



Mary Murrell

speaks to

Neil Kear



Being realistic about the economic situation, while not being pessimistic, is the best way forward, says Neil Kear, of J&S Flooring.

DESPITE current circumstances, Neil Kear is optimistic about the future for the Leicester-based J&S Flooring, which he owns with his business partner Jonathan Wells.

'I think there are good times ahead for those companies which, like ours, do a good job and maintain a high quality of service,' he says.

'The East Midlands is a very competitive area. However we are succeeding due to the three main strands of our policy. One is that we work with a varied group of end users, so that when one market sector is quiet another is busy. We don't have all our eggs in one basket.'

'The second is that we work closely with manufacturers like Altro, Amtico, Brintons, Paragon, Karndean and Polyflor, supporting them and not playing one off against the other.'

'We also use and value the technical expertise of companies like F Ball and Laybond for subfloor reports and specifications.'

'Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, we grow our own fitters through apprenticeships to work to

Reality check

our exacting standards.

'We do a very technical job, so training is vital, but at the moment we are unable to offer school leavers any quality training as Leicester College no longer runs any suitable courses.'

'We have been members of the CFA for many years, and I know the association networks with various training organisations. Maybe we need to work with Richard Catt and John Alcock to develop more varied training opportunities, as the current situation is untenable. If we cannot train young people we will end up with an ageing workforce with no-one to replace the fitters as they retire.'

J&S Flooring has a 33 year history of supplying and installing flooring in the Leicester region and surrounding counties. Founded in 1976 by Jack Riley, the company developed a reputation for offering a good reliable service.

Neil Kear has been in the flooring industry since leaving school and previously ran his own business, Premier Contract Interiors for 10 years, specialising in the healthcare sector, before joining the nationwide flooring contractor Axiom.

'That was a big learning curve,' says Neil. 'Axiom handled blue chip companies and I learnt how to plan and manage large contracts.'

'One day I found myself working on the same site as Jonathan Wells and his father Brian, whom I already knew, and out of the blue they suggested that I join them.'

'Subsequently, about



A local solicitors' office where J&S Flooring installed Amtico products

nine years ago when Jack Riley wished to retire, we bought J&S Flooring.

'The business has grown since then, so that we now have 15 members of staff including directly employed fitters, all CSCS approved, and a turnover in excess of £1m.'

'Due to the experience I have gained in running a business I have an overall role within J & S Flooring as well as managing some of my own clients. Jonathan is our contracts manager and is assisted by James Searston who is our estimator and is currently taking his HNC in construction management.'

The company supplies and installs carpets, vinyls, safety floorings, static conductive flooring and cementitious underlays and offers maintenance and cleaning services.

Over 90% of its business is commercial although it does install some domestic designer flooring.

The diverse range of customers includes the Hilton and Ramada Jarvis hotels, British Sugar, Livingwell, Fitness First and Bannatyne fitness centres, Master Foods, KFC and Subway food chains. In addition, the company is an approved contractor for the two universities in the city of Leicester, and has worked for Oadby and Wigston Borough Councils and Worcester County Council.

A major contract for the five star Hilton Metropole Hotel in Birmingham for mostly Brinton carpets in nearly all of its 700 bedrooms and in the function rooms was completed over a three year

period.

'We tailor our marketing to suit those people we want to reach,' says Neil. 'Our website is becoming increasingly important and we ensure that it reflects what we do, but 50% of our business comes through other sources and from recommendation.'

'Membership of the CFA is a valuable business asset. The logo is on our website and our vans and this has led to valuable contracts such as the one for £20,000 from a well known kitchen furniture manufacturer.'

The company runs a recycling programme, bringing back offcuts, particularly of pvc, to be made into other goods.

If one thing clouds Neil's vision it is the industry's payment terms. 'It simply is not fair for large organisations to tie up smaller companies, holding on to retentions long after payment is due or expecting an extension to the credit period. It does stop us dealing with certain organisations,' he says.

'On the whole I am very pleased with what J&S Flooring is achieving and I think Jack would be proud of the way his company has developed. Men who started with us 10 years ago as young lads are now part of a knowledgeable workforce.'

'Jonathan and I are custodians of this business and want to keep certain standards to maintain its reputation. It gives me pleasure to watch the workforce progress and the company grow. I have great hopes for J&S Flooring.'

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Installations by J&S Flooring: a restaurant (above) and the 19th Hole at Hinckley Golf Club

