

Getting a Raise

MORE COMPANIES ARE REALIZING RAISED FLOORING'S FLEXIBLE AND GREEN ADVANTAGES. BY RUSS GAGER

Commercial | INTERTECH COMMERCIAL FLOORING

The wired office is not about to go wireless very soon. Workstations must be linked by electrical, networking and communications cable, and staffing, technological capabilities and company ownership are in constant flux. Facilities managers need flexibility in office layout and design, and raised office floors can give it to them.

"Raised flooring basically puts the majority of mechanical areas that go in the ceiling under the floor and makes it much easier to access to make changes," explains Bill Imhoff, Intertech Commercial Flooring's CEO. "You have the ability to bring up systems directly at the site you need to have them, as opposed to having them drop down from the ceilings."

This is accomplished by routing electrical, communications and mechanical systems under the floor, and being able to position and move distribution boxes freely. "You can literally take a floor panel that has an electrical system box in it and unplug that box hot, and a facility person can do this without an electrician," Imhoff notes. The floor panel with the box then can be moved and plugged in at a new location at a much lower cost than making the change in a more traditionally designed office.

"Raised flooring probably represents about 25 percent of our business," Imhoff estimates. "The other 75 percent would be floor covering of some sort." Additionally, raised floors can provide more energy-efficient air circulation, because air circulated under the floor does not have to be cooled as much as when it is supplied from ceilings.

Raise and Cover

Raised floors have been prevalent in Europe since the 1960s, Imhoff says, but they were a new idea in the United States in the 1990s when Intertech began offering them.

"Probably the biggest challenge was the mindset of facilities engineers and architects – of changing the way they deliver – and the people who drove this were the end-users," Imhoff remembers, because end-users had to pay for frequent office remodeling.

When two or more contractors install a raised floor and its carpeting, finger-pointing

» Intertech's panels open to provide access to equipment under the raised floor.

