



From left: Aman Sadana, Simon Phillips, Senior Channel Communications Manager, Post Office Ltd, and Iqbal Sadana cut the rope to open the new branch

# LONDON CALLING

Subpostmaster Aman Sadana runs Wood Street Post Office in Walthamstow, north London. **Simon King** met him at the new premises, which opened in November 2019

**T**he Sadana family have operated post offices in east London since the 1980s and Aman Sadana is the third generation of the family to run the business, which started at a post office in Carr Road, Walthamstow, which the family operated for 25 years.

Aman says: "After selling the Carr Road branch, Dad (Iqbal Sadana) was looking for another big branch, and we went to Barking Road as a pit stop, and stayed there for two or three years.

"We came to see the branch in the Wood Street Plaza in Walthamstow, in 2007, and Dad loved it so much that he negotiated with the seller and did the deal

there and then."

Aman joined the family business as the 2,000 sqft branch opened in Wood Street Plaza and traded there until November 2019.

He says: "The local council had a compulsory purchase order over the land we were on, which forced us to move – but we've now got a better location, a better site and we are now in a busy area.

"At the previous location, the branch was pushed back – visibility was never perfect. Customers knew we were there, but passers-by would miss it."

When Iqbal and



The opening of the new branch was spread across three community events

Aman were given the keys to the unit, a huge project started as it was a basic shell with just four concrete walls.

"The refurbishment cost £500,000," Aman says.

"The council paid around 75% of the bill. We negotiated hard with the council because it had forced us to move."

Aman says that the process of moving position – just 10 doors away from its previous location – took 18 months from the first date he looked at drawings to the opening of the new branch. He says: "There were always going to be challenges

**"We've now got a better location, and we are now in a busy area"**

along the way. We were the first commercial unit within the development to open, which brought with it a number of challenges."

Aman made a conscious decision to keep the old branch open while work was being completed on the new location, with the services of Rapeed Design Shopfitters.

"We could have taken the easy route and closed for four weeks, but we are reliant on customers coming through the door. Since becoming a Main post office in 2013, our business is transaction-based," he says.

"I also have to remember that this is London – there is a post office on almost every street corner – the

## AMAN'S TOP TIPS FOR A PROSPEROUS BUSINESS

### DON'T FORGET LINKED PRODUCTS

In the new store, Aman describes the range of cards, stationery and gifts as 'superb'.

Aman says: "We now have a lot of the ancillary products to cards. I got a completely new range of wrapping paper – wrap, bags, ribbons and bows – which works as they are quality items. We chose Glick as the supplier, it's the gift wrap division of Nigel Quiney.

"We've got small pick-up items from £2.50 that sell very well, even for basic things like fancy pens."

From the post office perspective, Aman says: "We are focused on linking products. At the moment, we're going through a push for life insurance. We're actively speaking to customers about it and explaining the benefits."

### GIVING BACK TO THE COMMUNITY

Aman says that his family has always strongly believed in giving back to the community that it serves.

"While we're here to make money, of course, we're here for the community as well," Aman says.

This was typified by the branch opening, which was split into three events.

He says: "We had three openings. The most important one to me was the religious opening, on 17 November, because it allowed us to bring our Holy Scriptures in from the local temple and we had a prayer reading here on-site. We had a meal and 40 guests, which included family and friends."

The next opening was a soft launch on 29 November.

Aman says: "We opened at 1pm. What happened next took us all by surprise – we lifted the shutters at 12.55pm and there was a 15-person queue outside!

"At one point there was a queue of 25 people and there was nothing that could have prepared us for that; we just weren't expecting it. My Post Office Ltd

(PO) project manager, John Rollinson, said that this was the best opening he had ever done.

"The queue ran all the way round the shop, across the retail till and out of the door!"

The third opening was held on 5 December and was for the wider community, including 70 invited guests.

### GOOD RELATIONSHIPS WITH CUSTOMERS

Aman says that when growing up, his father, Iqbal, impressed upon him the importance of customers and treating them well.

He says: "With customers, you don't treat them as just customers and as a number, you treat customers almost like your own family. Customers are like an extended family to us, but, obviously, you can't get on with everyone. In our culture, everyone is an uncle or aunt. Forming relationships with customers is important as they appreciate that and then they come back."

