

30 SWEET YEARS

Cabinet Maker explores the history behind how a Lancashire bed manufacturer got to be 30 years old. Happy Anniversary, Sweet Dreams.

Sweet Dreams, the Lancashire bed and furniture manufacturer, celebrates 30 years in business this autumn. Founder and managing director Riaz Ahmed and his team have steered the family firm through the ups of inspired product innovation and canny investment, and the downs of recession and factory fire, to three decades of astonishing success.

Just looking at the figures tells a compelling story. In 1998, after ten years' trading, turnover was £5.4m, employees totalled 96 and square footage 50,000. In 2008, those figures were £17.3m, 222 and 150,000. In 2018, Sweet Dreams' thirtieth year of trading, they are £21m, 300 and 400,000. Sweet Dreams don't see any reason why that growth shouldn't continue for decades to come. 

www.sweetdreamsuk.com

FABRIC FRAMES - 2002

Fabric frames have become big business for Sweet Dreams as we took advantage of a number of factors:

1. Fashion – fabric frames started to become as attractive as leather, wood and metal. Part of the attraction was in the choice of fabric available, in terms of both texture and colour. It coincided with renewed fashion for fabric curtains rather than blinds and wallpaper rather than painted walls – an altogether softer look with many more permutations.
2. There was a definite swing towards British manufacture and Sweet Dreams were poised to take advantage of it, and did so!
3. The new space at Primrose Mill and later at Scholefield Mill allowed it from manufacturing, storage and showroom points of view.
4. Whether we took a lead or had our finger on the latest fashion pulse we're not sure, but just as TV beds became very popular we launched our first range at the Bed Show five years ago, in September 2013. All the fabric-upholstered TV beds launched then are still part of the range. So are our adjustable beds – two of those models have been around since the early 2000s.



Sweet Dreams established

The company moves into manufacture of beds and opened new factory in Burnley

Majid Ahmed, Riaz's eldest son, joined the company

Jackie McGarvey joined the company

Stephen Boyd joined the company

1988

1990

1992

1993

1995



UPHOLSTERY - 2005

Scholefield Mill is now used primarily for manufacture of fabric frames, headboards – and our upholstery. Sweet Dreams has manufactured upholstery since 2005, although not always under our own brand. However, 'comfort zone' remains a good term to apply to our collections!

Since early 2016 the upholstery manufacturing operation has been under the Sweet Dreams umbrella and this has helped open up a new customer base for our downstairs offer. In 2016 we launched imported recliners and these have proved very popular, fostering growth. Meanwhile the own-made range is going from strength to strength.



Glenmore



Spencer, new for September 2018

BEDROOM FURNITURE - 2008

Over the last decade bedroom furniture has formed a major part of the portfolio, and while designs and suppliers may come and go, ranges of wooden furniture to complement frames have been attracting buyers and consumers alike. It's very much an established line for us, whether we're offering flat-pack models or ready assembled. The products we select for our wooden ranges are a little different to what is generally on offer in the marketplace. Quality and price have always been at the forefront of our selection, and the fact that we stock the furniture to allow our normal quick delivery on even one piece has ensured its popularity.

GROWING LUXURY

In individual divans collections, the story to come out of the last few years has been one of luxury. While models change, the Royal Pillowtop and Pocket Air collections established in the last few years focus on a high number of pocket springs in response to the market, and luxury finishes. We've also seen a focus on natural fillings and many of our models feature those – including a number in the new Anniversary collection.

NBF Approved Member

This accreditation is very important to us and of ever-increasing significance within the trade. The NBF standard we adhere to is becoming prevalent; it is now increasingly the norm to be asked for this and we're proud to say we were among the first companies to sign up. We very much appreciate all that the NBF and the Sleep Council do to support, promote and safeguard our industry.



Enchanted Gwen Cashmere

Primrose Mill, Sweet Dreams HQ until the present day, acquired

Sleepzone® springs introduced

Sweet Dreams moves into bedframes

Upholstery business launched

Well Being collection launched

Bedroom furniture launched

1998

2002

2005

2006

2008

RIAZ AHMED, MD & FOUNDER OF SWEET DREAMS

TEN YEARS AGO

Book 8, 2008

"I am convinced that in times of recession it is those companies with a solid foundation, and who dare to be different, who succeed and who emerge the other side stronger. That is what I intend for Sweet Dreams, and for our customers."

On winning Male Entrepreneur of the Year Award 2008

"It's an honour and very pleasing. While very proud of being the recipient, I see the award as recognition of the efforts of the entire Sweet Dreams team. It's their contribution, together with the much appreciated support of my family, which has earned this accolade."

