From windscreens to whitening

*Dental Tribune* looks at a new practice which has transformed an old windscreen repair shop in Blackpool into a fabulous dental surgery

A former windscreen repair workshop might seem an unlikely candidate for conversion to a dental practice but that was the choice for Ivory Dental to expand their Blackpool practice back in December 2008. The growing success of the four dentist partnership meant the team had just run out of space in their existing premises. They also wanted to be able to offer new services to attract additional private patients but their building was bursting at the seams.

After a long search over nearly three years and considering lots of alternatives, the partners settled on a former windscreen replacement workshop and purchased the building in December 2008. The short-term plan for the new site was to provide two additional surgeries enabling expansion of the business from a four to a six surgery practice.

When asked why they finally decided on this building Elena Barlow, the Practice Manager explains “The location is fantastic, it is just a mile from our existing practice which makes working across both sites easy for the team. The building also has all important parking facilities which are difficult to find in the more residential areas around the town. It is also a vast space, with plenty of room to accommodate the future needs of the practice.”

Visualising the potential of the former workshop must certainly have been a challenge but Elena recalls at the time just how convinced she was that it was right for them. “It gave us the blank canvas we wanted to be able to design a practice from scratch. With such a huge open space to work with it granted us the freedom to put our imaginations to work to design a state of the art practice that would complement our existing site and reflect the ethos of the partners.”

Rightly, Elena is very proud of the building’s transformation, few would guess its original function. “We replaced the two huge workshop doors at the front of the building with floor to ceiling windows. The massive expanse of glass gives the whole building, but especially the reception area, a feeling of openness and space.”

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Building, decorating and kit-ting out a new practice from scratch meant the team had the latitude to invest in exactly the kit they wanted. Much of the equipment was sourced from McKillop Dental Equipment Ltd. Elena explains “We’ve used McKillop many times before and have always been happy that they understand our requirements and deliver on timescales. They also come very highly recom-mended locally”.

New cabinetry, X-ray and sterilising equipment and chairs were all on the shopping list. Elena is clear about why they chose the Clesta II Flexible Treatment Centre and Voyager II Treatment Centre both from Takara Belmont. “We wanted chairs that would look good in a contemporary setting whilst being functional and reliable. Also, the Voyager Treatment Centre gives us the flexibil-ity of right or left handed use. Our existing practice uses Takara Belmont chairs and so we knew the quality of what we were buying. In the end the toughest decision for the team was choice of colour! Both chairs look fabulous against the all-white decor of the surgeries.”

The main building works were project managed by the building contractor but were closely over-seen by the partners and Elena. “We had regular meetings with the Project Manager on site so we could keep abreast of the progress being made, ensure that deci-sions were taken promptly so time wasn’t lost and to ensure the work stayed on track and to our require-ments.” She is forthright in her advice for anyone undertaking a similar project. “Take time to plan and then try hard to stick to it. In other circumstances working with four partners to agree on the lay-out, design and decor might have been tricky, but with plenty of discussion we were able to work through differences in priorities and tastes to come to an end re-sult with which everyone is happy. Fortunately the original partner in the practice, Dr Woodhouse had undertaken refurbishments in the past so his experience was invaluable throughout.” This close involvement of the practice team ensured the final product was exactly what they had envisaged. It also meant the project expe-rienced few difficulties and was completed to time and budget.

The new practice now accommodates two new surgeries, an office for the practice manager, sterilising facilities, a spacious re-ception and enough spare room for the creation of an additional four or five surgeries as and when the extra capacity is needed. Elena is clear that the design of the new building and particularly the new reception space facilitates an excellent patient experience. “All our administrative activities now take place behind the scenes which means the receptionists are dedicated to welcoming and booking in patients and don’t need to be distracted by phones ringing or the hum of photocopiers and printers.”

Since opening at the end of November 2009 patient numbers have already increased by nearly 1,000. Across both practices, Ivory Dental Care now treats nearly 9,000 patients with scope for significant further expansion in the future.

Elena has no regrets about the whole project but so far it has certainly been all work and no play. “Since the new building opened work has been non-stop so we still haven’t had an official opening celebration for the staff!” Surely something the Ivory Dental Care team will work hard to pri-oritise this year.

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