

INSPIRED BUSINESS

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DESIGN SUCCESS IN REAL BUSINESSES



**Design
Council**

Small businesses are the lifeblood of the British economy, but even the most enterprising people need help to make the most of their ideas. This has never been more true in a world where markets and competition are global and customers are more demanding than ever.

Design is a vital part of the toolkit all businesses need if they want to be competitive. In the UK, we cannot always be the cheapest, but we do have the capacity to offer people something much better and more worthwhile - innovation made into something of real value by design.

FOREWORD

David Irwin

Chief Executive, Small Business Service

As all the stories published here show, design helps businesses to stay in touch with their customers and build the strategy that not only keeps those customers but adds new ones and opens up whole new markets.

All the businesses featured in this book have something inspiring to say about how they let design into their business and thrived. Some people may read these stories, draw inspiration but still wonder what to do next. Well, if this book carries an overall message it is that design is not a mysterious black art practised by a creative few, but a business process that can be managed like any other - and advised on, too - and the Business Link network is a good place to start.

All business people at some point face the need to change their ways and learn something new. I'm glad to say that all the businesses you are about to read about here did that with the help of Business Link and I'm grateful to the Design Council for telling these stories and joining us in our quest to make the UK the best place to start and grow a business.



*Be the benchmark,
not the competition*

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*Face the future
with confidence*

INTRODUCTION

Inspired Business is about 12 real companies, 12 real stories of business owners and leaders harnessing the power of effective design to gain real commercial advantage. These stories are intended to inspire you and spark thinking that unleashes the potential you never knew your business had. As David Lussey of Peratech says: 'The design process is fundamental to us because it provides focus and helps us choose what to do.'

All 12 businesses have benefited from working with Design Counsellors in Business Links and all have faced a problem, understood it, developed a solution, applied it and then evaluated the results. In short, they used the design process, either by working with a professional designer or applying new thinking themselves - or both. And because your time is precious, these stories are short and to the point.

The businesses featured here are very different. One developed a new material which makes touch-sensitive fabric possible and another completely reinvented itself to take advantage of the internet. One manufactures hospital furniture, while another produces equipment designed to handle glass on building sites. One of the featured companies provides business psychology and yet another produces a tool enabling builders to create effective pipe joints on site.

But, different as they are, all these businesses share common characteristics. All of them have understood the power of the design process and applied it to the way they think about what they do. Early in that thought process, the search for a new perspective led them to Business Links in various parts of the UK. There they teamed up with skilled and experienced Design Counsellors to identify their business challenges and opportunities and then to help them to work with appropriate design professionals.



*Ask fundamental
questions*

*'The discipline of good design helped us
to identify markets, define needs and respond'*

The businesses used the design process to ask fundamental questions: who are our customers? What do they want now? What will they want next year? Why should they come to us for it? These businesses have all realised that in the great majority of markets, trading on price is not a realistic option, and, even if it is, strategies based on it will make a business vulnerable to being outflanked at any time. They know that real competitive advantage lies in giving customers something they cannot get anywhere else. And that means innovation fused with design, in order to take hold of markets or tap ones which may not even exist yet. In the words of Steven Oliver of MIC Electronics: 'We were aware that design could make us the benchmark rather than the competition.'

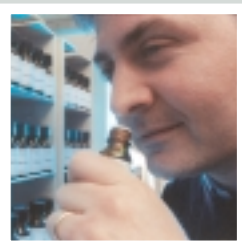
These stories prove that design, far from being an expensive luxury and only for big businesses, is something every business can profit from if they use it at their heart and don't employ it as an add-on late in the development process. 'Good design is not going to come cheap, but the money that it generates far outweighs its initial cost,' says Gill Riley, co-founder of GGR Glass.

In short, these stories are proof that design can have immediate and striking effects on a

business' bottom line. If you're looking for more evidence of that, take a look at the companies who were awarded Millennium Product status by the Design Council in the run up to the year 2000, for the way their products and services embodied the best in design and innovation by challenging conventions, solving problems, opening up opportunities and showing user benefits. Thirty-one of those companies are quoted on the London stock market. To gauge the impact of a design and innovation-led culture on their fortunes, we put all 31 companies into a hypothetical investment fund - the Millennium Products Fund - and tracked their backdated share prices over four years.

The results were striking to say the least. The 'fund' tracked the companies based on an 'investment' made at the end of 1995. By investing equally in each company at the beginning and reinvesting any profits, the growth to April 2000 was 137% relative to the FTSE All-Share Index. As the FTSE itself almost doubled during the same period, £1,000 invested in the Millennium Products Fund would have yielded more than £4,200 by April 2000.

An impressive return. You could be enjoying it too.



THE AROMA COMPANY

Website: www.aromaco.co.uk

Region: South East

HOW TO DEVELOP THE SMELL OF SUCCESS

Have you ever thought that the delicious smell of freshly baked bread that you can sometimes savour in supermarkets must be artificial, because it is so powerful and appetising? Well you would be wrong, because the smell of freshly baked bread is practically impossible to reproduce.

Who says? Simon Harrop - and he should know because his business, The Aroma Company, can create most types of fragrances. These have ranged from the scary, such as a volcano for the Millennium Dome or a human sacrifice for the National Theatre production of Oedipus, to the evocative, such as the smell of school corridors (a combination of cabbage, sweaty socks and disinfectant, in case you have forgotten) or of freshly mown grass. They can also be more conventional and commercial, such as using small wafts of fragrances to promote brands of air fresheners or body sprays.

