

Kbbreview Industry Awards 2007

CATEGORY: Master Retailer Award for Bathrooms

FINALIST: The Yard, Belfast

How would you describe your business to the judges?

Simply put, dynamic, progressive and passionate. We are a fantastically progressive business renowned nationally as the leading edge in bathroom design.

We have and maintain undoubtedly the most impressive showroom on the island and a skilled and very enthusiastic team. The new management team have refined the business to devote resources towards the pursuit of ultimate customer service. We commit to close relationships with key suppliers on an exclusive basis that affords us excellent support, knowledge and in some cases an influence in development of future products.

The company commits to a healthy stock holding and a distribution network improves buying terms.

A board of three directors with different skills has proved invaluable. It is still a shock that there have been no rows in two years! The client benefits from a combination of expertise.

The team

As our success is reliant upon our team, it is very rewarding to witness their sense of pride in belonging to the company. (Most of this is communicated to management at the regular social nights rather than in complete sobriety!)

Every individual is encouraged to contribute and the environment is much improved as a result.

Our showroom is continuously updated in response to our clients and designers wish list, incorporating everything from working wet room to custom built steam facility.

This year our investment in a new upstairs showroom will be in the region of £400,000. This is largely to fund the launch of a new tile business which has evolved from our customer wish list.

The Tile Yard, founded September 2007, incorporates the existing directors but is under the direct control of a fourth director. Sharon has been Managing Director of the area's most successful luxury tile supplier and has very quickly demonstrated her exceptional skills in acquiring orders and specification for our exclusive ranges well before the showroom is opened to display them! Our target market is predominately luxury however with the expansion of our contracts division we have added significant turnover for our suppliers.

By way of summary, we are continuously approached by other showroom's staff seeking positions, we have the trust and projects of the best architects and designers and it is a continuous comment from our customers that this is a very different experience.

What specific evidence(including financial) can you give that your business is successful?

Financial:

Continued investment to a controlled expansion programme. A new location is reserved to replicate the showroom in a well-researched market. This decision was favoured over the offer to franchise. The Company's performance has allowed us to resist the interest of investors in developing our expansion.

Customer Service: With a large portion of turnover attributed to referrals, customer satisfaction is the focus of our business. We continuously review our processes and strive to learn from every failure and success. With the support of our fantastic team we adapt to give the customer not just a great service but an all round good experience.

A clear indication of success is the increasing confidence that designers, specifiers and clients place in our proposals, in most cases approving their scheme following an outline brief.

Holding distribution stock has been invaluable, particularly of all first fix items as well as sanitary fittings and second fix items.

Skilled installers have given up their evenings to be trained as a recommended Yard installer. In the last 12 months our emphasis has included wetroom and steam training. The sessions have been full and we have secured specific schemes by providing competent installers for unfamiliar concepts. We also provide a measure and installation solution for bespoke glass.

Conscious that Belfast still conjures up apprehension for visitors, we pick our customers and suppliers up from train stations and airports. This facility has been very much appreciated.

A series of training programmes are scheduled for 2008, to include professional sales courses, technical support, and updates in legislation as well as intense product knowledge. We have a specific group of installers that we can currently recommend. It is our intention to refine this offering to our customer by providing a project management facility to reduce the client's time and make the experience hassle free.

Whilst business is a serious matter and profit is one of the ultimate goals, it is important to have fun! Our recruitment strategy will always take this into account. A robust skin and sense of humour are "essential criteria" to enhance and in fact survive!

We have recruited carefully to allow for the management team to focus more outside the business over the next few years.

Commercial Growth:

The growth in our luxury contract business has exceeded our best expectations especially hotels, indicating the dramatically increased expectations of guests. One of the recent 5 star hotels boasts the island most expensive cocktail, a Bentley experience and sports chandeliers at £80,000! Changed days for Belfast.

This year we have been specified for the vast majority of inner city residential development including:

450 apartments (first phase of 3000) at Titanic Quarter

106 apartments at Victoria Square attached to our first John Lewis store

85 apartments at Custom House Square

156 apartments at Ormeau Bakery

This doesn't reflect the escalating residential developments and key projects throughout Ireland.

What strategy do you have for the future?

Marketing:

We have an eighteen month strategy already planned to increase our profile in the architectural and commercial sector. A campaign will accompany new location and greater utilization of new technologies will be employed to target new areas.

Referral and References

A considerable reduction in our marketing spend in 2006 was the product of a dramatic increase in referrals, not just from retail clients but also from the progressive and demanding designers, architects and contractors alike.

“The team at The Yard confidently shoulder innovation - presenting design driven basics and extreme bathing luxury oh and Sharon’s tiles are great too” - Adrian Bailie (Adrian Interiors)

“The most professional and reliable service in a pressurised environment that we have ever encountered.” - JM Engineering

“Thank you for your great service” Howard Hastings - Hastings Hotel Group