FIVE YEARS AGO

Beds Brochure 2013 Introduction

"This year has witnessed the opening of our new £3m showroom, distribution and warehouse facility, which will lead to greater efficiencies and a more streamlined operation. It also enables us to keep imported product in stock on an even more regular basis. Together with new machinery, our extended premises represents several years of major investment for Sweet Dreams as we look to a bright future for both your business and ours, and the industry at large."

TODAY

"The last thirty years have flown by! It doesn't seem that long since I was starting out manufacturing headboards in Nelson, and then opening a factory in Burnley to make divans. We've progressed a lot since those days and overall it's been a very happy and rewarding journey. The people I've met and worked with along the way – customers and

suppliers as well as agents and especially our staff – have contributed to this, and it's a source of great pleasure to me that Sweet Dreams now provides employment for hundreds of local people. Of course, it's also very gratifying having seen members of my family join the company and contribute to its success.



NBF Bed Manufacturer 2014 Runner Up

I've seen a lot of changes in the industry, too. Not least the fashions, and how people are opting for bigger beds, beds with more storage, and beds that confer benefits through their fillings and covers. The change I've been most pleased to see, though, has been the industry's determination to make beds safe and healthy for consumers and to create a level playing field for responsible manufacturers. A lot of thanks have to go to the NBF for this. They've helped tremendously with marketing too, and with training sales staff in recent years, but in my view the most important industry innovation has been the NBF audit and associated accreditation. I'm very proud that Sweet Dreams was one of the first to get behind this initiative.

I'd like to take this opportunity to say a sincere thank you to all who've helped make Sweet Dreams what it is today, and to let you know how much I look forward to working alongside you in the coming years."



Burnley Girls U10s with Riaz Ahmed

Ottomans introduced to all divans except budget models

Riaz won Male Entrepreneur of the Year Award and a Lloyds TSB Jewel Award

First bed incorporating latex filling produced

Land and buildings adjoining Primrose Mill, long on Riaz's hit list, acquired

2008

2009

2011



THE AHMED FAMILY AT SWEET DREAMS



Majid Ahmed, eldest son: manufacturing director

"My father started the business 30 years ago starting off in a small unit in Nelson with just him and Mr Latif, who recently retired. He worked for us for over 25 years. I was the first of the siblings to come into the business, and then my sister followed (who has since left to follow a different profession). Both my brothers are in the business as well as other relatives.

My title is manufacturing director. My main job is to oversee the factory side, making sure everything is running smoothly. Like a lot of family businesses, I get involved in other areas when needed.

"This is my 26th year! (I feel really old when I say that). I started as soon as I left school at 16 and before that I used help out at weekends. I have done more or less every job going, from loading and unloading and machine operating, to work in all office areas: sales, buying, wages, transport and so on. At one stage at Queens Mill there was only me and Jackie in the office.

"It's great that my son Jamal has come on board at a similar age to mine when I started. I can pass on my experiences to him because we are following a similar route."



Adnan Ahmed, operations director

In 2011 Riaz's second son, Adnan, joined Sweet Dreams after a career in professional football. Translating his strategic skills from the football field to business development, Adnan has assisted Riaz in some of the key decisions taken regarding market sector diversification over the last two years.



Imran Ahmed, Accounts Manager

In 2006 Riaz's third son, Imran, joined the company in Accounts, after graduating in management from the University of Manchester. Imran's talent for figures has been of significant benefit to the company away from the areas of manufacturing and business development where Riaz and his other two sons excel, complementing their activities.



Jamal Ahmed, trainee

Majid's eldest – so now the third generation is working at Sweet Dreams. Jamal is almost 18 and is on a two-year programme learning the work of all departments. He lives with his parents not too far from the factory.

TESTIMONIAL TO 30 YEARS OF EXCELLENCE

"Sweet Dreams have been a key partner of Shop Direct for almost 10 years. During that time we have worked together on a number of exciting and important projects including an own brand proposition and new fabric developments. Their knowledge and experience of the Beds industry is second to none and we value their input and feedback when developing new ranges. They are also very flexible and reliable, a real strength in our trading partnership."

Joanne Fortune, Shop Direct

£3million Primrose Mill extension completed

Joined AIS buying group

Launched TV beds at the Bed Show

Won Burnley Medium Business of the Year Award

Nick Williams joined the company as key accounts manager

JACKIE MCGARVEY, GENERAL MANAGER

"I joined Sweet Dreams after starting my career with another bed manufacturing company. The first factory was in New Hall Street and is no longer there, but I do recall that at that time we made a bed called the Paris and it was blue! From there the bed collections grew.