It is in this latter area of the use of fragrances in the promotion of commercial products that The Aroma Company hopes to build up a multi-million pound business.

'Retailers have received the idea warmly,' says Simon, who established the company with his wife Sarah in the mid-nineties. 'It doesn't take up shelf space or floor space, it provides a bit of in-store theatre, it's interactive and it's an education to consumers.' Aroma's Poparoma® product allows consumers

to sample the smell of fragrant products prior to purchasing by pressing the Poparoma® button on the supermarket shelf, which pumps out a small, localised waft of the fragrance. The product is already in supermarket chains such as Sainsburys, Safeway, Asda and Tesco, promoting Sarah Lee air fresheners and Impulse body spray. It is also to be applied soon to anti-perspirants, shampoos, drinks and coffee.

Simon and Sarah, whose company is based in Wallingford, Oxfordshire, thought they had hit upon a winning idea, but in the early stages realised that they needed help in both protecting the concept and in designing the new product. They turned to Business Link Thames Valley whose Design Counsellor, Clive Steer, assisted in the protection of the idea and in selecting both a product designer and a corporate identity designer.

The designer's advice proved critical, as Sarah confirms: 'His specialist expertise alerted us at a very early stage to the need to switch from a battery-operated

Good design and product innovation are at the heart of everything The Aroma Company does; 'the whole process of design is so fundamental'



machine to a device using bellows. He then went on to build a prototype, organise the tooling and move into production.'

Product designer's advice proved critical

Meanwhile a corporate identity project transformed the company's former homespun, low key marketing efforts into a far more modern, professional approach.

Simon stresses that good design and product innovation are at the heart of everything that The Aroma Company does. 'The whole process of design

Good design and product innovation at heart of company

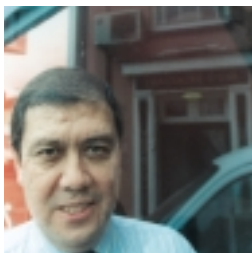
Process of design is fundamental to the business

is so fundamental, from listening to what the customer wants through to designing the end-product. Our potential customer base is so broad. It can be anyone who can benefit from experiencing smells in a commercial environment. The discipline of good design, in all its aspects, helped us to identify those markets, define their needs and respond creatively and commercially to them.'

Another of Aroma's products, Aroma Box, which is for spreading fragrances into a large area, has already received recognition as one of the Design Council's Millennium Products.

Looking ahead, turnover in 2001 is expected to rise to between £350,000 and £400,000, more than double the previous year's level. Enquiries from countries including the USA, France, Germany, Spain, Belgium and Italy mean that they could soon be tantalising the olfactory senses of the world!





TES 2000

Website: www.TES2000.co.uk

Region: Eastern

HOW GOOD DESIGN HELPED IN THE TRANSFORMATION OF A RECRUITMENT AGENCY INTO TRUSTED SAFETY SPECIALISTS

The privatisation of the rail industry created a range of opportunities for creating new businesses. Providing specialist safety services was one.

Tony Evans, who, as a former fireman for twelve years, had safety in his blood, was one person who

Specialists in supplying safety personnel to railway industry

had the enterprise and imagination to identify that opportunity. Privatisation had created a number of specialist Railway Infrastructure

Maintenance Contractors, who, in turn, created a market for specialist recruitment agencies. So Tony Evans Services was established in 1994 to concentrate on supplying safety personnel to the RIMCs.

But this is not a story about a small, specialised recruitment agency. It is a story of how Tony Evans Services metamorphosed into TES 2000, to become

New corporate identity key part of transformation

a project management company working alongside major players in the rail safety industry - and of how the design

and application of a new, high profile corporate identity was a key part of that transformation.

In July 1999 Tony Evans Services was already going from strength to strength, but in order to maintain

the momentum, the management decided to re-launch the company under a new name, TES 2000, with a new image. The objective was to re-position the company, so that it would no longer be regarded as simply an agency, but as safety specialists capable of taking on complex outsourcing contracts.

TES 2000 called in the assistance of Sally Brazier, Design Counsellor at Business Link Essex. She took them through a process which ensured that a clear and precise design brief was drawn up and enabled the TES management to define and commit to

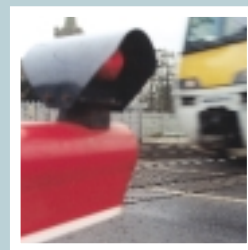
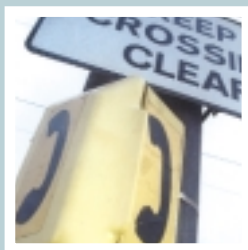
Now seen as capable of taking on complex outsourcing contracts

longer-term objectives and to their strategy for achieving them.

'The process assisted greatly in helping us to focus on where we wanted to take the company,' says Financial Director Donald Munro. 'We also recognised that we needed to put in hand other changes, such as preparing proper business plans, to support the new name and corporate identity.'

The new image was launched at the Railtex Exhibition at the NEC in Birmingham in November 2000 and already results are extremely positive.

Design process helped TES 2000 to define and commit to clear objectives



'Externally we are now perceived totally differently,' says Donald. 'We get comments about how we have really grown up. People admit that they didn't realise before how big we were or how wide our range of services was.'