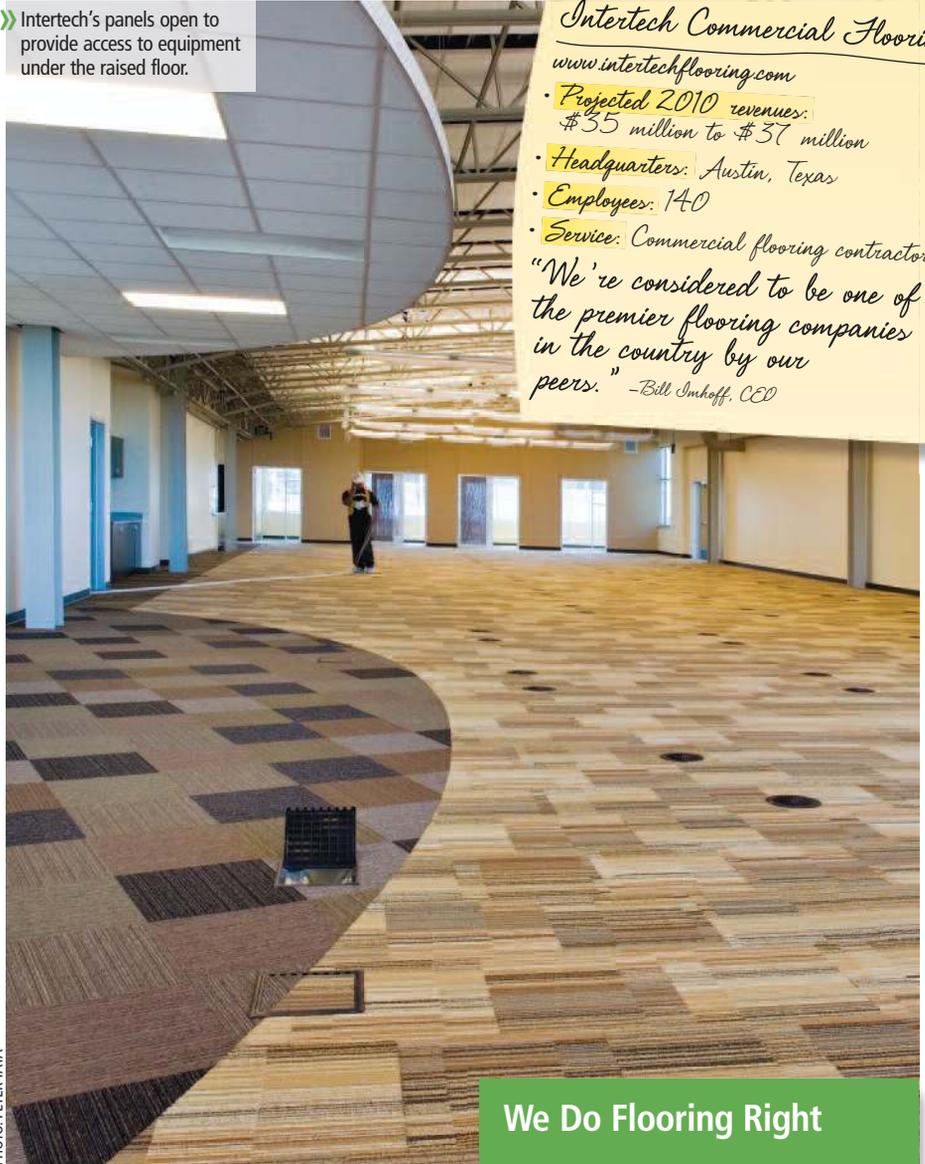


PHOTO: PETER TATA

Intertech Commercial Flooring

www.intertechflooring.com

- Projected 2010 revenues: \$35 million to \$37 million
 - Headquarters: Austin, Texas
 - Employees: 140
 - Service: Commercial flooring contractor
- "We're considered to be one of the premier flooring companies in the country by our peers." –Bill Imhoff, CEO

We Do Flooring Right

Imhoff tells a story about the time Intertech Commercial Flooring employees were interviewed for an ethics in business award by students of the Samaritan Center for Counseling and Pastoral Care and St. Edward's University, both based in Texas.

Each student interviewee said one theme emerged from the interviews for the award, for which the company was named one of six finalists. "They said, 'When you're with Intertech, you do that job right,'" Imhoff remembers.

might occur over issues such as stripping of access floor panels' corner-locked screw threads or not replacing carpet tiles correctly. "We're one of the few flooring contractors in the country that provide floor coverings and raised floors," Imhoff points out. "Most floor covering companies don't do that. It's just a different skill set for installation. It requires a little more mechanical carpentry skill than floor covering installations do.

"We felt when we first got involved in this back in 1991 that if we could be involved in the

whole process, it would be a much cleaner installation and give the end user a better long-term product," Imhoff continues.

The distance floors are raised can vary from one and seven-eighths inches to the 5 feet that Intertech currently is raising one corporate data room floor. "In the 1990s boom of clean rooms, we had some floors that were even higher than that," Imhoff remembers. "Typically, raised flooring even in a data center won't be more than 12 to 18 inches. Data rooms are a pretty big thing across the country at this point."

Green Flooring

Green flooring does not just refer to its color but to its environmental friendliness, an area in which Intertech Commercial Flooring specializes. Flooring products that require little or no adhesive and adhesives with low or no volatile organic compounds are being used, as well as recycled content for the floor coverings themselves.

Intertech installed flooring throughout the LEED Platinum-certified, 475,000-square-foot, Dell Children's Medical Center in Austin. It won the National Flooring Design Award from StarNet, a national commercial flooring cooperative, for its work on the \$200 million project. The company also did flooring at the design and administrative campus of Advanced Micro Devices (AMD) in Austin. For that job and its other environmental efforts, Intertech was awarded the Austin Business Journal's 2008 Going Green Award in the Large Business category for central Texas.

Intertech self-performs most of its installations, but it uses subcontractors for work that is outside its general competency, such as applying coatings. Its reliance on its own installation is aided by its three-year, 4,000-hour apprenticeship program.

