

Work hard, trade fair, have fun – the business philosophy of the man who sells flowers to the masses. **Shirley Wooton** meets **Will Wynne** of Arena Flowers

The sweet smell of success

“In the week leading up to Valentine’s Day, we handled 4,000 orders and had to use two Parcelforce trailers – the big ones – as extra workspace. It was manic. I gave an interview to the BBC at 5am on the day itself looking slightly the worse for wear.”

This, I suspect, is all part of the fun for Will Wynne, an investment banker turned marketing man, who started Arena Flowers in 2006 with Steve France. The two had a shared vision since they were at University: to set up an internet-based business, “when the time was right”.

That time came last September. Will had spent three years working for eBay, Steve had just spent three years in floristry. They had a vision for a new kind of business. They united their skills with experienced

Online floristry sales in the UK topped £100 million last year

flower buyer Ronald van den Burg and decided to cut out the middle men and import direct from Holland. It is Ronald who gets up at an unearthly hour every morning to search through the 40 million blooms at the Westland Flower Auctions and to get the best price for Arena. They arrive in the freshest possible condition at Park Royal and are transported direct to the customer.

But why flowers? Partly a pragmatic decision, based on Steve’s experience and partly because, “It’s a thriving market [online floristry sales in the UK topped £100 million last year] and one I like. We’re not just selling flowers, we’re selling emotion.”

Arena Flowers mixes the romantic with the practical. Orders placed by 3pm can be delivered free of charge the same day within

the London area and any order made by 6pm can be delivered next day, anywhere in mainland UK. Customers can customise the delivery and Arena texts the sender when the delivery is made, to ensure peace of mind.

And that peace of mind extends further. From the start, ethical practices have always been part of the business. Will is proud of the fact that Arena is the first UK florist to sell Fair Flowers, Fair Plants (FFP) accredited flowers. The FFP monitors every link in the supplier chain, from the flower grower onwards, to ensure the highest ethical and environmental standards. There is no cost to Arena, just a commitment to adhere to FFP standards.

I ask whether this extra scrutiny is worth it? Will is adamant: “We’re happy to be transparent. In an internet business where customers seldom see us face to face, we’ll take as many steps as we can to reassure our customers that they are dealing with a sound business that treats its customers, its suppliers and its employees fairly.”

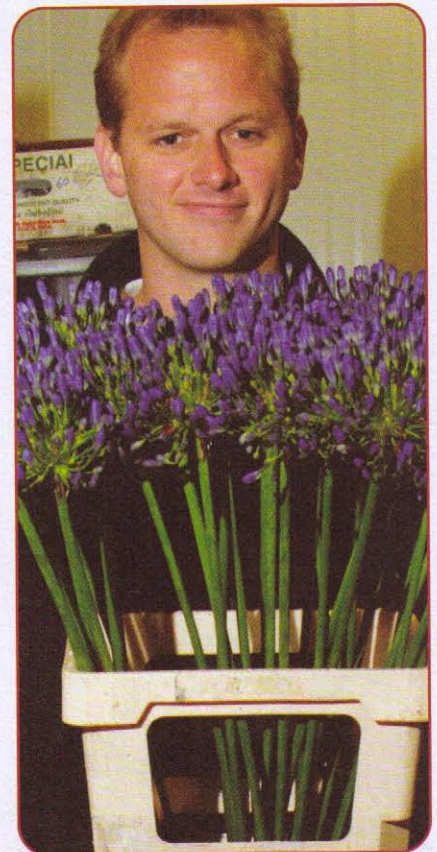
Things are looking good so far but what happens next?

Through partnering with other companies (one being Park Royal-based chocolatier Prestat) they will expand the goods on offer to the customer. If a beautiful bouquet isn’t enough, why not send a teddy bear or some hand-made organic chocolates? Specific wine and hamper websites are in development and should be open in time for the Christmas rush.

“Everyone should win with Arena,” he concludes. “We’re deadly serious about doing a good job; about delivering a great service. But we should enjoy coming to work. That’s the kind of business we want to work for and that we’re trying to build.”

Can’t say fairer than that.

For more details on grants and business support, contact Howard Beaumont at hbeaumont@parkroyal.org



Company CV Arena Flowers

Managing Director: **Will Wynne (31)**

Co-founders: **Steven France, Ronald van den Burg**

Start-up date: **September 2006**

Turnover: **£1 million in first seven months’ trading; currently doing £8,000 business per day**

Staff numbers: **30**

UK annual floristry spend: **£2 billion**

Arena offers PRP members a 10 per cent discount on any order.

www.arenaflowers.com