



*“We’re selling a good volume of Digrain C40WP”*

Tony Knight, business development manager, Lodi UK

# Lodi marches on

Well-known across the industry, Tony Knight is Lodi UK’s business development manager. He talks to **Simon King** about the sector and the company he joined 11 years ago

Having worked in the holiday industry, Tony Knight saw a job advert in *The Metro* newspaper on the London Underground in 2009; the rest, as they say, is history.

Speaking via a Teams call, Tony recalls the story: “The advert spoke about a large business in Europe that was trying to establish and grow in the UK market. It mentioned that the successful candidate could work from home, have a company car and would be meeting customers.

“The job sounded ideal for me, but not anywhere in that advert did it mention pests! Roger Simpson, Lodi UK’s managing director, was very clever in the advert as it didn’t mention what the company was about. At that time, I was petrified of wasps and I’d never seen a rat in my life. I know how to sell and that’s how I ended up at Lodi 11 years ago.”

Tony concedes that he fell into the industry and knew nothing about it. He started working purely in the pest control area of Lodi’s business.

“When I first started at Lodi, there were five members of staff. While Roger did all the sales at that time, I was his first big investment in getting a sales guy to take the pressure off him a bit,” he says.

“I’d absorb information in my first few meetings and then I’d basically repeat what

they’d said to me to the next guy I met until, eventually, I knew what I was talking about, and it went from there.”

At Lodi, he then started to branch out, firstly into the agriculture side of the business, then the cereals sector, then pig and poultry, then retail.

Now, after 11 years, it’s gone full circle and Tony is now focused on the pest control side of the business.

Just before lockdown, Lodi recruited Matt Towler, who was previously an area sales manager at Pelsis, to work alongside Tony in the pest sector, as national business development manager.

*“Pest controllers are great fun, they’re lovely, friendly people”*

Tony says that one of Lodi’s strengths during the COVID-19 lockdown was that the business continued to operate, with no members of staff furloughed.

He says: “I was having conversations with people for a week, maybe 10 days, and then

they became so busy. People were at home and suddenly hearing rodents scurrying in their roof or realising that they were surrounded by carpet moths that were driving them insane.

“Pest controllers are used to wearing PPE, so it wasn’t alien to them to put protective gear on. They had to walk into hotels like they were astronauts, but in doing that they’ve found that business has been good and they’re doing well.”

Tony says that he’s enjoyed working in the pest control industry, although he says that he did not know what to expect when he first joined Lodi.

“Pest controllers are great fun, they’re lovely, friendly people,” he says.

“The people who run small businesses are great. They’re happy to pick up the phone and have a chat; the challenge has always been getting into the bigger companies.

“However, once you’ve got through to the person that matters in pest control, they are just fantastic people and the whole ethos of Lodi is relationship business – it’s the way we are.

“We’ll never be a company where you just go on our website and order – although it would make life easier for some. We want people to pick up the phone and speak to the person that is looking after you.”

This is a point that Tony is adamant about: he wants his customers to call him directly.

“I don’t want customers phoning the office – I’ve made it clear to them to always phone me and if I am not available at that moment, I’ll phone them back,” he says.

“It’s all because I want those relationships with my customers, and I get on brilliantly with them.”

Tony says that Lodi’s strength is that it sells what it manufactures, while challenges in the

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of rodenticides

industry concern COVID-19 and the shrinking technician's toolbox.

He says: "The challenge in the sector now is getting work and how to go about doing the work and be COVID-19 compliant.

"I don't think there's any challenge in terms of stock, but pest controllers are always complaining that products they like are going off the market but that is legislation driven.

"There is no doubt about it – the toolbox is losing products all the time."

In 2019, Digrain AC (alpha cypermethrin), which Tony describes as an "absolute boomer" was taken off the market.

The product was a long lasting residual active which could keep performing for up to 12 weeks

"We used to sell loads of bottles of it and that going was painful," he adds. "Thankfully, just before that happened, we got in the wettable powder, Digrain C40WP, which lled that hole an extent.

// I think pest controllers only use natural products they have to //

"As it now turns out, getting that product replacement has been a bonus recently with Ficam W going off the market."

Unsurprisingly, Tony reports that Lodi is pushing Digrain C40WP as much as it can, but he says the hardest part is getting the message out.

He says: "People have tunnel vision and if someone says to them that Ficam W has gone they'll assume that wettable powders have gone – and people believe them.

"We're trying everything we can to tell people that if they really want a wettable powder, there is one still here – Digrain C40WP. Yes, it's not bendiocarb, but we are saying that we have a

40% cypermethrin wettable powder.

"We're selling a good volume of Digrain C40WP, but a lot of people are still using Ficam W – a lot of people stocked up and they've got until December 10 to legally use it. After this date, that's when we will really see a boom – we're not going to stop pushing Digrain C40WP."

Tony says that Lodi is also very pleased with the new micro-encapsulation technology.

"Bayer is doing a lot of promotion for K-Othrine Partix, and you can understand why it's a new product," Tony says.

"We have Phobi Caps, which has a micro-encapsulated residual, but ours also has a

very fast knock down active, prallethrin. If you normally get an eight week residual, by micro-encapsulating the active, you extend that to a 12 week residual, which delays the release of the active and spreads it further.

"Lodi's range also features the old school products – the Digrain aerosols, the Phobi F&F and Perbio Choc, which is still the strongest oil-based, ready-to-use (RTU) insecticide on the market."

At PestTech 2020, which was due to take place in November, Lodi was planning on promoting Digrain C40WP and Phobi Caps, as well as new Sapphire bait blocks.

Tony says: "The thing that we had always never had was blocks with brodifacoum; we had the pastes, grains and blocks in two of our but I think pest controllers will only use natural anticoagulants, difenacoum and bromadiolone, but we didn't have a brodifacoum block until now."

As for product development, Tony reports that he hopes will get UK registration over the next couple of years.

He adds: "We've got a cockroach gel of our own, Addict, which is doing fantastically well and it deals with all the common cockroaches occurring in the UK."

Tony reports that Lodi is also looking at natural products.

"Everything says to us, long term, with the way legislation has gone, that at some point they might say chemicals are bad news full-stop, and that everything has to go natural," Tony says.

"We just think it's important to be prepared for that market; Lodi is looking a lot at natural

// The toolbox is losing products all the time //

products, increasing what we call our Organ-X range.

"There's already a big demand for natural products in a lot of scenarios.

"The toughest thing with a natural product is getting one to work, frankly. Killing things with something that isn't a chemical is difficult."

Lodi's natural range includes a polymer product, Organ-X Pro.

Tony says: "The idea is that you spray it directly onto the insect; the natural movement of the insect is to get away from it, which makes the product react and it ends up encasing it, so the insect ends up in a cocoon of the polymer and they suffocate.

"I don't want to speak for the whole industry, but I think pest controllers will only use natural products where they have to. In the end, the customer wants the thing dead and gone as quickly as possible – there's no changing the fact that chemicals will do that.

"Customers just want a quick service and their pest problem dealt with."

Looking forward, Tony says that Lodi isn't

going to change its ethos. "We're good guys to work with and Lodi is a lovely company to deal with, so, hopefully, more people will come on board over time," he says.