Founded originally as the Billericay Dental Supply Company in 1971 by Gordon Mills, who remains at the helm as chairman, the company began by offering a mail order service and did not employ its first sales representative until 1988. Within eight years, The Dental Directory – renamed in 1983 to reflect its national presence – had a sales force of 33 but not before we were sure this was what dentists wanted; an early reflection of our approach and attention to detail has helped build our reputation.

Always ahead of the curve
We started to use focus group market research in the mid 90s, which identified the need for expert field based sales representatives, whose product knowledge would complement our catalogue and the company. Dental practitioners wanted independent product advice from professional sales staff who were not employed by just one manufacturing company.

In the 40 years that we’ve been in business, dentistry has undergone significant changes; the move from NHS to private, huge technological advances, expansion of treatments and services, higher patient expectations and increased regulatory requirements. However, the company’s ethos remains as solid as ever. The Dental Directory is still owned by the founding Mills family and is run as a hands-on, team effort.

As our Managing Director Martin Mills says: “At the end of the day, The Dental Directory works like a family, every member of staff will pitch-in and do what has to be done, to provide the best possible customer care.”

Judging by this typical testimonial from a customer, we are achieving that aim: “I’ve worked with a variety of wholesale companies and distributors over the years, and can confidently say the service and support that we have received has been nothing short of superb.”

Because The Dental Directory is family owned and has no outside shareholders or dividends to pay, we can react swiftly to the rapidly evolving dental market and have consistently re-invested in the business. In the past four years alone, more than £4.5m has been spent on a totally automated warehouse, stock holding capacity has been increased to around £17m at any one point and thus back orders have been all but eliminated.

Not only do we enjoy a reputation for excellent customer service, the company has long been established as a major philanthropic body, supporting a range of dental charities. In fact, to mark our 40th anniversary, we are establishing the The Dental Directory Chair in Primary Dental Care at Warwick University Medical School, which is thought to be the first new dental Chair to be created in over four decades and the first relating to High Street dentistry.

The plan, as Martin Mills explains, is to “…develop research projects aimed at improving the lot of the primary dental care provider who after all, is our main market so this is a way of putting something back into dentistry.”

The Dental Directory also works with the AOG Charitable Trust and a further 14 groups funding newsletters, local
Even though the Dental Directory is a family business that started in 1977, the company has a long service record. In a world dominated by corporate giants and high staff turnover, the long service records of The Dental Directory staff is a testament to the way our company operates; 11 staff have been with the company for more than 25 years, 65 for more than 15 years, and a further 34 who have been with the company for over ten years. The secret, according to Martin Mills and echoed by his father Gordon and fellow directors is: “A shared vision of customer service.”

For a family business not only to survive but to prosper during the economic rollercoaster of the last 40 years is an achievement in itself, but it is clear from 16 years of Investors in People recognition that The Dental Directory has backed up its core values of customer service, with excellent management and staff relations, as reported: “The well embedded culture of the company is, without doubt, one of continuously striving to maintain its investment in all of its people... (who) are totally clear and unambiguous with regard to what the company is about and how vital customer needs are.”

Or, as one member of staff puts it: “Continuous improvement is a fact of life for us.” This is borne out by this satisfied customer: “The Dental Directory team are friendly and caring yet manage to be professional and efficient at the same time. They work hard and always manage to go that extra mile.”