

Hardwick Motor Company Ltd

Steve Cook, Managing Director

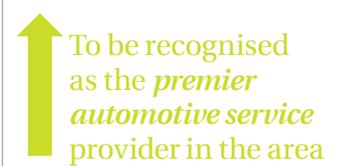
▲ Jobs



▲ Turnover



▲ Ambition



“I can’t tell you how huge the impact of GrowthAccelerator, now part of the Business Growth Service, has been on the business, all three areas have gained customers and revenue and we’ve won three national awards too”

About the business

Founded in Sutton-in-Ashfield in 1982, Hardwick has three areas of operation: Hardwick Motor Company provides servicing and repairs, the Tool Academy sells tools for the automotive trade online and, as part of the Fix Auto network of bodyshops, it carries out collision repairs. Still underpinned by founder Steve Cook’s original commitment to providing services that are reliable, high quality and cost effective and to giving customers honest and informed advice, the company has a strong local reputation and a loyal, long-standing workforce.

Our growth journey so far

I started out as an apprentice mechanic in 1966 and it was only when I got made redundant from a job looking after a building company’s fleet of vehicles that I thought of setting up my own business. We went along steadily for a few years, building a good customer database and buying our own premises. Then two things happened: the nice old chap who sold us tools out of his Volvo had to give up work – it turned out he was 93 and no-one would insure him – so we bought his stock. That was the start of the

Tool Academy. And then I met an Auto Fix rep. I really liked the new ideas behind the business and was one of the first in the UK to sign up to the network.

The challenge

A few years ago a new Auto Fix regional manager came over and gave us some help and advice. This opened my eyes to what’s possible and made me realise that the garage was jaded. Despite our best intentions, the business had become stagnant: we didn’t seem to be gaining new customers for our database, we seemed to be constantly fire-fighting and I had no-one to help take the pressure off me.

Getting the right advice

I’d known Steve Potts for many years and when I talked to him about my concerns for the business he said it was right up his street. He explained that he couldn’t put us forward for GrowthAccelerator until we were growing – so he helped us get going! We stripped the business back and looked at where we wanted to go. Once we’d set up a management team and got ourselves more organised we approached GrowthAccelerator and once we had joined the service, Steve became our Growth Coach.

Steve has been amazing. He doesn't tell you what to do, he enables you to talk, decide and take action together as a team. He's also introduced me to other local business owners and we talk about our common problems – which would have been totally alien to me before but which has been really helpful.

Being on GrowthAccelerator put us on a different plane with our new bank manager, whose respect for us grew the minute she heard. It's also meant we've been invited to attend and speak at Nottinghamshire County Council business events, which have been great for networking and recruitment.

Implementing change

The changes we've made have moved the business to another level – it's been a tremendous turnaround from the team as a whole. The garage is no longer in decline, the Tool Academy has customers from as far afield as Japan and Australia and Fix Auto turnover is on course to top £800,000 this year from £485,000 last year. We've had the confidence to take on six more people and an additional 16,000 sq ft of space. We have also won some national awards, including Garage of the Year, Body Shop Magazine's Consumer Choice Award and Fix Auto's Body Shop of the Year.

GrowthAccelerator helped us 100% with how we work with Fix Auto's management, which resulted in gaining two major new insurance clients. It has also ended our financial floundering by bringing in an ex-accountant to set up and train us to use spreadsheets. Better communication has had a huge impact on the business. Internal tensions have evaporated now that we hold regular meetings and share our burdens and joys. The Tool Academy has boosted sales through regular mailshots. And after talking to garage customers we've improved their whole experience, from reception to pricing. Steve also helped me realise I have a flair for marketing and we're rebuilding our database through a loyalty card, radio advertising, promotions and competitions.

What's next for Hardwick?

I have very high hopes for the next 12 months and beyond as these changes continue to help us grow. We also plan to respond better to employees' interests and strengths, for example Michelle, who's been looking after our finances for 30 years, is going to get some formal training and our receptionist James is going to take a GrowthAccelerator course after showing a real interest in business development.

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