

The future looks good for wholesalers



By **Malcolm Duncan**, Managing Director of **Super Rod**

This time last year, I was honoured to be asked by the team at EW to get out my crystal ball and look into the future to see what 2014 had in store for us all. Some people must have liked it because here I am again.

So what is ahead of us for 2015? Well for me personally there are a couple of milestones - firstly I hit my 50th birthday, and secondly I celebrate 30 years since I first entered our industry. I have to admit that both of these milestones fill me with a certain amount of surprise because where has the time gone?

On a more serious note, in my quest to look into the future I started with a little peak back at 1985 and in particular to my first mobile phone. Now when I say mobile that was stretching the truth a bit because it was about the size of house brick and twice as heavy - it certainly wasn't very mobile! Functionality-wise, IF I was in a good area, and high on a hill maybe I would be lucky enough to actually have a conversation with a colleague or customer. Little did I know at the time how much this bit of kit would change our lives in the years to come.

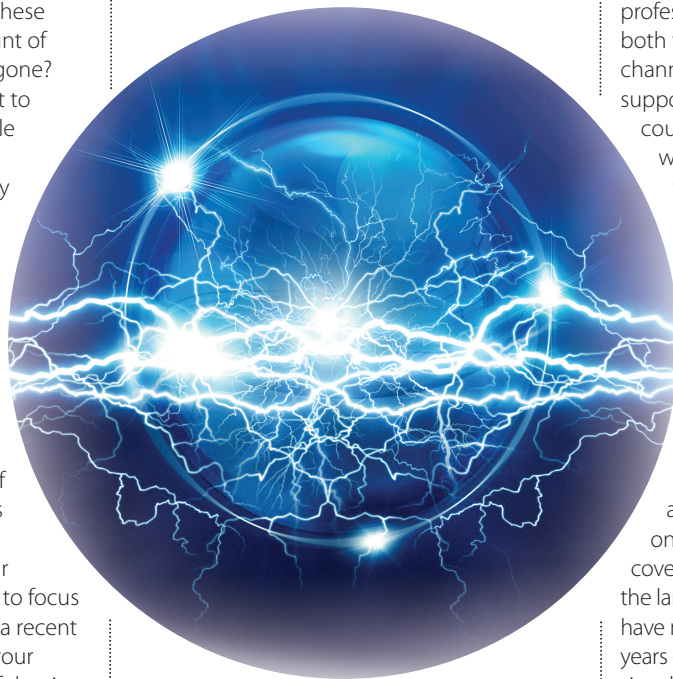
The mobile phone and its role in our business today is what I have decided to focus on for this year's review. The results of a recent survey tell us that actually talking on your phone now accounts for less than half the time you spend using it. The tipping point was in 2007 when Apple launched its first iPhone and that was when a phone ceased to be a phone.

So what, in particular, does it mean for the Electrical Wholesaling industry and those who operate in it? On a recent trip to the US we hosted a discussion with a selection of customers, including contractors, distributors

and manufacturers to discuss what real functionality they all wanted from the new technology on offer.

Tracking orders

Three main areas were highlighted; the first was visibility of the supply chain, i.e. the ability to track orders from the time of the order being placed through to actual delivery time etc. The



second area was in the ease of access to technical information, instruction manuals, instructional videos etc. And lastly, and possibly the most interesting, was the ability to communicate with their peers in the industry.

The development of on-line communities, discussion groups, forums, etc, was seen as a real positive for everyone involved.

The one issue I was surprised not to see on the list was 'price comparisons' as I know many wholesalers/distributors fear this as a potential threat to margins moving forward. So when I explored this further I was pleased to hear that all of the contractors present expected any price negotiations to be taken 'off-line' and balanced with the service and support they get from their local wholesaler.

The message was clear: a modern day professional expects to communicate with both wholesaler and manufacturer via all channels available. Yes they will continue to support the traditional bricks and mortar trade counter, BUT they must also have access to a wider range of information and be able to trade with that location 24/7, 365 days a year.

So for my predications for 2015? Fortune will favour the brave for those who embrace the digital platform and integrate it into their business offer. Unfortunately, those who don't will leave themselves open to attack from both traditional and non-traditional avenues.

And finally, back to my mobile phone analogy. Back in 1985, Vodafone was the only network available - it provided limited coverage over the UK and mainly focussed on the larger cities and urban areas. In theory, things have moved on significantly over the last 30 years - so why, then, can I still not get a decent signal when I'm driving up parts of the M1!

There is a simple message here for our industry. Our customers require a sound infrastructure to gain access to products, services and information, as long as we keep pace and continue to deliver on all fronts the next thirty looks bright for us all.

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