

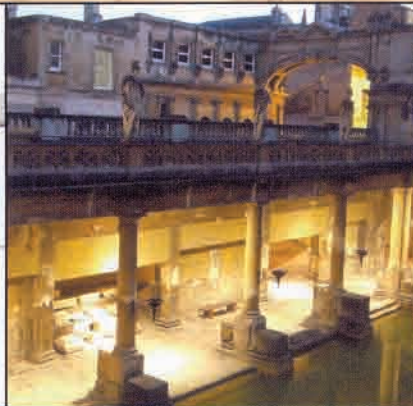


QUBE MAGAZINE

a Quality Understanding of your Built Environment

For Facilities, Building And Estate Managers Nationwide

£2.95 MARCH 2008 ISSUE 71



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Turning design into reality

by Andy Powell, managing director Spacetailors



The success of any interior project build requires cohesive interaction between fit-out consultant and designer or architect in order to turn specifications and plans into reality. A successful fit-out requires the consultant to remain reactive whilst consistently managing client expectations. Here Andy Powell, Managing Director of fast track fit-out specialists Spacetailors, examines some of the obstacles that can occur from initial design brief to completed build, and how these are overcome.

Fit-outs are often seen as the most straightforward aspect of a project build – the application of the finishing touches that turns the architect's vision on paper into bricks and mortar.

The reality is that the fit-out stage of any interior build is critical to its success and there are an enormous number of factors that can, and often do, conspire to throw a project into turmoil.

Initial Design Brief

While there will always be times when fit-out consultants work directly from specification, more and more we are finding clients require pre-design services to ensure an accurate estimation of both scheduling and budget.

By working closely with trusted architects, experienced fit-out consultants can highlight any problematic areas in the brief well in advance, sidestepping avoidable difficulties that can turn a project sour.

The prudent client will get combined input from architect and fit-out consultant working together from the out-set, ensuring that the final environment is both aesthetically pleasing (and therefore attractive to customers) and efficient to manage and maintain.

Planning and Early Site Visit

Preliminary client requirements often do not factor in the particular

conditions of the project site. Building regulations need to be adhered to and local planning requirements complied with. Delays cost money so it is essential that all the relevant paper work is completed on time, prior to contractors going on-site.

Early input from fit-out consultants can head off any potential issues and, of course, regular site visits need to occur before work begins.

A good example of how early site visits and prior planning ensure the smooth running of a project build, is the current case of a town-centre cinema build which our fit-out experts were involved in early on during the planning stages.

As a result of initial site visits, both architect and contractor recognised that the cinema, based in a residential area, needed to comply with strict environmental noise regulations and its structure therefore needed to contain and manage noise levels.

Specific attention was paid to sound transference and walls and ceilings were prepared and correctly foam insulated well in advance of their implementation within the building's framework, saving both time and cost.

Additionally, the use of sound panelled walls clearly affected other building considerations, such as the installation of air conditioning units

and projection equipment. These had to operate noiselessly behind the sound panelling and appropriate time was factored into the project's schedule to ensure that all panelling was thoroughly sound tested.

Materials

Every client demands a finish that is both of high quality and which is cost effective, and rightly so. A compromise should be reached rather than sacrificing the one for the other by incorporating unsuitable or cheap materials. In the long run, this becomes counterproductive and remediation work can be costly and take significant time.

Similarly, designers can overlook practicalities when putting together a brief and materials can be either not viable or even hazardous to the environment they are being considered for. Whether these are large oversights, such as the installation of a soft wood dance floor in a nightclub that will invariably become dented by high heels, or smaller, such as non-treated shower curtains in health clubs and spas, the end result is wasted client expenses.

Again, early consult can prevent these problems from occurring but it is also essential that on-site project managers remain reactive to changing briefs.

Time

Fit-out projects are always time critical. Clients understandably need designs implemented fast as this reduces man hour costs and ensures businesses are up and running as soon as possible.

Additionally, businesses often need to remain operational during a fit-out or refurbishment and this means best use of time in order to get the design complete with minimal disruption.

It is important that fit-out contractors remain flexible and work outside of normal business hours – be this overnight and/or on weekends – in order to ensure facilities remain operational and staff and customers alike are not impeded by the fit-out.

This necessarily means that the clean-up operation at the end of each night needs to be immaculate. Tools need to disappear and work areas cleared ready for when the doors open in the morning. Dust is a major adversary to any contractor and working areas need to remain dust-free.

There is nothing worse for a client than seeing an untidy environment half way through a project. It gives the impression that the fit-out is in disarray and not adhering to original design briefs.

Importantly, contractors need to install confidence in their clients and this means ensuring tidiness whilst guaranteeing a project runs on time to budget.

Efficient On-Site Project Management

We've seen how important it is to ensure every angle is covered early on and how this requires careful, co-ordinated planning from both architect and fit-out contractor. However, when it comes to the actual build, when design becomes reality, efficient on-site project management is also critical to the successful completion of a fit-out.

No design brief can anticipate every eventuality however, by remaining reactive, a good project manager will always look to saving time and money ensuring work does not hugely deviate from the original brief.

Additionally, site managers working on fast track fit-outs will need to manage multiple contractors, from electricians to plumbers, all working in the same area at the same time, often across multiple sites.

Efficiency is paramount and making sure one contractor isn't standing around waiting for another to finish requires excellent on-site time management.

Health and Safety Considerations

On-site project managers will always follow strict health and safety procedures to ensure that all contractors are protected at all times.

Additionally, experienced fit-out consultants can assist by flagging up any concerns that may arise during the design stages of a project. For example, accessible fire exits and Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) regulated access should be factored into a design brief.

By working with designers and architects from the word go, fit-out consultants can offer expert knowledge that serves the client better, cementing good relationships and promoting repeat business.

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