



AS IT CELEBRATES THE FIRST 18 YEARS OF BUILDING ITS REPUTATION AND RELATIONSHIPS IN THE INTERIOR FIT-OUT SECTOR, BASED ON PROVIDING QUALITY THROUGH A PERSONAL AND DEDICATED SERVICE, RLI CATCHES UP WITH GENERAL CONTRACTOR AND SPECIALIST INTERIOR FIT-OUT BUSINESS, BRIDGFORD INTERIOR'S BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR, ALAN PALMER TO UNCOVER THE FORMULA OF THE COMPANY'S CONTINUING SUCCESS.

Team Bridgford

The origins of Bridgford's success lies in high volume, rapid rollout programmes across the UK, though one-off bespoke projects with compelling and distinctive environments have also become part of its activities, providing a high quality, value-for-money service, with attention to detail and a personal touch.

The company manages to maintain a client base covering an impressive breadth of retailers but more impressive still is the depth of these relationships, some stretching back to 1994, as in the case of

Dixons Retail, and 1999 with the likes of TK Maxx and Starbucks Coffee.

The retail landscape is adapting at pace to keep up with the challenges of the tough economy and the change in consumer behaviour, technological advances and corresponding expectations. The original premise of local service, local customers and local competition would seem to have disappeared in favour of an evolving global marketplace where the customer is very much in control.

"Consumers continue to demand instant gratification, demanding products quicker,

cheaper and with as little inconvenience to them as possible – similarly this rings true of our own retail clients," says Bridgford Interior's Business Development Director, Alan Palmer.

With the world literally at the customers fingertips and the ability to carry out detailed research and comparison prior to entering a store, one would think that they are more ready to complete a purchase than ever.

"Creating a store environment to entice the consumer may in some cases be the catalyst and is increasingly important

and complex," he adds. "Couple this with stock availability and knowledgeable staff and the store should win every time! We have already seen with some of our clients how the seamless integration with multi-channel has led to new store formats and concepts being developed!"

There remains an abundance of shopfitters far greater than the availability of projects, those clients that have been brave and bold enough to press forward with expansion plans and refurbishments during the downturn have taken every opportunity to drive down costs taking advantage of fierce competitive, sometimes cut throat tendering.

"Recent trade surveys indicate that across the Top 40 revenue was up by 22 per cent which is positive news," says Palmer. "Whilst 17 per cent of shopfitting businesses have seen a drop in revenue between 2010-11 compared to 50 per cent between 2009-10."

Some 49 per cent of those surveyed saw profit margins reduce as a result of the competitive tender conditions we are experiencing, the average margin across the top 40 contractors was 1.6 per cent and ten per cent of businesses have experienced a negative profit compared to 20 per cent in 2010 – is there light at the end of the tunnel for those of us firmly entrenched in retail and leisure fit out?

Fortunately, in a sector that is typically reliant on a small number of long-standing relationships Bridgford has bucked the trend, working for 29 prestigious clients in 2012 – 20 of which are retained, some in excess of ten years.

The key performance indicator for Bridgford is its level of repeat business and its relationships with clients and project teams – producing a balanced and considered result time after time.

"We are extremely privileged to be engaged in long-term working relationships that have been nurtured and built on trust and open communication, providing consistency and reliability, supporting our clients every step of the way on their journey to success," adds Palmer.

Managing Director Paul Cockle puts the business offer in simple terms: "The project comes first every single time, our dynamic integrated approach to all aspects of the delivery process and the relationships formed as a result are the key to our success. At every stage of the project, our team are there to offer help, advice and support ensuring that each and every client is treated as No 1."

Martin Fahey, Commercial Director cites his experience of a

20 per cent increase in enquiries: "Tender activity this year has been at record levels as retail and leisure clients alike look outside of their existing supply chain towards contractors such as Bridgford in search of better value, this has led to new opportunities with clients such as M&S Bank, Car Phone Warehouse, Harris & Hoole, MediCinema and Greggs, to name but a few.

"There have been no notable 'Flagship' schemes this year but we remain thankful for our staple diet of projects for the likes of TK Maxx, Starbucks, Superdrug & Vue Cinema," he adds.

Recent years has seen the company's modus operandi move outside of its traditional shopfitting territory. There has, for instance, been a dramatic shift to night working, allowing a store to trade with minimal disruption whilst refit works are undertaken, as well as an involvement with the growing trend of pop up shops, including the fit-out of five Toys R Us stores in quick succession ahead of its peak Christmas season. Bridgford has also provided true general contractor construction works for developers, including works at the historic Bon Marche Centre in Brixton and two retail park redevelopment schemes; education is another sector – having completed projects to deliver a new cafe, a refurbished library and a toilet remodel at schools in Southwark.

The formula is simple, explains Palmer. The company is a trusted partner employed to translate vision into reality, providing greater efficiencies and innovation. It adds value where it counts ensuring the optimum balance of time, cost and quality, and its business has the flexibility to adapt to and to manage changing expectations and objectives with the benefit of competent and experienced handpicked site teams, which in turn enhances client relationships.

"Our people are our most valuable asset – they genuinely get excited about their work. The majority are from a trade background and understand the issues that are faced on site, having learnt the business from the bottom up," says Palmer.

With an updated online presence at www.bridgford.co.uk Bridgford continues its concentrated effort on marketing to improve the new business pipeline, and through teamwork seeks to stay closer than ever to existing contacts.

Palmer sums it up: "If we can leave one message with our prospective clients, contractor selection is about value – cheap construction isn't good, good construction isn't cheap."

