



The first Access Link meeting of 2003 hosted by JLG

ONCE EVERY three months the heads of a group of regional independent access rental companies gather under the banner of the 'Access Link' to discuss ways in which they can join together to loosen what they describe as the tightening effects of multinational rental companies in the UK and Ireland.

"Now in its fourth year, Access Link has made good progress and we are very close to having full coverage of the UK and Ireland" says Bowers. "However, we feel that there are greater opportunities to develop further national account business. It is natural that the larger members are better geared to developing national account business

shouldn't have a problem competing."

"The Link will always come out on top when competing against the nationals" continues Bowers. "Service care is the prime benefit and Link member company owners/directors are very close to the front line, ensuring more interest in daily happenings."

Strength in numbers

Access Link is now the UK and Ireland's second largest access rental body behind only Nationwide. C&A was invited along to the first member meeting of 2003 hosted by JLG.

It has taken the Link just three years to expand into what is now a conglomerate comprising 11 members stretching across the two countries, which now holds an 11 per cent market share represented by a fleet of around 3000 access platforms. It is the strategic positioning of these members scattered across the UK and Ireland, however, that forms the crux of what the Link is aiming to achieve.

"Access Link was set up in response to a trend by the bigger national hirers in setting up national and exclusive deals with the larger users of MEWPS" explains Malcolm Bowers, sales and marketing director at AFI and chair of the meeting – chairmanship is done on a rotation basis. "It also serves as an effective talk shop providing pooled information for its smaller members, while it gives manufacturers the opportunity to demonstrate their products to what is now the second largest access fleet manager in the UK. However, we are careful to keep manufacturers independent of the Link and no favours are shown other than the hosting of the meetings.

and this subject seems to be always high on our agenda. Obviously, the members situated in the larger commercial centres, such as Birmingham, Manchester, London and Glasgow have more work to do in selling the Link to the head offices of contractors within their areas."

Current members are, AMP Access, AFI, Skyhigh Access, Plantfinder, AJ Access, Central Access, Panther Platforms, North East Access and GT Access, Midland Access, Kimberly Access and Uplift Power Platforms in the UK, while Aerial Platform Hire and Highway Plant fly the Link's flag in Ireland. This amounts to a total of 29 depots across the region, providing a sound geographical footing which the Link believes will be the key to its success.

"Each business is individually run by its own director" explains Tony Mort of AJ Access. "In this way the customer still receives a personalised service and is continually in contact with the proprietor of the business, which is often not the case with the bigger national hirers. In terms of a personalised customer service, Access Link and its members

"The future for the Link is really about sales and marketing. More effort needs to be put into selling the Link to the major customers in our areas" he says. "As far as depots are concerned, the

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UK mainland is now well covered with only weaknesses in rural areas. The last four depots to be included in the Link are AMP's Poole depot, AFI's Peterboro depot and two depots in the Republic of Ireland belonging to Aerial Platform Hire, all added within the last three months."

And, according to Bowers, it doesn't stop there: "We are also interested in making contacts with like-minded companies throughout Europe and this is currently on the discussion agenda." 