



ASDA, TOTTENHAM



# Building on success

IN ITS 13TH YEAR OF TRADING, **BRIDGFORD INTERIORS** HAS EXPERIENCED A FOURTH SUCCESSIVE ANNUAL INCREASE IN TURNOVER, WITH A 35 PER CENT LEAP IN 2007 ALONE. RLI CATCHES UP WITH BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR, ALAN PALMER TO FIND OUT THE SECRET OF THE COMPANY'S SUCCESS

**B**ridgford Interiors Business Development Director, Alan Palmer sets the scene: "The interior fit-out market is a buoyant one at present, and typically involves delivering a variety of formats across a diverse property portfolio. Work entails a challenging programme of projects with slim margins — but does in return offer high volumes of work."

The marketplace is evolving, as are interior designs, and branding is based on the primary requirement to create an environment to attract shoppers, to steal market share from competitors and to create additional sales — other secondary issues involve re-brands as a result of industry consolidation, expansion programmes or compliance with statutory regulations.

Of course, shopping is probably the most popular activity in the world —

helping to build sustainable communities and acting as a catalyst to further regeneration. "Retail development is changing," continues Palmer.

"Entertainment now focuses heavily on the agenda in terms of cafes, restaurants, cinemas attached to the retail offer that are used as an attraction and seek to increase dwell times."

Consumers too are changing their habits, spend is predicted to reduce over the next ten years producing fierce competition for the mighty pound. Given that consumers are now more 'savvy' to what is available and have a variety of channels to market, they are becoming less loyal to particular brands, whilst at the same time their aspirations are increased — all of which makes the retailer's job harder.

Commercial Director Martin Fahey

outlines some of the pressures faced by retailers that also have a knock-on effect to contractors: "Power in the high street currently rests in the hands of a relatively few large retailers. While the mass retail market is in the centre of a 'Bermuda triangle' — bordered on one side by landlords with upwards-only rent reviews, rent being payable three months in advance. Add the topical issues of the day, such as environment and sustainability, materials cost increases and, in real terms, it has been calculated that sales figures need to improve by five per cent per annum to stand still!"

Such spiralling costs have a serious impact and to be successful retailers must trade out of the position by increasing productivity. Different options exist for varying formats and budgets, the most common being refits, modernising the



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store to maintain brand presence and attracting customers. Clients need all the assistance they can get to deliver good value projects and environments to 'wow' the consumer.

Says Palmer: "Sales figures for Interiors this year have increased approximately 35 per cent as a result of concentration on their core retail and leisure markets and attention to customer requirements. We have noticed this year that project volumes are down on previous years identifying a tendency towards larger or more complex schemes."

Managing Director, Paul Cockle puts this success down to: "an understanding of the customers for which we work and the marketplace in which they operate, we work in close partnership with our clients under varying contractual arrangements to deliver their objectives — in real terms we deliver solutions to their problems. Furthermore, we are a young and energetic business with ambition — in order for us to succeed we need our clients to succeed."

Bridgford has maintained around 85 per cent turnover through work with retained clients for leading blue chip companies such as Asda, Body Shop, Hotel Chocolat, O2, Screwfix, Starbucks, Tesco, TK Maxx and Vue Cinema. New clients secured include Arcadia, M&S, Orange, Rank, Toys R Us and Westfield.

"We are not so large that we have become impersonal," explains Palmer. "There remains director-level involvement on

every project. We firmly believe that maintaining relationships with people is the key at all levels; we seek to gain trust and respect from individuals and mitigate their issues, constantly seeking alternatives to assist with cost, programme and construction techniques with a view to delivering best value.

"We are extremely flexible and can react at the drop of a hat, the benefit of such a high volume of retained business is that we have the resources with specific experience and we are not constantly starting from the bottom of the learning curve."

He continues: "Retail fit-out remains key to our business as clients are constantly changing their format, size, location and brand requirements. Now, we must develop further the strategies put in place in 2006 that have paid such dividends for us. Strengthening and seeking closer relationships with retained and valued clients, whilst winning new accounts in our core sectors will be the main priority."

Slightly more sceptical, Fahey comments:

"Building prices have continued to rise for the last two years, tender prices are continuing to soar at six per cent per annum across the supply chain and this all points to increased competition."

On the positive side, as clients are coming to grips with maintaining and using KPI's, project allocations for future works are increasingly being based on performance which can only bode well for Bridgford Interiors, given its track record.

