

SINCLAIR OFFICE SUPPLIES (SOS) – HISTORY

The business was founded by Colin Sinclair in July 1996. Trading from a tiny shop unit at 62 Victoria Street in Stromness, the company launched an advertising freesheet “The Orkney Advertiser” in October of that year.

This first staff member was hired in March 1998 and as the company expanded it relocated to larger premises at 108 Victoria Street in February 1999. This brought a noticeable increase in commercial trade leading to a daily island-wide delivery service and the purchase of a first liveried red van.

The Orkney Advertiser by now had a circulation of 7,500 copies and was sold as a going concern in May 2000, freeing up the company to concentrate on its core lines of stationery, furniture and office machines. The Advertiser still operates successfully today.

Sinclair Office Supplies became the only local member of the Scottish Stationers Buying Group in November 2002, which gave vastly superior purchasing terms. Turnover continued to grow and in May 2003 the company purchased much larger premises at 71-75 John Street. As well as offering greater retail space it had the added advantage of a covered loading bay and vast back shop storage area. This enabled the company to carry a larger stockholding ensuring a higher order fill rate. A full-time delivery driver was employed in January 2004 at which point a twice daily delivery service to Kirkwall was introduced.

In December 2005 the business invested £15,000 in the StockIt computer system which automated both stock control and invoicing and introduced barcode scanning. In July 2007 the decision was taken to diversify into the picture framing market by setting up a professional standard framing workshop and hiring two full-time framers. The framers quickly gained a good reputation for both the quality and speed of their work, which was further enhanced by winning a national competition organised by the Fine Art Trade Guild in July 2010.

In March 2008 the Kirkwall firm of Business Equipment Service (B.E.S.) was acquired which gave SOS a better mix of retail/commercial trade as well as a strong presence on the main street in Kirkwall. This shop had been in decline for several years but was quickly revamped. Opening hours were extended while staffing and stock levels were immediately increased resulting in sales doubling by the end of the first full financial year. In September 2009 total annual sales for both shops topped £500,000 for the first time.

In June 2010 the company invested in a range of print finishing equipment including comb, wire and spiral binding machines, power staplers and an electric A3 guillotine, which enabled printing jobs including personalised notebooks and calendars to be undertaken.

Turnover dipped for the first time in November 2010 as a direct result of Orkney Islands Council opting into a National Framework Agreement for the supply of Stationery and IT Consumables. The company campaigned against this decision and were successful in having it overturned in January 2013. Although difficult at the time, this change led to re-evaluation of many areas of the business resulting in savings including a 20% reduction in staff costs. In January 2012 the company won an OIC tender for the supply of 6,200 reams of copy paper which was retained in January 2013.

In January 2012 Sinclair Office Supplies were instrumental in forming the “Orkney Lucky Locals” retail incentive which encourages shoppers to support their local shops. The scheme has more than doubled in size over its first year and currently offers quarterly prizes of over £5,500.

July 2013 saw the completion of a new shopfront at the Stromness premises which includes a new entrance porch and double glazed windows. As well as improving the appearance, it provides much greater insulation thus reducing energy costs.