

The man who puts writing on the wall

Profile: Finding a balance between life and work led Ian Hobbs to look at his priorities

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IAN Hobbs learned the lesson some time ago that a rapid growth of your business does not automatically equal an increase in happiness.

At the age of 23, the sign maker had a company employing 11 staff, with a big warehouse and three vans on the road. He does not regret the day he decided to close the firm.

He said: "It got pretty big, pretty quickly but without the experience back then and with the people I had around me I found it wasn't for me. I shut it down. I found I wasn't getting signs done. I was dealing with staff all the time."

"People kept letting me down. I tried pay incentives, docking wages but none of it seemed to work, so I thought I could have a better quality of life without this."

Ian went freelance, carrying out the work he was passionate about without the sleepless nights. Eventually, 18 months ago, he made the decision to start up another firm – Ian Hobbs Signage Consultancy.

He now has a team of four who work on production, installation and sales, with the rest of the work subcontracted out. The 34-year-old is now much happier.

"It's about risk elimination," he said. "I'm not in bed worrying. I prefer to do my bespoke designs. I'm not about money grabbing and getting more and more signs out on the wall. We don't deal in units we deal in signs."

"I finish most nights at seven, pick up my girlfriend and I've got my life still."

It was a lucrative deal with a hotel group which made Ian decide to start the company, which is

based in Kent and has an office in Great Guildford Street in SE1.

That deal gives an insight into how much he puts into his work, which many mistakenly believe merely involves sticking plastic letters on shop fronts.

The hotelier wanted a particular granite which led Ian to the Peak District.

He said: "Before I knew it I found myself up a mountain in the Peak District looking at huge boulders and it was there I found the right type of granite. I got a JCB to get the boulder, brought it back, hammered it and sawed it."

"Those are not the lengths I have to go to. They are the lengths I like to go to."

However, Ian believes the industry will be less about materials in the near future and more about computerised technology.



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He said: "Fascias will all be LED (light emitting diode) signs."

"Someone will turn up with a USB dongle and plug it in and the sign will be there. It will all be digital images just like the digital advertising on the Tube."

"Also with the explosion of 3D films who knows what will be possible in the high street."

And his views on the signs on Canary Wharf's skyscrapers? "Impressive because they are big and up there but why don't they just put a big changeable LED sign on them?"

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Cigars and Cognac for guests at the Dukes St James's, Mayfair

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Ian Hobbs' new sign making and installation firm is based in Kent but operates a sales office on the South Bank



Executives take pay cuts to land jobs

MANY senior executives made redundant in the recession are having to take pay cuts to get new jobs, according to a recent report.

InterExec, an agent for job hunters at the top end of the market, found 64 per cent of headhunters are seeing executives accept a drop in pay, with a quarter of them taking a reduction by more than 20 per cent.

Chief executive of InterExec Kit Scott Brown said: "Many headhunters are finding that redundant senior executives are having to take a significant pay cut in order to get their next job."

BA unveils route to Denmark

BRITISH Airways is launching its first route to Scandinavia from London City Airport.

Flights to Copenhagen in Denmark will begin on September 12 with the airline's subsidiary BA CityFlyer. One-way fares start at £65.

The carrier's commercial manager Luke Hayhoe said: "This has been a year of firsts for us at London City Airport, with new leisure focused flights to the Balearic Islands launched earlier in the year and now our first ever venture into Scandinavia."

LOUISA EMERY