

Super Seal - The Colour Of Money

Window and door fabricator Super Seal has redefined its offer to give installers and house builders access to new colour and finish choice. *Keystone reports.*



With an economic storm hanging over the Republic and recovery still fragile in the North, there have been few easy wins in Irish or Northern Irish construction in the past year. And now well into the first quarter of 2011, the economic hangover from 2010 is still going to take some shifting. But while it may take a more than a couple of paracetamols or alkazelsers before the Irish construction sector clears its head entirely, opportunities remain on the condition that product offer is right.

"We're seeing our customers, requesting higher specification products and more accreditations to go with them to win new business", says Claire Mulholland, Super Seal. She continues: "They're picking up work and new business but they're finding that they have to do that little bit more to tip the balance in their favour."

Manufacturing 1,500 window and door frames per week in the FC 60mm and F570mm systems from Profile 22, the company, which is based 30 miles to the west



of Belfast supplies window installers and house builders across the North and the Republic of Ireland. Claire continues: "We have continually reviewed and developed our product offer to new build and trade sectors to support our customers in identifying and accessing those areas of opportunity that are still very much available."

This commitment is manifest in a number of areas. An early adopter of Window Energy Ratings – it offered 24 WER 'A' and 'B' rated products as early as May 2008 – Super Seal has used the commercial advantage WERs offer to good effect to support its installer networks.

Claire explains: "WERs have been a big part of our strategy, we came on board early and we made a point of sitting down with our installers so that they knew what they were and how to sell them and that's been important in maintaining our volume and that of our customers."

This investment has to some extent allowed

Super Seal to counter economic downturn in the North and downturn coupled with wider economic instability south of the border. Moreover in insulating itself against the worst of the downturn the window and door fabricator has been able to sustain investment in its range at a time when others have contracted their offer. This includes a significant re-launch of its PVC-U colour and foiled ranges.

Carol Bell, business development manager, Superseal, explains: "We're continually working to give our customers better access to better products. Innovation in PVC-U technology, means that we're better placed to do that than ever before. Our colour foiled and wood grain building products ranges are part of that strategy, we believe the flexibility we can offer will support our customers in winning work."

This offering has been underpinned by a new and more flexible supply arrangement between the Northern Irish fabricator and its systems supplier Profile 22. Available on shorter lead times coupled with greater flexibility on order quantities, alongside wood grain finishes, Super Seal is also able to offer a choice of cream, black, grey or even dual colour options, allowing architects or installers to mix and match external and internal finishes.

And in the same way that Super Seal has put distance between itself and its competitors on Window Energy Ratings it has and continues to push foiled options so that almost 40 per cent of the product it supplies features either a colour or wood grain foiled finish.

"We do a lot of Oak, of 1,500 frames last week a little over 300 were in the finish but we're



also doing more black and cream, largely in the South but increasingly in the North", says Claire. She continues: "In the new build market the vast majority of product we supply features either a wood grain or a colour finish."

"It reflects growing recognition in the new build sector particularly, that PVC-U window and door technology has moved forward and new finishes are a more than viable alternative to aluminium or timber on a wide range of projects and when selected over them can also enhance thermal performance as part of that process."

But the growing use of PVC-U windows and doors by Irish and Northern Irish architects isn't necessarily to the exclusion of traditional materials, many opting to marry the new and the old. Claire continues: "We and our customers are supplying PVC-U wood grain and colour products for use alongside traditional materials, for example matching timber eaves or doors with antique oak or black foiled products because they want the durability and performance a PVC-U window can offer – it's an indication of just how strong an aesthetic match PVC-U delivers."

While Super Seal places significant emphasis on its colour range, its colour offer is firmly positioned as part of a holistic sell, pitched alongside security, energy efficiency, quality and service.

"It's been tough, there's no doubt about it", says Claire. "We have had to give our existing and our new customers more whether that's sales support or new products. We see colour and foiled finishes as important but alongside service and security energy efficiency. Accreditation more broadly is playing a bigger role in business and we're adding ISO9001 to those credits that we already have. "We expect difficult conditions to continue this year but we believe that we're able to offer our customers in new build and trade a product portfolio and service office that has been refined and is fully adapted to meeting those challenges throughout this year and those coming."

For more information visit www.supersealni.com or call 02879 469606 from the UK or 04879 469606 from the ROI.

Super Seal/Profile 22's new colour offer at a glance

- Choice of 19 colours and wood grain finishes
- Flexibility to handle small as well as large orders
- 10 year guarantee on foiled products
- Colours and new finishes include:
- Irish Oak
- White wood
- Gale Grey
- Chartwell Green
- Black
- Sienna
- Barley Water
- Willow Green
- Vanilla

CASE STUDY: betterhomes

The impact of colour on the Irish and Northern Irish construction sector also extends to the retail market as colour foiled and wood grain product offerings are used by a growing number of window companies to increase margin or as a sales differential.

Enjoying 40 per cent growth since the start of the downturn Super Seal trade customer and Belfast's largest home improvement specialist betterhomes has utilised colour and finish flexibility as a differential and platform for entry to new markets.

"We do a lot of rosewood and antique oak plus black ash, particularly in new build", says Nigel Mayne, sales manager betterhomes. He continues: "We're also currently promoting White Ash to our retail customers, not necessarily to increase margin but more as a differential. Offering our customers something different this shows just how far we are willing to go for them."

"We have found that in the vast majority of cases – we have had one instance where the customer didn't like it – once most customers see it they like it and want it even if the cost is a little higher. The market's still tough and if you can offer something a little bit different for not very much more money, it can make all the difference in winning or losing business."

Betterhomes currently installs more than 150 frames per week, alongside a roofline installation operation so that in all it has 14 fitting teams on the road.

David Boyd, partner betterhomes, adds: "We're growing so successfully

because of service we provide and the product quality. We also get a lot of recommendations because we have fully trained fitting teams who are committed to doing a good job and who fit a quality product. Our sales teams are also well trained and are selling a product and service that they know is good and they believe in it."

"Colour foils and wood grains are important for us but as part of that mix alongside things like Secured-by-Design and energy efficiency – we don't sell cheap and we are by no means the dearest we do sell quality and colour choice sits within that offer, at the end of the day the customer has to get value for money and no one understands this better than betterhomes"

On the back of its continuing growth betterhomes has launched a second operation from Glasgow's Queenslie Estate. "We hope to be doing 120 frames per week within six months to a year", says David. He continues: "Colour will also play an important part of that offer."

"I'm also sure we could do more with colour products here in Belfast. If we were, for example, doing two jobs a month in black ash and then said to our sales team that in the following month that's all that they were allowed to sell we'd be doing a lot more than two – the point I'm making is there is still a lot of potential for growth because people simply want it."

For more information call 028 90 771 986, email: info@betterhomesni.com or visit www.betterhomesgroup.com

