

Neptune boosts profit

Furniture manufacturer Neptune has posted a 43% increase in profits before tax, which co-director John Sims puts down to expanding the product range.

The company, which is known for its quality garden furniture, has overhauled the business model and is now pitching as a high end interiors specialist.

In its latest accounts to 30 September 2009, the company increased profit before tax from 295,775 in 2008 to 520,752 at the end of September 2009. Turnover was also up on last year; from £7.9m to £8.2m.

"A lot of the work we have put into expanding into kitchens and interiors has really come into fruition this year, with

desirable product ranges that have established us as an interiors brand" Mr Sims told Cabinet Maker.

"We have tried to rebalance the business because if you specialise in garden furniture, you are only making serious money for six months of the year. By expanding our product range and moving into other Home sectors, we are giving ourselves year-round potential."

Mr Sims added that the Neptune brand had "strong desirability" among consumers and this had transferred well to the new product range.

"The new product ranges have been very well received by customers because they know that they are high quality, well-made and beautiful furniture," said Mr Sims.

"In this current market, customers will spend money but they are looking for value."

The company has focused on building relationships with 'high-quality' retailers over the last year and estimates that 25% of new dealers who are coming on board are giving over half their showroom to Neptune products. Meanwhile, roughly 10% of new retailers are becoming full-line Neptune specialists.

Neptune is currently getting 1000 hits per day on its website, according to Mr Sims who says 46% of those consumers go on to the 'Where to Buy' tab.

"We have focused on a really strong PR in the consumer press in many of the glossy interiors titles,"



said Mr Sims. "Because we are building ourselves as a lifestyle brand now, we have become a very attractive option for retailers which I think explains the increase in new deals with them."

Going forward, Mr Sims says the company will "continue on the same path", building relationships with retailer partners and ultimately establishing Neptune

as a lifestyle brand with consumers.

"We think we are very different. We have a long-term philosophy of being open, honest and straightforward with our customers and I think that's what will see us in good stead."

▶ FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT www.neptune.co.uk

MK given Grade II status

Milton Keynes shopping centre is to be given protected status, making it a Grade II listed building.

The Secretary of State has agreed to a request for the complex to be recognised as historically significant - but the British Retail Consortium have reacted against the decision.

Elizabeth Hinde, the British Retail Consortium's Head of Property, said: "This sets a bad precedent. The shopping centre is not a building of significant national interest or under threat of demolition."

"Listing thecentre:mk will make it more expensive to adapt to changing customer needs. Grade II status will also make it less attractive for retailers to locate there, which will undermine local job creation. It's ludicrous to put up retailers'

costs, especially in these challenging times."

The BRC, which has never before commented on an individual listing proposal, wrote to the then Minister for Culture and Tourism in 2009 to encourage her not to list thecentre:mk.

John Lewis, Spoils Furniture, Hot House Blinds and Gardens all have stores at the centre:mk.

Found on Midsummer Boulevard, it held the title of UK's biggest shopping centre when it was purpose built for the new town in the 1970's.

The Secretary was not convinced by opposition that argued listed status would hinder future expansion.

▶ FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT www.thecentremk.com

FIRA adds services to Hong Kong base

FIRA's Hong Kong-based testing centre is now fully operational and offering comprehensive testing services to clients sourcing from Asia.

The operation, which has been offering flammability testing since May, now offers safety and structural testing of beds, chairs and tables to the latest British, European and International Standards. The laboratory can also offer textile performance and chemical testing.

"Being able to offer genuine FIRA testing services close to the point of manufacture is going to bring

significant financial advantages and reassurance to our clients who source from Asia," said Phil Reynolds, FIRA's Senior Technical Manager.

"All the equipment has been supplied, commissioned and calibrated by FIRA's engineers and key staff have been trained by FIRA in the UK, ensuring that the same level of quality will be achieved whether you are testing in the UK or Hong Kong."

An official opening ceremony is planned for Autumn 2010.



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