured into factories the length and breadth of the country, and they feel it is crucial that fabricators know that they can pick up the phone to them at any time if they have any concerns.

"What we want fabricators to understand is that calling us in for an evaluation of their current manufacturing processes is not going to cost them," says Mackey. "Our consulting service – JadeConsult – is not the sort of consultancy which charges vast fees. Our entire premise comes from wanting to help fabricators save money and produce windows much more cost effectively. If we evaluate a factory and feel that nothing can be added to make any profound improvements, then we'll happily drive away for no more than the price of a coffee. However, if we feel that improvements can be made, then those improvements will usually cover the cost of our involvement."

As an engineer, Adam Jones is genetically predisposed to making things work better and more efficiently. It is written into his DNA. Combined with Mackey's love of

numbers, they make a real force to be reckoned with when it comes to understanding the fenestration supply chain issues.

"For an industry that is so established, the chain of production still has some significant gaps," says Jones. "Jade has always been adept at making those connections to create a fabrication cycle which flows smoothly. No matter what PVC-U or aluminium system you use, who your hardware supplier is, even what machinery you have had installed, there are often small but significant tweaks that can be made."

Mackey and Jones understand the pain of going through transition, having just invested a not insignificant £4m in Jade's own operations. This was considered essential to safeguard Jade's overall role in the industry, protecting customer interests and making sure that its own delivery works towards improving standards in quality. The experience of this transition has made the pair even more conscious of the fact that many fabrication businesses are, like themselves, owner managed, and that comes with its own set of problems and issues.

"Somehow we have found ourselves in a position whereby Jade is the glue that connects so many moving parts within the fabrication cycle, and we take that responsibility extremely seriously," says Mackey. "A couple of years ago we had to ask ourselves some tough questions, and consider what would happen if either Adam or myself, or both of us, were suddenly taken out of the mix. The answer was not a pretty sight for our customers. It was crucial that we overhauled our own business and make it more process driven without losing our essential DNA."

It took a couple of years to make it happen, with the help of new (now not so new) managing director Gareth Davies. Today, Jones and Mackey find themselves tasked with the more front end role of JadeConsult, while the engineering team that they created operates smoothly behind the scenes without their direct control.

"Which is exactly how it should be," says Jones. "Taking us out of the day-to-day mix has done wonders for the business, and allows us to use our knowledge and expertise more efficiently. As an engineer, that is music to my ears. Our own factory is now running exactly as it should, and can now be held up as an example of what we are capable of achieving for others." □