

## Part 1:

# THE EARLY YEARS

*In part one of our new 'Shawcast' series Shawston CEO Rob Davenport talks to Alex Gale about the rise of Shawston. A full version of the Shawcast can be downloaded from our [media hive](#).*

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In the first of a series of podcasts and indeed the first ever Shawston podcast, Alex Gale talks to Shawston CEO Rob Davenport about the development and growth of the Shawston business throughout the last 18 years and its impact on the market place as a whole.

## 18 YEARS

**Alex:** Firstly happy birthday to Shawston. I gather it's 18 years.

**Rob:** Thank you. Yes.

**Alex:** Did you have a cake and balloons? What did you do?



**Rob:** We did, we had all sorts. We had a cake that I think somebody made which was a copy of a Shawston lorry.

We did speeches. We got invited to the depot – Michelle and I that is – Michelle my wife.

It was great and then we had a surprise dinner in San Carlos in Manchester.

They invited my son along who did an impromptu speech after he'd had a few glasses of red. It takes a bit to get me welling up but that got me close.

It was amazing. 18 years crikey, it's gone in a heartbeat.

## THE BEGINNINGS

**Alex:** It's a long time, 18 years. Talk me through that decision initially when you thought about

starting your own business.

**Rob:** It's a pretty simple story. I'd worked for a couple of PLC's since 1988.

I worked my way up, and I was the MD of a division of a PLC that was really successful.

SEE WHAT'S INSIDE...



The evolution of Shawston.

Key changes over 18 years trading.

Creating unrivalled customer service.

Initially the business was a family run affair however they floated on the stock market and were acquired by a huge French PLC in 1999.



I was 30 and I didn't want to be in the rat race. I didn't really want to work for anything other than an intimate, family run type of biz.

When the French PLC took over the business that was the day I decided I was off. I didn't know where "off" meant but I just knew that I needed to do my own thing. It was probably in my blood anyway, so I resigned without a job to go to.

## EMBRACING CHANGE

**Alex:** A big decision.

**Rob:** Yeah it was, it was pretty radical really looking back. I'm not sure what a few people made of it, least of all my mum and dad especially because our son arrived 6 months later.

**Alex:** What a change.

**Rob:** Yes, and I was gainfully unemployed. It worked really, I needed to clear my head and I'd had a little nibble at the owner of Shawston, who was a pal. He

was in his mid-60's, a Dubliner, a lovely, lovely guy called Pat Lyons.

“ **PROBABLY THE KEY CHANGE [IN THE LAST 15 YEARS] HAS BEEN THE TRANSITION TO GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAINS** ”

I think he knew that I wanted to buy it, but I didn't know how to go about saying it and I didn't have a clue how to do it. But one thing led to another...

**Alex:** And 18 years later here you are.

**Rob:** Here we are.

**Alex:** You must have seen lots of things change over the last 18 years. What do you think are the most influential developments in the industry that have happened?

**Rob:** Wow! That's a question. We're only 5 minutes into this, look I'm squirming in my chair.

Probably the key change has been

the transition to global supply chains and the gradual removal of some marquee brands from the sectors Shawston operate within.

