





Invisible Touch

Some of the World's largest organisations are firms most of us have never even heard of. Freddie Steele visits the new London headquarters of one of them - Acxiom.

The first recognised economist, Adam Smith, once famously defined the free market and its creation of wealth as 'the invisible hand that guides the economy'. It was the combined actions of individuals in the pursuit of their own goals that generated the forces to change the world. He may have identified the processes but even he may have been astonished at just how unseen those forces have become in the recent past.

That past is a foreign country. They did things differently there. The world's major corporations had names like Ford, Heinz and IBM and did us all the favour of sticking their names all over the things we drove, ate and used at work. Now some of the world's largest and most important companies have names we don't instantly recognise. At least not until they come to the attention of *Mix*.

One of the most influential companies in the world today is Acxiom. Founded in Arkansas in 1969 at the advent of the digital age, the company is now active around the globe, supplying information on consumers and related services including analytics and consultancy to help its clients carry out their



▶▶ direct marketing campaigns via direct-mail, email, advertising and social media.

Acxiom's tale can best be told in numbers. Each month it carries out 10,000 distinct campaigns and three million surveys, contacts 375 million people, delivers 700 million emails, updates 10 billion data records and carries out 125,000 background checks. Around 17% of all the mail carried in the USA is pre-processed by Acxiom. In short, it's a company of our times; unacknowledged by most of us but whose activities are woven into our daily lives.

Even a company so closely linked to the virtual world needs somewhere in the physical world to call home. Acxiom has recently moved to new UK headquarters in Southwark. The man who oversaw the move is Head of Property and Facilities for Europe, Middle East and Africa, Mark Mercer. 'I was brought in as part of a new management team two years ago to address several strategic issues to do with the way property was working,' he says. 'In London there were several obvious challenges, not least consolidating a workforce that was split between two buildings into one new office. There was a clear business case for this, both in terms of communication and identity and the opportunity to save significant costs as well as improving our environmental impact.'

Home is now 17 Hatfields, a short walk from Blackfriars Road on the south side of the Thames. The building is listed and a converted warehouse dating from the early years of the 20th century. Acxiom now occupies the bottom four of its five floors and sublets the top floor. The top floor has more natural light and better views but Acxiom felt unable to occupy it for security reasons. 'Obviously we have to maintain complete security with regard to the information we hold,' explains Mark. 'That means maintaining a contained physical location as well as total digital control. Having somebody sat in the middle floor of our offices is not an option.'

The design and fit-out of the building has been carried out by Claremont Group Interiors who have maintained many of the industrial features of the building and sympathetically applied contemporary workplace design principles throughout the building. 'It was important that we created something that was cost-effective, paid due respect to the building itself, portrayed the right image of the business for everybody and helped us to communicate more effectively internally,' explains Mark. 'I think ▶▶▶▶



▶▶▶▶ that we have managed to strike exactly the right balance between each of those objectives.’

A walk through the building always reveals a great deal about the dynamics of an organisation and Acxiom is no

exception. There is a different atmosphere in each of the floors even though the design of each is ostensibly identical, with each defined by the understated intelligence of Staverton ZD desks and Humanscale Liberty task chairs, with only subtle

differences in the building’s structure and colour schemes physically defining the different floors. This is the all important ‘feel’ of the different teams within the building and it’s not just down to the sound they generate, which is always noticeably higher on commercial floors.

The notion that the services should remain exposed on the ceiling to retain the original form and character of the building had its own challenges, not least in how to carry services around the ceiling in a sympathetic and cost-effective way. The solution was a system of co-ordinated coloured metal containment trays carrying the services across the ceiling, to conceal the wiring and pipe work. It is a remarkably simple and effective solution in the context of this building.

Each floor also incorporates collaborative spaces, including cellular offices with clever bespoke workstations from Staverton and branded whiteboards from Artworks Solutions, which mean that they can double





up as both meeting rooms and quiet offices. Service areas for drinks and food preparation and breakout spaces reflect the aims of the new building in encouraging informal collaboration between colleagues.

The focus on collaboration is also particularly evident in the basement level, which contains a perimeter of partitioned meeting rooms, fully equipped with AV systems from Viewpoint and a cluster of different social and informal meeting spaces incorporating a range of soft seating and cafe furniture from Orangebox, Connection and Pledge. The basement is also home to that most modern of workplace amenities, a

gym. This is a discreet and well used space that features yet another stunning yet simple and cost effective feature in the form of a multicoloured floor made from differently coloured lino tiles.

The most classically formal room in the building is – as always – the boardroom and even here there is a degree of deconstruction in its thinking. The table is asymmetrical, offering a rethink of the democratising idea of the round table in that it is not immediately apparent where its most dominant position lies.

The move to the new building has had a profound effect on the organisation

according to Mark Mercer, and not solely on its bottom line. ‘Overall, we’ve saved about £3.9 million over the term of the lease, as a result of the consolidation into 17 Hatfields,’ he says. ‘But we’ve also noticeably made great gains in other areas too.’

‘The building has more than achieved what we set out to do in developing a stronger identity for the organisation and improving communications between the teams.’

Acxiom may well be the most successful company you’ve never heard of, but they won’t go unnoticed for long with buildings as impressive as this ●

essential ingredients

Client • **Acxiom** | Design & Fit-Out • **Claremont** www.claremontgi.co.uk
Furniture Supply • **Logic Office** www.logic-office.co.uk | AV • **Viewpoint** www.viewpoint-av.co.uk

Systems Furniture • **Staverton** www.staverton.co.uk

Task Seating • **Humanscale** www.humanscale.co.uk

Flooring • **Milliken** www.millikencarpet.com

Branding • **Artworks Solutions** www.artworks-solutions.com

Soft Seating • **Orangebox / Connection / Pledge**

Storage • **Bisley** www.bisley.com