



Steel partitioning stays strong

Any modular system can trace its origins to single and double skin steel partitioning. So, what has happened to the sector in the last 10 years and why are sales growing? FIS technical manager **Joe Cilia** takes a look.

There was a time when no respectable office or factory was complete until it was outfitted with the cream and brown of a steel partition system, single skin on the factory floor and double skin for the offices, complete with glass, double glazing and integral blinds.

Then came plasterboard, aluminium and glass, and it all changed, yet this stalwart from the Midlands was not for quitting. In fact, many of the top-end monobloc products favoured by owner-occupiers such as accountancy firms and banks can trace their DNA to these products.

The benefits of fast, dry, dust-free installation; complete de-mountability and re-locatability; and low-maintenance, hard-wearing, wipe-down surfaces are still key requisites in a number of traditional and hi-tech sectors such as automotive, aerospace and clean-room factory environments.

Surprisingly, the growth of 'e-commerce and e-distribution' units, which allow customers to order products online and get delivery the next day, has benefited steel partition manufacturers, who have seen their sales grow as the distribution centre infrastructure for the e-sector has become more sophisticated.

David Teulon, managing director at steel partitioning systems manufacturer Troax Lee, said: "The many benefits of modern, fully demountable steel partition systems are now widely recognised by end users and contractors alike.

"Colour options and integration of power sockets, grilles, cable management and other essential features, together with advances in door construction and access control, has meant that steel partitioning has certainly kept pace with customer demands and is now a first choice in so many applications."

Double skin steel partitioning also

has other benefits in performance and environmental credentials. It can be fire rated up to 60 minutes (integrity only), provides sound insulation up to 36dB Rw and is manufactured with recycled content that, in turn, can be readily recycled when the time comes, though there are many sites operating with partitioning that must be over 40 years old.

Mr Teulon added: "Some clients specify the product with perforated panels to absorb airborne sound around noisy machines, which led us to producing guarding products to meet the required legislation. This is another growth area for the sector."

Steel partitions are generally categorised as single skin or double skin, with double skin panels also being available with a twin line joining system where

a clean or wipe down product is required, such as in food preparation areas or catering facilities. The panels are usually in modules of 900mm incorporating smaller make-up panels and adjustable wall abutments to take up site variation. Being narrower than plasterboard makes them easy to handle and move around site. Panel elevations include all steel; steel and glass in a variety of options; single and double glazed; and mesh.

Architects have also realised the benefits of using a proprietary product in common areas in flats to provide secure storage for bikes and outdoor equipment, for example. Describing this, Mr Teulon said: "This product is similar to the mesh products used in distribution and high street stores for high-value products such as mobile phones and computers. The panels can be stacked or what is known as 'double and triple lift', which means we can divide high-bay warehousing using powder-coated steel panels which require minimum maintenance and can be moved if the requirements of the space change."

Despite having its feet in the past, the partitioning sector is in the future when it comes to technology. With computer-generated drawings and visuals being used to confirm all aspects of a quotation before manufacture and because of its modularity, steel partitioning is being designed, specified and ordered using BIM objects – definitely a sign of a sector with a foot in the future.

FIND OUT MORE

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