

UBM Head Office

Complete	Area	Client	Architect
2015	UK England	UBM	Gensler

UBM (formerly United Business Media) is a global events-led marketing and communications services company with a history going back to the 1840s, that is today one of the world’s leading business-to-business events organisers. When moving their London headquarters to a new location, they were looking to build an efficient and flexible workspace that represented the creative ethos of the organisation and provided state of the art office management capabilities.

They selected the top eight floors of the newly built 240 Blackfriars to provide 32,000 m² of workspace. The top level is the main reception area with public meeting rooms, full kitchen, mini-cinema and a double-height private events space with mezzanine. The office floors contain open plan “hot-desking” with breakout space, video-conferencing, meeting rooms and a different type of creative space on each floor where people can collaborate on ideas together. There is also a gym and aerobics room located at ground level.

The building’s distinctive angular shape makes maximum use of natural light and provides a 360-degree panoramic view of London. The office has achieved a BREEAM excellent standard and in 2015 became the second highest LEED-CI project in the UK.



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Services provided

Sandy Brown was engaged to provide acoustic advice for the fit out of the new headquarters, as well as for reviewing the design for the base-building which was not yet complete when the project started. Areas that we advised upon included:

- achieving appropriate levels of speech privacy between enclosed spaces
- achieving a workable privacy and acoustic environment in the open plan office areas
- ensuring reverberation and other room acoustics elements within the varying types of meeting and collaboration rooms provided good speech intelligibility
- controlling noise from building services
- special detailing and construction for the gym to control noise break out.

Special acoustic features

To demonstrate speech privacy standards to the client, we carried out an audio simulation so that they could better understand the sound level differences between spaces and how this was affected by the background masking noise level. This allowed for informed decisions on different levels of privacy for the varying types of key rooms.

Many meeting rooms had non-rectilinear shapes with angled walls that allowed through modelling for a reduced amount of sound absorption while still maintaining suitable room acoustics.

The collaboration rooms were designed to provide both differing visual experiences and differing acoustic experiences, while still maintaining appropriate speech intelligibility for the space.

The open plan office areas on each floor were designed to provide 'hot desking', with desks being checked out using a touch-screen booking system, and to provide varying break-out meeting zones without separating walls. Privacy screens were not conducive to the company's creative ethos or to the panoramic views. In addition, the building's mechanical services system used quiet chilled beams for temperature control. These factors made electronic sound masking desirable, keeping the basic background noise level high enough to provide reasonable privacy and concentration at each desk. This was combined with vertical hanging baffles at the ceiling that absorbed excess sound and also blocked noise from traveling along the ceiling to other parts of the office.

For the on-site gym, extreme care was required with its design and construction so that impact and structure borne noises from exercise classes, treadmills and free weights did not disturb the tenants above and to the side. This was made more difficult by the very limited head height and weight restrictions of the aerobics area on a free standing mezzanine. A lightweight floating floor was provided for the aerobics area with all walls built isolated from the surrounding structure. Even still, a limiter for the sound system was specified to guard against exuberant instructors turning up the sound level.