### CONNECT TO THE NFSP VIA WHATSAPP

In addition to the regular regional and branch meetings with the NFSP locally, which Aman says are useful to share tips and ideas, he says the NFSP's WhatsApp groups have been useful.

Aman says: "If I want a quick response to something and a customer is waiting, it's great to be able to message like-minded subpostmasters. It's quicker and easier to contact a panel of subpostmasters than it is to call a helpline.

"By the time I have chosen the right option on the telephone and got through to a real person, I could have typed a WhatsApp message and had three replies."

● To find out how to join NFSP WhatsApp groups, please email [communications@nfsp.org.uk](mailto:communications@nfsp.org.uk) or call **01273 452324**.



nearest one to us is only a 10-minute walk.

"I didn't want to lose customers."

The Sadana family were given the keys in August, and Aman says that he made a commitment from the start of the building work that it was going to be a seamless transfer.

We worked up to 5.30pm on the Tuesday (26 November) and on the Wednesday morning, the Horizon engineers turned up to disconnect the existing IT system and reconnect it in the new branch."

The new branch opened on 29 November, and Aman admits that he had to be convinced to agree to open at such a critical time of year.

"I was very reluctant to open a new building in such a key location at such an important time," Aman says.

"In a post office, you can do 20-25% of your trade in the run-up to Christmas.

"I was worried that customers wouldn't follow – we did as much as we could in terms of signage at the old site to say that we had moved. We had a very good December, takings in the first quarter were exceptional. We've almost doubled retail turnover, year-on-year, which is amazing."

In the last few weeks of the build ahead of the grand opening, customers became more and more curious.

Aman says: "When we were building the new store, there came a point when the fascia had to go up, although we were not yet trading from the site."



### SHOP TALK

WOOD STREET POST OFFICE,  
WOOD STREET, WALTHAMSTOW,  
LONDON

- **Size:** 1,600 sqft
- **Staff:** Three (full-time) plus Aman
- **Opening hours:** 8.30am-5.30pm (Monday to Thursday); 9am-5.30pm (Friday); and 9am-3pm (Saturday)
- **PO counters:** Five (two fortress, two open and one combi)
- **PO services:** Banking, car tax, full on-demand currencies, mail, parcels, passports, returns
- **Retail:** Cards, gifts, stationery, passport photos
- **Facebook:** @WoodStreetPO
- **Twitter:** @WoodStPO

"Many people tried to fight their way into the new store – moving fencing and trying to pull apart the automatic doors, which were not functioning yet!

"I kept asking myself, how many shops do you go into where you have to push past fencing and try and force automatic doors to open?

"We had to explain that we were not yet open, and they'd have to go to the existing store – we had been there for years and people didn't know we even had one!"

The family's old store in the Wood Street Plaza in Walthamstow had been "a mix of everything", Aman says, and he decided to specialise in the retail offering in the new store, which includes premium stationery, cards and gifts.

Aman says: "We sold cards in the

**"We've almost doubled retail turnover, year-on-year"**

previous branch, but it was a real mix of products. Now I've specialised and people now know me as a destination point for cards.

Customers know that if they want a quality card, they need to come here.

"I don't stock any wholesale or cash and carry cheap cards. I'm dealing directly with Hallmark and some of the

smaller suppliers including Second Nature, Ling, Carte Blanche, ICG and Nigel Quiney.

"I wanted to support the smaller suppliers, so I gave Hallmark 70% of the display and that gave me 30% to do what I wanted to do with the smaller suppliers.

"We got Hallmark to plan the whole display, but only supply 70% of the stock.

"If you walk down Wood Street and you want a top quality card,

The new branch is a 'destination point' for greeting cards



there is no other place for shoppers to go – and Wood Street, which is just under a mile long, has many shops."

The previous branch offered passport photos, but Aman introduced instant photos, so customers can print photos from their smartphone either via Bluetooth or by using a cable.

So, was the move worth it?

Aman says: "The location is 100% better, which feels weird to say as we only moved 10 doors down, but it's made a big difference. The previous post office was set back from the road, so we always missed out on driven trade, as people didn't know we were there.

"We are now almost opposite the London Overground train service, which is a direct link from Wood Street to Liverpool Street. A lot of the houses are selling on the back of the railway line – property for City workers who don't want to pay City prices."

- Rapeed Design Shopfitters can be reached on 07831 556653.

