

PC crackers make millions

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CHRISTMAS crackers can be real jokes when it comes to creating festive amusement round the dinner table, now one company has taken the issue by the reindeer horns and gone all PC.

But that doesn't mean the groan factor has been scrapped – far from it. Swantex boss David Byk said that is absolutely vital.

He said: "That doesn't mean we want to upset anyone with something that is just not that funny.

"So mother-in-law jokes are out, and in come a fresh new lot that will at least make you groan and sometimes laugh."

The managing director said business is booming for the company, based in Swanley, with cracker orders up 21 per cent on last year to more than 24 million, and wrapping paper demand is up by 18 per cent.

He said: "Christmas is a time when we don't want to have any more problems with the family than there already might be.

"Insulting the mother-in-law or getting the little kiddie asking awkward questions, doesn't help with having a nice Christmas meal.

"That is important to us. We just want to make sure everyone just has a real old fashioned belly laugh. It's all about keeping it simple.

"Getting a good groan is just as good. That is where we need to be and that's where we work hardest.

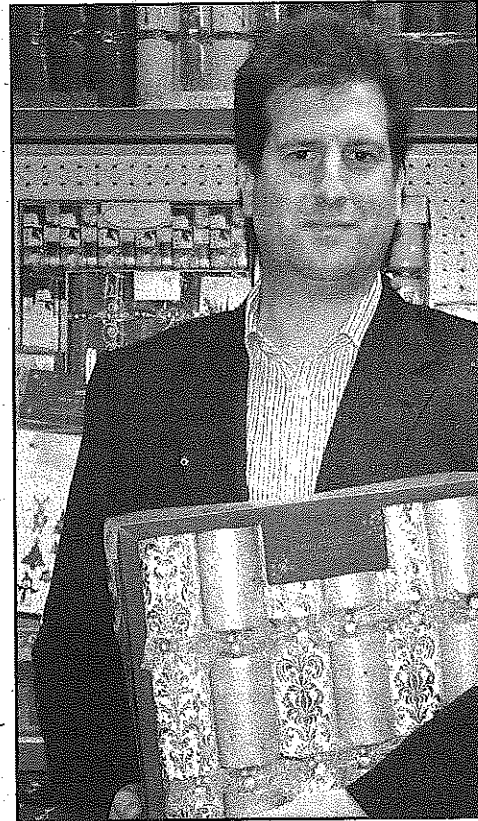
"This humour is not going to be cutting edge, it's not going to be done by a professional stand-up comedian. It does have to be in line with Christmas cracker jokes and they are meant to be a bit poor.

"We write them down through the year, listen out for them, and we try to make a few Christmas related so they are topical."

But the little slip of paper has moved on from the old days.

Mr Byk said: "Now we have charades on them, we have questions and ice-breakers, which are little lines you can ask to spark off a new off-beat conversation which helps at some of the more stuffy dinner parties we sometimes end up at or if you are with someone you don't know.

"These have gone down really well."



COMEDY GENIUS: David Byk is having a laugh with his new politically correct jokes

He said the family-run company is doing well despite the recession.

Mr Byk said: "Sales are doing great. We have worked really hard to get new contracts, our Far East office is doing well and we are now supplying in Australia, which we haven't done before.

"We do what we do really well, and that helps.

"Yes, there is a recession on and prices are harder, which makes margins difficult, but we are pleased with where we are going."

Swantex started in 1892 and has just bought another napkin business and they now employ 250 people, making it Britain's biggest cracker business.

He said: "We have made a lot of investment in automatic machinery and people and we are going well."

Their main products are napkins and tableware, but crackers account for £26

million on their balance sheets.

Wrapping paper orders are up to 35 million metres, almost enough to go round the world.

The old

What's green and turns red at the flick of a button?

A frog in a liquidiser

What do Santa's reindeer put on a Christmas tree?

Horn-aments

What do you call a deer with no eyes? No idea

The new

What do angry mice send each other at Christmas?

Cross mouse cards

What lies in a pram and wobbles? A jelly baby

What do you get when you cross a hen with a clock?

An alarm cluck

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