



Mary Murrell

meets

Julian Cox



Recession or not, we'll never give up on

Having just celebrated the 15th anniversary of his company, Justfloors, Julian Cox appears to be a happy man, despite all the current doom and gloom:

quality

'We always give good value, but we won't lower our standards to do cheap work'

THE reason is that Julian's sales in October were better than the same month last year, and Justfloors has just had its best year ever!

'I feel I am where I want to be,' says Julian. 'I believe the secret of our success is that we don't try to grab every piece of business in sight.'

'We concentrate on markets where good quality and service are appreciated, which is what we give to our customers.'

He and his wife Joanne set up Justfloors in 1993, and her father, Alan King, also invested in the embryo company. Julian knew the flooring trade well, having worked in his father's company, Butler Cox Flooring in Milton, near Abingdon, for five years.

Initially based in Unit 45 on the Romsey Industrial Estate, the company was able to move to the larger Unit 50 five years later. This year a mezzanine floor has been installed there to give extra office space and a small showroom.

Justfloors now employs eight full time fitters and has a fleet of seven vehicles. When Alan King retired, Joanne took over as business manager.

'The business went reasonably well from the beginning,' says Julian. 'I had contacts and a good relationship with suppliers from my years with Butler Cox, and we gained more contacts through the large construction company where Joanne worked.'

'In 1998 we applied for registration with the British Standards Institute. Gaining the

BSI Kitemark gave our business a boost, and maintaining it enables us to keep our contracts with the NHS, because the quality of our work is assured.'

In fact, 60-70% of the company's business is healthcare orientated, either through the NHS or private providers of care homes.

Additionally, Justfloors is an approved contractor for Hampshire County Council, other local authorities and the police. Only 5% of turnover is for domestic work.

The company offers carpets, vinyls, entrance matting, linoleum, safety flooring and staircase installations from a wide range of manufacturers, plus surface and subfloor investigation and preparation.

Its website gives an A-Z index of the type of locations where its products can be installed, including specialised areas such as wet rooms and X-ray departments. It has recently begun fitting ceilings as well as part of these specialist installations.

Initially the company took on work in any location, but for the last seven years it has confined itself to an area bounded by Orpington in the southeast, the south coast and

north as far as Newbury.

'Concentrating on a smaller area has had a positive effect on our business,' says Julian, 'partly due to reduced costs, and partly because we have become better known.'

'All employees wear Justfloor branded clothing and this, together with our liveried van fleet, raises our profile.'

'Niche marketing works well for our company and so now we are specifically targeting scientific clean rooms and wet rooms.'

Most work comes through recommendation, but the company does sometimes advertise in journals aimed at particular markets.

Justfloors joined the CFA as soon as it could. 'I had used its services in the past, and knew we could get good advice from the association should we need it,' says Julian.

Generally satisfied with the flooring industry, the one thing which annoys Julian is when a potential customer asks for both a

cheap job and the best quality. 'We always give good value, but we won't lower our standards to do cheap work,' says Julian. He is, however, full of praise for wholesalers. 'We buy direct sometimes, but we are supported by four distributors, and we value their service to us.'

To ensure standards are maintained Justfloors carries out in-house training whenever possible.

'Everyone can always learn something as we all have weaknesses,' says Julian, 'so we have a small training room where the experienced fitters can pass on their knowledge.'

Julian occasionally lays floors to keep his hand in, but when he is not working he enjoys playing the guitar with his son, and sailing with his father-in-law.

Although Alan King is retired, the advice he is able to give is greatly appreciated. 'We use him as a sounding board, because he can give us a different perspective. He still has his finger on the pulse of the industry!'

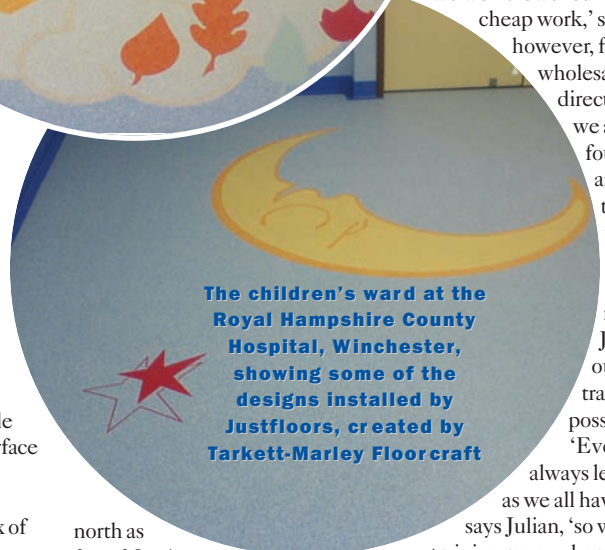
'We have all discussed the current economic crisis and understand we need to be flexible to ride out the recession.'

We review our business every two months, and we know we will make the best of whatever comes our way,' says Julian. 'Undoubtedly there are difficult times ahead, but we are ready.'

CFJ

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The children's ward at the Royal Hampshire County Hospital, Winchester, showing some of the designs installed by Justfloors, created by Tarkett-Marley Floorcraft



One of the corridors at Royal Hampshire County Hospital. Justfloors was required to introduce lines in different colours to demark clinical areas as part of their drive to eradicate bugs