

News release from Leeds Manufacturing
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Expanding Signs Of The Times

A leading UK signs company that has grown consistently in its 17-year history to top £12m annual sales is extending its Leeds premises to handle bigger projects, increase warehousing and bring metalworking production in-house. The new 2,000 sq ft extension will enable Omega Signs to increase lean manufacturing processes, staging additional staff training and improved materials recycling facilities.

From modest origins, the company now employs 70 people at its modern Cross Green factory and handles signage for major UK and international brands. A far cry from the day current chairman Michael Chapman and manufacturing director Tony Timmermans left Oldham Signs (then part of the Tetley brewing empire) to set up business in a small office with no production facilities.

Early contracts were completed by sub-contracting production, a strategy that still plays a part in major installations, but Omega's multi-skilled in-house workforce now embraces techniques ranging from traditional gold leaf lettering to three dimensional computer design and implementation. It's a mix that brings major branding projects for customers ranging

from independent brewers to major banks, leading supermarkets and even premier division soccer clubs.

According to managing director Duncan Chapman Omega is the fifth biggest UK sign company – depending which criteria is applied – and including road sign producers. “We’re happy with this position and our reputation as the best and most profitable,” he says.

Cllr Andrew Carter, leader of Leeds City Council said: "The success of Omega signs is testimony to the ability of Leeds manufacturing companies to innovate and adapt to changing market conditions. The combination of product innovation and a lean manufacturing operation has won them a market leading position within the UK sign industry."

A tour of the impressive Cross Green facility takes in traditional signage for the refurbished shop at London’s last surviving independent brewery, Fuller’s in Chiswick; and 3D modelling for massive external signs for supermarket giant ASDA and Chrysler Jeep. Retailing is an important area for Omega – a £1.1m project for internal signage in Waitrose stores was completed in just three months, including video filming of half the stores.

The firm’s reputation for innovation has come to the fore with a major contract for HSBC Express Banking. “By introducing a process for the production of coloured acrylics, we’ve cut out the need to paint the lettering, saving on costs, while improving quality,” says Tony Timmermans.

Innovation is also playing a role in signage lighting, where LED installations are increasingly being used. “LED presents a range of installation options and full-life sustainability with lower maintenance and fuel consumption costs for the customer, so we’re using it more and more,” says Timmermans.

He admits to keeping a weather eye open for televised home games for Aston Villa, where Omega recently completed a total branding package for the entire ground and its widely varying buildings. “It was a challenging, but fascinating project – a modern premier division ground is now akin to a village, requiring corporate identity and informative signage.”

Shelters Go Down A Storm

Omega management studied the ban on pub smoking in Scotland at first hand, working alongside Courage Scotland to provide basic smoking shelters. “We had a gut feel this would present a serious business opportunity when the ban extended to England,” says Duncan Chapman.

“We commissioned in-depth research that backed our judgement and quickly moved from the manufacture and installation of rudimentary shelters to sophisticated al fresco units. Our Infresco division is now supplying, top of the range sheltered outdoor drinking and eating areas, not only to pubs, but also to upmarket hotels and restaurants. We found the quality research invaluable and now use it regularly in order to gauge future development and product lifespan.”

Ends

Photography: Omega Signs' Tony Timmermans on the shop floor with newly completed signs.