

LINTELS BRIDGE BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

The Keystone Group's acquisition of IG Lintels marked the consolidation of two giants in lintel manufacture, with traditionally unique approaches to the merchant market. Here UK Managing Director of the Keystone Group, Derrick McFarland, explains what the acquisition means for the IG Lintels brand in particular.

Previous to its acquisition, IG Lintels made its name as the housebuilder's favourite. Concentrating on maintaining a consistent and reliable supply of high quality standard lintels, facilitated by the company's 70,000sq ft production and distribution facility in Cwmbran. It's a strength of supply that the Keystone Group will of course continue to deliver, but the company believes there is so much more to offer from the IG brand.

The Keystone Lintels brand has grown significantly over the last decade. Whereas IG Lintels previously sought more direct supply, Keystone Lintels has always focused on working alongside merchants to help them penetrate the sector, with active sales support and exceptional service levels. Keystone has also dominated the lintels 'specials' market, bringing added margin to merchants' sales by encouraging higher value orders via its unrivalled bespoke service. It's this level of merchant support and innovation that the Keystone Group now aims to also deliver via the IG Lintels brand.

The linchpin of Keystone Lintel's success has been the 'on the ground' sales support the company offers merchants. Now, with a larger sales force across the two brands, merchants who stock IG Lintels will also benefit from this 'back-selling' approach, with IG Lintels' sales representatives tasked with driving orders back to the merchant.

It's a method that has proven extremely successful. The company offers a free lintel scheduling service, where they can specify and manufacture lintel requirements directly from the site plans. Over 80% of enquiries are converted to sales this way, with every order channelled through the merchant.

Product training is also taken incredibly seriously by the Keystone Group, with merchants reaping the rewards. When a sales person is fully informed of the features

and benefits of the products they are selling, it stands to reason that the sales come that much easier, and more often.

IG Lintels will also now offer specially formulated training programmes for merchants and their sales staff, to ensure they are comfortable and confident in selling the products themselves. IG will run in-house courses and is also currently working on a BMF-assessed merchant e-learning course, which will be available soon.

In addition to enhancing IG Lintels service offering, the Keystone Group is also revitalising the product offering and introducing an improved 'specials' service.

'Special' lintels are bespoke designs, manufactured specifically to meet the most demanding architectural challenges. They include arches and bow lintels, corner and sun lounge lintels, as well as solutions for splayed and square bay lintels.

Improved manufacturing capabilities of steel lintel manufacturers, such as Keystone Lintels, has opened up the 'special' lintels market over recent years, with architects and housebuilders increasingly moving away from standard designs to more creative solutions. This presents a whole new margin opportunity for merchants, if they partner with the right lintel supplier.

IG's 'Creative Lintel Solutions' is the product of the Keystone Group's wide experience in successfully meeting the needs of the architect. The service covers every aspect of lintel design and supply, from loading calculations to coordination with construction scheduling and consideration of budgetary requirements.

IG merchant customers can expect even the most complicated of lintel designs in days; not weeks! This will enable merchants to drive customers towards higher margin specials, without compromising their build times.

Keystone Lintels' strength has always been its total service culture and it's this philosophy that will most benefit the IG Lintels brand and its merchant customers. The Keystone Group prides itself on a level of support that grows merchant lintel business.

For more information on IG Lintels, part of the Keystone Group, visit www.thekeystonegroup.co.uk or call IG on 01633 486486.

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