Dramatic change in external perceptions... able to tackle larger ventures

This change in external perceptions has, among other things, enabled TES 2000 to join in partnership bids with other companies so

that they could tackle larger ventures - an essential part of their agreed strategy. For example, they have partnered with Jackson Rail, a £170 million turnover company, to submit a tender for a re-signalling project at Dartford in Kent and other similar opportunities are occurring regularly.

Beneficial impact internally

The new focus has also had a beneficial impact internally. 'Our staff now

has a great sense of pride in what we are achieving and in the way we present ourselves,' comments Donald. 'It has also helped with recruitment, because our professional image helps to persuade

candidates that we can offer excellent career opportunities, rather than just a job.'

The success of the new style TES 2000 is already very evident in fundamental financial terms.

Turnover growing at phenomenal rate

'Turnover is currently about £5 million and growing at a phenomenal rate,' says Donald.

'Our expectations are that it should rise to between £12 million and £15 million within two years.'

'The new identity, and the thought process that we went through to introduce it, were an essential element in our progress,' he concludes. 'I'm totally convinced that if we hadn't done it we wouldn't have achieved anything like the success that we have.'



GGR GLASS SERVICES

Website: www.ggrglass.co.uk

Region: North West

VACUUM HANDLING HELPS CREATE CONTEMPORARY CRYSTAL PALACES

It was an exciting moment when huge panes of glass were being installed in the landmark development a leading architect had designed for Standard Life in London's Finsbury Square. And when the task was successfully completed there was good cause for a modest celebration.

Such an occasion highlights the challenges faced in installing huge panels of glass or other material high above the ground. The ones at Finsbury Square were said to be the tallest glass panels in the country, 7.2m in height and 1.5m in width. Currently there is a lot of enthusiasm among architects for complex glazed structures, so challenges of this kind are likely

Niche business in use of vacuum technology to handle glass and other materials

to become even more demanding.

Any nervousness there may have been was misplaced, however,

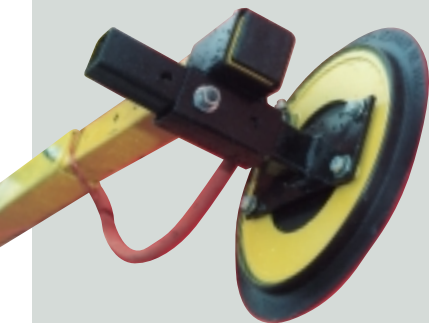
because the installation was in the capable hands of an experienced contractor using the latest specialist glass handling equipment, designed by GGR Glass of Oldham.

In the last few years, GGR has built up a strong, £1 million niche business in designing and hiring out specialist equipment, which uses vacuum technology to lift and install large panels of glass and cladding materials.

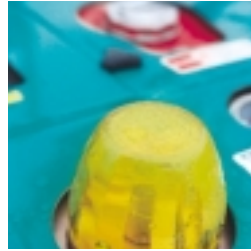
GGR came into being in 1996, when Graeme Riley took voluntary redundancy from BT and decided to use his redundancy payment of £5,000 to set up in business, with the assistance of his sister Gill. With a father in the glass fitting business, they soon identified a niche in glass handling.

At first they sold hand cups for manually lifting glass and then moved into power lifting using vacuum technology. With their equipment being put into use in buildings such as Tate Modern, the Royal Opera House, the new MPs' offices at Portcullis House and the new Jubilee Line stations, GGR quickly established a powerful track record.

By extending their offering to running training courses in vacuum handling techniques, they have further reinforced their positioning as experts. Gill Riley, joint founder of GGR with her brother Graeme, comments: 'Besides being very versatile,



*Design reinforces GGR Glass's position
as leaders and experts; design process
'always at the forefront of our thinking'*



the machines remove the need for construction firms to build so much scaffolding. They also mean that tower cranes, previously tied up by lifting panels into place, can be freed for other things.'

Need for consistent input to reflect GGR's status as leaders and experts

From its early days, GGR recognised that design in all its aspects would be critical in establishing the company's brand as the specialist, expert company in glass handling for the construction industry. With the assistance of Carl Webster, the Design Counsellor at Business Link Rochdale, GGR has been careful to ensure that through product, graphic and trade stand design there is a consistent imprint that reflects their status as leaders and experts.

'We quickly found that design goes a lot further than the machine drawing for a new product'

Gill Riley comments: 'We quickly found out that design goes a lot further than the machine drawing for a new

product. Up to the point of working with the Business Link and our Chamber of Commerce we had, for example, considered advertising, but not

with the same eye as a specialist. The same can be said for exhibition layouts, computer networks, websites, training courses and so on. Currently we are re-designing our e-business function on the

Design process 'at the forefront of our thinking... benefits can far outweigh initial cost'

advice of the Design Counsellor, who will have saved us from expensive mistakes.'

She concludes: 'Now, whenever we consider

the introduction of new machinery, training courses or business strategies, the design process in its various aspects is at the forefront of our thinking. After all, good design is not going to come cheap, but the money that good design can save, and better still, generate, far outweighs its initial cost.'



IPEC

Website: www.ipec.co.uk

Region: North West

DESIGN CRUCIAL WHEN ACADEMICS VENTURE INTO WORLD OF MULTINATIONALS

When you have just moved from the Campus Ventures incubation unit at Manchester University into the Manchester Science Park, but have a product which should interest a major multinational cable manufacturing company, customer perceptions can be very important.

