

# connections

THE MAGAZINE FOR NICEIC AND ELECSA REGISTERED CONTRACTORS £5.00

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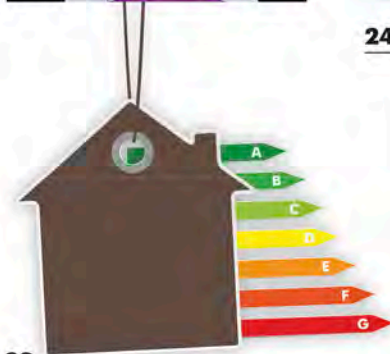
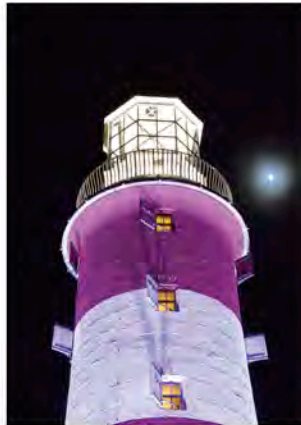
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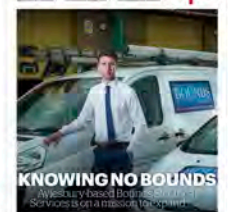
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### connections



» Cover photo:  
Richard Lea-Hair

**COMPANY:** Bounds Electrical Services

**BASED:** Aylesbury

**FOUNDED:** 2007

**MAJOR PROJECTS:** Zeppelin Building, London; Hillingdon Council

**STAFF NUMBERS:** 17

# Know no bounds

Aylesbury-based Bounds Electrical Services built its reputation on test and inspection work for managing agents before moving into bigger projects and energy efficient installations. It's now looking to extend its scope further

By Nick Martindale

**L**iam Bounds, founder of Aylesbury-based Bounds Electrical, knew from early on in his career that he wanted to start up his own business. "I did my apprenticeship in the quarrying industry as an electrical contractor, starting at 16," he says. "But I knew I wanted to work for myself and I'd had such a good apprenticeship that I knew I had the tools to go out and do it."

Originally from the south-west, his chance came when he relocated to Aylesbury in 2007, at the age of 25, to move nearer to his wife's family. Initially he set himself up as a sub-contractor, with the aim of working for other electrical businesses, but quickly found himself taken on by a firm he had supervised in his previous job, working on a large job for a water company. "I jumped onto that for a year while starting to do other bits and pieces," he recalls. "It would be me plus a team of guys and we would go off and do the work. Then I added an apprentice and another one and we carried on from there."

Things changed, however, when the downturn hit in 2007, and Liam could see that sub-contracting opportunities would dry up as companies struggled to keep their in-

house teams busy. "I made the decision to break away from sub-contracting and became a main contractor in my own right," he says.

Initially the main focus for the fledgling firm was working with managing agents of commercial and domestic properties, mainly around test and inspection requirements. "We would go in, test the premises and complete all the required remedial works and any electrical upgrades and that kept us busy throughout the downturn because people had to get the work done," he says.

Over time, the business built up a solid client base, including Savills, Smiths Gore, Harrods Estates, John Mortimer Property Management and FM business First Choice Facilities. End clients include Hillingdon Council – working on vacant council properties – and the prestigious Zeppelin Building on Farringdon Road in London, which was completed in May this year.

Alongside this, the business also started taking on bigger projects, including working in data centres and industrial premises, returning Liam to his roots after he had initially had to focus on smaller projects. "The industrial sector is a hard nut to crack, and obviously your company has to be big enough to take that work on, but we're going back into that area now," he says. "The data centre work for Virtustream

**£1.6M:**  
The amount the business expects to turn over this year



**'I knew I wanted to work for myself and I'd had such a good apprenticeship that I knew I had the tools to go out and do it'**

was the first part of it two years ago and we've since started to take on a lot of industrial work through them. We can now take on those works no problem."

The next stage is to move into other specialist areas such as schools and churches, and it has recently appointed a business development team – in the form of Erica Hill and David Crick – to help grow this side of the business. Alongside this, there's also a round-the-clock reactive maintenance arm managed by Darren Beard, which deals with day-to-day callouts and planned maintenance. "A lot of companies will shy away from the reactive work, but we want to be able to take anything that is thrown at us, whether that's emergency callouts, planned maintenance or the projects side," says Liam. "If you're able to take on all those aspects, companies are naturally going to give you more work."

