



# Soap Reigns Eternal

Our timing is, for once, immaculate. We've come to see the new PZ Cussons headquarters at Manchester Airport's almost as new business park and have just discovered that this forward-thinking Group is currently abuzz with the news of a major new acquisition.

Case Study



Photography: Anthony Weller @ Archimage

PZ Cussons operates in Africa, Asia and Europe, developing leading brands for the markets in which it operates. The Group operates world class supply chain networks that enable it to deliver its brands quickly and efficiently to local consumers. There are, of course, a number of brands here that are not simply household names, but will undoubtedly be found throughout our own households – from Imperial Leather, Carex and Original Source through to Sanctuary Spa and the aforementioned and newly acquired St Tropez tanning products range.

The Group has a long and close relationship with this part of North West England, previously headquartered in Stockport. We are met by CBRE Director Peter Fearon-Brown and Senior Project Designer Marzia Panizzutti, and PZ Cussons' Facilities Executive Denise Hayton, who guide us through the sleek contemporary and buzzy reception space through to the intriguing meeting zone beyond.

The reason we use the word intriguing here is simply because the zone is a genuine feast for design eyes, with fantastic breakout seating dotted throughout the central core, whilst further, more formal meeting rooms line the periphery. But more of this later. First we want to know more about what has clearly been a giant leap of faith for the Group. Peter begins by telling us about the origins of the project. 'We were involved from pretty much the start. We worked with the base build team and so we were able to influence the base build to a certain extent.

'When we started working with the Group we had no idea about the size and scale of this operation. They're huge! People relate to Carex and Imperial Leather...but there's far more to this Group.'

'People in the UK tend to know about the personal wash products,' Denise agrees, 'but as Group we are into all kinds of different products and sectors; nutritional drinks in Nigeria, flat screen TVs, white goods & even small commercial vehicles...and in the last few months we have continued to acquire other brands.

'We were previously in a suburb in Stockport, on a street that nobody really connected with – and, as a major international headquarters it was felt that we needed to have a greater presence and be more outward-facing.

'Our new location, right next to the international airport, is great for our Head Office and this building is also home to our >>>>>>

Case Study



» UK business, so we have the two functions working together here.

‘From a staff point of view we went through quite a lot of changes, starting with the rejuvenation of the main board in 2005/6, which brought fresh thinking and changes to the way they wanted to manage and how they wanted the business to progress. They have a much more informal, more relaxed way of working.

‘It was decided that it would be far more beneficial to relocate rather than refresh and refurb our existing premises. We had the luxury of specing a building that hadn’t been built yet – we had agreed to lease the plot – and then, as Peter said, we were able to work with CBRE to influence that base build so that we didn’t have to come into a leased space, rip half of it out and start again. That was massive advantage for us and also gave us the opportunity to really do things the way we wanted.

‘Again, we worked with CBRE on the workplace consultancy. We looked at our working styles and how our layout was in comparison – we learnt a lot of things through that exercise. We were very hierarchical in our structure; Directors had desks a certain way and had a meeting table, and if you were the next grade down, you didn’t have a meeting table & so on... it was an absolute minefield. Now, since the move, the main board still has offices, but instead of being in a mahogany row behind closed doors they are in glass offices on the main floor – so they are visible and the doors are usually open.

‘Another big change, for both the UK and international businesses, is that the Directors now sit on the same pod as their teams. This was one of the more challenging aspects of the process. It took some time for people on both sides to buy into this.

‘We’ve also introduced a flexible working hours policy. Previously we were very fixed with our working hours – and there was no breakout space for people to get away from their desks during the day.

‘Now we have adopted a 37.5-hour week, over the course of five days, 7am–7pm, albeit with core hours – so that we have sufficient people around for the bulk of the day.’

And this, we get the feeling, is key to this Group and to this space; we are clearly dealing with a company willing (and extremely keen) to move forward with an honest and open approach to the way it works and to its staff. This is actually about trust.