'We were all post-graduates from Manchester University's Electrical Engineering Department and at

IPEC needed to 'move away from image of a bunch of academic enthusiasts'

that time we had no real commercial presence,' recalls Dr Colin Smith, Technical Director of Independent Power Engineering Consultants

(IPEC). 'It was essential that we moved away from an image of being a bunch of academic enthusiasts and showed that both we and our equipment were professional and serious, otherwise we might not get the breakthrough we needed.'

Fortunately IPEC was already in touch with Business Link Manchester, and when they decided to get design assistance in the production of one of their most heavy duty pieces of equipment, they were able to call on the services of Design Counsellor Ray Millard.

The success of the design and the lessons learned through the design process are now reflected in IPEC's very real commercial presence. Based on four main areas of activity, all of which come under the general heading of 'high voltage diagnostics', that is

determining the condition of high voltage insulation for both the insulator manufacturer and the end user,

Lessons learned in design process reflected in commercial success in UK and overseas

rapid progress is being made both in the UK and overseas in markets such as China and Malaysia.

IPEC has won two DTI Smart Awards as well as a DTI SPUR Award. Furthermore, with 18 employees, an expected turnover this year of £1 million and the right attitude to design, they need no longer fear not being taken seriously.

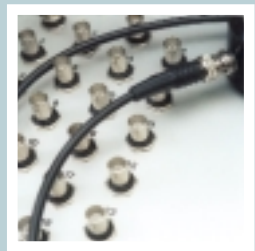
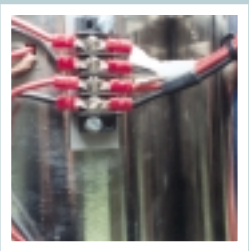
The equipment for which IPEC first sought external design assistance was an on-line monitoring system

Product design had to reflect heavy duty use and sophisticated electronics

for the production of high voltage and extra high voltage cable. It uses ultrasonics to detect layers and flaws in the insulation as the cable is

being extruded. The cables have diameters of up to 150 mm and the methodology behind the monitoring system means that they have to be held extremely accurately at the centre of a water bath so that the

Specialist electrical engineers needed design to establish commercial presence



ultrasonics can do their work. It has to cope, therefore, with a heavy duty mechanical task but at the same time incorporate high-tech electronics and software. The design had to reflect its capability on both fronts. Colin admits that as IPEC had never worked with outside designers he didn't know who to approach, how to approach them and what to expect. So he warmly welcomed the input and assistance of Ray Millard.

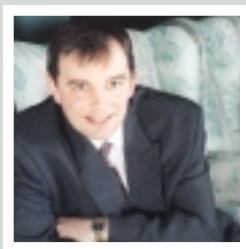
Breakthrough achieved with major cable manufacturer

'Apart from the design being successful, I found the whole process extremely interesting and instructive,' says Colin. 'The lessons learned have had a whole range of beneficial knock-on effects in other parts of our business. We have become more effective in doing our own designs and have had all our corporate literature successfully re-designed to make it more accessible. Certainly nobody could accuse IPEC now of looking as though it was run by a bunch of academics out of touch with commercial reality!'

'Ray initially went over the problems and came up with some interesting thoughts on how to solve them. He then worked with me to produce a design brief and put me in touch with a few designers with the right kind of capabilities and skill base.'

As a result of this process, a designer was finally chosen and the consequent successful collaboration resulted in the launch and initial acceptance of the new machine by the major cable manufacturer.





RENRAY DAVID BAKER

Website: www.renraydavidbaker.co.uk

Region: North West

BETTER DESIGN A MATTER OF LONG-TERM SURVIVAL FOR HOSPITAL FURNITURE MANUFACTURER

Geoffrey Bibby, Managing Director of Renray David Baker Ltd, which manufactures specialist furniture for hospitals and care homes, is very clear. Introducing better design to his company's products was a matter of 'long-term survival'.

'Good design is becoming even more fundamental to business,' he says. 'There is more and more competition from other companies, particularly on

'Without a shadow of doubt I would recommend the serious use of a strategic design process'

price. You need a USP for your products or you'll go out of business - you'll be undercut. You have to invest in the design and tooling process. People then can't copy you without spending

thousands and for a one-off order that's not worth it. Without a shadow of doubt I would recommend the serious use of a strategic design process.'



Renray is certainly no inexperienced minnow in commercial terms. With an £8 million turnover and 170 staff, the Winsford-based company has a 30 year history in the contract healthcare market, manufacturing wooden furniture such as bedside lockers, high-backed chairs and other bedroom and dining room furniture.

Like so many markets though, this one has undergone radical change. Purchasing is done by individual hospital trusts or groups of trusts, rather than through central NHS supplies.

Radical changes in the marketplace

Occupational therapists now have a bigger influence on furniture design and the centrepieces of the wards - the beds - are electrically operated and contemporary in aspect.

Renray wanted, therefore, to introduce new ranges that met the changing requirements of its customers and would also enhance the environments in which they were used. Quite how to go about this was not so obvious and Renray decided to call in the assistance of Nanette Davies, the Design Counsellor at Business Link Vale Royal.

Strategic approach to design adds to understanding of market and means Renray can face the future with confidence



The first step was to help review the company's internal approach to design. One conclusion was that while Renray had excellent in-house skills and facilities to build prototype test products to manufacturing standards, it lacked the design skills to explore and develop suitable concepts, evaluate them from a sales and production perspective and sketch model and test before making costly product samples.

