



Case Study

Markel International

20 Fenchurch Street, London



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The iconic “Walkie Talkie” building already had quite a reputation. That’s why when Markel International acquired 7,500sqm of high-level space inside, the company was determined to make an impression.

The big idea? To create a space that attracts people and that inspires repeat visits. It needed to be beautiful. It needed to exude quality. It needed to be a talking point.

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Markel was very clear from the beginning about the level of quality it expected to be delivered by the three collaborating companies: Optima, EDGE Architecture + Design and Paragon (an Interserve Company). Markel previously had a presence at street level on Fenchurch Street, so the move to a skyscraper would take away the footfall that they had once relied upon. With so many other insurers already occupying the building, Markel had to be something special to draw clients in and to make them feel at home.

There was a balance to be struck. Nothing too ostentatious, but still achieving a level of quality that made people talk about the space.

"Markel didn't want gimmicks. We just designed it to be one of the best spaces in the building."

Douglas Taylor-Saunders
EDGE Architecture + Design





“You prepare for and expect change on every project and it was extreme with Markel’s acquisition of a new business. You need tried and tested partners in those situations.”

Rob Aspland
Paragon

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Every single detail was carefully considered, from the size of rooms, to the finish and alignment of walls, to the position of the reception desk. There was a coordinated effort between trades to ensure that every aspect of the design and implementation made the grade. Early workshops were key to ironing

out design issues and ensuring that everything would come together and work flawlessly.

However, plans took a new direction when, three months before work was due to start on site, Markel acquired another company. This called for a 70 per cent change in design and a 40 to 50 per cent

uplift in finishes and quality in a short period of time. Despite this, Optima and its partners were determined that Markel would get its space, to its specification, on time.

The programme was 24 weeks to build, but the project took 18 weeks to draw. Such a huge amount of design time was

necessary to ensure that every detail was considered.

There were logistical challenges, too. 82 per cent of the building had already been let and there was only one specialist goods lift in the whole building. If it broke, which it did once, it put a spanner in the works.



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These practical problems, combined with the late-stage design changes, might have caused any other team to crumble but Optima, EDGE Architecture + Design and Paragon took it in their stride, helped by their early adoption of industry tools that haven't yet caught on elsewhere. Through its use of Building Information Modelling (BIM) and Revit the team could implement design changes quickly and easily, saving time and money, and removing the human error factor.

"It means that if we move one wall, it updates every other part of the drawing and every drawing that has ever been linked to it."

Douglas Taylor-Saunders
EDGE Architecture + Design

An added benefit of BIM is that it allows quantity surveyors to accurately calculate exact quantities of each partition type, or even the exact amount of paint required if each drywall partition was to require three coats of paint. This level of certainty rarely exists in projects like these, and it proved invaluable.

The design team also pushed for prefabricated products. The clever design of pre-fab products, scheduled to fit in with delivery slots, allowed the team to make significant headway without compromising standards. Maintaining

the level of quality with these sorts of products can be a challenge, but the team worked tirelessly to achieve this.

Their effort was rewarded by a finished product that surpasses expectations, everywhere you look.

Optima glazed screens were used to create meeting rooms and offices out of open spaces across three stunning floors.

Bespoke handles, integrated glass sliding doors and mitred glass corners offer subtle elegance and meet the high-specification demands throughout.

As well as visual quality, advanced acoustics were a vitally important factor in the project from day one. Optima's expertise in sound performance has helped create spaces that work, so much so that the Markel offices have become showcases. EDGE Architecture + Design regularly revisits them to demonstrate to clients just how effective the acoustic qualities of Optima's glass partitions can be in real-life work settings.

"Lots of people have reservations about glass sliding doors...But I play music on my phone and as soon as that door slides shut, clients' eyes open up in amazement."

Douglas Taylor-Saunders
EDGE Architecture + Design



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The team shares pride in what has been achieved at Markel.

"Hand on heart, it's probably one of the best projects I've ever delivered. I've had the most positive feedback. Everybody we've taken there is blown away by it. It's one of those gems of a project that you just want in your portfolio."

Douglas Taylor-Saunders
EDGE Architecture + Design

There is no doubt that the collaboration worked so well because of the shared

vision, the commitment and the industry expertise of everyone involved.

"From an Optima perspective, I think our Project Manager and Site Manager made a huge difference. They were positive, happy and only had solutions, not problems."

Allan Wood
Optima

Perhaps the greatest plaudit this project could have achieved is the reality that, within this iconic building, Markel is the one name you hear resonating on people's lips.

"We love working with you guys - we know we're in safe hands with you."

Douglas Taylor-Saunders
EDGE Architecture + Design

"You had a can-do attitude and were prepared to go the extra mile if needed. You were committed and dedicated. It's the same on every Optima project."

Rob Aspland
Paragon

Products Installed:

- OPTIMA 117 PLUS single glazing
- 54mm timber doors in timber frames with tech panels
- REVOLUTION 97 mullion-free double glazing
- Switchable glass
- Lift Lobby doors
- Frameless double glazed pocket sliding doors
- Flush frameless double glazed EDGE doors in Microflush door frames



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