

# concession

## NEWS

### UPDATE



## MAIDENHEAD AQUATICS – MEETING THE MARKET LEADERS



In this week's edition of Concession News, we meet David Lawrence, Managing Director of Maidenhead Aquatics, who explains the importance of garden centres to their operation and their continued growth within the sector.

Maidenhead Aquatics have pioneered Aquatics retailing and have helped convert garden centres into the day out destinations they are today. They opened their first high street store in King Street, Maidenhead in 1984 and have now grown into Europe's leading Aquatics retailer, trading predominantly within garden centre locations.

In the early 1990's, Maidenheads expansion continued and they opened their first garden centres at Bourne End Garden Centre followed by Iver Flowerland and then Country Gardens Windlesham which are still trading today. The success of these stores enabled Maidenhead to recognise that their customers would travel out of town to these sites to use the expertise of their staff. The trading environments provided customers with an experience different to the high street, as the dwell times enabled them to have more time to discuss their own individual requirements.

Speaking with **David Lawrence** we asked; **How did garden centres become a key part of your strategy?**

"As a specialist retailer we wanted our staff to be in an environment with other experts to provide the customers with a unique, advice driven experience. Customers are more likely to travel to garden centres if they believe they are getting the best products and can discuss their requirements with experts so, we thought our offer would be perfectly suited to that kind of environment."

**How important are the staff to the Maidenhead Aquatics format?**

Extremely important. We ensure that all of our staff are knowledgeable and understand every part of the ranges we offer. Our staff tend to be hobbyists who enjoy their work and care for the fish when they are on site and after they have been sold to the customer. We provide our staff with regular in house training and OATA (Ornamental



Aquatic Trade Association) courses, in addition to offering specialist training with Spasholt College.

### **What are the main points of difference that a Maidenhead Aquatics store offers?**

We offer an unrivalled, specialist standalone store rather than an Aquatics department, which enables our expertise to set us apart from garden centre run departments and our competition. Our dedicated staff are key to the service we provide. The onsite teams work with customers to assist them through the hobby and offer them the opportunity to develop their interest. We can help, support and encourage customers as their interest in the hobby grows and we find that our customers come back throughout the life of their fish and beyond. We are also unique in the way we manage our store formats as they can vary depending on the local market. In some cases we will increase ranges of certain areas (such as tropical fish and accessories) to fulfil the individual customer requirements of each store.

### **How important is your relationship with garden centre owners?**



We work very closely with garden centre owners and the onsite teams work very well with each other. We concentrate on creating our own customer base and our inclusion on Garden Centre marketing helps the footfall to the site as we are seen as an attraction.

### **Are you still looking to expand?**

We are always looking at new opportunities but we are concentrating on areas of the country where we can develop a new customer base. 10% of the population keep fish, so there is still an exceptional demand for us to service. We are happy to work with garden centres to take over the management of their existing Aquatics departments as we appreciate that they can be costly to run. We have done this before and when we did, we added to the turnover and ran the departments more efficiently.

### **How have you seen garden centres change since you first started working with them?**

Garden Centres have definitely improved their retail proposition over the years we have been working with them. They have moved away from being only horticultural focused and now offer a diverse retail proposition. The major improvement has been to the standards of the catering on site. Garden Centre restaurants are now their main feature and provide an excellent environment for the customers to enjoy a day out experience.

**First Franchise Managing Director, Keith McIntyre** met David when Maidenhead were trading from 10 stores and assisted with the retailers expansion within garden centres, “We have an excellent relationship with Maidenhead and I have been working with them since the 90’s. They have pioneered the concession model within garden centres and shown how added attractions and, working together with site owners, can enhance the overall retail proposition and create year round reasons to visit.”

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