

The South's



Most Ambitious Companies

SCREEN SOLUTIONS

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FOREWORD

Which are the most ambitious companies in the region, those which have the most potential?

Research commissioned by law firm Rawlison Butler reveals that most are names which simply don't tally with those which appear regularly in the media as exemplars, because they tend not to be networkers or publicity hunters.

The research programme to identify the companies took as its criteria:

- * A desire to build a business of some significance, to be a leader rather than a follower.
- * An ability to think (and act) strategically as well as operationally and opportunistically.
- * A willingness to build a management team and to be open to new ideas and advice.
- * Either an ability to re-write time-honoured modus operandi, or a skilful perpetuator and up-dater of traditional beliefs to achieve/sustain competitive advantage.
- * An organisation which is determined to continually develop new standards in terms of process, practice, and delivery.
- * Demonstration of a will to succeed despite obstacles.

This paper considers the attributes of one of the researched companies.

SCREEN SOLUTIONS

To everyone else, it sounds like an oxymoron. But as far as Dan Valovin, managing director of Screen Solutions is concerned, bespoke furniture is simply standard.

The business started twenty years ago when the spectrum of office furniture was similar to the approach that Henry Ford had to colour choices.

“It was this size with this feature,” says Valovin. “But we turn unique into standard. We can offer 12.58 width or 12.37 and cut any fabric to any size, still with the lead times that meets customers’ requirements.”

Screen Solutions are in the curious position of having their customers as their biggest competitors. Valovin unravels that one with a simple explanation: “Lots of people sit at branded desks, on branded chairs, using branded screens. We sell to different brands and they brand wrap. That works for us because they’re very well known and have an end user base.

“With the birth of open plan, architects would design floors which look great, but perform badly,” muses Valovin. “When people are trying to concentrate and colleagues are speaking loudly, there’s noise everywhere and that’s where we come in with acoustic treatments built into the screen.”

“People working in an office building will generate sound, so it has to be managed,” explains Valovin. “One major firm of accountants has a ten-storey building in London with floors of glass and metal screens, which reflect the sound; and they have a thin carpet. So all ten storeys have lots of reverb and no sound blocking.

“We’ve put in cladding in the form of wall art with a built-in sound masking system, which is an engineered noise, similar to white noise. It runs in the background and provides a level of background sound to suppress the sound of the staff. It’s like waves at the seaside and it covers conversation with a peaceful sound. It absorbs 90% of sound and can be designed as a feature. If you have a high quality image, it can be printed into the fabric.

“We did a job in Brighton for a company

which creates video games and they wanted Japanese-style cartoons printed on the screens. And if a customer needs a wider aperture to accept a monitor arm or a cabinet, we’ll say, ‘where do you want it, how many, what width and which colours!’

“We go into a building and take thousands of acoustic tests to measure the acoustic performance when the floor is empty and then again with staff. For instance, an accounts team is quieter than sales staff, so we tune the solution to a level of privacy required by each individual area. Each can be tuned to emit a particular type of noise.”

It was eight years ago that Screen Solutions decided to launch the world’s first fully recyclable range of office screens (the fabric can be easily pulled off the frame for example). You’d expect the product to be premium price - which, to be fair, is what Screen Solutions thought would be the case - but after costing it, they found that the Element range could be introduced as the lowest price point in the portfolio.

How did that happen? Because the product itself is made up largely of recycled materials, it turned out to be lighter in weight, which means it doesn’t need such highly engineered brackets for example, and as a consequence, it can be fitted by one installer instead of two.

Now Screen Solutions are diversifying. The business was formed on selling office screens and has now mutated into pods with lids and integrated lighting, which fit into open-plan office layouts, sold for example to law firms and financial institutions which want to lose the dated idea of partitions and go open plan while maintaining some privacy.

“Our pods have been installed at Hastings College for meetings with students and tutors,” explains Valovin. The pods can be square, rectangular, or round with integrated ventilation or air management filter systems which change the air every fifteen minutes. We put four huge pods into the main offices of Staples, the office supplies company. There could be pods in motorway service stations where people can hold their meetings, then

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go their separate ways.”

In their twenty years, Screen Solutions have become Europe's largest office screen manufacturer in size and output. It sells predominantly into the Middle East and Russia - “places who like Western furniture” - as well as the Benelux countries.

Growth is likely to come from their acoustically aware products and export rather than bolting on a business or two. “Five years ago we looked at acquiring a competitor, but the growth story needs to be there for it to really work,” explains Valovin.

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Researched and published by
DECISION magazine
www.decisionmagazine.co.uk