



CEDA
Grand Prix Awards 2007
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Grand Prix Awards 2008
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Vision Commercial Kitchens

Case Study
Gordale Nursery & Garden Centre



Vision Commercial Kitchens



Peter & Jill Nicholson
Proprietors

Ever since the introduction of a second-hand ice cream machine into the greenhouse of their Garden Centre back in 1984, husband and wife team Peter and Jill Nicholson have recognised the importance of providing their customers with refreshments.

When the time came to take their offering to the next level of service and standards, only one company truly understood the nature of their commercial requirements.

The Garden Centre was bought by your parents in 1948. Back then the business would have been on a much smaller scale but, is it fair to say still essentially the same model, look after your customers and they will come back again and again?

Yes, the business is highly focussed on service and therefore very much service driven, we respond to our customers likes and dislikes. They are, as you say, very loyal.

However, change something slightly and you can upset them, so it is very important that we have a close relationship with them or they will go elsewhere.

When you joined the company back in 1979, you had studied horticulture for five years in both England and Holland. How much of a learning curve has it been to adapt your skills to what is ultimately a commercial environment?

It certainly has been a massive learning curve, but we built on each small success. The ice cream machine in 1984 was complemented by a small number of coffee cups, then people wanted tea, with tea people asked for cake and on it went. Very soon there wasn't enough cups or cakes!

I had been very sceptical about the success of the ice cream machine, but literally, as soon as it was up and running we had a queue. We were eventually ordering six tonnes of liquid ice-cream per year!

How important is the coffee shop to Gordale now?

Both Jill and I believe that a coffee shop is vital to the successful running of any Garden Centre. If for some reason the shop is not open, we expect takings within the Garden Centre to be down by as much as 40%. A coffee shop is what customers have come to expect.

Case Study

Gordale Nursery & Garden Centre



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So Jill, how was the coffee shop laid out before Vision got involved?

The footprint was not very different to how it is now but we only had one run of servery and in the kitchen there was no differentiation between food prep and washing up. It is only a small space and was a bit of a mess. I noticed that at the paypoint, the flooring had worn away and there was an ugly white mark which ended up running the full length of the servery. I said to Peter that it was time we sorted it out and we decided that if we were going to replace the floor we might as well do everything else in one go.

So you then looked for suppliers?

Yes, and we spoke to a few. Various people came in to see us and one of them, who was a customer of ours, worked for Vision Commercial Kitchens. He left some literature with us and it got buried amidst the other paperwork in my office.

Various other suppliers came and measured up, left, then got back to us eventually but with no real enthusiasm. This just slowed up the whole process and I was so fed up that I mentioned my frustrations in passing to my badminton partner, Paul Kerr, who also happens to be a chef. He told me that he would send Amanda McGreavy from Vision down to see me.

It was only in tidying my office five minutes before she arrived that I found their literature and put two and two together.

People tell me that Vision just seemed to ‘get it’, can you try to distill for me what you mean in saying that?

With the other suppliers none of the measurements would add up, we actually brought in one supplier with his tape measure and physically showed him the problem. The servery would always seem to end in the wrong place and take up vital seating space, but the main thing was that they just didn’t seem to care. None of the plans would show or even consider the customer seating area. We learned quickly that their objective was to get a basic design for kitchen and servery, then sell as many ovens, microwaves and coffee machines as possible. Vision’s drawings demonstrated the commercial viability of their proposal by showing how the Customer area interacted with the servery and kitchen.

Are there other aspects of their service that sets them apart?

Yes, we got on well with Amanda straight away. We gave her a vague idea of what we wanted and only six weeks for the project to move from design to installation. It was vital that we were operational before the start of spring. We were given revised plans sometimes twice in a week, and not just emailed or explained over the telephone, Amanda would come to see us. This contact extended through to the other members of the Vision team. We spent a lot of time with their Designers, and had ready access to the project manager and installation team. We were taken to see examples of other projects delivered by Vision and at all times were dealt with efficiently and professionally. Amanda has been the most important link in the chain, on hand at all times even with Christmas slap bang in the middle of the design stage.

You mentioned the installation process, tell me a bit about how that went.

We found the process to be very well organised. We had regular site meetings with the fitters. Everyone was here on the day

that they had promised and completed their jobs on time even with such tight deadlines. All told the installation took just thirteen days and was a true turnkey operation. We actually completed a day earlier than we had aimed to.

So how do you feel about the Coffee Shop now?

It looks fantastic. We have doubled the serveries, doubled the tills and improved the kitchen layout, albeit in limited space with three ovens where previously there was only one. We retained the same amount of customer seating and introduced a dividing wall which helps to direct footfall along the serveries and also separates the customer area from our homewares department. The staff are really happy with their new surroundings which was also very important to us. We opened on the weekend of Mothers Day and were operating at full tilt straight away. The kitchen stood up to the demands with no problems.

“... the installation took just thirteen days and was a true turnkey operation.”

Any advice for other businesses thinking about using Vision?

Yes, make sure you keep their literature close at hand!

Both Jill and I would have no hesitation in recommending Vision to anyone. Our advice would be to allow as much time as possible at the design stage in order to get the most out of your available space, because even when it was limited, and with considerable time pressures Vision did a fantastic job.



www.visionck.co.uk

Vision Commercial Kitchens provides a full service to a growing number of clients throughout the UK from its base in Manchester. The company is one of the few in the industry to have gained ISO9001:2000 accreditation which supports their commitment for the highest quality of performance throughout the business.

- Full AutoCAD design and planning service
- Equipment specification, sourcing and supply
- Project management and installation
- Full after sales service and warranty management

Vision's capabilities are demonstrable across a wide range of completed projects including garden centres, restaurants, hotels, bars, schools, colleges, nursing homes, hospitals and the MOD. Clients include many of the leading names in the industry such as Barton Grange, The De Vere Group, Malmaison, Hotel du Vin, Leon, The Marriott Group and various local authorities as well as numerous main contractors working in both the private and public sector. The company was formed by its four founding directors who have over 60 years combined business experience predominantly in the commercial kitchen industry.

Vision is a member of CEDA, The Catering Equipment Distributors Association, the industry's representative body. All members work to the highest standards as defined within CEDA's 'code of good practice'.

Winners of CEDA (Catering Equipment Distributors Association) Grand Prix Awards.

2009 winner of The Caterer and Hotelkeeper Equipment & Supplies Excellence Awards Best Installation category for Cameron House Hotel.

2008 Best Sustainable Kitchen winner for our work at De Vere Deluxe Hotels, Cameron House.

2007 Overall Grand Prix winners.

2007 Outstanding customer service award for our work with Malmaison Hotels and Heathcote's Restaurants.

2006 Shortlisted large project category, highly commended for Malmaison, Oxford Castle.



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