



Excellence in
**NORTHERN
IRELAND**

RIDGEWAY

SUPPLY CHAIN INNOVATION



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From a starting point over forty years ago in traditional building supplies, Ridgeway has become a supply chain partner of choice for major companies operating in a range of sectors, encompassing construction, engineering, off shore, oil and gas, bringing innovations in both products and processes in every sphere.

The Belfast of 1969, rife with the civil unrest that launched three decades of 'the troubles' was hardly the ideal setting for a new business start-up. That is just what Ridgeway founders, Maurice Kane and Norman Adamson did, launching their business in Belfast's Ridgeway Street to service the needs of building trades such as painters, steelworkers and electricians and to promote working safely at heights with a range of products. Thanks to the pragmatism and hard work of the partners, the company thrived and grew steadily throughout the years of unrest in Northern Ireland, moving premises several times to accommodate growth, from Ridgeway Street to Finaghy, then to the Boucher Road industrial area and finally, in 2004, to its current location in Belfast Harbour Estate.

Maurice Kane's philosophy was simple: know your customers, understand their needs in detail and meet those

needs, not only with the products they ask for but also with innovative construction and engineering solutions that would save time and add value to the build process. Ensuring compliance with legislation and enhancing safety at work were equally important to the Ridgeway business model and helped cement its reputation as a 'go to' destination for the best products, solutions and operating methods. Last, but by no means least, rigorous financial management ensured a low gearing ratio which served to protect the business and allow for continual and sustainable growth.

Now under the stewardship of Maurice's son, Stephen Kane, these basic tenets still underpin a business that has continued to innovate in its core construction and engineering markets and has also diversified into new sectors. Stephen Kane commented: 'Ridgeway



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has always focused on innovation. We were first to market in Northern Ireland with the introduction of a host of products and solutions for construction, for example, lightweight aluminium scaffolding, elevated work platforms, edge protection systems, temporary site fencing and demarcation, steel and GRP walkway solutions. Likewise, it was Ridgeway that first launched architectural metal mesh, welded gabions for cladding and land and sea reinforcement, high security perimeter protection and airless paint spraying and pumping solutions to the market here.'

'Our core market sectors are continually developing and Ridgeway is instrumental in collaborating with manufactures and their customers for continuous improvement to solutions. This approach ensures we stay at the forefront of markets needs and expectations. At the same time, we continue to lead the way in new market sectors for the company, such as aerospace, wind energy and sea defences.'

PEOPLE MATTER

As with almost every successful company, the people who make up the Ridgeway team have been pivotal to success. 'With a focus on innovation and best value at the core of the business, we needed people who would commit to our business, share our goals and help us to deliver, year on year,' explained Stephen. 'We have built a strong team who know and understand our products and solutions, our ethos and our vision for the future. We all work together and have a lot of fun doing what we do, thriving on the success of our customers and their projects, with whom we work as key partner suppliers. The development and dedication of our loyal staff have been at the centre of our success, alongside our close customer support relationships. That's something we are extremely proud of.'

In terms of staff and, crucially, customer retention, training play a key role. Each product or system requires detailed

knowledge to specify and implement with due regard to installation, health and safety and legislative compliance when the system is operational. 'Ridgeway prides itself on being a responsible supplier and education and training go hand-in-hand with selling our portfolio of products and systems. We train our customers' staff on the correct handling, installation, use and maintenance of our systems, we work with architects and engineers on the design side and we offer aftersales and ongoing continuous professional development support and training. Ridgeway is not there simply to sell and walk away, we are a supplier partner to our customers and, as such, we're with them every step of the way. Again, this comes down to the fact that we have the right people with the right skills, knowledge and experience on our team.'

LOOKING OUTWARDS

While Ridgeway's roots were firmly embedded in the local Northern Ireland market, one which is still of utmost importance, economic, market and even political changes have been factors in fostering a strong outward-looking and export focus for the company, which, together with the team's innovation ethos has taken Ridgeway to a new level.

As Ireland's economy took off in what became known as the "Celtic Tiger", Ridgeway's partner relationships naturally drew the company into the market, supporting its specialist customers on infrastructure and industrial build projects. Meanwhile, the Northern Ireland economy was still heavily reliant on public sector infrastructure and maintenance spend and there was a degree of uncertainty in the business community as the fledgling institutions of the devolved government grappled with both administrative and political issues.

Stephen Kane, who is currently chairman of the Construction Group for Northern Ireland, which lobbies for the industry's interests, felt strongly that his own company needed to continue to look outwards for growth. 'The Irish 'Tiger'



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years opened Ridgeway up to the possibilities and the constraints of the local market, in terms of size, economic and political administration factors led us firmly to the conclusion that growth would come through aggressively targeting new sectors and export markets,' he said.

'The ability to seek work outside Northern Ireland has always been a driver for our major companies, who have shown that resilience and determination will lead to success, together with a dynamic and flexible supply chain mobilised to support them. Our construction and engineering industry's capability and "get the job done" mentality has been central to our ability to deliver on the global stage and become more independent. From Ridgeway's earliest days, self-generating growth has been at the core of our business thinking and our push into new markets, both technologically and physically, is the next step in that philosophy.'

INNOVATION AT SEA

For Ridgeway, expansion into new markets has involved moving into sectors such as offshore wind, oil and gas installations and civil engineering solutions for flood water defence, where the company's particular expertise has been bringing niche products to market to solve the particular challenges. An excellent example is a Filter Unit, made in Japan from recycled drinking water bottles. The unit is filled with local aggregate and has a range of underwater applications.

'Ridgeway already had experience in land and sea reinforcement solutions, so we could immediately see the huge benefits of these highly technical products,' said Stephen. 'We developed a strategy in collaboration with Sumitomo and Kwoya from Japan that would see the product introduced pan-Europe to target solutions in the civil engineering, offshore renewables, oil and gas sectors.'

Ridgeway was fast to impress the Japanese with its local UK and Ireland knowledge and its ability to mobilise staff expertise in promoting the product, while at the same time overcoming major cultural and language challenges during the process. Now with some major world first projects in these sectors involving major clients such as Dong Energy, TAQA, Statoil, Eon, SSE, EDF Energy, Environment Agency UK, Rivers Agency and Prysmain Cables, Ridgeway has established a firm base to develop the distribution of this much-needed engineered solution to provide contractors and clients installation and maintenance benefits over traditional solutions, while at the same time promoting green, recycled, natural behaving products that utilise local aggregates and thus have a multiplier effect to local economic benefit.

Embracing the concept of using recycled materials for manufacturing and building products, Ridgeway has also introduced to market a range of WPC products (Wood Plastic Composite) for cladding and decking. Relevant for construction projects from top-end commercial and retail to social and domestic housing schemes, civic landscaping projects and even at harbours and piers, WPC products offer a no maintenance, easy installation alternative to traditional timber or UvPC plastics.

The kind of forward thinking mentality that has brought these and so many more products and solutions to market, combined with the right people, knowledge and a "can do" attitude have underpinned Ridgeway's continued growth and success since its inception over forty years ago. The company's seamless move from building supply to construction and infrastructure supply chain partners and onwards to embrace offshore renewables with green solutions demonstrates the remarkable commitment to innovation which is driven by doing things better, safer and faster for less over the whole lifetime of a project or product.





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