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Inner space



PATRICK McDONNELL speaks to Andy Powell of fast-track cinema fit-out specialists Spacetailors

Cheltenham-based Spacetailors is a provider of a fast-track fit-out service for concession areas in four key markets: leisure and fitness; retail; hotels and hospitality, and the corporate sector.

The company started in 1963 as Gwyn Powell & Son working in the private refurbishment sector. In 1980, Gwyn Powell's son Andy joined the business and the company began focussing on offering a complete fit out service to its clients. Andy Powell became managing director in 1997, building on the success of his father. In 2006 the business re-branded as Spacetailors.

With the revival in cinema exhibition from the mid-1980s onwards, Spacetailors began working in this sector to provide a one-stop fit-out service for new cinema builds and the refurbishment of older venues. The company's current cinema clients include the Odeon, Reel and Showcase cinema circuits.

Spacetailors most recent project was Reel Cinema's new four-screen Andover venue in Hampshire, which opened this month.

"In addition, we are upgrading facilities at a number of Odeon sites, including the circuit's London flagship Odeon Leicester Square venue. The fit-outs includes implementing Disability Discrimination Act regulated fixtures to ensure greater accessibility," Powell says.

Spacetailors is also about to start work on an IMAX venue for Odeon at Epsom, while another in Odeon Uxbridge is scheduled to start later in the year.

Cinema Business talked to Andy Powell on the site of the Reel Cinema in Andover about the outfitting of concessions areas, a vitally important financial asset for today's cinemas.

Powell believes that the front-of-house experience is the shop window of the cinema experience.

"Each project is a one-off, but as we work regularly with our clients we like to think that we understand and meet or hopefully exceed their expectations," Powell says. "Some of these projects are tendered, others are negotiated. The tendering process has become somewhat more formalised, but that is to be expected in what is a maturing market. Also clients have slightly different requirements as to what works for them."

"Planning is critical in any fit out, be it either new-build or in updating, and we work closely with architects and designers from the word go in order to ensure every aspect of the build is covered. Everything from what size the cut outs need to be for the popcorn machines to where is the python of tubing for the post-mix drinks dispensing going to run, to where are the tills going to sit. All these are factors that need to be considered and are crucial to the ultimate design."

In the cinema sector, Spacetailors often works with architect NBDA, a specialist in the design of cinemas. Powell says that clients and designers such as NBDA place a lot of importance on the materials used for the build, Powell adds. "Obviously there is an awful lot of plasterboard and sound insulation. Sometimes structural steelwork intervenes, depending on the design. Plus there is usually a great deal of timber and plywood for raised floor areas."

"Then there is the finish to consider which is often budget led. For instance does the design utilise DuPont's Corian solid surface tops or does the client go the laminate finish route."

It is only when all the many variables are decided upon and the drawings signed off that the Spacetailors crew are called in, he says. "Our company has a workforce numbering 50. The frontline troops consist of our joiners, carpenters, ceramic tilers, plasterers, painters, ceiling fixers, plumbers and labourers," Powell says. Spacetailors also works with the UK's leading contractors for its mechanical, electrical, flooring and seating needs, adds Powell.

Counters and joinery for the build are purpose-built in Spacetailors workshops, as are some of the steelwork components, which are then assembled on site. This ensures a good quality build and also ensures the minimum time on site, says Powell.

As to the build time for each project, this varies, depending on the specific demands of the site in question, Powell says. "Reel Cinemas seven-screen Hull venue was particularly challenging for us, that build took 15 weeks. The multi-screen venue was situated on the third floor of the city's St Stephens shopping centre. All the materials used had to be forklifted in. This was complicated by the fact that a new bus station was opened in the shopping centre and therefore the road could not be used during the day," Powell observes.

As to the future, Powell says: "We intend to expand by increasing our market share, not only in the cinema sector but in the general leisure industry. We are building the Spacetailors brand so that more and more clients put us onto their tender list." ■

Planning is critical in any fit-out and we work closely with architects and designers from the word go

ANDY POWELL



It starts like this...



leave it...



then these guys...



...looking like this