

PETER LAMB, LAMBS LARDER, BELLS YEW GREEN, EAST SUSSEX

Lamb with all the trimmings

Tan Parsons

COMING from a busy career running a television company, Peter Lamb brings the same level of precision and a fiercely energetic approach to managing a small shop.

It started a little more than two years ago when Peter began selling eggs laid by his chickens at the side of the road, and he quickly realised he wanted to run a store. He bought the site in an auction, refitted the building and taught himself how to be a retailer.

"I just said to my wife one day, 'I want to run a farm shop.' I spent a lot of time on the fit-up – I wanted it to look like a US-style mini-mart," he says.

About a quarter of his customers live in the hamlet of Bells Yew Green, with a population of just 300 people, and the rest come either from passing trade or on their way to Frant railway station, which is next door to the store.

Peter opens the shop each weekday at 6am to catch the morning commuters on their way into London. The first thing you see when you enter the store is the coffee machine – pretty much a daily sacrament for anyone catching a train into work.

"We knew we wanted the coffee to be the main focus when

you come into the shop. And anyway, I'm a coffee nut," admits Peter. "I tried several machines before I found the one I wanted. I think it makes a better cup of coffee than you get in somewhere like Caffè Nero."

Customers serve themselves coffee and locals and regulars get it at half price or even free on occasion.

It still offers high margins despite the discount, and Peter says selling it for a knock-down price creates 'mountains' of goodwill – something that is essential for a small shop to succeed.

This sense is fostered by a free-to-use community notice board and cash machine and an

energetic marketing strategy. He has an LED ticker running in the shop window, an online presence with various social networking sites and a monthly printed news letter, 'Lamb's Larder's News of the Weald'.

But one of the main things he has found is how important it is to shop around for the best deal.

Putting his money where his mouth is, Peter spends a lot of time searching not just among wholesalers but everywhere, including micro-suppliers, eBay – and supermarkets.

"The key to high profits is not your selling strategy, it's your buying strategy," he says.



Peter's top tips

Differentiate yourself

You need to stand out from the competition

Don't overstock

For us, the shop is the stock

Think green

Get fresh fruit and vegetables every day

up to £100 a week on speciality items such as pak choi, ginger root and kale. As well as giving his customers a reason to visit, fruit and vegetables brighten up the shop and create an impression of freshness, says Peter.

In the future he has big plans to expand the business, opening another store and introducing a fleet of vans to make his business mobile, taking advantage of the commuter crowd at other railway stations where there are currently no shops.

"I'm extremely proud that we have gone from a small enterprise to a profitable business in just two years. By becoming mobile we will be able to move to wherever the market is."

● See the article on page 4 about Peter's book 'So, You Want to Run a Convenience Store'

"Your selling strategy has to be competitive – you have to be realistic about pricing but even more realistic about your buying."

As well as stocking the basic ranges in each category, it is important to differentiate yourself with high-quality products, too, he says.

Peter is a self-confessed wine buff and stocks bottles from Chateau La Tour De Choller – the only other place it is available is at Jamie Oliver's restaurants.

He has great meat from a nearby butcher, with tasty, old-fashioned pork chops with the rind still on them, and he sells frozen

seafood, including enormous black tiger prawns, tuna steaks and swordfish. He also sells more than £1,000 worth of ready meals a week.

Fresh fruit and vegetables are ordered daily, depending on what his customers want – some will spend

