CASE STUDY 03 | EXECUTIVE PROOF

Scaling an Owner-Led Industrial Distributor

An anonymised board-level growth blueprint | c.£7m baseline to £12m ambition

Marcus developed a commercially integrated scale-up architecture for a recently separated industrial distributor—aligning revenue growth, margin, digital trading, working capital and execution discipline so ambition did not outrun cash or operational capacity.

GROW WITH MARGIN	RELEASE CAPACITY	DIGITAL + HUMAN
Segmented acquisition and a deliberate shift toward higher-value proprietary products.	SKU discipline, faster stock turn and reduced debtor days to protect cash.	Simplified SME trading while preserving expert support for complex accounts.

The business challenge

Following a corporate separation, the distributor was operating at approximately £7m revenue with a cost base, inventory position and management structure inherited from a larger organisation. The Board wanted to reach £12m, but the existing model was too reactive: administrative costs absorbed 29% of sales, stock turned only 3.0 times a year and customer acquisition depended too heavily on inbound demand and legacy relationships.

What I saw

- Revenue growth on its own could make the business weaker if additional sales consumed working capital, warehouse capacity and management attention faster than they created cash.
- The business had two different buying journeys—large, compliance-led accounts and fragmented SMEs—but was trying to serve both through broadly the same process.
- A strong proprietary-product opportunity existed, but product mix, sales incentives and inventory decisions were not yet aligned around margin quality.
- Digital trading was treated as a website project rather than a redesign of account opening, payment, personalisation, compliance documentation and fulfilment.
- The strategy needed a practical execution engine: clear workstreams, owners, measures, decision rights and a regular Board rhythm.

The strategy I developed

- Separated the route to market into strategic-account acquisition and a lower-friction, card-first SME journey, each with different propositions and economics.
- Designed a product-and-margin plan to increase proprietary-product participation while retaining selected third-party ranges where they completed the customer solution.
- Connected SKU rationalisation, stock policy, debtor discipline and cash governance to the growth plan so expansion could be funded more safely.
- Specified the digital trading architecture: e-commerce and ERP integration, simplified onboarding, artwork/logo automation and accessible compliance documentation.
- Reframed compliance and sustainability as customer value—reducing tender risk and administrative burden—rather than using regulation as fear-based sales language.

Modelled value-creation targets

Modelled measure	Strategic target—not a reported result
Revenue	c.£7.0m baseline ⟶ £9.5m Year 1 ⟶ £12.0m Year 2.
Gross margin	38.4% baseline ⟶ 40.0% Year 1 ⟶ 42.5% Year 2.
Proprietary-product mix	40% baseline ⟶ 55% Year 1 ⟶ 70% Year 2.
Stock turn	3.0x / 124 days ⟶ 5.0x / 73 days, designed to prevent growth trapping disproportionate cash in inventory.
Debtor days	66 days ⟶ 45 days through clearer credit policy, faster payment routes and active account discipline.

Execution architecture

Execution layer	What it controls
Months 1–3: foundation	Validate baselines; rationalise priority SKUs; define segments; establish governance; begin ERP/e-commerce integration.
Months 4–6: commercial launch	Deploy account-acquisition plays, SME proposition, margin discipline and customer-facing compliance tools.
Months 7–12: controlled scale	Expand partnerships, refine conversion economics, strengthen forecasting and scale only where service and cash measures remain healthy.
Four working groups	Customer & Growth; Product & Margin; Digital & Data; Operations & Cash—with named owners and cross-functional membership.
Board rhythm	Weekly operating review, monthly value-creation review and explicit decisions on growth, cash, capability and risk.

Leadership reach demonstrated

- **Commercial diagnosis —** identified the few interdependent constraints that would determine whether scale created or destroyed value.
- **Board translation —** converted a headline revenue ambition into a measurable growth, margin, cash and capability system.
- **Customer-led redesign —** challenged inward-looking habits and rebuilt the model around distinct buying journeys.
- **Execution discipline —** created a sequence, ownership model and governance cadence rather than a list of disconnected initiatives.

Why this belongs in the portfolio

The work shows how Marcus applies experience built at scale inside Saint-Gobain to an owner-led business: quickly diagnose the commercial system, challenge legacy assumptions, connect customer value to operational reality and give the team a route to become self-sufficient.

Assignment status and evidence boundary: this is an anonymised strategy case developed by Marcus Jefford from supplied financial information, management context and public market research. Company, ownership, location, customer and product-brand details have been removed. The £12m ambition and every future-state number shown above are modelled recommendations, not implemented or realised results.