



TIM GANDER

Partnerships

Noel Lock and Ingram Legge

When an ex-publican and an ex-professional racing driver met on an MBA course they combined their skills, put theory into practice and came up with the Greenfuel Company. Interviews by Amy Duff

Noel Lock



When I sold my pub/restaurant business, I made some money but effectively put myself out of work. Thinking about what I could usefully do in 12 months, I decided to do an MBA and met Ingram.

We worked on a number of projects. We had to simulate a small business start-up, for example. The idea for Greenfuel (a business which converts motorists' cars to Liquefied Petroleum Gas) was one that we came back to. We wondered why nobody was pushing LPG more positively. We spent six months researching the market, thinking about how we could influence it. We realised there was an informational role to play. The business was self-funded and our priority at first was to build an efficient, interactive website.

There were a number of challenges: finding staff; gaining credibility from inside and outside the industry; sourcing suppliers that were up-to-scratch, and time management. It's a very fast-moving market. Keeping abreast of it is a challenge—we both work silly hours. We keep promising ourselves a better work-life balance but it hasn't happened yet. When you're always fire-fighting there's no time to put in improvements.

The biggest challenge we have right now is adapting our skills in relation to the growing business. From a two-man band we now have a larger team to manage. I'm not a very good man manager. I've got to learn to stand a bit farther back from every tiny item. I'd say that's Ingram's biggest weakness, too. We've tried to split our responsibilities—I'm more into strategic planning, Ingram is

increasingly hands on. I'm quite opinionated, so he has to put up with that. But arguments never drag on—we don't have downtime trying to settle disagreements. I admire Ingram's determination and his ability to get things done (although he's rather disorganised).

We've made fairly significant strategic changes to the business every year and will continue to do that. Our research and development is cutting edge within the market in its own right and our turnover in year three was about £1.4m.

Fundamentally, we're doing a good thing by reducing pollution. We're not gun-running or doing anything illicit or immoral. The nature of what we do is very satisfying.

Ingram Legge



I wanted to formalise a lot of things I'd been trying to do in business and get an academic qualification, so I did an MBA at the University of Bath.

Everybody was looking at issues around environmental transport. Noel and I felt that LPG had been marketed poorly; that something needed to be done. I've always had a passion for cars, so that helped.

We funded the business ourselves, and through friends, family and fools! We felt the business wasn't big or established enough to sell a chunk to venture capitalists so we made the decision to wait until we could prove the model worked, then talk to potential investors. We invested a lot of time up front to research the market and make sure it was real and not perceived.

Noel's very strong on research and strategy. He'd say he's the

environmentalist and I'm the petrol-head. While the company is growing we're both very much hands on, and we're asking staff to take responsibility for things that they might not usually take on. We've got to be good at communicating what we want.

We like to agree on things before we do them, so we don't really have to settle disagreements. We've got a third director on board now, which helps. We eat, sleep and breathe this business.

Noel has a tenacity that few people possess. He's like a dog with a bone and won't let go, which really drives this project and gives the business direction.

"Fundamentally, we're doing a good thing by reducing pollution. We're not gun-running or doing anything illicit or immoral"

Neither of us had a background in LPG or marketing. To take an idea and turn it into a practicality makes us a strong partnership. We've got a number of strengths across the board—there are few areas where we lack expertise.

We're quite bad at going backwards, looking at what we've achieved and giving ourselves a pat on the back. We're constantly looking forward. In many ways, I think doing the first conversion is the business milestone I'm most proud of—it confirmed what we thought would work and got our first sale underway. We've turned a cottage industry into an established industry.