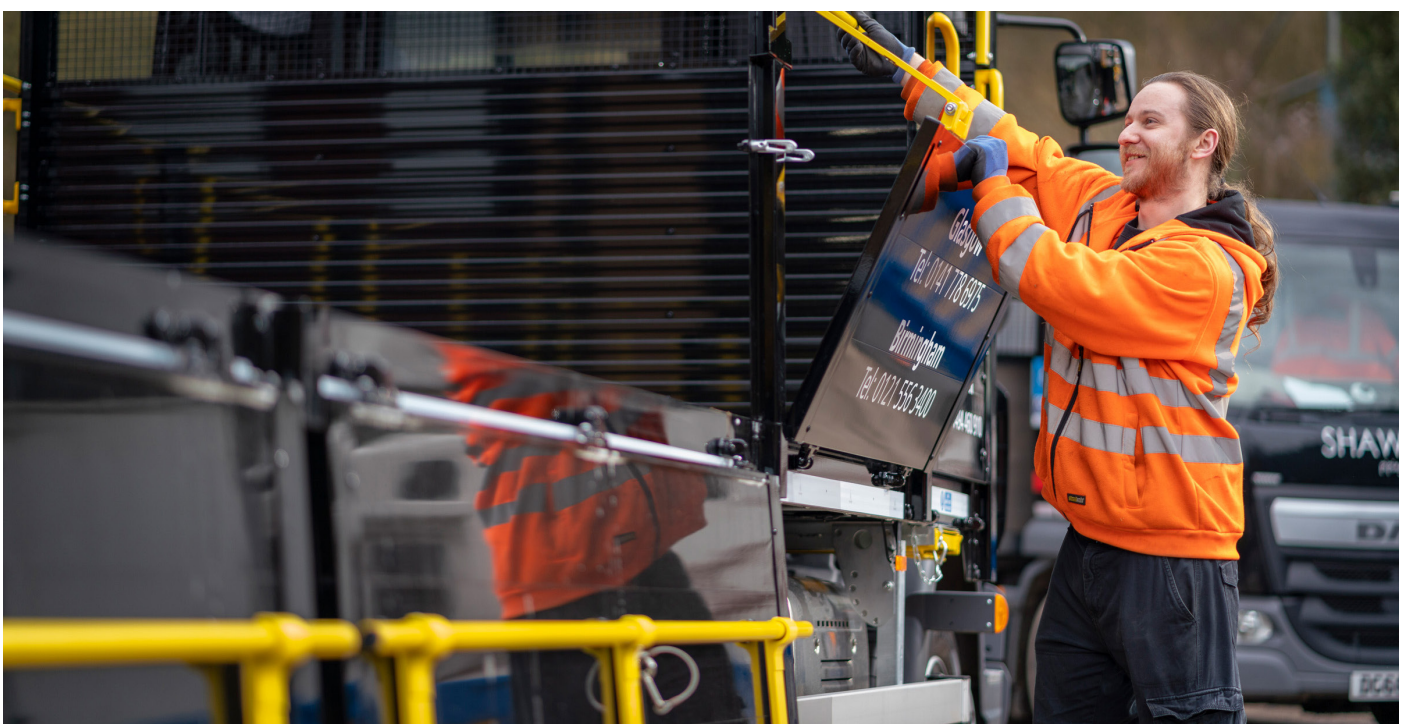
Pretty much the whole of our industry during my time in the 80's, 90's and the early 00's was totally dominated by UK brands with what turned out to be, compared to China or India, inefficient manufacturing and expensive pricing.

From 2003 we saw a gradual outsource to China and India which today is our norm. So the trade changed, and we were the first in our sector to embrace it.

I went out to India and found the factory that manufactured on behalf of the UK brands and that was a big turning point for us.

We then realised that we wanted our business model to be something that we could control and that it was going to be an inside out philosophy rather than outside in.

We wanted the brand to be about





### About Rob Davenport:

- » CEO and founder owner of Shawston Holdings Group
- » 25+ years' experience within the fire and mechanical services markets
- » Serial entrepreneur
- » Passionate about employee ownership
- » Born, raised and settled in Manchester
- » Avid Manchester United fan
- » Husband and father of two

Shawston, customer service and people, not somebody else's name and we wanted to cut out the middleman, which we did successfully in 2004.

The owner of that particular factory has become a mate and we've done a lot of business with

him over the years.

That was a turning point for us. China and India have become the global powerhouses really.

### MEETING DEMANDS

**Alex:** Presumably speed and efficiency are key in meeting customer demands and expectations. How does a typical order flow at Shawston?

**Rob:** In its most extreme what happens is we transact 50% of our turnover each day between the hours of 2pm and 5pm.

That's the way the trade, the industry has gone, no one customer is any different.

That's quite challenging for us, we have a compression of orders and business between 2pm and 5pm.

Typically, a customer will either ring or email a shopping list or order. It hits our customer service teams where it gets keyed onto the computer system.

That produces a pick list and a dispatch note which will hit the warehouse. That's taken me about 10 seconds to say, but each stage will take between 10 and 30 minutes depending on the size of the order and whether it needs checking and validating. As soon as the pick list is released, it will go to a team of pickers and they will pick it, put it into a dispatch area, and then

the vehicle routers and drivers will kick in. They will load the vehicles tactically and that will all be done by the end of the shift.

### UNRIVALLED CUSTOMER SERVICE

At High Wycombe, for example, the drivers will all roll into the yard at 5:00am. They jump into their cabs and off they go - North, South, East, West, in and out of London on timed deliveries. They're normally back in the depot by 2:00pm.

“ WE TRANSACT 50% OF OUR TURNOVER EACH DAY BETWEEN THE HOURS OF 2PM AND 5PM. ”

If there is one thing we are famed for, it's the London delivery just-in-time service. It's a tough place to deliver product is London.

That's typically how an order comes in. There are 60,000 of them a year so there is a lot of activity, it's a busy business.◆

 [Click here to listen to the full podcast.](#)

**This is part one of a five-part series of podcast interviews with CEO Rob Davenport. Find out next time in part 2 how Rob and his team provided stability for customers and staff during times of economic uncertainty.**

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