

Best Foot forward for a common goal

Ian Keefe, vending sector manager, Benders Paper Cup Company

When I was asked to write the last word, I immediately had a flashback to my school days - that cold fear when someone asks you something and you don't know what to say. "Just write something you are passionate about" - easier said than done, so here goes...

It was about this time last year that myself, and a group of other like minded individuals from the vending industry, took part in 'Arthurs Amble', in memory of a dear friend to vending, Arthur Myers who had sadly passed away some months earlier. The camaraderie over the 50 mile walk along the Fife Coastal path was fantastic, and will live with those that took part for some years to come. There certainly was great evidence of people working as a team to ensure we finished, and a good sum was raised for the worthwhile charity.

It reminded me of a similar event some years earlier, when many of the same group took part in the 'Diamond Hike', a 75 mile, three day walk over three countries (England, Scotland and Wales) raising money for Macmillan.

Both events have certainly produced a common bond between those that took part, and will stay with us all for as long as we are all in the vending industry. I still recall, as clear as a bell, Roger Bunn complaining about the lack of hot food, Paul Marriot (aka Mad Max) driving the bus between three countries in the British Isles, John Ferguson's blisters, and Jonathan Smith, 'was that pint at Robin Hood's bay the best we have ever had?' Not to mention the fact that we all witnessed John Crichton walk 25 miles without entering a pub en route. Great times fondly remembered by all, with the pain and blisters a distant memory.

Within our own organisation, Benders Paper Cup Company, we have organised and completed a number of challenges that have involved the entire organisation from the shop floor to senior management. Thankfully we are located in one of the most beautiful parts of the country (Snowdonia, not Wrexham!) and in recent months we have completed a walk up Snowdon, 25 long and hilly miles along Offa's Dyke in North Wales, a number of evening walks, and in June we are planning



a weekend event in Snowdonia involving camping and tackling Snowdonia's Peaks. Many of our employees and friends are joining in and looking forward to the challenge, and I think it's fair to say that the 'Benders Hiking Club' has many enthusiastic members.

Before Benders was restructured to concentrate solely on paper cups, we had a really tough time. It was only having a good time, and working together that carried us through. What has been fantastic at Benders as we posted profits for 2010, is the development of many company wide initiatives that have had the effect of creating a great team spirit across the business.

Alongside the walking, we have really pushed training throughout our business. Everybody attends, even Andy Cunliffe our managing director. We have even had training on understanding what sort of personality traits people have - unbelievable, who said you cannot teach an old dog new tricks?

Of course, there are some new tricks that cannot be taught, and for me it's golf. Over the years I have failed conspicuously to compete on the fairway, and the greens for that matter, with fellow suppliers and vending operators. Whilst it is clear that everybody works hard in our industry, I cannot understand how good they all are - perhaps I am missing something here!

I can certainly see many similarities between the two charity walks, and our own events that we run at Benders. It's great to see a team of people representing the shop floor, sales office, IT department, credit control and sales take part as one group working together to achieve the goal of finishing. It has certainly brought together the whole of the workforce, and has created a real buzz amongst the organisation, and what's more important, we really feel and work like a team.

In today's demanding world it certainly does pay to take a bit of time out and get everyone involved in an activity that will result in a lot of great memories and laughter - let's be frank, there is not enough of that in our industry these days!

Now for all you golfers out there, I am organising a trip up to Snowdon in September. Who's up for it? Let me know by email: ian.keefe@benders.co.uk. I K

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