

MEDIA COVERAGE

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PROJECT: IM GROUP (BIRMINGHAM)

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INTERIORS CASE STUDY

IM ready

Freddie Steele visits IM Group's new offices and finds an oasis of peace and a great place to do business



Making your way through the rural idyll of Coleshill in Warwickshire to the new office building of IM Group, you'd be forgiven for thinking you were approaching a country house hotel for a sedate weekend, rather than a meeting at a business HQ.

But at the end of the drive the modern office building is there all right, all brushed steel, tinted glass, manicured lawns and topiaried trees and shrubbery. Step outside the acoustically sealed bubble of your car and the distant rumble of traffic noise reminds you of exactly where you are: in the middle of a bullet-shaped island of countryside formed by the sweep of the M42 and M6 motorways.

Which is music to the ears of IM Group, one of the UK's largest importers and distributors of vehicles, selling Daihatsu, Subaru and Isuzu cars and commercial

vehicles through a national network of dealers. The new 3,700 sq m, two-storey office building is home to staff working for those three franchises, along with a number of support personnel who have made the move from the company's original premises in West Bromwich.

The first question to ask was why the move? 'There was a lot going for the firm where we were in West Bromwich. We had high staff retention, indicating that people were happy, and the business was thriving. But we also recognised the need for change,' explains Andrew Edmiston IM Group's MD.

'About five years ago, the market began to change rapidly. The industry was under pressure to reduce prices, the use of the internet was changing our relationship with customers, there was a world oversupply

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Far left: The view from reception is uninterrupted
 Top left: The atrium resembles a car showroom

Top right: Open-plan spaces are designed to encourage communication

Bottom left and right: The top floor includes the boardroom suite, meeting rooms and room for expansion

ars, consumers had greater market ywledge and we were facing issues with rency fluctuations. Added to that, we are always keen to ensure t our dealers use their premises to project right image. That all meant we had to look what we did as a business, which inevitably o meant looking at our offices. It would e been no good us talking about the image he people we work with if we weren't pared to go down the same road ourselves. after looking at what we needed we came with three watchwords for the new lding: agility, inventiveness and openness.' his was the brief delivered to Claremont up Interiors, which provided design and ut for the building, as well as audio-visual tems through Viewpoint, its specialist AV 1. Ann Clarke of Claremont believes the

challenges laid down to the developer were clear. 'It's always good to have a clear brief,' she says. 'Everybody knows what to expect, and it helps to shorten the project times and reduce the scope for misunderstanding.'

OPEN PLANNING
 One of the most notable things about the company's new office building is its openness. The view from the reception through the large central atrium to the glazed rear of the building is uninterrupted, flooding the entire interior with light while also reflecting the firm's link to car dealerships. In short, it looks a bit like a car showroom. This impression is reinforced by the Subaru Tribeca that is mounted on a point-of-sale display in the middle of the floor.

The space is also clearly focused on getting

Project list

- Architect – Abacus
- Interior design and fit-out – Claremont
- Group Interiors
- Audio-visual – Viewpoint
- Graphics and signage – Artworks Solutions
- Carpet – Milliken
- Desking and storage, glazed partitions and storewall – K @ N
- Task seating – Orangebox
- Director offices – Bene
- Director seating – Interstuhl
- Boardroom suite – Gordon Russell
- Boardroom and meeting room seating – Vitra
- Informal seating – Vitra, Orangebox
- Cafe chairs/tables – Vitra/Orangebox
- Catering – Catering Partnership

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lhway links the upper over the cafe area

ple together. Dotted around behind the site-desked reception area to its fore is a nber of Coconut chairs. Off this central i is a large, theatre-style auditorium, which be opened up to create a larger space ed to the main atrium. Running above central area is a walkway linking the two es of the upper floor. The main open-plan is run around the perimeter of the interior, dly sectioned off in four areas, one for 1 franchise and another for support staff. ach area is branded according to its s to the company's external partners, it down to the storage units, which have ially made coloured glass tops to reflect brand identity.

he top floor includes the boardroom, ating rooms, director's suite and a certain unit of space for expansion. Each area is ported by wall-mounted monitors, linked e firm's intranet to help keep everybody e building informed of market elopments and company information. he space is there primarily as a platform 'ommunication,' explains Edmiston. rinally, this means a focus on meeting ns, supported by exceptional AV systems spaces for casual meetings and more nal interdisciplinary teamworking.

Externally we need to ensure that we project the right image to clients as well as offering a space that they can use themselves, and somewhere they can feel at home.

'What is important for us as a business is that we have a building that expresses our business goals. We are often up against major corporations in the marketplace, so we have to play to our strengths. That means being flexible and agile as a business, developing ideas quickly and, frankly, also taking a few well-judged risks.

'We think we have the premises now that will not only help us to achieve that but that will help the people who work here to think in those terms too.'

The building certainly reflects this focus on people. As well as the break-out space there is a bistro restaurant looking out over the grounds, providing a clear view of the curiously box-shaped trees at the rear. Catering is provided throughout the day, including a breakfast service and enabling staff to pre-order food from their desks. 'Pit-stop' facilities for making drinks and snacks are hidden away in wall storage units next to each of the open plan office areas.

But it is perhaps in the area of technology that the firm has achieved the most innovation. 'We've made a great deal of investment in IT as part of the move,' says Edmiston. 'This has meant looking at the IT infrastructure, but it has also been about the relationship between people and technology. So we have used radio frequency identification (RFID) tags in identity cards as a way of introducing more flexible working. Instead of staff starting work at 8.30am, they now have a degree of flexibility to work around core hours, because the building knows when they're in.

'Having that flexibility can be invaluable when you work in a place where the traffic can be a problem at certain times.'

And as you make your way out of IM Group's new offices, through the fields and back on to the tarmac that is most people's usual experience of this part of the West Midlands, you can't help but admire the way that a car firm has managed to create this oasis of rural calm and light, bordered as it is on all sides by some of the busiest roads in Europe **fmx**

Further information
www.claremontgi.com
www.imgroup.co.uk

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