

Relationship is more than just a business transaction for MK Gallery

A contemporary gallery in the heart of Milton Keynes programmes exhibitions, workshops, cinema and arts events, bringing the best cultural activities to the region. The gallery has evolved from a small contemporary art space to a regional arts centre, with Bluecube at its side for most of that time, providing IT support and services.

Founded in 1999, the MK Gallery outgrew the space it occupied very quickly, and embarked on a six-year capital redevelopment of the site. The new gallery was officially opened in March 2019.

Kate Chadwick, Deputy Director of Operations at the MK Gallery says it now has a 156-seat cinema, more gallery space, a beautiful café and shop, education spaces, a playground and a garden around the building.

In the first year of re-opening, the new gallery had 150,000 visitors through its doors – twice as many as expected. *“We had a fantastic first 12 months of opening. We were really well received locally by the general public and the business community. We were looking forward to our second year when COVID-19 hit.”*

Re-build visitor numbers

One of the biggest challenges facing the MK Gallery today is how to get business back to the space and rebuild the income streams it had created pre-lockdown. *“One of the primary drivers of our redevelopment was to become financially self-sustaining. Sustainability supported by the return of our visitors is one of our primary challenges now.”*

“Thirty percent of our income was from our own businesses: our café, cinema and shop. That income hasn’t materialised in the last six months, and is unlikely to re-materialise to the same level in the next six. We’re in the same boat as many cultural institutions. We’ve got to find ways to operate that make people feel safe – so that they want to take part in the activities we provide.”

More than a business transaction

The MK Gallery first started working with Bluecube around 2005. *“Bluecube upgraded us, made us more professional and did it within our budget. That relationship has continued for a long time. We’ve always had a good relationship. That’s really important to us. We need suppliers that we can rely on and Bluecube’s always been there.”*

“That relationship has never changed. Staff have changed along the way, but you’ve still got familiar faces there. Relationship management has always been good. It’s more than just a business transaction.”

“Bluecube, a growing business in the city, demonstrated corporate social responsibility and a charitable aspect to its work. It was a right fit.”

“Good, consistent customer service and understanding our business are the main things we look for.”

Kate Chadwick, Deputy Director MK Gallery

Take a personal interest

Bluecube take a personal interest in MK Gallery, and its people make a point of attending events when they can. *“We love it when Bluecube people come to some of our events. It’s nice to have that relationship.”*

“Many Bluecube people live in Milton Keynes. They work here and have leisure interests in the city. They’re part of what we do. It’s nice when people take an interest in what we do as a business.”

Understand how the MK Gallery works

Bluecube always try to help out, and sometimes that’s ‘over and above’ what they’re supposed to do says Kate. The engineers are there all the time, and have got to know each other very well.

“It’s knowing that if something goes wrong, we can rely on Bluecube to understand the immediate problem, but also understand the way that we work.”

Need a connected IT system

As the Gallery grew, it began to have issues connecting its systems and, in particular, its accounting software. *“We needed our systems to work together, without it being a large cost.”*

“We also have a massive issue with space for data storage. As a gallery, we have huge numbers of high-res images and couldn’t find a solution to manage the volume of data we need to store. Bluecube suggested rather than patch up the problems, we look at a different solution.”

Saw benefits of Microsoft 365

Kate saw the benefits that Microsoft 365 was delivering for another organisation she is a Trustee of, and felt it was the answer for MK Gallery.

"My colleagues at the Gallery were very nervous about losing the way they work, but we convinced them that this needed to happen. That overall it would be better."

A small number of people migrated over to Microsoft 365 early in 2020. *"I use the system. I can work anywhere. I can access my emails. Can access 365 on my phone. It's just the future. I'm pretty pleased with it. I feel most of it is fairly intuitive."*

Entire team migrating

The plan is for everyone else at MK Gallery to migrate to the new system, ready for when it re-opens in September 2020. *"Migrating now is a benefit because we all got to think about different ways of working. People are more open to it. It's frustrating that we've not been able to shut down the old system yet. But, we will soon."*

Look forward to normal operations

The MK Gallery was working on migrating everyone over to Microsoft 365 the week that the Gallery was forced to close, which has delayed everything. *"We've not worked on the migration project for six months nearly now. That has frustrated people on both sides. But, there's nothing anyone could do about it."*

"It's simply the fact that we can't get everybody up and working efficiently because we're not working as we would normally be. I am looking forward to getting everyone online again - using 365 day in, day out. I think it will be really good."

Cohesive IT strategy

Bluecube's given MK Gallery a better IT base and a far more cohesive IT strategy, it says. *"We were quite 'cobbled together' in the early days. Bluecube's given us a more professional and cohesive IT system. With the move to 365, that is ultimately what we're trying to do."*

The Gallery wanted to upgrade to a system that, in the long term, would be best for it and would save money. *"For us not to be changing every five minutes. If we have to make a capital investment, we have to look at the best way of doing that to last for another five to ten years"*.

Relationship of trust

Over the years, MK Gallery have worked with the same team of people from Bluecube, getting to build a close working relationship. It values that when new people join Bluecube, there's a good handover process and that people take time to get to know the MK Gallery.

"The biggest benefit is that consistency of relationship working with a company for so long. They know us. It means we can be very honest with each other and can say it how it is."

"It is the longevity of the relationship and trust. Knowing Bluecube listen to us and don't try to pull the wool over our eyes. I don't feel Bluecube would ever do that. That's a big thing and something incredibly important."

"We like the engineers. They're good guys. They always help us out. They're always friendly. We've had some good people looking after us."

"Bluecube has delivered good service over a long period of time - going over and above."

Supportive of local charities

Kate says she would recommend Bluecube and has done so in the past. *"If you're looking for a provider, I'd always be happy to say 'Try Bluecube ... they've been good for us. They're supportive of charities locally, so have a conversation with them.' I would recommend Bluecube within the third sector and the wider arts sector too."*

"We're a community asset - at the heart of leisure and culture in Milton Keynes. So, Bluecube having a presence in Milton Keynes is important. That's what drew us to them. The fact that Bluecube's stayed in Milton Keynes as a business and has clients locally is important to us."

"Bluecube's given us a more professional and cohesive IT system."

Kate Chadwick, Deputy Director MK Gallery



MK Gallery

900 Midsummer Boulevard
Central Milton Keynes MK9
3QA

mkgallery.org