



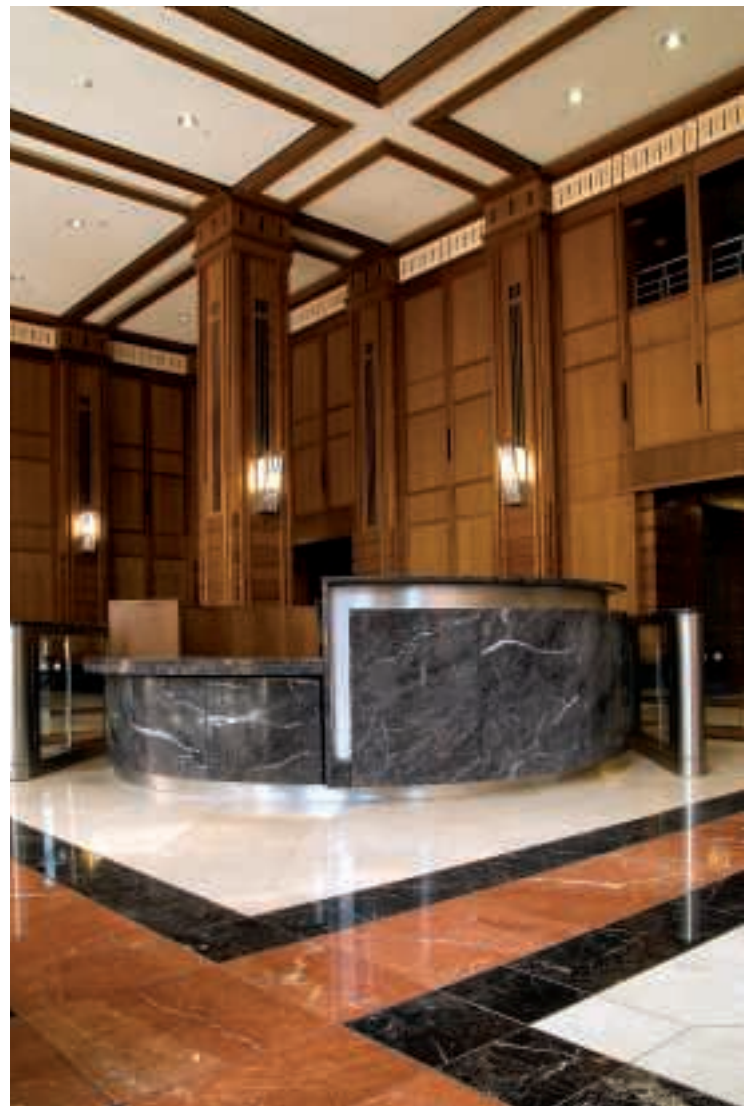
daisy duke

We love stories about entrepreneurs. Get up and go people who make it happen. This is one of those stories, complete with all the good stuff about selling the car and starting the business in the spare bedroom.

Perhaps what makes this particular tale especially pertinent today is that Bryan Daisy chose the middle of a recession as the time to start the company. Nearly 20 years later Frem Group turns over £12million – and there's no way that 110 employees can fit in that spare bedroom any more.

We'll get back to the here and now a bit later in this piece and kick off with a little background. If you're going to print a profile about a risk taker, a charismatic guy who blends being driven with an enjoyment of life, it's more than a little instructive to hear about where he comes from.

'I grew up on a council estate in Ipswich. Dad worked for Fisons, and was a great social animal. I reckon I was very lucky that dad valued holidays much higher than owning property – I remember going to Lloret del Mar aged 10 when it was virtually unheard of for kids like me. Dad's love of a good time almost irrespective of cost is certainly something I inherited. Leaving school at 16 I did an apprenticeship in Mechanical Engineering and qualified as an Engineering Technician at Suffolk College. My first job was working for Ransomes making agricultural machinery such as sugar beet harvesters. I look back on that four year period as a great educational and practical experience: I got my hands (and everything else) dirty lying on my back in a field in Yorkshire dealing with farmers who are not renowned for their love of southerners! I also realised after a>>>>>





▶▶▶▶ while that I didn't want to work in an office – my career progression would ultimately lead to peaking as the manager of the drawing office.