Review of the internal approach to design

Outside design assistance was needed, but Geoffrey Bibby admits that he did not know where to start looking for a suitable designer. The Design Counsellor at Business Link Vale Royal helped by searching for suitable specialist designers and assisted in the briefing and interview process.

Assistance with selection of specialist designers

These were a new three piece suite, an adjustable height chair and a bedside locker. In one case the designer was prepared to work on the basis of royalty payments on sales, with a reduced up-front fee - an attractive proposition for a

company inexperienced in commissioning outside designers. Renray is also entering a licensing arrangement with a named designer, something which will highlight even further the importance of the design element.

The new strategic approach to design has added to Renray's understanding of its markets and Geoffrey Bibby believes that Renray can now

Strategic approach to design adds to understanding of the market

face the future with confidence. The newly designed products have been well received and expectations are that additional government spending on healthcare will stimulate rapid growth. Renray is also establishing an export business, something that it might not have contemplated without the upgrade in the design input.

'The whole process was very difficult, but most worthwhile,' Geoffrey concludes. Design is recognised as a key element in the company's success - so much so that Renray is now considering employing its own full-time designer in-house.



CGR BUSINESS PSYCHOLOGISTS

Website: www.cgr.co.uk

Region: London

DESIGN PROCESS LED TO RENEWED PURPOSE FOR BUSINESS PSYCHOLOGISTS

According to Helen Lewis, Business Development Manager at CGR Business Psychologists, it's a chicken and egg thing. Which comes first, the logo or the brand?

The catalyst for an exercise which led to the clarification of a whole raft of issues and renewed purpose for CGR, was the

Design exercise led to clarification of raft of issues and renewed purpose

Part of Helen's brief on joining the company was to develop the brand and raise the company profile,

but there were mixed corporate images. Simply put, there were two different logos and there was little consistency in any of the visual material produced.

'We needed a new corporate identity, but how were we going to brief the designers?' says Helen. 'Yvonne Fuchs, the Design Counsellor at Business Link London North West, recommended that we went through a formal process to facilitate this, reviewing strategies together by asking questions such as - Where are we

Comprehensive and logical brief for the designer... completion of business plan

now? Where do we want to be and how do we want to get there? What sort of organisation do we want to be?

'As a result of this process, we were not only able to prepare a comprehensive and logical brief for the

designer, but we developed a better vision for ourselves - we were able to articulate our values and what our objectives as a business should be. We were also able to write a detailed business plan, which previously had been less focused, despite the best of intentions.'

As business psychologists, CGR - which has offices in Harrow and Manchester - applies psychology to the workplace to solve human resources issues. They help select, retain and motivate the right people. They help individuals with their development and support organisations through change. They also assist with specialist areas such as stress management - anything which will help to ensure the smooth running of a company.

So the identity subsequently developed by the designers, which is featured in all CGR's visual material, has a 'target' representing targeted solutions for clients, plus wavy lines representing the 'soft' skills in human resources, as well as CGR's flexibility in approach.

'The new design is good for morale. We are all proud of it and what it represents,' says Helen.

New branding heightens profile, creates 'esprit de corps' and pays rich dividends



'But perhaps more important was the process that we went through to achieve it, which I would thoroughly recommend to others. We had to pull together and incorporate the thoughts of all employees. We had to agree our strengths and weaknesses and emerged with a greater focus and a clearer sense of priorities for the business.'

'New design good for morale... but perhaps more important was the process we went through to achieve it, which I thoroughly recommend to others'

CGR soon honed their marketing activities as a direct result of the exercise. It was clear that on the basis of their actual experience, their strengths, their culture and their preferences that they should concentrate on professional service organisations and global companies, using targeted marketing techniques.

Now with clients such as PricewaterhouseCoopers, Clifford Chance, the Bank of Ireland, the Bank of England and Philips Electronics, the 'esprit de corps' and higher profile created by the design process is paying rich dividends.





PERATECH

Website: www.peratech.co.uk

Region: North East

AWARDS GALORE FOR TOUCH SENSITIVE MATERIAL

A company which has won two DTI Smart Awards, Millennium Product status, the Saatchi & Saatchi Innovation in Communication Award and a Tees Valley Technology Award, after being in existence for only three years, obviously has something rather special on its hands.

This is certainly the case with Peratech, a Darlington-based company that has developed a material which is completely new to science and industry. It is a

A material which is completely new to science and industry material, now called QTC, which can be put onto other surfaces to make them touch sensitive.

In its normal state the material looks and feels like rubber and has the insulation properties of rubber, but when the material is pressed, twisted or stretched, the electrical properties change gradually from those of an insulator to those of a conductor. So if you use it on a power tool, as Peratech did when it won a Smart Award, instead of having a mechanical switch you can have a surface that you press. The harder you press, the more electricity is conducted and therefore the faster the machine goes. In granule form, QTC can be applied to all types of surfaces, such as textiles. For the Saatchi and Saatchi Award, Peratech displayed a working piano keyboard on a roll of cloth!

