

Rethinking roofing practices for solar installations



What started with an idea shared around a family's kitchen table has quickly grown to become a business that is revolutionising industry practices for solar panel installations on slate roofs. As Genius Roof Solutions celebrates 20 years in business, PES caught up with Directors, Jemma Green and Joanna Ashcroft, and the company's Head of Business Development David White.

PES: A warm welcome to PES. Firstly, can you share the story behind the founding of Genius Roof Solutions?

Joanna Ashcroft: We are a family business that was founded by my father, Jimmy, who has been a slate/tiler for over 50 years. That many years of experience is a lot of roofs and a lot of challenges to overcome along the way. While on and off the roof Jimmy found himself thinking of solutions that would make the time consuming jobs much quicker.

While he was not an obvious commercially minded businessman, he had a brilliant mind for ideas and invention. He knew that one of the most important characteristics of an innovative idea is that it solves the problem. Necessity is the mother of invention. With Jimmy focusing on solutions and the backing of a supportive family to nurture and support his ideas to market, a successful business was born.

PES: What motivated you to enter the roofing industry, specifically focusing on solar panel installations?

Jemma Green: We were exhibiting our Hallhook® slate fixing repair which replaces broken slates or slates that are put back after a solar installation. Jimmy visited exhibitions and realised there wasn't a solution for flashing the brackets that he felt maintained the integrity of the roof and ensured the roofing material wasn't load bearing. He could see there were a lot of questionable practices, including drilling through the roofing material, something an experienced roofer would never do.

We entered this industry to ensure that excellent roofing practices are an integral part of solar installation, a task typically performed by electricians.

PES: What were some of the initial challenges you faced in developing roof flashings for solar panel installations, and how did you overcome them?

David White: The challenge was to convince installers to avoid the methods that undermine the integrity of the roof. When we developed the SolarFlash® we competed with practices that were focused on getting the installs finished in record time and non roofers cutting corners.

While this may have been a quick method for installers who would have been under pressure to undertake many installations in a week, we were in no doubt this was putting the homeowner at risk of damage to their roof and water ingress. We knew the likelihood that problems would arise in time, usually once the solar company no longer traded.

We pledged to be the company to educate the distributors, company directors, and installers and to demonstrate how SolarFlash® gives the homeowner 100% peace of mind.

PES: How has the business evolved since its inception?

JG: The business started from our family kitchen. Jimmy had his first innovative idea a few years earlier but didn't have the finances to bring it to market. The Hallclip® was a lead fixing clip designed to secure lead flashing. With the help of his eldest daughter, my sister Julia, and a loan from the bank, they started to approach companies to sell the launch product. This would soon become successful and other members of the family would join the business.

Jimmy has three daughters who didn't have a natural affinity for roofs and although he didn't have a son, he has a son-in-law, David, who began learning from Jimmy over 10 years ago and is now an integral part of our business.

We now have over 25 employees and moved premises for the fourth time last year. We are already considering our next move to a bigger warehouse.

PES: Are there any pivotal moments or milestones that you consider crucial in your growth?

JG: SolarFlash® sales have increased year on year. This year we launched the SpeedFlash®, with a patent applied for, which is the same concept and benefits as the SolarFlash® but without the need to remove slates, making it up to 70% quicker to install.

We are receiving incredible feedback and are already seeing lots of companies who didn't previously install on slate roofs now happy to do so. We are excited at the prospects for SpeedFlash®, not only in the UK but also in other countries where slate roofs are present.

PES: Being a family owned business, what advantages do you believe your family business structure brings to your operations and customer interactions?

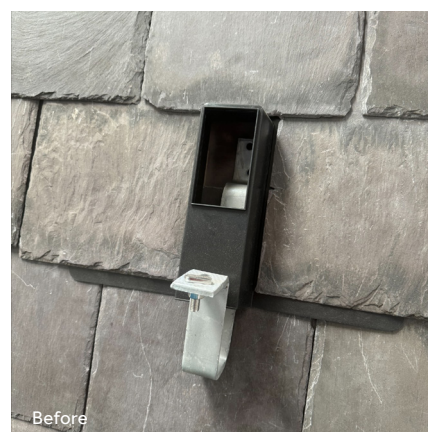
JA: We all have different skills and experience that complement each other. We are a close family, and not only do we work together, but we also choose to spend a lot of our time outside of work. This means we never truly 'switch off' from work and are always discussing ways of improving what we do and what we offer.

We have the family business mentality when it comes to customer service with an 'if we can, we will' attitude. This approach is the same if it is a large wholesale customer or Joe Bloggs calling about his roof. When it comes to our customers, we are incredibly thankful for their valued business, and we believe good relationships not only make for a successful and dynamic business but also an enjoyable place to work.

PES: Customer service is crucial in any business. How do you ensure that your customers receive the best service, especially when dealing with complex installations like solar panel flashings?

