



L to R Mark Woods, Josh Llewellyn,  
Chris Harvey and David Graham.

# Industry insiders seek sales success

**A new idea devised by hire industry professionals aims to connect hire business sellers with keen buyers - with the added advantages of commercial nous and decades of operational expertise thrown in. We spoke to marketing man Chris Harvey to find out more ...**

The new business is called 'The Hire Exchange' and it comes to our attention not merely because of the service offered, but due to the illustrious profile of its team members - David Graham, former sales director of Youngman and MD of Speedy Hire; Josh Llewellyn, a well-respected supplier to the hire industry; Mark Woods, a serial investor with much experience of IT and project management, and Chris Harvey, an established hire industry marketing specialist. The Hire Exchange 'offer' combines the talents of its founders, all in the pursuit of improving the often fraught and expensive process of selling a hire business - most generalist business brokers lacking the required insight and expertise, as the team discovered in preliminary research.

"It was David Graham's idea in the first place," begins Chris.

"It was his observation that many independent hire depots have problems selling their businesses, because they don't know how to value their stock or how to present a case from an acquisition point of view, and they often don't get the price they want after due diligence. Also, buyers never quite know what they're purchasing, because the information is often not there. Our solution was that if there was a group of people who understood what buyers and sellers need to know, and where the opportunities lie, then the chances of achieving value for both parties would be greater."

To this end, The Hire Exchange produces a comprehensive sales prospectus for each of its clients. "The first thing we do is meet with the seller and look at their business and the condition of their equipment," says Chris. "David Graham has been in the hire industry for over 30 years and he knows what well-maintained kit and thriving businesses look like. He also knows when he looks at the customer base whether the business will be appealing to a potential purchaser. We use EBITDA (earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortisation) as the basis of our report, which provides a statement of value based on what the business generates, and, using our experience, we include a lot more information that articulates the opportunities and supports the sales proposition - our last two reports were 44 pages long. We'll then go headhunting for suitable buyers, using our contacts within the hire

industry and looking at other potential buyers where there might be a strategic fit. Because everything we do is upfront, when a deal goes forward the chance of it being scuppered at the due diligence stage is much less."

Not all hire businesses are the same, of course, both in terms of their size and the sorts of equipment and services offered. The Hire Exchange has the staff and experience to suit most circumstances, so clients are sure of personal attention and a bespoke service. But who does what within the company, we asked? "Each client is given a specific account director," Chris explains. "Our chairman Mark Woods brings a broad commercial and operational expertise. David is our commercial specialist and is best placed to really understand the opportunities and values within a hire business, and Josh Llewellyn manufactures in his own right and also has a hire business. He is especially good with buyers - particularly the big guys. And I help to move things along, pull people and projects together, and present to the clients. It's a good mix of talent."

Our short interview does not pass without the inevitable question regarding the dreaded coronavirus. The outbreak and consequent lockdown caused the cancellation of the official launch of The Hire Exchange recently, and many hire businesses have been shuttered since. Chris is nevertheless at pains to explain that the process of selling a hire business should never be hurried. "Selling a business is a strategic move and is not subject to short term fluctuations," he advises. "We would want to say to people that things might be bad now, but they will recover. Talk to us now because we could be doing a lot of planning and development work for when the tide finally turns."

So that's The Hire Exchange in a nutshell. The global pandemic notwithstanding, the company already has several businesses on its books, with one at the heads of agreement stage and several other prospects to look after when better times return. With the expertise and wherewithal that really could enhance the process of selling and buying a hire business, we wish them good luck. ●