

Meachers Global Logistics drives ahead with Paris Smith

In this Paris Smith client profile, *The Business Magazine* finds out how Meachers Global Logistics has relied on the firm's legal support throughout decades of transition and growth

'Red lorry, yellow lorry' is a tough tongue twister and for anyone living in the Southampton area and across the south of England is perhaps what they say to themselves whenever a Meachers Global Logistics vehicle drives by.

The fleet colour scheme certainly delivers strong brand recognition for the company. Started by the Meacher family in Totton in the 1940s as a coal haulier it is now run by Bob Terris and his sons. Today, Meachers is an innovative, technology-driven global logistics operator with 180 staff and £30m-plus annual turnover.

Paris Smith has been part of the Meachers story for over two decades, advising primarily on employment and property matters. The two businesses both have long histories in the region, with the law firm starting in Southampton more than 200 years ago.

Their strong connections provide Meachers with useful contacts across the local business community. "The networking and social side of our relationship with Paris Smith is an important benefit in addition to our commercial dealings", said Bob Terris, chairman of Meachers. "It's a relationship based on trust, continuity, and being confident that the advice we get will always be good."

Terris' career began in engineering, where he developed an interest in the distribution side of the business. He joined Meachers in 1962 when he was 17. "I was the first person outside the Meachers family to be involved in running the company. I joined because I wanted to have an influence over how things were done. I was a quick learner and the brothers were happy for someone else to take it on," he recalled.

And he's been running things ever since. In that time, Terris has steered Meachers through economic recessions, road haulier strikes and the intricacies of ever more complex global supply chains. The company now faces the dual challenge of Brexit and the coronavirus pandemic, which have plunged supply chain logistics into what could be a prolonged period of uncertainty.

Terris had risen to managing director when the Meachers family sold the business to Pirelli in 1981 after the Italian conglomerate won a large contract with one of its customers, the Central Electricity Generating Board. During this transformative period as a plc subsidiary Terris embarked on a series of strategic acquisitions to expand the business.

After a corporate restructuring, Pirelli decided Meachers was no longer a core business and sought a buyer for the company. This was clearly a frustrating time for Terris that dragged on for a number of years. He eventually made the case for an MBO and in 1996



Bob Terris

persuaded Pirelli to part with the business. He became the independent company's chairman in 2011 and is the majority shareholder.

His sons Stuart, managing director, and Jamie, director, cut their teeth working in different departments across the business to gain valuable experience. They now help chart Meachers' future with their father, who continues to play an active role in the company.

As one of Southampton's largest transport operators Meachers has ambitions for continued growth by being flexible in response to changing transport sector requirements. It operates from three units on Southampton's Nursling Industrial Estate and has a centre in Derby. Together, this provides over 400,000 square feet of storage and a 24-hour a day operation handling domestic and international freight services by road, sea and air.

The company focuses on UK transportation and distribution, international freight forwarding, warehousing and supply chain management services for companies of all sizes. The underlying philosophy is based on helping customers drive efficiencies in their supply chains.

Meachers is a certified Authorised Economic Operator, the voluntary EU-wide compliance and security standard that is part of a global series aimed at enhancing supply chain security. When the realities of trading in a post-Brexit world eventually kick in, such global credentials should prove very useful.

Terris is also committed to investing in technology that supports operational efficiency. This includes inventory management systems, as well as electronic tracking for clients to check the status of their shipments at every stage. The company has ISO accreditation for its quality management systems.



"Technology is one of our biggest expenses. It was pencils when I started!" said Terris. "We have our own IT department and also write systems for clients and manufacturers who use our warehousing."

For customer Carnival Cruise Line, almost everything that goes on board its fleet is transported, shipped and warehoused by Meachers. "Our long-term success with Carnival's US owners is based, in particular, on our policy of continuous improvement. Carnival even uses our quality management systems in other parts of its business," said Terris.

Advice and support

Meachers began using Paris Smith over 25 years ago, mainly on employment and property disposals from its portfolio of warehouses and industrial units. Today, the business relies on the firm for all of its legal support, including corporate, IP and data security advice. Paris Smith also handles Bob Terris' personal legal affairs.

One of the firm's earliest assignments was the disposal of warehouse premises at Southampton airport when its owners needed more space to expand. Meachers' own growth has involved acquisitions and long-term customer contracts that require employees to be transferred under TUPE arrangements.

"We rely on up-to-the-minute legal advice from Paris Smith as employment law is changing all the time," said Terris.

The depth of knowledge provided by Paris Smith's team of eight employment lawyers helps smooth what can be a difficult period of transition for employees coming into Meachers.

The level of support provided by the firm extends to in-

house training for Meachers' managers. "It's important that we update them on the latest legislation and best practice," said Clive Dobbin, a partner at Paris Smith who specialises in employment law. "We also encourage their managers to contact us whenever they have questions or issues that need our support."

What has always impressed Terris is the way Paris Smith takes time to understand how the business is run. "We want to do things the right way for our employees and trust them to get the legal aspects right for us because they really know us," he said.

This close level of regular contact creates real strength in the partnership. "It's a foundation based on continuity. I have made a lot of friends at the firm over the years. I know them as individuals as well as our lawyers," said Terris.

Beyond Brexit and coronavirus

As the coronavirus pandemic runs its course, supply chain activity has slowed or stalled altogether. "There's plenty of stock being held in the UK, in fact there's probably a shortage of space at the moment as not much is being moved. However, after Brexit, that should change significantly," said Terris.

Such uncertain times make it hard for Meachers to prepare for Brexit. Nevertheless, the company is weathering the coronavirus storm, helped by strong cash reserves and attentive debt collection. Terris is focused on being ready to meet staffing requirements when the economy picks up again.

"One thing's for sure, employment law is unlikely to get any less complex in the future, so we look forward to maintaining our relationship with Clive and the firm," he said.

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