DW: We are always at the end of the phone for any technical advice that is needed. We will go above and beyond for our customers, and it is not unusual for one of us to be driving a package to the nearer courier depot for any last minute orders that our customers need.

As we are from a roofing background, we know the importance of the installer having the right tools, so their job is not held up; the weather in the UK is responsible for enough of that!





Joanna Ashcroft

All our flashing kits come with a QR code for the installation instructions, so the installer has them at their fingertips. We also have a technical advice line for any advice needed and our social media platforms are available out of hours to contact us.

PES: How do you gather and incorporate customer feedback into your product development and service improvement processes?

JA: By encouraging feedback and listening. By staying really close to our customers and by having good relationships with our distributors. We have a strong presence on social media where we encourage our customers to showcase their work and share their feedback with other installers.

PES: Roofing conscience is an interesting concept. How do you define it, and why is it particularly important in the context of solar panel installations?

JG: In business, there can be a tension between profitability and doing things properly. In our business, morality and ethics are a prominent feature because of the motivations of our founder member; Jimmy. He is of an age and an era where you do things right the first time and you do an honest job. He is not a material man, and his primary objective is to honour and respect the craft that has been his life's work. These ethics are



Jemma Green

at the heart of our business, and we are proud of the culture this creates.

We know solar was made for roofs, but roofs were not built to house solar panels. It is with this in mind that we develop solutions that guarantee the roof is not compromised and work with other industry providers to support this effort. Often the roof integrity is an afterthought, but we have seen first-hand that when it is done wrong it can be a costly affair.

We are strongly against drilling into the roofing material, using sealants and the roofing material being load bearing. All our products are designed to support MCS compliant installations.

PES: What role do you believe roof flashings play in ensuring the longevity and effectiveness of solar panel installations?

DW: Our flashings are essential for the vital trust that is needed in the solar industry, so we don't see another wave of 'Solar Doctors' fixing shoddy installs undertaken by inexperienced installers.

I am a member of the MCS steering group and the National Federation of Roofing Contractors (NFRC) Pitched Solar Technical Committee. We play a huge part in maintaining and improving industry confidence, so homeowners are not discouraged from having solar on their roofs.



David White

PES: In what ways do you see the roofing industry evolving with the growing adoption of solar energy, and how is Genius Roof Solutions preparing for these changes?

JA: Solar roofing has become increasingly popular as concerns about climate change and energy sustainability continue to grow. Technological advancements, government incentives, and decreasing costs have made solar energy more accessible and affordable than ever before.

The integration of solar panels into roofing systems is set to become more prevalent in 2024. Solar technology is advancing and becoming more affordable. Homeowners and businesses alike are recognising the long term benefits of generating their own clean energy.

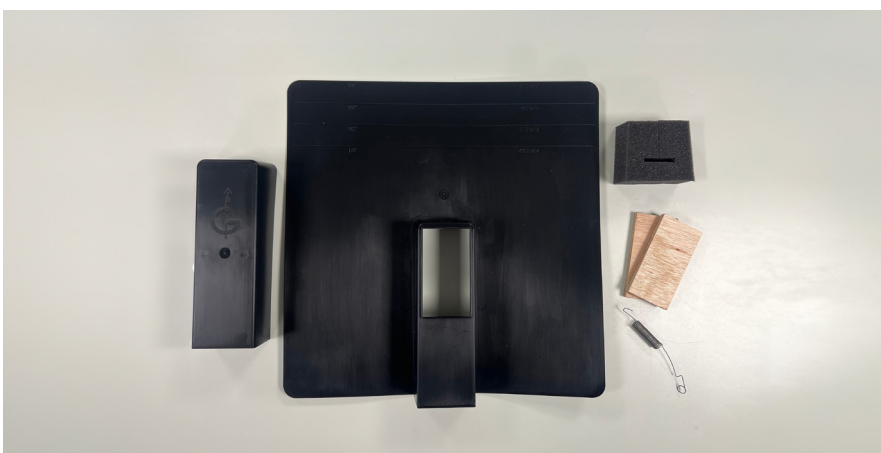
Genius Roof Solutions is committed to continuing the development of new markets and products and is already branching out into Europe and beyond. We are building partnerships with varying industry players in our mission to arm the tradesman with the products and tools necessary to do a good job.

PES: What are some of the most significant successes Genius Roof Solutions has achieved in the solar panel installation market?

DW: If we are measuring success against an objective of improving roofing practices, then the most significant success in all our markets is in how we revolutionise industry practices. If you listen to our customers and the industry system installers, they will tell you that our products are essential for their work and how these products enable them to do a good job day in and day out.

PES: Looking to the future, what are your long-term goals for Genius Roof Solutions? Are there any upcoming products or initiatives that you are particularly excited about?

JG: Our long term goals for Genius Roof Solutions are to continue to grow our team and provide quality innovative solutions to a worldwide market. We are particularly excited to launch our revolutionary SpeedFlash® to the European market.



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