

# NEWS



## HOLIDAY SPECIAL

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### NEWS FOR THE MEMORIAL INDUSTRY

#### OPEN DAY 2023 REVIEW



Welcome to the final Blast Shop newsletter of 2023, Christmas edition. It's been what seems a long but interesting year.

In September we finally managed to hold our much delayed but eagerly anticipated open day. The event, held at the end of September, was fully booked out on both days. We're always keen to make sure that our open days are relevant and contain new content so that it's worth coming back to and it was reassuring to see both a number of new faces but also some returning to see what had changed.

The open days provide an opportunity to get hands on experience with all of our current equipment but a key part of the day is spent looking at what's happening within the trade. As this open day had been delayed twice by Covid it seemed an ideal opportunity to look at the immediate impact of Covid on our business and also review the more long term prospects and issues we're facing. After all, if we are facing the issue then the chances

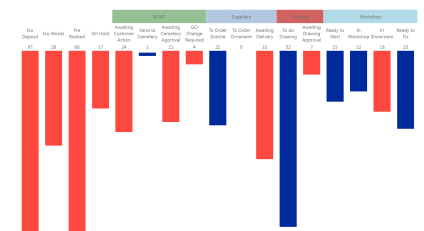
are that there will be other masons in the same situation.

Whilst Manchester was hit harder than most by Covid, the overall picture across the country was similar, demand for memorials remained high but production was down with many workshops running at reduced capacity whilst trying to maintain a degree of social distancing. This short term impact was actually just a continuing trend of increased death rate across the country. Since 2014 death rates have grown 20% and over the next 20 years the office for national statistics predict that the death rate will increase by a further 20%. Obviously this won't necessarily translate to 20% increase in memorialisation but it's got to help the trade.

So the outlook is good but what about the backlog of orders? Supply chains have more or less caught up with the backlog in production and the shipping lines are finally reducing prices back to a reasonable amount, however we're still finding that shipping times are about 2 weeks longer than they used to be due to goods sitting around at departure docks waiting for space on boats. If we look at an imaginary mason that takes (and produces) 10 orders a week with an average lead time prior to the pandemic of 12 weeks then they might expect to have 120 orders on their books at any one time. If their production was reduced by 50% during the pandemic and, like our business,

was impacted for around 6 months (24 weeks) due to lockdowns and social distancing, then they would have a backlog of 120 orders that they had taken but not produced. Put another way, their average time to complete an order had gone from 12 weeks to 24 weeks - this may sound familiar to you? The knock on impact of this is that you now have twice as many customers contacting you chasing their memorial, twice as many orders to sift through to work out which one you should be doing and unfortunately a tendency to complete the orders where the customer shouts the loudest, not the one that has been waiting the longest.

The Blast Shop CRM | Card Rack



When forced to work from home, we were very fortunate that we had in place a workflow driven, web based order management system. This meant that the system showed us exactly which orders were most pressing and also ensured that if we should be doing something we were aware that we needed to do it! No more cemetery approval forms that get lost in the pile of paperwork (or more accurately, we're aware that somewhere in that pile there is a cemetery form to send out!).

We've recently started selling this system and are now fully booked up with installations into Q2 2024. If you're interested in finding out more about MOMS (Memorial Order Management System) then please give us a call to arrange a demonstration.

In addition to looking at how MOMS helped us to keep on track of the orders that needed our attention, the open day presentation also looked at how we could use the system to help reduce the perceived completion time and get more 5 star reviews on Google (more of this in the next newsletter). Following the Open Day we helped a number of visitors claim their business with Google and Microsoft, enabling them to start the process of gaining reviews. Some visitors also put in place simple feedback forms to ensure that they are providing good customer service.

Feedback from anything you do is important (something we discussed in depth during the presentations) and whilst you often learn more from negative feedback, it was great to get an overwhelmingly positive message from all those that attended – it made all the effort that goes into producing one of these events extremely worthwhile.

## PERSONAL TOUCH

Whilst we have, like other suppliers, made the difficult decision to stop regular weekly visits with customers, we are reviewing how we continue to maintain and develop close customer relationships. We value these relationships and enjoy the opportunity to talk with you to get a proper feel for the problems you face and how we might be able to help.

There are many ways that we can now chat with customers, face to face, on the phone or via virtual meetings like zoom. We're planning on using all these methods in 2024 so if you would like a visit from Rob or Lee in the

new year to discuss any of our products, processes or systems in person, please let us know and we will be more than happy to arrange that for you. We still have some of the coveted Blast Shop Mugs available...

## PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Since Rob came across the Magic Size at the Nuremberg Stone-Tec Show in 2021, and we started trialling it, we knew that we had something really special and equally revolutionary...

We used to use Lefranc size but in recent years we found the gilding window was not as wide as we were used to and the shelf-life significantly reduced once opened.

Often we found ourselves missing the 'sweet-spot' in the gilding window and ending up having to start the sizing process again.

With the Magic Size you can start gilding on the new size as soon as 15 minutes after application and you can wait as long as 12 hours if you want to. Because it has such a wide open time you are always gilding in the "perfect" window so the resulting gild is shiny and consistent. We use the clear version as an undercoat and tinted to provide a yellow base to the gild.

**'Game Changer' – 'It's revolutionised the way I work' – 'Amazing'** are just some of the samples of feedback we've had about the Magic Size.

We can't remember a new product which has generated this much interest and positivity to the point of people calling us personally to tell us how good it is!



## SOLAR ENERGY



Since having our initial renewable energy survey in the summer of 2022, we've finally had a large array of solar panels installed on to The Blast Shop's warehouse roof and the scaffolding was brought down in early October.

It took just over a week to install the panels; a bit longer than expected due to the usual Mancunian inclement weather.

On the sunnier days (yes, there have been a few!) we've been generating around 35-40% of our own energy which all helps to lower our energy bills and reduce our carbon footprint.

Going forward we plan to install car charging points for our staff and customers to use, and possibly utilise a battery storage to offset the solar energy for use during those rainy spells.

We'd be more than happy to share our experience with you if you want to have a chat about how we started looking at the whole solar power and renewable energy process.

It's small steps but packaging our ground anchors in cardboard and adding the solar panels is gradually lowering our carbon footprint, and reducing plastic use and waste.

## SEASONS GREETINGS

We'll finish the last Blast Shop newsletter of 2023 by wishing you a very merry Christmas and prosperous New Year and thank you for your continued business and support through, what has been another challenging but interesting year. Last day to ship orders is 21<sup>st</sup> Dec, back 3<sup>rd</sup> Jan.