



Intelligent Environments

Punching well above its weight

Driving along Rosebank Rd it's easy to miss number 438a. It's not a glitz, look-at-me place from the outside, but the designing and innovation that goes on inside most certainly is.

Intelligent Environments Ltd (IEL) is responsible for some really smart buildings in Auckland, and around the country. For a business employing 12 people - three of them from the Harris family - it punches, in a phrase beloved by boxing scribes, well above its weight.

Nikki Harris, co-founder and general manager, says an intelligent environment, is "one that responds, almost intuitively, to the needs of those using the space".

And the company's logo is a distinctive green "for a very good reason".

"We assist companies to incorporate energy-saving initiatives into their buildings - a lot of the places we work on are green star buildings."

These include projects such as the ASB's headquarters on Auckland's waterfront, the Wynyard Quarter Innovation Project with tenancies Warren & Mahoney, Mott MacDonald, GridAKL/ATEED, Davanti & Online Republic, with the Wellington team completing the new control tower and multi-storey carpark at Wellington International Airport.

IEL specialise in providing technology solutions that integrate the various building systems such as lighting, HVAC, and audio visual, and then provide easy, often automatic control, of the whole environment.

Clever, eh?

That cleverness began in 2007, from Nikki and husband Paul's home garage in Conifer Grove, Takanini. While sales manager for Clipsal Integrated Systems, Paul saw a hole in the market for a company specialising in creating integrated and intelligent control systems.

"Paul's skills are in technical sales, and his ability to understand what a customer requires, and to come up with a practical solution. My previous corporate experience enabled me to look at the big picture to drive our strategic direction and oversee the financial management of the business."

Nikki worked at FranklinCovey (brain child of Dr Stephen R. Covey of "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People fame) and

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Then there's the third family member. "Not long after starting we 'head-hunted' our daughter, Rebecca. She was a project manager in the telecommunications industry, doing very well and successful in her own right.

"She had different skill sets, ones that we needed. Rebecca had been on maternity leave and was returning to the workforce. To be honest, at the time we probably couldn't afford her, but at the same time we couldn't afford to lose her.

"We consider her the technical wizard of the family. She oversees the design and pricing of the various technical solutions and the implementation of the appropriate technology - nowadays with a team of engineers to back her up."

After Conifer Grove, they moved briefly to premises in New Lynn, and then into the Rosebank Road commercial area about seven years ago. "We chose this location deliberately. We do a lot of work at the airport, on the North Shore and in the central city.

"This location is really handy for us to get to all those places very quickly, particularly since the opening of the tunnel."

Starting a company, and growing it from its initial family roots, involves "a huge growth curve," says Nikki. Since moving to Rosebank Road they have grown from the family group of three, to its current team of 12. The strong family values that grounded the business in its first few years, are still very evident in today's wider and more diverse team. "Individually everyone is amazing, but it's as a team that our combined skills create awesome results!"

"Our business is about innovation and we have always been extremely open to learning. The Rosebank Business Association has been a big help to us and other businesses like ours, with useful courses/seminars, and other opportunities to assist SMEs."

But the work that Intelligent Environments does is by no means limited to small and medium concerns. It has provided lighting control systems for Air New Zealand lounges in Palmerston, Dunedin, Tauranga and Hamilton, for the Four Points by Sheraton in the CBD, control systems for lighting and 'nets' at Papakura's Bruce Pulman sports centre, and numerous projects at and close to Auckland Airport such as AIAL, Novotel, Sistema, Coca Cola and more.

Currently the company is working on two major projects: the new 7-star Park Hyatt under construction in Wynyard Quarter, and the 40 storey Commercial Bay Precinct. Both buildings require control of a huge number of DALI ballasts and control/monitoring of the emergency lighting system.

Another interesting new project, is the delivery of a unique microphone solution for the teaching spaces at Wellpark College. Gone are the days of traditional audio cabling connecting microphones to computers using them to video conference and record, this system is merely network infrastructure.

"Clients come to us for innovative solutions that can meet their current and future needs."



Commercial Bay

Nikki sums up the company's ethos: "In today's throw-away society, we aim to encourage people to seek robust systems that will stand the test of time: ones that are supported, can be maintained, and changed or added to as requirements change.

"Throw-away is bad for the world. The construction industry constantly asks 'What can we get for the cheapest possible price?' With control systems, mostly they are just looking for a product that will last the 12 month warranty period, they are not considering the cost of replacement.

"Of course, we still have to compete and what we are offering will rarely look like the cheapest at the time. But if you look at cost over length of life, then it probably is."



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