Case Study



▶▶▶▶▶ PZ Cussons' new space has been designed to accommodate this new culture and attitude – and this has all clearly been led from the top. Indeed, Denise tells us that, at the launch event for the new space, the Group's CEO spoke of the importance of the new building and how it was used. The message was very clear: 'You're all adults, and the way you feel you can deliver your work best is fine with us.'

So, if Cussons' staff feel they'd like to let off some steam in the fully-equipped gym (wellness room), then they can. If they want to simply get away from their desks, then they can go to the impressive coffee shop, elegant restaurant or, like us, lounge in the variety of breakout and informal meeting spaces now available to them. Oh, and all of this is supported by vastly improved technology, including wall-to-wall WiFi.

We already know that the relationship between PZ Cussons and CBRE began back with the base build and developed through to the workplace consultancy, but that is most definitely not where CBRE's influence ends. 'We put through a proposal that we could do the whole thing here – that we could find the building, do the deal with the developer and we could actually design the thing!' Peter tells us. 'Once the decision had been taken to move rather

than refurbish, the move was seen as the catalyst to change the way the Group worked and thought. It was such a wide-ranging brief – we were given a lot of room and a lot of influence here. I think we were trusted and I'd like to think we've got a really good rapport with everyone here.'

'Everyone here was incredibly open and very trusting in our opinion,' Marzia agrees. 'We worked very hard together to always come up with the right solutions here. They were really open to the idea of mixing closed space, with open areas and to introducing colour and brightness.'

And this is immediately apparent throughout this ground floor meeting suite, where the raised central facility, as mentioned earlier, resembles a who's who of Italian seating, with each space cleverly broken by fabric sails. To one side of this core is a series of almost lounge style glazed rooms, whilst the other side holds a series of elegant, formal meeting rooms.

Furthermore, we are told, this flexible space can even be opened up for major events or product launches, with the platform on which we are currently sat acting as a stage.

'The furniture specification was a huge project in itself,' Marzia smiles. 'We tried to find the right furniture for each place, without too many changes of style. This

platform was the main area where we wanted to put something different. We wanted lots of layers here, and colour and personality.'

EB Office Interiors worked alongside CBRE on the general furniture specification, and proposed a huge number of furniture options to their client. PZ Cussons proved to be open minded and very design conscious, as the innovative and funky Italian pieces from great manufacturers such as B&B, Tonon, La Cividina, Zanotta and ICF proves.

Marzia has not stopped here when it comes to adding colour and personality. Elegant purples and greens are combined in the restaurant, whilst on the open working floors above we find a dazzling array of signature colours leading through to more bright and brilliant breakout spaces.

The central core of each of the two open plan working floors features a clever multi-purpose facility that can accommodate meeting space, product display, utility stations etc – with each of these elements developed (almost kit-like) to be quick and easy to change and update as and when needed.

Even the carpets here have 'slashes' of colour to bring through the vibrant scheme into the office area and breakout spaces.

Praise should also go to EB Office Interiors for its solution to the 120 degree desk challenge here: how to retain a 120 degree footprint whilst increasing desk space and the under desk aperture for leg space. EB has developed a unique desk design that has indeed met all these criteria through Ofquest's Neo Evolution.

The choice of task seating is another example of Cussons' open approach to its staff. An initial online task chair trial for all 240 staff, sampling 10 different task chairs, was conducted. The choice was narrowed down to four chairs by a detailed user group, with Techo's Sidiz chair eventually chosen as a clear winner.

We'll leave the final words to Denise: 'This has been a massive cultural shift for us, but people genuinely walk around with smiles on their faces. We've even had people bringing their families in to 'show off' where they work.' ●

essential ingredients |

Client • **PZ Cussons** | Interior Architect & Project Manager • **CB Richard Ellis** 020 7182 2000

Quantity Surveyor • **AB Associates** | M&E Services • **TB&A** | AV • **Pure Audio Visual** | Graphics • **TBWA**

Furniture • **Moroso, B&B Italia, Tonon, Boss Design, La Cividina, Zanotta, Ryan, Arper, Kastell, Allermuir, Ofquest**

Flooring • **Amtico, InterfaceFLOR, Helen Yardley**

Lighting • **Zumtobel, Modular Lighting, Martinelli, Vistosi, Northlight**