

Crossing borders into Europe

INSTALLATION
MANUFACTURING



PROTOTYPING



PROJECT MANAGEMENT

DESIGN DEVELOPMENT
VALUE ENGINEERING

LOGISTICS

GLOBAL SOURCING

AMS GROUP IS A GLOBAL SUPPLIER OF BESPOKE FIXTURES AND FITTINGS FOR A NUMBER OF HIGH PROFILE RETAIL CLIENTS. JIM CLARK, MANAGING DIRECTOR, AND DAVID HYDE, SALES AND MARKETING DIRECTOR, SPEAK TO RLI ABOUT THE BUSINESS AND ITS EUROPEAN EXPANSION.



JIM CLARK



DAVID HYDE

AMS Group, with facilities in the UK, Czech Republic and China, provides complete retail solutions and has vast experience in design development, prototyping, in-house manufacture, global sourcing, project management, logistics and installation.

AMS has a significant fashion heritage, having worked with a range of big names – both past and present – naming the Burton Group and New Look amongst their historical client list. Current key clients include Debenhams, M&S, Tesco, Footlocker, Laura Ashley, as well as a number of volume hotel operators such as Premier Inn as part of a secondary operating division.

In the last 12 months AMS have welcomed companies such as Primark into their portfolio together with Moss Bros and Hobbycraft, for whom they have delivered new concept stores and are now readying a number of additional stores for these retailers in time for the Christmas trading period.

The company have a range of both high spec clients such as Infiniti Europe car showrooms and value driven volume

customers such as Tesco, with whom they have worked for over 10 years, seeing them now also supply volume equipment for their expanding clothing offer across Europe, along with the new high profile F&F fashion fixtures and department stores, from their Prague based European facility.

David Hyde, Sales and Marketing Director at AMS Group, said: "We are a truly bespoke business and are not constrained by any standard equipment ranges when interpreting our clients' requirements. We start every project with an open mind and effectively a blank sheet of paper, as the range of what we are able to provide is extremely diverse, by market sector, material type and levels of specification. The result is a skilled creative development business backed by our established and proven volume manufacturing, global sourcing and implementation ability".

The company now employs around 200 people. Headquartered in the Midlands, UK, its base contains a 250,000 sq ft manufacturing and warehousing facility, metal, acrylic and joinery facilities, assembly and warehouse, as well as support functions such as sales, projects, development and prototyping resources and the buying office.

An additional facility established in 2004 - AMS Asia Sourcing in Shanghai, has dedicated local AMS personnel

running a quality assurance team and supply and sourcing office for projects requiring competitively priced equipment from the Far East. Further expansion saw the company open a new central European division in Prague earlier this year, offering a 50,000 sq ft warehouse facility, project management facilities, warehousing, distribution and installation services.

The Prague base will deliver over £2million turnover during 2011 alone. Speaking about their European expansion, Clark said: "We have a longstanding relationship with Tesco and last year we were presented with an opportunity to also produce a wide range of fixtures for their clothing departments in Europe, amongst a number of other initiatives – it's one which we took and subsequently led to the opening of our Prague warehousing centre".

"We have subsequently delivered and installed some 16 stores in Czech, 22 in Poland, 14 in Slovakia and 14 in Hungary since April. In October alone, over 40 large vehicles left our facility in Prague in-line with Tesco's programme across all 4 countries – quite an achievement from a standing start in April".

"We want to take our European offer that has already proved to be successful and bring other customers on board. We are not only able to service Western Europe from the UK as we have for the last 15 years for clients such as Infiniti

and Footlocker, but we can now service the whole of Central and Eastern Europe too. This is critical, as it's my belief that a lot of retailers from the UK and in other markets in Europe are recognising that they are not going to get the growth they are looking for in their own markets and will look to other countries for growth – something we are now ready to support".

Hyde adds: "We want to expand our offer throughout Europe and our Prague facility will allow us to deliver the benefits of our global supply ability through a localised portal, ensuring closer and visible contact, therefore improving relationships through personable communication".

The company's plan for the next two years is to expand its European offer and looking further forward, it is planning to expand retail opportunities in India and Asia, through utilising its growing Shanghai sourcing operation.

Clark adds: "We will never take our eye off our historical business activity, but it is my clear aim to try and drive expansion in these two areas, whilst the established team here in the UK continue to look after our existing customers."

Despite the recession the company has seen large growth in its operations – noting a 60 per cent growth in 2010 and a further 30 per cent growth in 2011. Clark, along with three new directors, including Hyde, bought the company through an SMBO in 2004 with a then

£15 million turnover and quickly grew it to £40 million in four years.

Whilst many companies suffered set backs during the recession, AMS Group is well on track to again achieve its former levels of growth in the near future.

Clark said: "Some harsh decisions had to be made during what was a challenging time for the industry as a whole, but as a close knit business everyone pulled together and got through it – what's more, the same team has again supported us back through the growth which is especially pleasing for me and the rest of the board."

Hyde said: "Managing growth is one thing but managing retraction and then being able to go back to that growth level has been a huge learning curve and an achievement for the business as a whole".

"Given the positive performance we had pre-recession, we had a strong financial position to ride that storm out. However, it was a combination of galvanising the team and the pain we shared as a team, which I believe ensured all involved blossomed and as a company, we are undoubtedly stronger for having gone through it. "Everyone had to work a little bit harder and think outside the box in terms of how to personally offer better value and that is something we have retained as a unit as we move forward, significantly helping our continuous drive in winning

new business"

AMS regularly comes out on top of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) introduced by many retailers to monitor efficiencies, quality of communication and service, measuring everything from delivery times, customer service attitude, creativity and response times.

Hyde explains: "The sector in which we operate is certainly unique and often demanding but that's not to say it can't be enjoyed. As individuals, we do all we can to ensure working with AMS Group is a positive experience and something which is readily repeated by our clients. We view our clients as "individuals" rather than simply contacts or organisations, resulting in our personable, clear and honest communication at all times with a definite can do attitude, balanced with a professional and realistic stance, in order to ensure we deliver what we promise."

Clark concludes: "We listen and think about everything that people feedback and sometimes even about what they don't say. We are sticklers for detail, we are still hungry and still feel we have something to prove and want to be out there as the market leaders. That means we will go the extra mile but there again, we always have, it's an attribute of the business that has got us where we are today"