



MOTOR FUEL GROUP

Modernising the forecourt experience

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Author: Kate Hanaghan

Email: khanaghan@techmarketview.com

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COMPANY OVERVIEW

St Albans-headquartered **Motor Fuel Group** (MFG) is the UK's largest independent forecourt operator. Its roots can be traced back to 2011 and it offers six major oil brands along with its own EV Power (electric vehicle) brand. Indeed, last year MFG announced that over 600 ultra-rapid electric vehicle chargers had been installed across its network, meaning it now has 5.4% of the Ultra-Rapid UK public charging network. MFG partners with well-known retail and fast-food brands, such as **Costa**, **Subway**, **Greggs** and **Uber Eats**.

The firm recently announced the acquisition of 337 Morrisons forecourts, taking the number of MFG forecourts to over 1200 in the UK. This deal, together with the transfer of 400 parcels of land to develop as EV charging stations, positions MFG as a leading independent forecourt provider in the UK.

OWNERSHIP

In December 2011, Motor Fuel Group was acquired by a new management team, headed by current CEO, William Bannister and joined by Jeremy Clarke and Tom Biggart. In 2015, MFG was sold to **Clayton, Dubilier, & Rice** and the forecourt firm has since undertaken numerous acquisitions. For example, the acquisition of 90 stations from **Shell** (2015) and the acquisition of **MRH** for £1.2bn in 2018.

SIZE

In FY22, the most recently available set of accounts, MFG recorded its strongest performance to date. Revenue was £5.6bn (up 36.5% from £4.1bn – mostly due to a significant increase in wholesale prices) and operating profit grew from c.£280m to c.£347m. Non-fuel profit also increased. Unusually for the industry, MFG owns the freehold to more than 80% of its sites.

IT DECISION MAKER



MFG's IT Director is Paresh Patel. He is also on the Senior Leadership Team. Patel joined from convenience and forecourt EPOS, payment, and loyalty solutions provider, **HTEC Ltd** (where he was Director of Forecourt Sales). Prior to that he was with **Indigo Retail**. This experience positions Patel very well as a senior leader at MFG where the performance of the retail aspect of the business, combined with demands on corporate governance, are essential. Patel has been at MFG (in previous guises) since 2011 and was instrumental in architecting the IT systems at head office and at the forecourt level. PCI, ISO 27001 compliance, and cyber have been key drivers of an increase in the IT budget in recent years.

"Digital Space is my number one port of call'."

Paresh Patel, IT Director, MFG

IT PROVIDER PROFILE: Digital Space

Newark-headquartered **Digital Space** is owned by **Graphite Capital**, which acquired the firm from **Horizon Capital** in November 2022. Horizon had owned Digital Space since February 2017, with Neil Muller brought in as CEO in November 2018. Muller played a central role in the development of the company and the subsequent Graphite/Horizon transaction. Crucially, the senior leadership team has remained in place.

Digital Space, which was rebranded in June 2021 from **Timico**, targets the mid-market with secure, connected cloud solutions. Horizon/Muller transformed Timico into a Managed Service Provider (MSP) focused on helping organisations to progress their digital transformation. Digital Space now has c.340 staff who, we understand, warmly welcomed the new financial backer. Under the ownership of Graphite, Digital Space will be driving organic growth, but is keeping an opportunistic eye on possible acquisitions. We are also likely to see ongoing investments in SD-WAN, cyber, and Microsoft Azure solutions. The firm currently boasts a spread of household name customers, including **Domino's Pizza** and **St John Ambulance**.

The original relationship between MFG and Digital Space started during the Timico years. Over time, and following various acquisitions, MFG has worked with a range of suppliers. Not all of these have proved to be plain sailing – and that's not an atypical experience. Patel says Digital Space has set itself apart with its approach to managing the relationship – and in particular how relevant Execs and account managers are proactive in managing the contract and delivering value.

Digital Space and MFG have been working together for more than eight years. Building on that, MFG wanted to undertake a specific programme to connect all its forecourts with a modern ACL connection. This universal connection between forecourts, with the back office, and for payments was an important modernising step for MFG, enabling it to streamline existing (and in some cases, unused) telecommunications lines and create cost efficiencies.

“There are many IT experts out there that are incredibly capable, but they cannot cover the whole spectrum of technology, which is why we need the deep specialists to achieve the real productivity gains.”

Paresh Patel, IT Director, Motor Fuel Group

MFG's adoption of cloud has been driven by Patel's very pragmatic approach. As a highly acquisitive firm, data governance has featured highly on the agenda (e.g., all data must be held – but not necessarily accessed/used – for seven years). Patel has taken a very considered approach to cloud (*“investing in some tech can actually impede productivity,”* he says), maximising the firm's relationship with Microsoft.

IMPROVED PRODUCTIVITY

Patel approached Digital Space with three primary requirements. Firstly, to get ahead of the ISDN switch off in 2025 by moving to a fully digital service. Secondly, ensuring the firm had the right SLA agreement in place that included proactive field coverage – something it had not had before. MFG now has a true 24-hour helpdesk for staff in the field, thanks to Digital Space. Thirdly, in the past there were doubts regarding the reliability of backups – and now the firm has a cloud-based dual backup service. Although these steps are not ‘mind-blowing’ in their own right, together they are important upgrades that contribute to both improved resilience and greater productivity across the business.

Investments have also contributed to improved staff productivity. Reduced downtime, forecourts that are running more smoothly, and staff that are more proactively supported not only improves employee productivity but also contributes to a much better customer experience all round. Indeed, MFG can also now offer Wi-Fi for customers, arguably increasing their productivity too!

TechMarketView LLP

PO Box 2288,
Pulborough

RH20 6BR

t: +44 (0)203 5764266

e: info@techmarketview.com

www.techmarketview.com

@TechMarketView

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