I was delighted to be given many roles through the company which allowed me to grow my expertise and develop a thorough understanding of what it takes, not only to make good commercial models, but also innovative new models. Selecting products to enhance our own manufactured range has also been a speciality, together with sourcing supplies – mattress cover fabric and ticking, base fabrics, frame fabrics, mattress fillings and everything else.

When I first joined, Majid had just left school and started work at his father's company. The other children would come in through the summer holidays and it has been a pleasure to see them grow into the people they are today. With Jamal, Majid's son, having come on board, the next generation is now in place to ensure that the company continues its success through the coming years.

Reflecting on my 25 years at Sweet Dreams, mostly I would have to say a big thank you to Riaz for allowing me the freedom to work with my own instincts and for supporting my decisions, and letting me learn from them. The enthusiasm from the family for the business, along with the company's ethics, makes it an enjoyable company to work for and I hope to be here for many years to come; Riaz and his sons have always made me feel part of the family."

Jackie McGarvey has been with Sweet Dreams for 25 years



NEW SHOW VAN HITS THE ROAD!

In 2018 Sweet Dreams invested over £30,000 in a show van and the 5.1m Luton is already proving a great success.

In just a few weeks spent travelling up and down the country in the company of five of our sales agents, the show van has helped them to make 60 placements of upholstery to retailers.

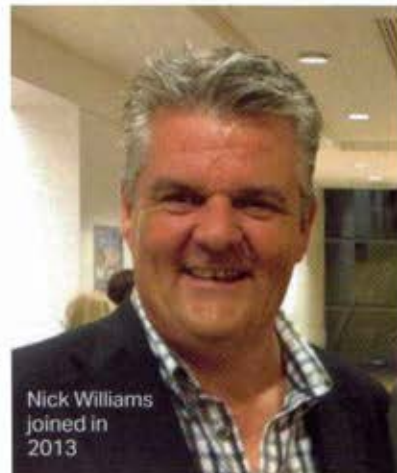
The new van will be used to display and demonstrate all the Sweet Dreams range – upstairs products as well as downstairs.

"We're over the moon with the new van," says Nick Williams, sales manager. "We exhibit at shows, we invite retailers to our showrooms, but sometimes nothing beats taking the products out on the road and to the very stores themselves. So far, everyone's seemed glad to see us!"

NICK WILLIAMS, SALES SUPREMO

Sweet Dreams has experienced considerable growth since Nick Williams came on board in 2013, first as Key Account Manager, and from 2016 as Sales Manager. His was the first new salaried sales post since Jackie joined the company in 1993.

The culture at Sweet Dreams has allowed me complete freedom and flexibility to grow our sales and extend our customer base, with full support at every turn. I'm very pleased our efforts have been so successful. It's always a team enterprise, and having the best people and the right products have enabled us to grow significantly over these last few years. I'm proud to be a part of Sweet Dreams."



Nick Williams joined in 2013

Scholefield Mill purchased in nearby Nelson at 165,000 sq ft

Pocket Air Collection launched

Sweet Dreams Highly Commended in NBF Bed Manufacturer of the Year Award

Royal Pillowtop collection launched

Enchanted collection launched

2014

2015



WHAT'S NEW FOR 2018?

Anniversary collection

Our Anniversary collection, launched in September to celebrate our 30th anniversary, is very special. We've identified our most popular high-end specifications and created four divans to commemorate the best in Sweet Dreams manufacture. Two beds are encapsulated and have cushion tops with mini springs. Two beds feature traditional pocket spring mattresses. All contain natural, luxury fillings. The bases, with chrome-coloured glides, come in divine textured velvet in three colourways and are available in diverse drawer and ottoman options. There'll be a matching Anniversary headboard, too.

The launch of the Anniversary Collection will also usher in a competition that will see 30 of the new beds won by retailers from October. We're also giving away Roary, our cuddly lion, with every order, (for as long as he is not on the endangered species list).



Celebration 3000 Natural from the Anniversary collection, new for September 2018

More beds, more frames, more furniture – plus many more

We'll be launching beds across the collection at Telford, including new Enchanted models, a new adjustable bed and a range of gorgeous new frames. In the new 2018 brochure, look out for our children's bedroom-in-a-bunk and for more upholstery – plus the new Living division...



Cheshire high sleeper, new for September 2018



Latexmatic, new for September

Marsden Mill purchased round the corner from Scholefield Mill at 70,000 sq ft

Foam-cutting machinery purchased

Jamal Ahmed, Riaz's grandson, joined Sweet Dreams

Anniversary collection to be launched in September

2017

2018