





brand turismo

Tricky thing, branding. Tricky, yet absolutely fascinating. Over the past 10 years we've seen an astonishing rise in brand awareness and marketing prowess throughout this sector. Some say brand is key. While we might not agree wholeheartedly with this, we do admit that a strong brand can make all the difference. After all, you do need to stand out from the pack.

It stands to reason then that amalgamating two or more existing brands is fraught with danger; how do you ensure a successful, established brand is not damaged when it is consumed by another successful, established brand?

To find an answer to this question we have come to see Forbo Flooring Systems – a hugely successful company, and an acquisitive ▶▶▶▶

▶▶▶ marketplace right now, we have the healthcare and education sectors – which are very good marketplaces still. These things do balance themselves out.

‘What we also find as well, in a UK context, with mature businesses coming together, there are new opportunities for our Forbo product; we are now able to provide not only wide ranging solutions, but we also have global reach and global solutions. The model is essentially the same in our Australian business, for example, with the same product ranges, as it is here in London.’

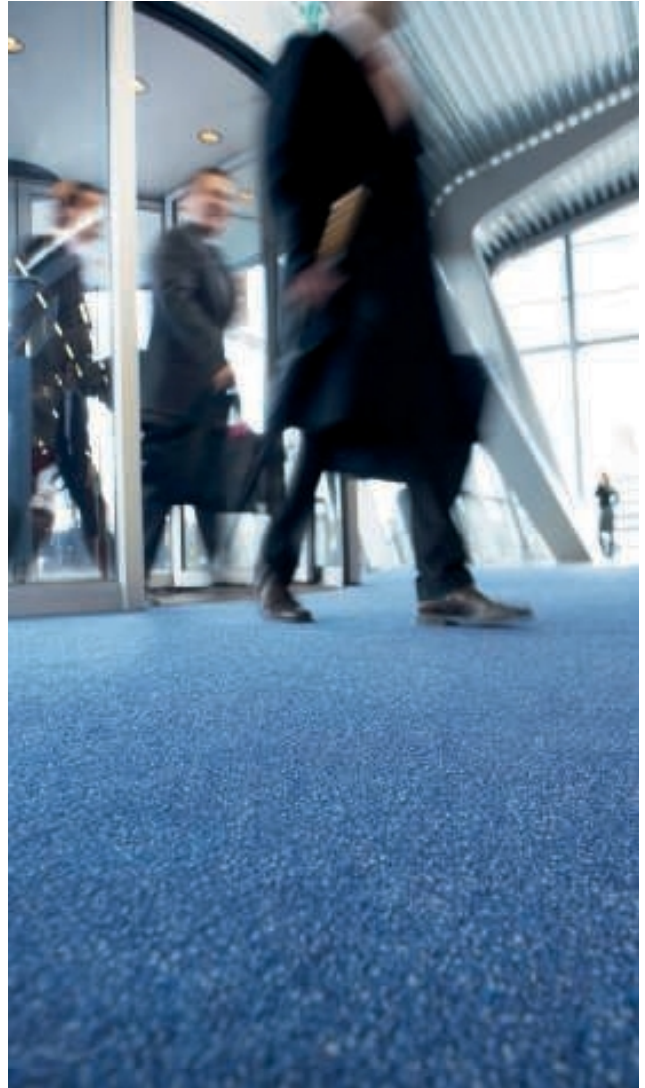
‘We recognise a lot of synergies between the product areas we now have. If you look at the Westbond ‘wall of colour’, you can relate this to how we sell Marmoleum – with a focus very much on colour and design. There’s a great fusion between those brands.’

Just as a bit of background for you, Forbo is a huge global operation – approximately four times the size of the beefed-up, acquisitive Bonar brand, and currently has 34 sales offices in defined geographies around the world. When it comes to global reach therefore, it is Forbo that is very much the leading brand here. The international business for Bonar Floors was largely through third parties and distributors.

‘If there is a commercial office building in London, influenced by an American practice, for example, we could have a direct Forbo employee face-to-face with that client on the same day,’ Mark expands on the importance of this global reach. ‘That’s the beauty of this synergy and shows just what Forbo brings to Bonar.’

We move on to talk about the all-important hot topic of brand integration. ‘I think we’re trying to bring the best of both worlds here,’ Angus considers. ‘We’re trying to integrate all these brands under this Forbo corporate umbrella. A lot of the brands had very distinct identities – and we wanted to try, wherever possible, to actively retain those distinct identities under a sympathetic corporate umbrella.’

‘There is a genuinely complementary nature about much of the offer here – and that has helped a lot in letting us understand how this can work. Westbond is known for colour, for example, and that branding and that look and feel have now been distributed across Europe. If you put that offer alongside our Forbo Resilient offer, which was developed independently of Westbond of course, you can see an obvious link – from the specifier’s point of view, you can see how they can naturally work together.’ ▶▶▶▶▶▶▶▶





▶▶▶▶▶ This is not just sales bluster from the gents; the two – once independent – offerings do indeed work together. There is however, one question which we feel we must ask – albeit one that comes more from our hearts than our heads. When it came to the Clerkenwell showspace, was there not a temptation to keep the Westbond name above the door? After all, when it comes to the London specifying community, this is surely the most recognised and respected brand within the newly extended Forbo portfolio. ‘There was a temptation, absolutely,’ Angus admits. ‘I think, in a way, that Westbond brand still is at the forefront here. What we have to do is to keep the values that Westbond has and respect those, albeit with a slightly different presentational approach. With new geographies, it is quite hard to take Westbond as it is and plant it as a seed – it is far easier for it to be led in with the Forbo brand.’

‘Like I’ve said, however, we are very keen to retain the values – that 1 sq m of any colour, that colour combination offer that is limitless – and now promote them more widely and more comprehensively – certainly on a Pan-European and global basis.’

‘We also do need to have a consistent look and feel across the entire business – that’s our modus operandi. We recognise that it is important that a London architect, working on a project on Copenhagen, is able to quote the one reference, get the right service – it must be able to all work together as a single entity. That is what we are attempting to achieve here, across the country and throughout our global markets.’

‘We have had the same dilemma with Tessera, and before that with Gaskell,’ Mark admits. ‘Certainly in areas such as the north of England, these are well known and respected brands. Also, how can we get London architects to appreciate that offering in the same way they do Westbond? This is the real challenge for us, and, what we realise we must do here is cherish, nurture and respect all of the legacies that are our individual brands.’

‘At the same time, we are putting a roof over all their heads which has equity on a global scale. The real challenge, therefore, is to get that balance absolutely right.’

So, how do you integrate a number of strong, successful brands? You make sure you acquire the right brands – brands that complement, brands that have synergy with your existing business and brands that open up new markets and new opportunities. After all, two (or more) brands are better than one ●



