

**What makes a
good adhesives
partner?**

A roundtable discussion

intertronics
adhesives, coatings, sealants & equipment
for your manufacturing and technology applications

What makes a good adhesives partner?

Every adhesives supplier will say they are one, but what does it mean and how can companies back it up?

We brought together people from across our team for a roundtable to discuss this.

The roundtable included:

Peter Swanson
Managing Director

Ben Swanson
Sales Manager

Rachel Chancellor
Marketing Manager

Andrew Gibson
Internal Sales Executive

Matt Baseley
Technical Sales Executive



What is an adhesives partner?

What is fundamental to a partnership?



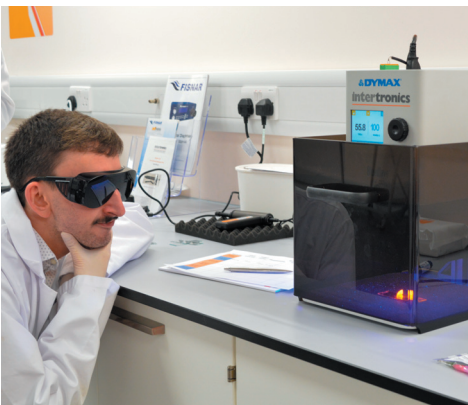
Ben: A partnership is a relationship where the partner adds value, as opposed to transactionally supplying materials or equipment. It is inherently long term – more about achieving customer results than selling products.

Peter: People, culture and attitude are central to establishing a partnership. To be able to collaborate effectively and get results, partnerships must be founded on shared understanding and trust.

Fundamentally, company values underpin the whole relationship. Our Intertronics values are to grow by taking advantage of learning opportunities, to collaborate openly to earn trust and effect measurable results, to empower our people to listen, take ownership and deliver positive outcomes and to respond quickly.

How do you build understanding

with new customers?



Ben: Understanding comes from establishing the why behind the what. For example, if a customer approached us asking for an alternative material, it shouldn't be a case of sifting through data sheets to give them a quote. We'd always ask, why? That way we can establish whether it is the right material, or if there is a better one, and be sure we are solving the customer's problem.

Our sales process is designed to help build understanding. That means we don't assume we know the answer or jump to our own conclusions, we go backwards first – gaining a deep understanding, and ensuring our customer knows we understand too. As well as asking questions, we can explain how we have worked on similar projects, seen similar applications or demonstrate that we really know the technology.

Matt: A lot of it comes down to listening to the customer, understanding their situation, building on that to make recommendations. It's helpful for a partner to ask the customer for their thoughts rather than talking at them.

How can a supplier achieve a trusted advisor status with its customers?



Peter: Maintaining an authoritative technical voice is one way to develop a customer relationship to achieve trusted advisor status. Our authoritative technical voice is built on knowledge of our customers, products, people, processes and industries, and excellent listening skills.

Because one of Intertronics' core values is learning, we accept that we don't know everything. Every application is different, and we may not have seen it before. To help our partners to the best of our ability, we take every opportunity to learn about our world, our customers, and our staff, keeping our knowledge current. If a team member does not know the answer to a customer question, they'll pass the query on to someone who does.



Ben: Absolutely. We know a lot, but we don't know everything! It is key to take opportunities to learn something new, but also to have a clearly defined limit.

We're even happy to say no to opportunities if we think we aren't the right partner —instead, we will recommend another company we think could help. We know where we fit, who our customers are, and where we have the experience.

Matt: Becoming a trusted partner is also about sharing experience-based issues and advice. For example, recommending the best candidates for testing, explaining why, and substantiating with previous examples.

Lab Reports produced by our Technical Team can offer additional clout, as do live trials, where you can establish the performance of equipment and demonstrate that it achieves the customer objective.

As we've just discussed, a partnership is founded on trust. How do you grow and maintain this trust?



Ben: There are three parts to building trust. The first is empathy, which is the process of understanding the customer, their application, and specific needs. The second is competence, backed up by authoritative technical voice, communication, and responsiveness. The third is authenticity, which is based on integrity and honesty.

Matt: We try to give the customer everything they need to make a decision — the good and the bad, which helps with their confidence. We'd say, while we are confident in the product and that it's the right kind of thing, there are certain areas it might fail or that you might need to be aware of. We'd then recommend testing that specific aspect.

For example, we'd proactively point out to a customer that they might experience yellowing in a particular epoxy. If we recommended a product and simply said it would do the job, we'd lose the trust very quickly once it failed.

Peter: It's put up or shut up. We either say we can't help and recommend someone who can, or do everything we can to solve the problem for the customer quickly.

Andrew: The integrity and honesty Ben mentioned sometimes surprises customers. For example, a customer might call with a large budget, where something simple would solve their problem. We would recommend what is best for the customer, rather than the most expensive solution.

Rachel: An important part of maintaining trust is the ability to right wrongs quickly. So, if there are any quality questions, or if there is a rare mix up during delivery, taking quick action to sort it and prioritising the customer's needs. Even if the customer is at fault, a good partner should step in and resolve the situation to prevent expensive downtime.

Matt: For example, we recently had a product recall that we had to communicate to customers. Many of them thanked us for informing them and taking such a positive approach! It helps that our team is empowered enough to make quick decisions and tough calls; it means we can do the right thing.