'This ability to put touch sensitivity onto common surfaces makes it a designer's dream,' says Peratech's founder and Managing Director,

David Lussey. Potential uses of Peratech's unique composites already being explored include power tools, keyboards, robotics, consumer electronics,

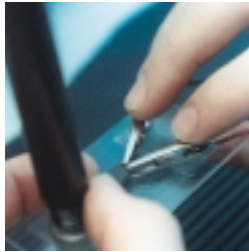
Touch sensitive... the harder you press the more electricity is conducted... a 'designer's dream' toys, wearables and military applications. As QTC can detect breathing and other life signs, there is also great potential in the medical area.

Working with Graham Turner, Design Adviser at Business Link Tees Valley, Peratech realised that they had to take a strategic approach to design.

'In these circumstances the problem of design is a key commercial decision,' says David. 'The design process is fundamental to us because it provides focus and helps us to choose what to do. To sell our

wares we need designers to build it into products. To make real progress we have to target an application and demonstrate through design just what QTC can do for a company's product.'

Design process helps Peratech to choose what to do



'For example, we worked with a design house to make the power drills which had a radical new shape. We also produced them in the corporate colours of the power tool company we were taking them to.'

Need for name and logo to underline material's potential

At another level Peratech needed actually to name the product and create a logo. 'It looks like black sand and we just got used to referring to it as the 'stuff', but that certainly did nothing to underline its capabilities or its potential!' says David.

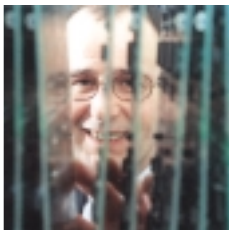
QTC was selected, as it stands for Quantum Tunnelling Composites and the esoteric mysteries of quantum mechanics are at the centre of its capabilities. For two

Esoteric mysteries of quantum mechanics at heart of QTC

conductive particles that are extremely close together but not in direct contact, a quantum mechanical process called tunnelling allows charge to pass between them. The amount of charge that passes depends on the separation of the particles and this is controlled by the amount of compression, bend, stretch or twist applied.

'The fact that the material can be put onto other surfaces to make them touch sensitive means that we can more easily control the environment around us, including electronic and electric machines,' concludes David. 'Peratech's touch technology will make sure that the future will be a tactile one.'





MIC ELECTRONICS

Region: West Midlands

CORPORATE DESIGN ESSENTIAL TOOL IN BECOMING THE BENCHMARK, NOT THE COMPETITION

Steven Oliver, Managing Director of MIC Electronics, knows that first impressions in his business are very important. 'It's like buying a house. When you are walking up to the front door, you think 'I could do something with that'. Or you might think 'this house hasn't been very well looked after - I'll need a really thorough survey'.'

Being the designer and manufacturer of integrated circuit boards for companies like Rolls Royce cars, MIC has to know a thing or two about quality.

Winner of zero defect accreditation

MIC has also been accredited with QS 9000, an international motor industry standard which strives for zero defects. They were among the first of the smaller specialist manufacturers to achieve this demanding standard, which also brings benefits to their customers outside the automotive industry, including household names like Siemens, Dowty Aerospace, Sunrise Medical and Alstom.

Achieving this level of quality means that all manufacturing must take place in a very tightly controlled environment.

All aspects of manufacturing facility must create right impression

MIC originally traded in circuit boards, without their own manufacturing facility. But as quality demands increased, so did the insistence of customers that they wanted to see where the boards were actually manufactured. So in 1998 MIC invested in their own manufacturing

facility in Kingswindsford and made sure that everything about it, including first impressions, were of the very best.

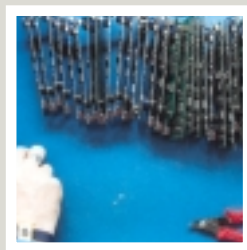
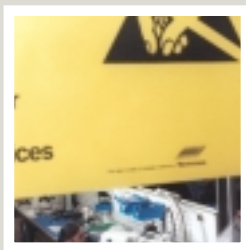
'The physical appearance of our plant is very important,' says Steven. 'We want a style and an atmosphere which is like the very best of hospitals. This permeates the business at all levels and means that the people who work the machines must have the right uniform and be responsible for their own immediate environment.'

Corporate design essential tool for keeping a step ahead

But when it came to being a step ahead of its competition, MIC recognised that corporate design would be an essential tool. 'We were very aware that corporate design could give us a profile which would make us the benchmark, rather than the competition.'

MIC set about this task with the assistance of Mike Norrey, Design Counsellor at the Wolverhampton Chamber and Business Link. And while Steven and his colleagues are obviously extremely well practised in the art of circuitry design, they admit that deciding how

'It really made us think about what kind of company we wanted to be'



they wanted to present themselves through graphic design was much more difficult than they imagined. 'It really made us think about what kind of company we wanted to be. It wasn't just a matter of dreaming up a new logo,' says Steven.

'Before we built our own plant, business was beginning to decline,' says Steven. 'But now we feel much more in control of our own destiny and the work we have put into design in all its elements has made a great contribution.'

Holistic approach to branding is bearing fruit

MIC are very pleased with the outcome and their holistic approach to branding through every

aspect of the quality and style of the manufacturing facility is bearing fruit. Business has picked up considerably and they feel confident about their ability to grow further to a turnover of between £5 million and £7 million within the next five years.



RIVERMILL CONSTRUCTION AND AAC GROUP

Website: www.aacgroup.co.uk/plastics

Region: West Midlands

FROM HOUSE BRICK TO FERRARI IN SEVERAL DIFFICULT STAGES

'Why make it look like a house brick when it could look like a Ferrari?' That was the conclusion drawn by 65-year-old builder David Higgs when the designs had been completed for a unique new building site tool.

