

# Bathrooms, Kitchens, Wetrooms, Inspiration and Perspiration



Starting and building a successful business is almost always a combination of good judgement and good luck. The trigger can be inspiration or desperation – a bright idea that just has to be made real, or the desire to do something different, get out of a rut and take control of your own destiny.

Sensible entrepreneurs embark on this journey knowing it will be tough and tortuous and may not even reach its destination.

For Mike Lloyd, founder of Inspired Bathrooms & Kitchens with branches in Wirral and Chester, all of this is true.

“In 2003,” he explains, “I left a good sales job because the industry I was in was changing dramatically. That was reprographics and print production, and it was shrinking because of the impact of the digital revolution. So I decided I needed to step out completely and change course; I started a business looking after maintenance of houses, gardens, cleaning, and so on. Our offer included the installation of kitchens and bathrooms. It took off quickly, and to my surprise we soon had ten staff.

“We got locked into fitting bathrooms for a Birkenhead company and after a while it became clear that they wanted all of our expertise most, if not all, of the time. Their sales guys would sell the bathrooms; I was designing them, creating the visuals, and then the fitting would come back our way. So we had ten men in teams of two working more or less all the time. And then this company went spectacularly bust and suddenly we had no work and the question was, what do I do now? What happens to my staff of ten?”

“We did have some of the jobs that were booked in, and then I passed a property in Prenton, right next door to Tranmere Rovers, and I thought, I’ve lots of sales experience, I know how to design bathrooms, and I know how to fit them. The best thing to do is set up my own shop. In 2007 I signed the lease on Prenton, and while Tranmere played Leeds I was scraping all the old vinyl graphics off the windows. In July we started to trade as Bathrooms & Wetrooms Limited. We picked up some of the customers from the business that had gone under, we started to find new clients, and we began to gather momentum.

“Then, in 2008, came the Big Crash and recession. Suddenly there was no easy credit. Lending just stopped. You couldn’t pick up the phone and arrange a loan just like that. You couldn’t easily add to your mortgage. Anyone who was in a very low value marketplace just disappeared.

“Luckily for me, though, we were where I’d always wanted to be, in the mid to high range part of the market, providing high-quality rooms of which I – and our customers – could be proud. Despite economic woes, clients looking for our sort of brands and service stayed active, partly because they were less reliant on borrowing, and partly because, instead of moving home, in a dodgy housing market they decided to improve or extend instead.

“So our market continued to grow and, on top of that, some major local players didn’t survive the recession. I can’t deny I was uneasy – even multinational companies were going to the wall – but it did become apparent that we were in a niche market where customers were still prepared to spend so long as I and the team could continue to deliver fabulous rooms on time and with meticulous attention to detail and top notch customer care.

“From day one we’ve never held a sale. We’ve never dropped prices to chase work or come up with discounts which, in the end, can be less real than they might seem. I much prefer to sell a very good product at a very fair price, and it has worked for Inspired. Through the first year of recession we grew about 20%. The same the following year and the year after that. We were moving forward and, most importantly, were building a fine reputation.



James Kenrick and Mike Lloyd

“It was a relief, because at the start I was doing deliveries, bringing goods in, answering the phone, doing surveys in the evenings – basically I was at it seven twelve-hour days every week. Then we took on more staff, more installation teams, and I started to think about expanding. First I launched an online business which sells the components needed to make wetrooms, and obviously has a reach beyond Wirral and the North West. It’s gone well – Wetrooms Online is now the UK’s largest reseller of wetroom products and employs five people.

“In 2013 a bathroom company with premises in Upton-by-Chester went into administration. Chester was a market I’d long wanted to enter, but in the city itself rents and business rates can be pretty hefty. What’s more, the building we took on is on a nice main road, very easy to find, with parking, and I’m pleased to say it’s doing OK.”

Earlier this year, Mike took the plunge and opened a third showroom in Heswall, Wirral. It bears a new company name – Inspired Bathrooms & Kitchens – because it represents not only geographical expansion, but also an important addition to the company’s offer.

Mike explains: “We realised that sometimes we were losing a bathroom commission because we couldn’t design and install a kitchen at the same time. Some customers were choosing companies that could do both. In Heswall on Telegraph Road there was a wine bar which was in completely the wrong place for a bar, but in exactly the right place for a bathroom and kitchen showroom. The bar failed, we took on the lease, ripped everything out and built a great showroom at a cost of just shy of £100,000.

“Then, just a couple of months ago, the unit next door became vacant, it was offered to us, and I thought, can I risk doubling the size and undo some of the work we’ve just done? And I thought, yes, I can.

“I can’t claim to have a grand strategy for Inspired, but I’ve watched businesses stand still, thinking they’re at the top of their game and can’t do any more, that they can’t do it better or differently. We’ve always said we’d strive to be better than everyone else, and that means adapting and evolving and seeing opportunities and taking them.

“The trick is not to take your eye off the ball. Over the past 12 years, having been a fitter, along with my co-director, James Kenrick, we see the reverse engineering of the product, all the way from the pristine finished kitchen or bathroom, right back to the initial planning. We’re highly experienced at understanding what can be done, the art of the possible, from the initial consultation with the client to the finishing touch.

“At Inspired, when people buy our products and services it’s the start of a ten-year relationship. The products we prefer are so well made that when something might fail after nine years the customer needs to know that he or she can ring us and we’ll sort it out. That’s why we have a Customer Relations Manager and an Installation Manager, so there are enough points of contact to make sure that sense of trust never breaks down. And if anyone wants to speak directly to the owner of the business then he or she can.”

Mike Lloyd has lived in Wirral all his life, first in Oxton and now in Willaston. Inspired Bathrooms & Kitchens employs 19 members of staff and 12 individual installers.

**If you’d like to find out more or arrange a free design consultation, call 0151 342 1000 or visit [inspiredbathroomsandkitchens.com](http://inspiredbathroomsandkitchens.com)**