

MEDIA COVERAGE

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PROJECT: PACE MICRO TECHNOLOGY (BRADFORD)

CASE STUDY

Pace of change

George Bailey reports on how Pace Micro Technology has transformed a listed industrial mill into a modern, people-friendly HQ



You wouldn't necessarily expect to find one of the UK's foremost technology companies at home in a World Heritage Site, let alone in the same building as a permanent David Hockney exhibit. But then, working in a converted mill in Saltaire beats life as a wage slave in a speculative block on a technology park in Swindon any day.

And there is something rather sedate about the former industrial village of Saltaire in Yorkshire. Founded by Victorian mill owner and philanthropist Sir Titus Salt as a better place to live for his mill workers during the 19th century, it is now a clearly thriving and well-heeled community, close to but separate from its neighbour Bradford. It claims David Hockney as one of its most famous sons and boasts close proximity to Brontë country. Its distinctive architecture forms the link to its

past, but roots it in place as well as time. Looking around, you really couldn't be anywhere else in the world but Yorkshire.

Its architectural treasures encouraged UNESCO to name it as a World Heritage Site in 2001. Prominent among its many distinctive edifices is Salts Mill, which was the world's largest industrial building when it was built in 1853 and is still imposing today. The vast site is now home to a permanent exhibition of David Hockney's works, along with a number of other galleries, shops, bars and restaurants.

Nothing too surprising there, then. Unless you count the fact that Salts Mill also happens to be home to one of the world's leading technology companies. Pace Micro Technology supplies digital technology including set-top boxes to the pay TV market across the world. Going by its financial results, the company is

thriving in a healthy market. According to its last annual report, its turnover in 2007 had doubled to some £386m, driven by major new contracts in the world's largest market, the US.

But just as important to the company as financial success is speed. The company needs to keep ahead in a market that relies on innovation and quality. Pace by name, pace by nature. And being a technology company, the need for speed is evident in the spaces it creates for itself.

CULTURE-DRIVEN CHANGE

'What we have created here comes from the top,' says group facilities manager Graham Barker. 'We've been on site for 15 years now, but the recent redevelopment of the building has been closely tied with developments in the business strategy, about making things

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From left: The spacious canteen, stylish reception and games room for rest and relaxation



happen more quickly and better and of putting over the right image. And it's a two-way thing. Changes in culture are driven by the development of the facilities as well.'

One of the key tenets was that the workplace had to encourage interaction between people. 'What is particularly important was for the building to bring people into contact who may not normally spend a lot of time together,' says Barker. 'To do that you have to encourage them to move through the building, to bump into people they wouldn't normally meet and get away from their normal places of work. And to achieve that they have to be encouraged to use that space at times other than normal break times and lunch, so it becomes an HR as well as a design issue.'

Central to this thinking is a canteen for up to 250 people, which also includes a games

room and a range of meeting rooms and client suites which can accommodate up to 150 more. The design and construction of the new development was down to Claremont Group Interiors. 'When you look at a project as unique as this, you have to ask fundamental questions,' says Claire Holdcroft of Claremont. 'You have a number of restrictions on what you do because of the nature of the building. So, what you can do is either make the best of things or you can turn those restrictions into strengths and create something else.'

She continues, 'Geographically, the canteen – a former manufacturing area – is located at the heart of the building. So you make it a focal point to encourage people to use it instinctively. The brief was always to look at getting people to work better and enjoy their work more. Getting them to take a break and

meet up is key to that idea.'

In using these principles to develop its workplace at Salts Mill, Pace has pulled off something remarkable. It has managed not only to maintain the feel of its grade II listed home, but enhance it and convey an image of modernity based on these unmistakably contemporary management ideals of interaction, knowledge sharing, relaxation and empowerment.

Graham Barker believes that they have been more than sympathetic to the building. 'We haven't changed the structure at all,' he says. 'In fact in many areas we've rediscovered it. A good example is the way we've exposed elements such as columns and ceiling features that were originally covered up. We're proud of the building we occupy, and it's great to stay true to the principles of the business

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while also maintaining the integrity of the architecture. There have been challenges, of course. This is not your normal office environment so there have been issues about the concealment and management of infrastructure, for example.

'But that has proved manageable through good design and the use of existing features of the building, such as its cellars.'

Barker also believes that the redevelopment has stayed true to the firm's green principles. 'We had clearly defined objectives with regard to this. The change was a chance to re-evaluate our heating and ventilation systems and also address issues of lighting. This has been partly a design issue with the use of natural light, finishes and the way we specify interior architecture. Partly it's a technical issue relating to things like the installation of lux and movement sensors. What we have achieved is a significant reduction in our environmental footprint, which we've included in the company's reports.'

Image is clearly important for the firm, entirely understandable given the business in which it works and its international clientele. Claremont was also charged, along with its specialist AV sister company Viewpoint, with the development of client suites at the front of the building. 'It was important that the building was just as accessible for visitors as it is for the engineers and admin staff who work there,' explains Claire Holdcroft. 'So as well as incorporating ideas of the Pace corporate ID into the public areas of the building, it was important to open them up technologically and physically to people who visit the site.'

One of the most intriguing elements of this is the presentation area behind the main reception. Rather than a showroom for various product ranges, Claremont and Pace have created a living space with a bedroom, kitchen and lounge to show how the products function in real life. 'It's great because it's real,' explains Graham Barker. 'It's better to show than to tell. We can update the area with new technology as it becomes available, and so can also demonstrate the latest thinking on systems such as how they can work across multiple rooms. It brings it all home' **fmX**

Light adds an airy feel, original ceiling features link with the past

Further information
 Pace Micro Technology www.pacemicro.com
 Salts Mill www.saltsmill.org.uk
Design and build
 Claremont Group Interiors
www.claremontgi.com
Audio-visual
 Viewpoint www.viewpoint.com
Flooring
 Milliken Carpet www.milliken地毯.europa.com
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Soft seating
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Other suppliers
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