

David Sanders, Blum UK sales and marketing director

essential company profile Blum UK



Gaining Experience

Blum UK is pushing kitchen functionality to the top of the agenda at its new Experience Centre. We head to Milton Keynes to enjoy an exclusive first tour

Words **Amelia Thorpe** Photos **Paul Craig**

In a world of ever-increasing demands on our time, it is no longer sufficient to have a standard showroom. These days, it's all about creating "an experience". At least, that's what David Sanders, Blum UK sales and marketing director, says as he opens the doors to the newly completed Blum Experience Centre in Milton Keynes. "We want to try to allow our customers to experience all of Blum, and not just the product," he explains. "We believe we have quite a lot to talk about outside the product, and so we wanted a facility to allow that conversation to take place." ►

► The 11,500sq ft centre, part of the HQ and warehouse complex for the company, is four times bigger than the old showroom and has been designed by Think Architecture & Design in Leeds. It features a 'welcome pod' complete with white board on which to pen your expectations of your visit, a gallery to showcase the history of the company – with diffuser to scent the room with the whiff of an iron foundry (Blum's origins can be traced back to a blacksmith in 1952) – even a virtual reality experience, with 3D movie of the manufacturing process. Then there's

a full-size and luxuriously appointed apartment, where Sanders says they have "pushed the product to the ultimate of its boundaries" with extra-wide and deep drawers that will hold up to 70kg of weight, 1.8-metre-wide bi-fold lift systems and more. And finally, there are rooms geared to the needs of manufacturers, retailers (a kitchen showroom-style set-up, showing the best that Blum's visual merchandising team can offer) and the consumer 'test drive' facility, plus 'break-out kitchen' for those in need of refreshment.

David Sanders on Blum's Top 5 products for kitchen and bathroom retailers

1. Tip-on Blumotion offers touch-to-open with soft close, ideal for handleless drawers. And because it is a mechanical, not electric, system, it can be used in bathrooms
2. Servo-Drive Flex is an electric touch-to-open system, ideal for handleless built-in fridge and freezer doors
3. Space Tower is a larder unit system, designed to provide ample, easy-to-access storage space for provisions, which can be tailored to each customer's needs
4. Legrabox is our re-engineered drawer box system with a completely new runner system, high load-bearing capacity and higher quality of motion
5. Ambia-Line is an inner drawer dividing system, designed to match Legrabox, and made simpler and easier to retro fit following the installation of a kitchen



The Aventos bi-fold lift system ensures that wall cupboard doors do not protrude into the room, and are easily opened and closed with Blum's electric Servo-Drive system



This kitchen is designed with the Dynamic Space concept, with easily accessible pull-out storage and lift-up wall cabinet



A simple white kitchen with 'standard' shelving, but less storage space, used to highlight the benefits of the dark Dynamic Space kitchen



Inside the retailer room, on the left, a highly functional kitchen designed with the Blum Dynamic Space concept and ergonomic interiors, costing around £200 more than the white kitchen by the same manufacturer on the right, designed with more cupboards, yet less storage capacity



It's no wonder that the full tour takes two hours, and visitors are welcome to make it a full day. "What we are trying to do is elevate functionality within the sale of a kitchen," says Sanders of the key purpose of the Experience Centre. Visual merchandising is offered free of charge to retailers by Blum's Retail Services Team, set up in 2013 and now a team of six, with the latest recruit joining in July. "They are absolutely run off their feet," says Sanders of the success of the service, gesturing towards the immaculately filled drawers. "We do it all – plan it, put it all away, we'll

even go and get the food if you pay for it, and then put it all away for you, and make it look like this."

With group turnover for the financial year ending 30 June 2016 up 6.5% hitting €1.65bn, the Blum emphasis on training retailers to sell ergonomics and functionality as part of their package of expertise to consumers appears to be working. "The UK business is performing very well and our market share is increasing, and we are on par with the group worldwide," he says. ■



Amanda Hughes, customer experience manager



Inside the apartment at the Blum Experience Centre, designed as an aspirational setting to show off the latest fittings, including extra-wide drawers and lift-up systems, and ladder solutions

