

BUSINESS PROFILE

CENTURY OFFICE EQUIPMENT (ESSEX) LTD

A Family success story began in the late seventies in Tiptree when Ken and Doris Bays in conjunction with brother Rodney and father Fred began their office equipment business from a Nissan hut. Through a stroke of luck a relationship was built up with the proprietor of the next door electrical retailer who provided Doris with assistance in her accounting systems, in exchange for Ken's help with television repairs.

Primarily second hand office furniture was sold, and as word spread the business grew and grew, the turnover increased, and the family began to provide new equipment in response to demand. Ken and Doris bought out the two partners and invested in purpose built brand new premises, at 100 Church Road, Tiptree, hence the name 'Century' was originated.

In response to the acceleration of orders flooding in to Century, they opened new premises in Basildon in 1988 and the Harlow branch followed this in 1996.

26 years later and with 16 dedicated staff members, Century Office Equipment now offer 70 per cent new and 30 per cent second hand furniture, and have a client base to be proud of. This includes many satisfied Blue Chip companies from all over the country.

To continue the family tradition Steve and Gavin, sons of Ken and Doris became Directors and their sister Claire also works within the company.

From conception to design

“One thing we always pride ourselves on is service,” said Steve. “From the first contact with the client we will spend much time researching the needs of the business, to produce the design concept to suit their individual requirements.”

Either Steve, Gavin or Chris Nolson from Tiptree, Basildon and Harlow branches respectively will visit the company to undertake filing, worktop, storage and working surveys, analysing the working groups, in order to understand the dynamics of the company. Measurements are taken, information noted concerning who works with whom, the space required between the technology, taking into account health and safety requirements, and how much cabling needs to be concealed. From this research a computer designed room layout will be prepared completely free of charge to encapsulate all the information gleaned, including colour co-ordination, and two and three dimensional plans produced for the clients approval.

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Their own fully trained installation team will deliver, assemble and position the new furniture to any configuration the customer requires. “We do not use any outside installers or transport,” said Steve. “To be honest, we do not trust anybody to take the same care of our furniture as we do. We will not take on a new contract unless we can follow it through to the end, then we can ensure that the furniture and installation is to everyone’s satisfaction.”

Century has its own range of furniture, created through experience of the needs of the modern office; as the technology has developed, so has the average working space metamorphosed. They will specify the components they require a manufacturer to use, and have produced their own comprehensive full colour brochure.

Unsurpassed service

Many satisfied customers will testify to the high standards of service, design and equipment supplied by Century Office Equipment. Edward Goss of Eastgate Assistance Limited of Colchester said the following: “I have been dealing with Century Office Equipment for the past 15 years and I have always found them to be most helpful. It’s a family business and because they deal with you on a one-to-one basis, the service is unsurpassed!”

Crowe Insurance has a prime example of Century’s classic design welcoming their clients in their reception area. Century Office Equipment has supplied the Crowe Insurance Group’s furniture continuously for more than twenty years, involving three generations of both the Crowe and Bays families.

The two companies have grown together. When first setting the business up in 1978, Michael Crowe’s initial order consisted of three second-hand desks and four chairs. Since then, the Crowe Insurance Group has grown significantly, employing over 600 staff. “Throughout Century’s expansion they have remained reliable, efficient and have always given first class service – long may our close association continue.” Sue Styles, Crowe Insurance.

Century Office Equipment was a key player in a recent project for Climate Changer Software. John Warren, Chairman said: “We had three weeks in which to set up a computer centre for Royal London and all it entailed. Century Office Equipment helped us achieve this target by delivering the goods within this very short time scale – 70 workstations arrived and were installed within the deadline! We have been dealing with Century for around seven years now and have been delighted with their service.”

With the turn of the ‘Century’, this company is looking forward to providing their special style of service to customers new and established for many years to come.