



Mary Murrell

meets

John Harris



On being

'We don't do doom and gloom here,' says John Harris, md of UK Flooring. Mary Murrell reports:

proactive

AS 2009 dawned Bristol-based UK Flooring was still enjoying a good amount of work, according to the md, John Harris. The reason, he says, is: 'We are very proactive in promoting our company!'

UK Flooring is part of a group of three family companies all with John Harris as md. The other two firms are Pubs N Clubs and Harris Bros, a shopfitting division, which makes bar and student furniture.

Each company operates separately but joint turnover exceeded £11m last year. All work out of a 20,000sq ft unit including offices, showroom, storage and the furniture factory.

Having started in the industry at Harris Bros, John branched out on his own aged just 20, setting up UK Flooring in 1990.

'Our first job was for six little kitchens for Pearce Construction. It was worth £2,000, but it was a start.

'We turned over £100,000 the first year,' says John, 'but I lost £20,000, learning the hard way how important it is to employ really good fitters!

'It's been a struggle at times, but our company has built some good relationships over the years which have contributed to our success. We now own our own premises, having invested £1m in this building.'

UK Flooring supplies and fits carpet, vinyl, resin and wood flooring as well as wall cladding for main contractors and local authorities for locations including casinos, cruise liners, golf clubs, factories, hospitals, hotels, nursing homes, restaurants, schools, public houses, social clubs and universities.



The company specialises in sports floors from small gyms to large multi-use centres, wet and clean rooms and offers a service for sanding and sealing existing timbers. It works closely with main contractors ISG Pearce, Laing O' Rourke and Cowlin and others listed on its website.

The UK Flooring website also lists major suppliers, value of completed projects and photographs to illustrate the standard of work achieved.

Recent projects include Colston Hall, Bristol, theatre venue; Swansea Leisure Centre to be used for the Olympics (£400,000); Southmead Hospital (£350,000); Marlborough School (£400,000); two new buildings at Rolls Royce, Bristol; and Virgin Active Health Club, London.

One major contract with a student accommodation group needed 35,000sq m of floorcoverings uplifted and replaced, in seven weeks across locations in Leeds, London, Manchester and Sheffield.

'We used 50 fitters who also had to move the furniture out of the rooms and put it back,' says John.

Three hospitals are among new projects included in £2m work so far secured for 2009. 'We also work for

the MoD, including recent contracts for the Commando Training Centre, Lymington, a large super diner at Battlesbury Barracks, and civilian offices at Tidworth Barrack.'

Most work is by repeat business, recommendation or through the website. 'We tender for about 100 jobs a week with a high success rate,' says John. 'We have all the latest technology to enable us to give a very prompt turnaround on quotes.'

Despite having a general manager, John oversees the whole business. He has 40 fully employed fitters who are all CSCS certified.

'We only take on experienced guys whose standard of work is proven, but we have an extensive training programme for younger people who seek a career in the industry.'

'We offer a good service – quality products, H&S site management including COSHH regulations and method statements, and give operational manuals with technical literature and maintenance procedures.'

'We are ISO 9001 registered and are in the process of obtaining ISO 14001 for the environment.'

'This means we have a reputation

ABOVE LEFT: A major project at Frome Hospital, working with Laing O'Rourke, where UK Flooring laid Forbo linoleum
ABOVE: Carpet from ege fitted at Richmond Care Village
LEFT: Another project with Laing O'Rourke, this time on Swansea Leisure Centre, where Gerflor Taraflex Combi-Sport vinyl flooring was installed

to maintain, and we won't carry out a job unless we have fitters with the skills to do it properly.'

UK Flooring has been a CFA member for many years and appreciates the services offered by the association, 'although we are able to resolve most problems ourselves.'

John believes that UK Flooring is competitive and gives good quality work. 'We have not yet been affected by the recession, but as it deepens more contractors will be trying to buy work with sub-standard labour.'

'We are often asked to put right a botched job, and such problems might increase. I hope buyers will look at a contractor's work record rather than just the price.'

'Luckily, most of the companies we work with are professional, and won't take a chance on poor workmanship.'

Another sore point for John is retentions. 'I can understand money held back until a job is successfully completed, but it is simply unjust to continue to refuse to pay due to a dispute with another contractor on the same project.'

'We have good credit control and insure all our contracts. We know we will overcome any difficulties that may come our way. UK Flooring plans to be in this game for a long time to come!' **CFJ**

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