

# Company of the year

What does it take to make Building and Construction Review's company of the year? Does it need impressive business acumen and first-rate customer service? Of course it does.

But it also takes dedication to staff safety and furthering their training. It means commitment to supplying the exact-right products and services to every client. It involves amazing growth in the face of global turmoil.

Construction hoist specialist Direct Hoist is the well-deserved winner of 2021's coveted award – a trophy that lines up alongside many other accolades to recognise this forward-thinking firm is rising to the top.

Direct Hoist's success can be attributed to its founder, Rob Wilson, a man whose dedication to business is equalled only by his attitude towards his employees' welfare.

Rob says, "We're ever-expanding. I started Direct Hoist in 2014 from a double garage, and after seven years' trading we're now in our fourth location. We've recently taken on additional premises – a 30m unit with internal height of 6.6m – which will help our in-house training."

Currently thriving despite reduced staffing, Direct Hoist is a living-wage employer (more than minimum wage) and has two vacancies for trainee hoist installers. Each will be educated in the multifaceted skills that are crucial for the specialised nature of construction hoists – including product types, electrical systems, fault-finding, assembly, disassembly and reconfiguration into alternative layouts.

Direct Hoist then enrolls trainees into NVQ schemes, manufacturer courses and the all-important health-and-safety tuition. Indeed, several Direct Hoist staff have NVQ Level 3 qualifications – the equivalent of a



respected CSCS gold card on site.

Rob says, "We have an exceptional reputation for safety. Ours is a very specialised industry, heavily governed by legislation – which is probably why there are fewer than 15 hoist companies in the UK.

"It's surprising how much there is to learn for hoist installation, even for experienced construction workers and managers. We need to know load calculations, equipment specifications, whether there are any voids below grounds or obstructions (such as telephone lines) above."

Rather handily, Direct Hoist offers free advice, site surveys and expert project planning. And not just for the job in hand – Direct Hoist assesses what might be needed later in the scheme to ensure the right equipment is provided from the outset.

Fortunately, Direct Hoist is continuously investing in new equipment to ensure its large modern fleet of versatile hoists is varied enough to suit any development.

"We supply German GEDA hoists," adds Rob. "They're the best on the market for quality, reliability and their

electrical components.

"Our most popular units are the 300 Z goods hoist (ideal for barrows, boards and roofing equipment) and the 500 Z/ZP transport platform, which can be used as an 850kg goods-only hoist or up to 500kg for personnel. It's a great, versatile hoist; it can be left- or right-handed and has the facility to move around the loading/unloading ramp."

Direct Hoist relishes the scope to erect equipment in areas many would consider impractical or too inaccessible. A recent project involved installation of a 58m hoist in Newcastle, where the entire platform had to be stripped and fed through a car park with 1.8m head height.

A popular usage of hoists is to speed up the construction of scaffolding, which again might involve some pretty creative thinking.

Rob reports, "Because platforms can be configured to different widths, 21ft scaffold tube can be carried vertically and safely, on a much smaller footprint."

No wonder so many scaffolding companies are now buying their own installation platforms. Similarly, city-based furniture removal specialists have discovered the convenience of owning their own hoists, which prove invaluable when delivering large three-piece suites into apartments through high windows.

Needless to say, Direct Hoist is ideally placed to offer sales and servicing of top-quality GEDA hoists to ensure customers choose exactly the right equipment – not just for their current circumstances but to allow scope for expansion – and stay safe throughout their working life.

And, like all installations, Direct Hoist offers product familiarisation on hand-over to the end user.

Rob says, "We've been expanding our sales department and can now offer finance on our products. This year hasn't been quite as good as we'd hoped due to Covid. But as soon as construction was reopened, the phones just went mad, we were inundated with contact forms from our website, and we had a waiting list for our most popular hoists.

"I'm glad to say we managed to pull through and come out smiling. We've done very well lately – we recently had five hoists at one hospital alone – and we're continually investing in new equipment.

"We're trying to go green, but electric vans don't yet offer the range we need. So we've installed an HVO (hydrotreated vegetable oil) diesel tank for all of our vehicles, which is 100 per cent renewable, and gives a 90 per cent reduction in CO2.

"We're a forward-thinking company," Rob smiles. "The only way for us is up."

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