'What I did notice was that the reps had Chrysler Alpines! Absolutely fantastic compared to my Ford Anglia with the doors falling off and 'Bryan and Claire' plastered on the windscreen. It was difficult for a 20-year old with no relevant experience to get into sales but when I interviewed at Spur Shelving, the Sales Director, Norman Johns, must have seen something in me. I was engaged, had just bought a house with a massive £13,000 mortgage (which we could only afford because Claire worked for a Building Society), but I said I would work for no basic but a commission on all sales. Not a career move that impressed my wife to be, who said a lot of words to me about my great idea – 'reckless' being one I particularly remember. Three months later I was the highest earner in the business and Spur Shelving put me on a salary in order to cap the high commission payments. I got a mustard Chrysler Alpine too!

'Within 10 years I had progressed from being an area rep to Managing Director.'

So what makes Bryan Daisy so good at sales? 'I suppose in the beginning it was naivety – I went to places I shouldn't have gone to because I didn't know any different. As I progressed through the ranks from Area Manager to Sales Director to Managing Director I always got good support from my customers, so I suppose that trust comes into it. Even now I get the best buzz from sales; I reckon presenting to a client is even better than sex! Selling and winning the order irrespective of size is what it's about – which is why I still spend two or three days per week in London seeing clients. I'm not interested in accounts and I get no real buzz from the production

side – I like the end result which is the buzz gained from seeing a happy client.'

Surely it's more than just sales ability that's needed? 'I think and work in a very structured way. I invest a lot of time and money thinking about strategy. It's not an autocratic business at Frem – I've structured it with good people in key areas with real responsibility. Getting me involved in the detail of areas such as marketing or production doesn't add value – what I'm doing is making sure the structure is right so the culture flows through the group correctly.

'In 1986 Savages floated on the USM. I was Managing Director of the main trading company within the Group Spur Shelving at the mature age of 28. In the next three years we progressed the group through aggressive acquisitions from £10 million to £120 million turnover. What with all the external shareholders and young 3i account managers questioning everything at all times, I decided to do something different. The urge to set up my own business was just overwhelming. So Claire and I decided to cut the luxuries and plough everything, including her six month old Porsche, into the new venture. Frem was born. We had two young daughters aged five and three, and the market place was in recession.

We just about broke even in our first couple of years, backed by a group of Danish manufacturers, but the idea of bringing their products to market was more complex and inflexible than we envisaged, so we bought them out. Frem means 'forward' in Danish by the way!

'Along the way we bought out a sleeping partner which enabled us to plough all of our money into the business and expand into manufacturing which we did by acquiring MDS in Milton Keynes. That acquisition in 1991 created FG manufacturing, followed by FG▶▶▶▶▶



We asked what Bryan's plans are for the future. 'In the last three years we've had two serious approaches to buy the business but I definitely don't have any interest in selling. It's my baby, my life. I'm unemployable – what else would I do? It would be a disaster! I love being in control of the business but I have no problem going on safari in South Africa or running the company for two weeks from our house in Florida. I enjoy travelling a lot, and I love our family life. Those two little girls are 24 and 22 now – nothing beats us all going out together. We've been to China, Hong Kong, South Africa, and South America is our project for 2009. My biggest love outside of work is the theatre. I have seen Les Miserables 13 times, including once on Broadway. I also like my comforts; I like good hotels and the finer things in life. Equally, I enjoy going to my local and having a pint – which I do too often. I'm a big Ipswich Town fan from my childhood, but home games now require a 220 mile round trip. Because of the Ipswich connection the Frem logo is blue and there's always a reference somewhere in every brochure.

'I like movies. Claire and I agree on almost everything except films. I have a real problem with sentimental films – I cried during The Lion King. On holiday in Florida this summer the girls laughed at me when I cried during Mamma Mia.

'My golden retriever Henry is a big part of my life. Henry's been sitting under my desk for 12 years – all my customers know him. When we move to new premises in Northampton we're thinking of calling it Henry House, and possibly putting a picture of him under the 'our people' section of the website!'

We started this piece by talking about entrepreneurialism in a recession. Let's finish by letting Bryan Daisy tell the story. 'Selling in Kuwait kick-started the business – I took a sales jaunt out there in 1990. I turned up and saw the oil fields burning – the Iraqis were pulling out, taking all the furniture with them. I did £2 million that trip; funnily enough we're having the same discussions about business in the Middle East right now ●

▶▶▶ Corporate Design in 1995 and the establishment of FG Library Products and FG Corporate Environments in 2000. The acquisition of Ruben Furniture in 2003 allowed us to merge our bespoke manufacturing facility and form FG3 Manufacturing.

Today, Frem Group turnover is £12 million with 110 employees – and I think we're the market leader in bespoke reception desks.

