

Sands is upbeat despite shift in market

Owner insists independent food store chain not for sale



SIMON BAIN

AS the last standard-bearer for independent food stores in Scotland, David Sands is passionate in defence of his eponymous chain which has almost 30 convenience stores across Fife, Perthshire and Kinross.

"We are not for sale," he says. "We are busy focusing on growing our business profitably. It has been a long, challenging road to get where we are, but that's life running a business."

On the swallowing up of so many smaller beasts by the hungry predators of the convenience store jungle – led by Tesco, Sainsbury and the Co-op/Scotmid – Mr Sands is diplomatic.

each day I'm not constantly thinking about how we can differentiate ourselves from the multiple stores."

When Mr Sands joined his entrepreneurial father in the business in 1989, after taking a business and law degree at Edinburgh and working for Sainsbury, it was a fifth-generation business which though solid had never outgrown its single shop in Kinross.

"We bought a second store, and at the time we saw the future as operating medium-sized supermarkets," he recalls. "But in the early 1990s a multiple store opened in Kinross – that was a big shock, and a big worry. It was a very difficult moment, we discovered at that point that banks are fair-weather friends."

Inspired by his first visit to



TARGET: David Sands is eager to differentiate his independent chain of food shops from the multiple stores

to take everything and we were all doomed – but actually over the last 20 years, we have grown our business to 29 stores."

The muscling of the supermarket giants into the corner-shop market has been good for the shopper, Mr Sands says. "Convenience stores have evolved and become, I think, great places to shop. I do think the UK boasts amongst the best supermarkets and convenience stores in the world – though it does make it very competitive

nating in the creation of its own "David's Kitchen" range of exclusive in-store fresh foods and ready meals.

"We are very much a small regional chain, a family business," the boss says. "We are very much focused on the areas we trade in and we have no aspi-



We have never really had

matching its bigger rivals – but research shows its customers rate friendly service as more important than value. "We do huge amounts to recognise customer service, we do a lot of mystery shopping ... whenever anyone scores well on a mystery shop either myself or my dad will seek out that person, thank them for doing a great job, and give them something as well. We have been doing it for five years, trying to create that culture."

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