

Managing Director of Humidity Solutions.

John Barker



How did you get into the industry?

I studied mechanical and production engineering at university and applied for several jobs – it just happened to be that the one I took was in humidification.

I've always had an interest in engineering and how things work – production engineering in particular appealed to me and still does. It fascinates me how people mass produce things, how they make the huge quantities of certain items, and how far factors such as humidity affects this.

What is your biggest achievement to date?

Setting up Humidity Solutions and building the team we've got here.

We've got a big team who enjoy working together as well as having a real breadth of knowledge. Bringing those two things together is an achievement which hopefully offers good service to customers.

The toughest part was deciding to set the company up in the first place and then making the jump. We had a pretty clear idea of what we wanted to achieve because our customer service philosophy came out of previous experience. We worked for people who were offering a low level of customer support that we were uncomfortable with.

What do you most enjoy about working in the industry?

The variety of applications. For example in a single day last week I visited a clean room, a hot yoga studio and a farm – there can't be too

many sectors that have that wide a range of applications.

What do you most dislike about the industry?

Weak specifications. We do a lot of work with designers of various types, not just consultants, and it doesn't matter how good the design is, they end up looking at the capital costs and not the ongoing costs.

In some instances humidity control is cut because it's not the sexiest part of the building and they feel they can do without it. Because of this, a significant amount of our work is retrofit because they suddenly find that humidity would have been a good idea – and it's twice as difficult to install it as it would have been in the first place.

It's hard sometimes to even to get humidity even on the agenda.

What is the biggest challenge for industry?

Climate change and making sure we're part of the solution rather than part of the problem.

We need to make sure that we, in the air conditioning community, have a strong enough voice. We need to make sure that we move forward with a unified voice to make sure that changes occur.

My fear is that we're all a little bit like Brexit – we all have slightly different agendas which means we're not going to end up with one solution.

If we could lay out some simple parameters such as temperature range, humidity range,

purification range, and so on, then I think we would be in a very powerful position to move forward, lay out legislation to support it, create opportunities and an improved indoor environment.

I don't think many of us are that far apart, but somehow someone needs to unify all the thoughts, boil them down and present it as one user-friendly document to government.

Is legislation doing enough of the right things?

There's very little legislation specifically for humidity control so, for example, the manufacturing sectors have almost produced their own criteria based on what helps them with production.

Within offices it's generally accepted, with strong scientific support, that humidity should be from 40% to 60% – but it's not written down.

What would you say to any youngsters about entering into engineering as a career?

There's a lot of developing technology in the industry now, such as controls – and from the engineering point of view there are a lot more opportunities and interesting things happening.

You can apply your knowledge to a wide variety of different applications and this is a growing sector with emphasis on Indoor Air Quality. There are big issues that we can affect.

Sport/Team/Player?

Brighton Hove Albion! I was born in Sussex and my dad supported them too.