The story of the patenting and re-design of the Pipemate began when David approached Business Link Solihull with a rough working model of the unique new tool he had developed. He was seeking assistance in finding a manufacturer to tool up and start production, as he had already taken out a provisional patent.

Rough working model of unique tool

Link Solihull with a rough working model of the unique new tool he had developed. He was seeking assistance in finding a manufacturer to tool up and start production, as he had already taken out a provisional patent.

Professional design skills will greatly increase chances of success

But Richard Stannard, Design Counsellor at Business Link Solihull, whilst recognising the potential of the tool, also foresaw that the product would greatly increase its chances of success if professional design skills could be applied. What followed, says Richard, was a 'classic story of tenacity, heartache and ecstasy in product development in an SME.' However, David Higgs can hopefully now look forward to an exciting new phase in his business career, when most of us have already settled for walking the dog in our retirement.

According to David, the idea behind Pipemate came out of 'sheer necessity' and is based on builders'

struggles to grind a satisfactory bevelled (or tapered) end to a 4" or 6" diameter plastic pipe. A bevelled end is essential for the rubber gasket that seals the joint between pipes to be fitted smoothly but tightly.

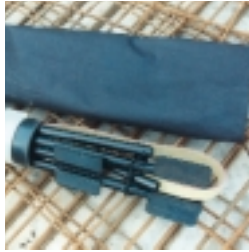
Idea for 'Pipemate' came out of sheer necessity

Ready-made lengths of pipe are manufactured with bevelled ends in place, but when different sized lengths are required the builder has to resort to grinding down the ends with a file, a brick or anything suitable that comes to hand. This is not just laborious, but often leads to ill-fitting or damaged gaskets and the kind of leaks and subsidence that can bedevil newly constructed housing or industrial estates.

Now the Pipemate will enable builders to bevel these pipes quickly, neatly and accurately with a specialist portable tool, and a companion collapsible, foot-operated bench called Gripmate has also been developed, which will facilitate the process even further.

To reach this stage though, it was agreed that the product required the input of industrial designers

Professional design input turns Pipemate tool for building trade into a 'winner'



who were commissioned to radically improve the appearance of the product and produce all the working drawings.

Input of industrial designers to improve appearance of the product

What followed was almost two years of intensive work and planning. Furthermore, the original patent application had to lapse and fresh worldwide patents obtained, as the professionally designed product was so superior to the original.

'Design process was a surprise and frustrating at times, but without a doubt we have ended up with a much better product'

'The process was a surprise to me and frustrating at times,' admits David, 'We almost started all over again, but without a doubt we have ended up with a much better product, which I am sure has a much greater chance of success.'

'People in the building trade are a discerning bunch. The tool has to be quite heavy so that they are

convinced that it's up to the job, but it has to look streamlined and professional too. We've now got just the right balance. Everybody in the building and tools trade who has seen it reckons it's a winner.'

Now Pipemate and Gripmate are approaching their formal launch. Leaflets are being prepared and final pricing agreed. But according to David, Pipemate has already exceeded his expectations. In his eyes it is already the Ferrari of the building tool trade.





STILTLAND

Website: www.stiltland.co.uk

Region: Eastern

THINK ABOVE YOUR STATION IS ADVICE TO SHRINKING VIOLETS

'Your corporate identity and promotional material should always be a bit above your station - you need to grow into it.' That is the direct advice given to the shrinking violets of this world by Steve Wakeling, Managing Director of Stiltland, the architectural joinery company based in Wickford, Essex.

Steve learned this the hard way. He made his first foray into corporate design without professional support. This was not successful and he had to tear it up and start again.

Fortunately the second attempt, under the guidance this time of Sally Brazier, Design Counsellor at Essex Business Link, proved an outstanding success and delivered everything that was expected of it.

Stiltland was established about 20 years ago and, after steady progress, had reached the stage where

Prestigious clients expected formal documents and brochure

there were opportunities for prestigious corporate work which would enable growth to accelerate.

The company had already won the contract to

provide the back-of-house joinery for the Royal Opera House in Covent Garden, but more and more potential clients expected to receive formal documents and a brochure.

Now with the necessary identity and promotional materials in place the company is going from strength to strength. Employing 30 people, it has

a turnover of £1.6 million, which it expects to more than double over the next three years. They have

Stiltland now going from strength to strength

built their own 15,000 sq ft factory to expand and modernise their operation, to undertake more prestigious

contracts such as the New Tate Gallery, British Airways London Eye, global corporate organisations, airports, railway stations, homes of celebrities, hotels, offices and themed public houses.

Steve recalls: 'We had put a lot of time and money into the preparation of the first brochure and we had a rough final version. But I was very uneasy about it and decided to ask Sally for her view.

She immediately confirmed my suspicions and we decided to start again with her assistance.

It's always hard to go so far down the road and have to turn back but I don't regret for one moment the decision to start again.'

Original project had been treated in isolation and separate from business strategy

Sally Brazier quickly realised why the original design was so off target. 'The project had been

Decision to start again with advice of Design Counsellor was outstanding success for architectural joinery company



treated in isolation and separate from the overall business strategy,' she says. 'We needed to work with Steve to draw out his knowledge of Stillland, the industry and the future direction for the company.'

It was agreed that Stillland should be positioned as being substantial enough to meet large corporate clients' needs and that the designs should reflect that it was an innovative, modern company using current technology and methods to produce a diverse range of custom-built products.