"We take people right out of high school and train them, and they become installers for us," Imhoff explains. "As they became older and better flooring mechanics, the top folks rise and they became project coordinators and project managers."

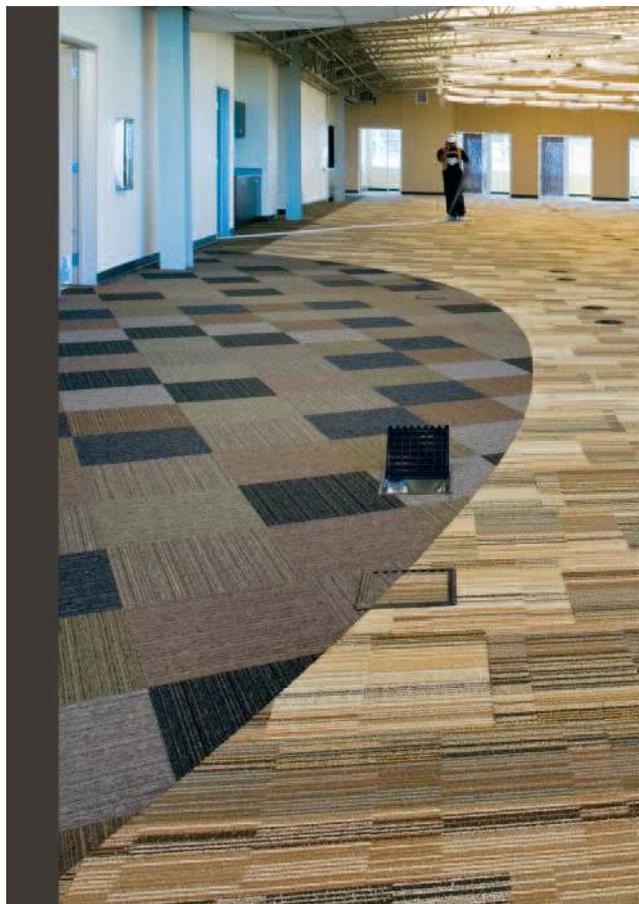
The company's mix of new construction to renovation fluctuates with the economy, which is recovering well in Texas, Imhoff maintains, where the majority of his company's business is located. In boom times, he estimates approximately 70 percent of the company's work is new construction, but in economic slowdowns, the same percentage is in renovation.

Lasting Trends

Besides green flooring, Imhoff sees a trend among his customers to select flooring products that will last. Longevity can be increased with proper maintenance such as regular cleaning, which Intertech also offers. "It helps keep us in front of our clients for a longer period of time, and it certainly gives them a lot more service than just someone that sells the carpet and they don't see them until they need carpet again," he points out.

Imhoff predicts the company's ability to deliver one-stop flooring services and maintenance will make its future bright. "We're considered to be one of the premier flooring companies in the country by our peers," Imhoff maintains. "Being able to offer more choice for facility managers, end-users and general contractors – where they can go to one flooring contractor for most of their needs – is just going to increase."

The company's future success, of course, depends on Intertech's employees, and Imhoff is optimistic about them, too. "We treat our people right, and we give a lot of our employees the ability to do their job and run their portion of the business," Imhoff maintains. ♦



Healthy Buildings *Begin at the Ground Floor.*

Green building demands smart flooring choices. Begin your next project with the flooring company that leads the industry in LEED experience - Intertech Flooring. Our access flooring and LEED experts can guide you to the best flooring solutions for a healthy building, and healthier environment.

When it comes to access and green flooring solutions, no one matches Intertech Flooring's expertise. Just ask our access flooring and LEED-project clients, like AMD Lonestar Campus and Dell Children's Medical Center.

www.IntertechFlooring.com/greenbuilding

Austin: (512) 385-4574

San Antonio: (210) 650-9670

Dallas / Fort Worth: (817) 912-3200

Rio Grande Valley: (956) 584-3592