### Energy boost

Another element that has grown rapidly in recent years is energy efficiency, where Bounds will conduct a full energy audit and present clients with a self-funding means of financing improvements, mainly through the use of LEDs and presence detectors. "That's big business for us now," says Liam. "We offer a five-year warranty and an incentive plan so they can use their savings to pay us off over a 12-month period. We've done it in industrial premises, warehouses, office blocks, underground and multi-storey car parks, communal areas – everywhere where there's lighting. It's not always the glory work that electricians like doing, but it provides your client with a massive saving."

"Even if we're doing a domestic install we put in LED," he adds. "If any contractor is not on that they're being left behind. We were installing that three or four years ago, and the technology has moved so far on that you can give a five-year warranty and feel sure that you're not going to be getting a call back every five minutes as you were in the early days."

Today, the business employs 12 engineers and a further five office-based staff, including David as well as Dave Macleod, who was brought in a year ago as a supervisor with a view to helping the business cope with larger projects. "Our normal project size is anything from £1,000 to £100,000," says Liam.



### 17:

#### The total number of staff employed by Bounds

"We turn over a big volume of projects worth £20-25,000, and that's how we make our money. But we want to start moving into larger projects. We're trying to edge our way up to the £250,000 mark. We have annual contracts that are a lot bigger than that, but in terms of a job size we'd like to get to around £250,000-£500,000." It expects to turn over £1.6 million this current financial year – up from £1.4 million last year – and has grown each year to date, investing money back in the business to fund further growth.

Perhaps surprisingly, however, very little of this work comes from its immediate geographic area, and it's even more surprising to hear why. "When I started out I felt it was a closed market round here, so my main focus was out of the Aylesbury area," he says. "I've never got to a position where I've thought we are established or where I want to be. We're still not at a level where we can be picky about the work we take on.

"Our actual coverage area is vast; we cover from Peterborough down to Southampton, and from Swindon down to Ramsgate and Folkestone." All engineers are based in the area and come in each morning before travelling to their jobs, says Liam. Most work tends to be around the Home Counties or in central London, he adds, and the business is currently looking to expand more into Oxford and Milton Keynes.

#### Double vision

As for the future, Liam's stated aim is to double the size of the company over the next five years; something he believes could be done without having to add significantly to the office-based staff or move from its current premises outside Aylesbury.

Much of this will come from building up the bigger projects. "We feel we've established ourselves well in the commercial managing agent sector, and we're taking on larger works around office refits too," he says. "Now we're looking to build

**'Even if we're doing a domestic install we put in LED. If any contractor is not on that they're being left behind. We were installing that three or four years ago'**

> David Macleod, company foreman, and Erica Hill, who provides business development support

more relations with building firms, which want to work with a trusted electrical contractor on bigger projects. A lot of that work is based on what you've done previously so you'd be foolish to think you can go into that kind of job just as an electrical contractor. You need to have a track record."

Schools are a different case, he says, hence the focus for David. "Many schools now have a different way of resourcing electrical contractors," he says. "Previously they would go to a builder but now you can go direct and sell your company to them. But with other larger works a lot of it goes through a main contractor."

Further down the line, the aim is to develop the existing team – around half of whom joined as apprentices – with a view to helping them progress to running the business. "I've got children so I would be happy if they came into it, but I would also be OK if they didn't," says Liam. "But my main aim is for people in this company to take it on, so when I finish they can run it for years to come. I'd like to be able to train them to follow the same path that I did, so to start off as an electrician, and then become a manager, a business owner and a managing director. There's a pool of people in the company at the moment who would be able to do that."

For now, though, Liam is justifiably proud of what he has built up over the past eight years. "It's about how hard you're prepared to work to make something happen," he says. "People think you have to be a magical entrepreneur – you haven't; you've just got to work hard, and when the opportunities arise you have to put yourself out there to be able to get it. But the more money we turn over the luckier we become, because the harder we work."

Now the business is more established, Liam is also hoping to get a bit more time for himself and his young family. "I was doing seven days a week until about two years ago," he says. "I'm down to six now. By this time next year I would like to have dropped the Saturdays. But I'm in for 6:30am every morning and I finish about 8pm, and I often have work meetings in the evenings as well. That's what's helped us grow and sustained the level we've got to, by quoting, meeting clients and getting new business. And I enjoy it; what else am I going to do?" 🍷

» Nick Martindale is editor of *Connections*

• Could your business feature in *Connections*?

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