





▶▶▶▶ about our customers – Waverley Gate provides a location that reflects Microsoft’s core values. We originally set up in Edinburgh 15 years ago with one phone and dial-up internet access. These days we’ve grown to about 50 staff, mostly in a sales or marketing role. We deal with commercial customers, large and small, so we want to present ourselves in the best possible light. We’ve bucked the trend with this office. This is treating Scotland as an entity, as a country – it’s especially important when thinking about Scottish government contracts, but it’s vital for dealing with Scottish businesses generally. Normally, for key presentations we would have had to get our customers to London or Reading – we don’t need to do that anymore with this facility. We work closely with our Business Partners, which range from one man businesses to major companies – they are the ones who deliver the solution to our customers. This facility is fantastic for them and demand is huge because it allows our partners to accelerate their business propositions, pilots and visioning professionally and quickly.

Essentially, what we have here condenses the problem solving process.’

As you may have gathered by now, this is not just a branch office. Or even just a smart head office. This is one of only 17 Microsoft centres of its type in the world. Of which more a little later.

‘There’s also a strong HR element for us here,’ says Raymond. ‘It’s comfortable for our people, and the way it’s designed helps our drive for more collaborative working. The sharing of information is vital for our business, and we’ve already seen a significant improvement in that area. The layout minimises divides and promotes communication. There’s a ‘feel good’ factor about being here for our staff and our customers – it’s a statement of confidence in the Scottish economy, a beacon of commitment. We were keen to find a location that’s good for public transport. The office sits next to Waverley rail station, and we’re on the main route for buses and the new tramway. That’s good for everyone, and it’s also good for the environment – energy efficiency is a major consideration for us’

Edinburgh based Michael Laird Architects designed the new Microsoft interior scheme, and Project Architect Kenny Fraser confirms the office’s green credentials. ‘This unusual double facade shields the building from solar gain, and is a strong feature of Waverley Gate’s architecture. Furthermore, the Microsoft space makes use of one of the most energy efficient chilled beam systems available in the market – it works well.’

‘What Waverley Gate gives us is a competitive edge,’ concludes Raymond. ‘There was recognition that it’s important to have a Scottish office, but beyond that there is a strong business foundation for what we’re doing here. We’re in the technology market place, and we’re in the process of transitioning our business model. For many years it was about selling software – but these days many products can be delivered off the cloud, off the web. More and more customers though are thinking about their need for bespoke solutions and security. So our business model these days is about packaging commodity and customer unique solutions together – giving customers something that is easy, secure and reliable. Our ability to demonstrate the Microsoft solution is what this place is all about.’

PR and Marketing Manager Lynda Walker shows us round the subtly impressive offices, which starts, logically enough, at the spacious fifth floor reception. ‘The Michael Laird team designed this space to maximise the wow factor for customers and staff. There are great panoramic views from the Castle to Holyrood, Arthur’s Seat, Calton Hill and the Firth of Forth. It’s intentionally warm in feeling – you don’t think you’re at an IT company. We have wireless access for our guests, so that if one of our Business Partners has a spare hour they are able to touchdown here. At the same time, the design is deliberately geared to allow us to use the space in different ways. For example, this can be a breakout space if all the meeting rooms are occupied, or as an event space spreading to the rooftop terrace.

‘There are four meeting rooms of various sizes and capabilities to seat up to 60 people. Added flexibility is there too, with folding walls allowing us to change configurations depending on customer needs. As you would expect, the meeting rooms incorporate state-of-the-art technology, but it’s hidden and discreet. We’ve no desire to look too clever – we just want our partners and customers to get the most out of our facilities.’





Down one level to the fourth floor, we find that the space is split between workspace for the staff and product or concept development areas. 'There is a total of 52 open plan workstations – capable of accommodating a mobile workforce of 80 – aligned along the window walls to the north and south,' indicates Project Interior Designer Mary Ellis. 'Down the centre is the 'collaboration spine' – a series of different double ended spaces. It's a timber-clad wrap form to enclose a variety of collaboration spaces and functions – fully glazed meeting pods, open and informal meeting areas, in-trays, cloaks, admin hubs – which terminates at its east end with the cafe breakout area.'

The sleek scheme makes intelligent and efficient use of space and light. Technically too, the environment is fully cognisant of Microsoft's 'Workplace Advantage' principles, embodied here with a blend of VOIP and contemporary space planning concepts.

Private phone booths and high level bench touchdown areas provide the team with further working options, and, combined with the collaboration spine and open plan areas, form a varied and stimulating environment. The desired level of collaboration is achieved well despite the inherent mobility of the workforce. 'It's a bright, happy space', notes Lynda. 'People like to come in and be close to their colleagues – and most work far less from home than before. The breakout bar angled to make the best of the view, the communal roof garden, the whole space...it makes for a good place for us to be.'

The west end of the fourth floor houses a vital element of Microsoft Scotland's business. The product and concept development area is a series of functional, yet flexible spaces where Microsoft's bespoke solutions are developed and demonstrated to customers and partners. The envisioning centre is key to this, with concepts demonstrated through the use of technology in real-life business scenarios. Realism is built through changeable illuminated backdrops and furniture settings depicting different environments. This technology centre, one of only 17 in the Microsoft world, combines the envisioning and proof of concept areas in a way that is aimed squarely at non-technical decision makers.

This is a sales and marketing operation through and through, and as Lynda Walker confirms, already a highly successful one at that. 'We've been here since the end of August, and just a few months in we're fighting for use of the various presentation rooms! We're making it fly, and hoping to prove that in an economic downturn the companies that are ready to hit the bounce are the ones that will survive. We make our global brand relevant to the local Scottish community – we work with the IoD, the FSB and Chambers of Commerce and put on events with them. It's not about flogging software, it's about listening to our customers and helping them reduce costs and address their issues.'

And with that we're off to hail a taxi to whisk us to the airport. We'll take the tram next time, when it's built and up and running! ●

essential ingredients

Client:	• Microsoft
Project Architect:	• Michael Laird Architects
Project Manager / QS / Planning Supervisor:	• Faithful and Gould
M&E Consultant:	• White Young Green
Fit-out Contractor:	• Sharkey
Furniture Supply:	• Workplace Design 020 7253 3291
Systems Furniture:	• Verco 01494 448000
Task Seating:	• Herman Miller 0845 226 7202
Soft Seating:	• Orangebox 020 7837 9922
Glazed Partitioning:	• Komfort 01293 529500 Optima 01494 492725
Carpets:	• InterfaceFLOR 0800 634 6032 Milliken 020 7336 7290
Timber Flooring:	• Junckers 01376 534700
Lighting:	• Fagerhult 020 7403 4123
Meeting/Breakout Furniture:	• Steelcase, Boss Design, Allermuir, ISU, Naughtone, Howe