How important is product offering to an adhesive partnership?



Ben: I don't think the technology matters that much. Technology changes – we don't sell the same products now as we did 20 years ago. But our values are the same.

Peter: It's less about the products themselves and more about how you put them together. From materials to equipment, to curing technology, to robotics, we can build some very sophisticated processes.

Andrew: Agreed, it's more about how we integrate, install and train people, rather than just the technology itself.

Matt: Although, I think our passion for the technology, how we make the customer feel, and our confidence in it carries into our customer relationships. We only sell things we believe in!

Ben: It ties into the idea that people don't buy what you do, they buy why you do it.

Andrew: It helps that we have a central team on site that can work together as a knowledge pool. This means every customer can access the full technical support of the company, from a single contact point.

Ben: Yes. Many of our customers have valuable working relationships with several members of our team. For example, sales, technical and quality. The important thing is that the customer gets the same experience and level of service whoever they speak to, not that they can pick a product off the shelf.



Should a partner prioritise making purchasing easy for the customer?



Peter: Where we really add value is having conversations with our customers. As we have already discussed, a successful adhesives application is not just down to product, so making it easy for the customer to order products wouldn't help them solve major problems.

Ben: It would be easy to do datasheet matching for a material, but we'd never do that! We'd always ask what the customer was doing, why they were looking for a new material, what problem we were fixing and more.

What this does is focus on the customer achieving the best final result. Because product selection is process related, a brochure on a website can't provide the context or insight into return on investment or productivity.

Peter: We often put return on investment at the front of our conversations with customers; value for money comes down to achieving customer results. Return on investment is to do with good product selection, picking the right materials and equipment to fit with a customer need, rather than a specific product in isolation.

Matt: However, I do think being a single source for adhesives, equipment and associated consumables and the simplicity that offers can be an advantage.

Rachel: Absolutely! There may be no one single answer that solves the customer challenge; they might require a combination of products. For example, when bonding difficult plastics, it might be an adhesive plus a plasma process that would achieve the customer results. Breadth outside of a product category helps us create a solution and a process.

Andrew: I think it is useful for a partner to make it easy to get in touch, such as to offer multiple contact options that suit different audiences. Not everyone works the same way, so it can help to have a phone number, an email and an option to schedule a meeting, or call at any time. Alongside a good system to direct the enquiry to the best person, of course!



What is good customer service?



Andrew: It's important that the customer can get in contact easily, without spending time on hold, and in a way that suits them.

Ben: It's important to respond quickly and direct them to the person who can help. It's off-putting to be left on hold for hours on end or reach voicemail. In fact, I've even taken calls from people enquiring about neighbouring businesses and walked around with the message myself; it's just what we do here – get back to people as quickly as we can, with the right information.

Matt: It also includes checking in later down the line to see how the customer is getting on and to understand what results they are getting from their trials or projects. Good customer service should involve listening, not trying to assume what the customer needs, but gaining a proper understanding and assuring them that they are speaking to the right person.

Rachel: All companies will claim they have good customer service, so it is unlikely to be taken seriously when you claim it. I think there is something to be said for social proof; if your potential partner has online case studies or customer testimonials it will reinforce that the company isn't making it up.

How important is access to the partner's facilities?

Andrew: Access to a facility can be extremely helpful when making an investment decision in adhesives or dispensing equipment. It helps the customer gain insight into the full product range and their partner's expertise in a broad way.

Matt: A well-stocked and tidy Technology Centre speaks for itself. Visiting a partner's facility can mean the customer doesn't have to spend hours looking through a full product range on the website or browsing brochures. Our visitors often leave inspired, for example, thinking about how they could apply the technology in different way, or with a different product than they first expected.

Ben: We often hear from customers that another supplier has offered them lab time several months in the future and for a high price. Whereas the passion we have for our industry means our team may complete something straight away, just because they could and wanted to see if it would work!

You all seem very passionate about this!



Peter: Every new application which comes in is a fascinating puzzle, with many variables to consider. Providing the optimal material and process to a customer is very rewarding: on an intellectual level, on a commercial level and on an emotional level. There is not much better than knowing you have been an enabling part of a new technology which can go on to give great societal benefits. As Ben said, it's why we do what we do that drives us and gives us credibility.

So, from what you are saying, being a good partner is not dependent on what products you can supply?



Peter: Absolutely! The culture and values of the business and the attitude of the team are what creates a good partnership. And this is true of us and our partners too! We are a distributor, not a manufacturer, and we focus on supplying products that offer repeatability, quality, and consistency from partners who share our values.

We're strict about what products we take on and always do our best to make sure they consistently do what they say they will.

Ben: I think being a good partner is living by your values every day and, importantly, proving yourself, day in, day out.

**Looking for an adhesives partner to solve your process challenge?
Call us on +44 (0) 1865 842842 to speak to our team.**

Contact us

INTERTRONICS supplies adhesives, coatings, sealants and equipment to customers with high technology, high performance assembly applications. Our customers are manufacturers in industries such as electronics, medical devices, plastics, optical, automotive, energy, defence and aerospace.

For more information, please email info@intertronics.co.uk or call **01865 842842**.

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