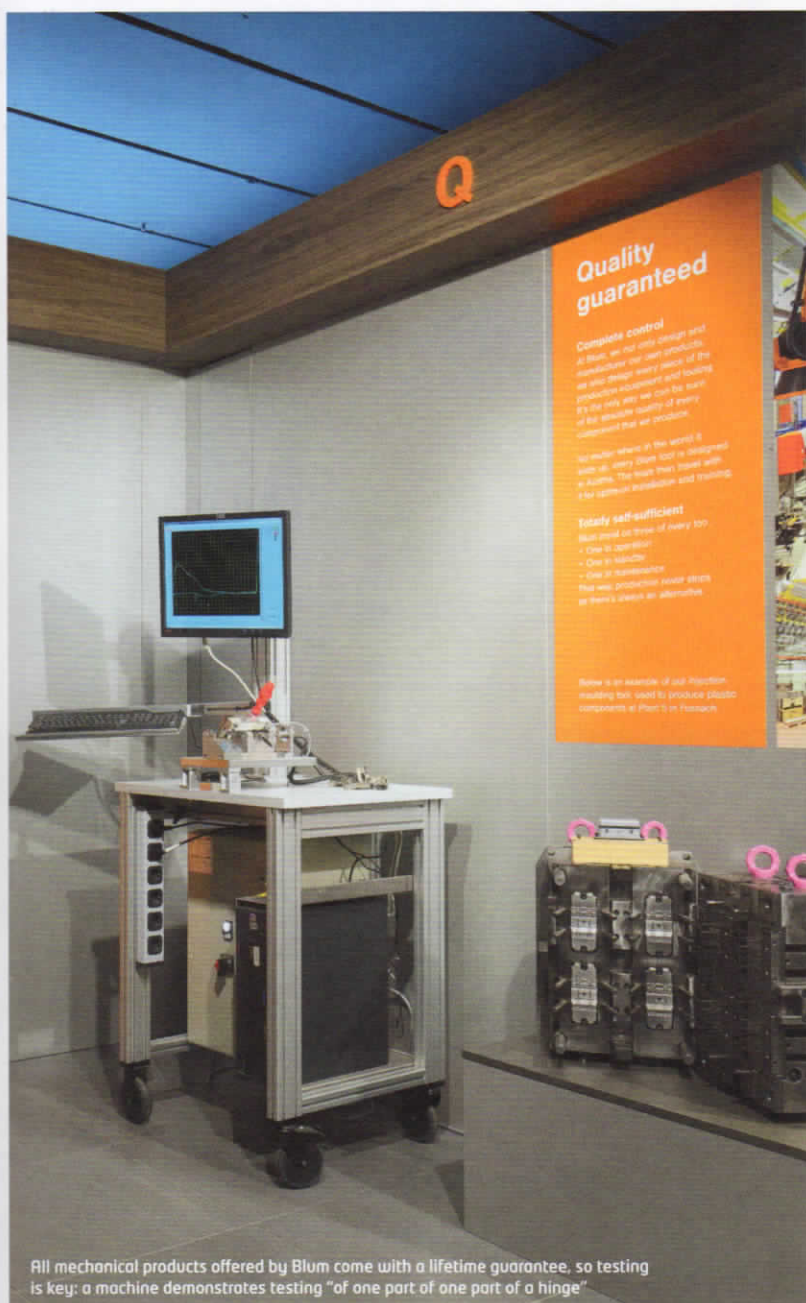
"WE WANT TO ALLOW OUR CUSTOMERS TO EXPERIENCE ALL OF BLUM. WE BELIEVE WE HAVE A LOT TO TALK ABOUT OUTSIDE THE PRODUCT, AND SO WE WANTED A FACILITY TO ALLOW THAT CONVERSATION TO TAKE PLACE"

David Sanders, sales and marketing director, Blum UK



Inside the retailer room, showing a typically sized retail showroom and how it can be used to sell functionality

- » **What is your greatest opportunity?** "To allow our customers to get to know us better and for us to get to know them better – it's a two-way conversation. This whole facility is one big discussion place, a very glorified one, but a discussion place all the same," says Sanders
- » **Your greatest challenge?** "Always to make our culture and our product relevant to our customers' needs," he adds
- » **Strange but true** "It always amazes me where our product ends up. I never imagined that our runners and hinges would be used in the furniture on Air Force One, or that our 120° hinges would be used in the back of ATM machines"



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David Sanders, sales and marketing director, Blum UK



company profile

Blum UK

Who are we? David Sanders, sales and marketing director, and Amanda Hughes, customer experience manager

Where are we? Mandeville Drive, Kingston, Milton Keynes MK10 0AW. Tel: 01908 285 700. www.blum.com

What we do International manufacturer of furniture fittings, including drawer, hinge and lift-up systems

Business history Blacksmith Julius Blum founded his company in Austria in 1952 to make horseshoe studs, designed to prevent horses from slipping. In 1958, the company produced its first furniture hinge, the Aunba, before further innovations, including concealed hinges in 1964, roller runners in 1966 and Clip hinges for tool-free mounting in 1985. The company remains family owned, and son of the founder, Gerhard E. Blum, is CEO. Today, Blum has 27 subsidiaries, 10 production sites in Austria, USA, Brazil, and Poland, and supplies its products to 120 countries. 50% of sales are made in Europe, 15% in USA, 35% rest of world, reporting total revenues for the financial year 2015/2016

of €1.65bn. During this period, the group invested €173.6m in the business. It employs 6,929 staff worldwide, and as of September 2016, will employ 306 apprentices. Blum products have been distributed in the UK since the 1970s, before Blum set up its wholly owned UK subsidiary in 1987. It moved to its present premises in 2003. The complex includes the Experience Centre (created from the old showroom and some unused warehouse space) and HQ offices, as well as a 6,000 pallet location automated warehouse. David Sanders, now 51, joined Blum as a sales person in the North of England in 1995, having previously worked in the family kitchen business. He is now sales and marketing director. Amanda Hughes, 46, was previously a manager at a FMCG retailer

Sales stats "The UK business is performing very well and our market share is increasing, and we are on par with the group worldwide," says Sanders. Group results for the financial year ending 30 June 2016 are up 6.5% **Staffing levels** 54 members of staff in the UK

