

Sky leads on design to create prime position

With the launch this month of a brand new range of British designed and manufactured seating, the next step for Sky Creations is to build a network of dealers looking for a unique selling point. In an exclusive interview with Interior Channels MD John Hoath reveals why he wants dealers to take up the Lotus position

Although Sky Creations Ltd has only been in business for two years, early successes accelerated the plans to move into new purpose-built headquarters in Thame, Oxfordshire. The new premises provide the space not only for offices and a loft-style design studio cum showroom, but for manufacturing and warehousing facilities. Managing director, John Hoath, said: "We are serious players. Our investment partners are in it for the long-term. We all love this industry and believe that, by thinking outside the box, we can really make a difference". Not just brave words, as we discovered.

"I believe our initial success was the result of putting the investment in place that allowed us to create a brand new



John Hoath,
managing
director,

range of design-led products and market them. In the first six months, we spent £20,000 promoting the company in the design magazines and it had the desired result. It is now the right time to invest in bringing our sales, admin and manufacturing under one roof. Our new factory gives us ample room for growth and I hope it proves to our customers our desire to make a major impact in the contract and soft seating marketplace".

Most importantly, "We are committed to working with British designers - Ian Marchant and David Carroll - to bring a fresh approach. We now have a targeted portfolio that reflects the best in British design, com-

plemented by a core range of modern and contemporary products, enabling us to meet the full requirements of any installation". The range includes chairs for offices and break-out areas, receptions, meeting and conference rooms. "We also have an exciting forward product development programme that will ensure a continuous flow of new products to our customers".

Ready to build a dedicated dealer network

With the new showroom open; a brand new range of 14 chairs launched this month; a product marketing and promotions programme ready to roll out and generate leads for dealers; and a comprehensive dealer service and support package in place, John Hoath and his management team are ready to build a dedicated dealer network. "We have 300 dealers on our books, but currently only 10-12 who we are actively engaged with.

"Our plan is to build a network of 50-100 committed design-led dealers looking for a front-line supplier who knows what they want in



John Hoath, in the new Sky Creations showroom

New fabrics for Aurora tub chairs



Lyra for receptions

terms of product, service and support and is ready to provide it. One thing they can be sure of is that we won't be flooding the market with our new products; unlike some of the larger manufacturers who sell to all and sundry, only to fail them all when it comes to service levels. If we maintain a base of no more than 100 dealers, we will be able to meet our service commitment. When we say we will deliver in four weeks, it will be four weeks".

Space planning service for dealers

Thanks to a heavy investment in computer aided design and manufacturing technology (CAD-CAM), space planning is one important service that Sky Creation offers its dealers, along with bespoke manufacturing. Managing that service as part of his responsibility will be new recruit, design manager Gareth Smith.

Asked to explain what a bespoke design service means in practice, John Hoath told us: "Most manufacturers would throw up their hands in horror at the very mention of the word bespoke. We won't. Take our tub chairs as an example. Pisces is a traditional design, with arms and a metal or wood front. But our new Aurora tub chair is made from four separate components – seat box, two arms and a back. If someone wants the back upholstered in a different fabric from the arms, we can do that. If they want the shape of the seat back changed, we can do that, too. You cannot do that with a traditional chair. So we are thinking outside the box a little bit in order to offer our dealers and their customers something unique".

A key element of the support is Sky leasing, a service provided in association with Plus Finance. In addition to assisting our dealers generate sales by supplying sales aids and sales arguments, leasing can help them overcome the 'can't afford it' and 'too expensive' sales objections, which tend to crop up when budgets are tight and projects liable to be downsized or downgraded. "It is a tool that gives our dealers more chances to close a sale or even increase the sale value by offering products that the customer could not otherwise afford".

Investment in website and web search

Yet another aspect of the support package is the investment in an optimised website and search engine marketing tool. "It means that customers searching the web for specific product lines in our portfolio



New Corvus modular seating

will see our company appearing on the first results page. Interior Channels tested it by searching Google for ProBax, a new seating technology being introduced and, lo and behold, Sky Creations was listed third behind Lotus, the first company ever to use the technology, and Nubax, the manufacturers.

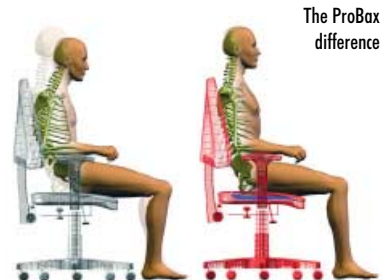
"We are very excited about ProBax, which is a new seating technology we are bringing to the contract market. When Lotus decided after extensive testing to use it in the Elise, it was voted the most comfortable car in the world". It could well achieve the same status in the world of office seating. Invented by

Texan-born Donna Jackson and made by NuBax, it is essentially a seat pad constructed from different grades of foam made to fit the seat to ensure the user is fully supported in an ergonomic position naturally, without having to use numerous levers or pushbutton mechanisms to make the necessary adjustments.

"The great thing is it works on any seating surface because it is essentially just a pad; albeit it a very clever one. You can incorporate it in any chair you want. We have launched a conference chair called Stella Square which incorporates ProBax and is available at £240 full retail. A top of the range ergonomic task chair would normally cost in the region of £400-500 per chair; but because ProBax can be fitted even to low cost chairs, it allows people who do the real work to be given an ergonomic chair, not just the senior managers who attend meetings". No wonder marketing manager Gary Martin looked as excited about the prospects as John Hoath. Having something really new and different to promote is every marketing man's dream. ■



Sky Studio seating



The ProBax difference