The designers, selected from a shortlist provided by the Design Counsellor, put forward three alternative concepts for the identity. The one chosen was, in everybody's opinion, the most radical but very obviously the best.

'The new designs have been very well received, both internally and externally,' says Steve. 'They give the

'New designs give clients confidence... it has had a huge impact'

company a very professional air. When we're going for a high calibre job it gives a new client the confidence that we can do the job.

'Internally everybody is proud of what we give out to clients too. It has had a huge impact.'

So striking is the impact of the signage on the company's vans that Steve's acquaintances are always spotting them and commenting on them. 'They think we've got a whole fleet - but we've only actually got three!'

'Moving on... 'I've seen what good design can achieve'

Steve is already talking about updating the material. 'We've moved on again and we have already got a lot more to show than we had originally. I've seen what good design can achieve and it would be wrong to rest on our laurels.'



WATERRA

Region: West Midlands

RAPID PAYBACK FOR WATERRA

Sometimes the payback from an investment made in corporate or product design can take a little while to materialise. But there are other occasions when the impact is almost instantaneous and benefits start flowing through to the bottom line within months.

That was certainly the case with Waterra, a Solihull company which manufactures and distributes environmental monitoring equipment. According to their Managing Director, Peter Dumble, a product and

Sales of re-designed units have more than doubled

corporate design project undertaken with the guidance of Richard Stannard, Design Counsellor at Business

Link Solihull, has been 'a huge commercial success.'

Sales of the re-designed units have more than doubled. Since Waterra now has control of the whole process of manufacturing, rather than being dependent on imported units, profit margins can be maintained at a higher level and the payback time on investment shortened.

Waterra's core business lies in the manufacture and distribution of groundwater monitoring equipment, typically for use around existing or potentially contaminating sites. Customers include landfill site operators, environmental consultants, local authorities, university research institutes and a wider range of industrial users, such as oil and chemical companies.

Specialist product in need of development for the European market

Waterra commanded a specialist sampling pump market but needed to improve its performance in order

to broaden the appeal of the product and lift its image for the European market. The imported model was clumsy, too heavy for use in the field, poorly engineered and unreliable - plenty of scope for improvement in fact! With the help of the Business Link, Waterra began to consider whether the imported pump could be re-designed and manufactured

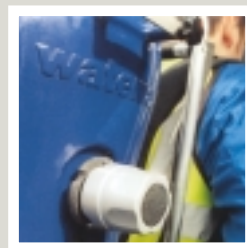
in the UK.

Design 'wish list' was start of process

'The beginning of the design process was to set out on paper a product design specification (or 'wish list') with the help of Business Link Solihull,'



*Product and corporate design project
‘a huge commercial success’
for environmental monitoring company*



Peter says. ‘We defined the market area in which we operated and specified a range of requirements. The new product had to perform at least as well as the imported model, but needed to be light enough for one person to carry and operate. It also had to be ergonomically designed and conform with European CE standards. Last, but not least, we specified the cost parameters within which it would have to be manufactured.’

Through Business Link Solihull, this brief was sent out to a number of design companies and one was finally selected to take the product through a series of stages, culminating in actual production - a process taking less than 18 months. The company’s product brochures were re-designed to reflect the great advances made in the product being offered.

‘Surprised and impressed by how much difference the formal design process makes’

‘Without Business Link Solihull’s input we simply would not have known where to look for suitable designers,’ says Peter.

‘In addition, by going to external designers, we obtained a broader overview of available technology and manufacturing processes.

They were able to make our product look more attractive, reduce the engine size and weight, yet still make it outperform the original model.’

He concludes: ‘I was surprised and impressed by how much difference this formal design process and the designers themselves could make. Even our original overseas suppliers were amazed by what we achieved.’



RITEC INTERNATIONAL

Website: www.ritec.co.uk

Region: London

STRONG IDENTITY GIVES RITEC 30 COUNTRY INTERNATIONAL REACH

A strong identity can give a small company great reach. At least that is certainly the case with Ritec, a North London company specialising in 'non-stick' surface technology, used mainly on glass, but also on other materials such as metal, wood and plastic. Their systems are used to upgrade ordinary, high-maintenance materials into 'non-stick' surfaces which are much easier to clean.

Ritec employs only 13 people at the moment, but its products are distributed in about 30 countries through an international network of marketing partners and 80% of its sales are overseas. Market pioneers and leaders in their particular niche, Ritec believes it is important to control the use of their identity by all their distributors internationally.

'There are some adjustments made in each country,' says Serge Perkoff, Ritec's Marketing and Communications Manager, 'but all distributors have to work within guidelines laid down in our handbook and the logo always remains the same.'

The position of Ritec in the market and the high performance of its technology is perceived to be its true value

'After more than 16 years of product and market development, our technology was recognised as being the leader in glass surface protection, but our

identity was not reflecting our true position in the market. We wanted to send a clear message that the company had gone a long way since pioneering the industry and was still committed to innovation for the future. Our new identity has really made a

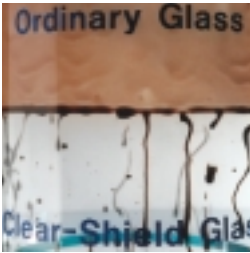
difference to the way we are perceived. We had a stunning new stand at an exhibition where the new identity was launched in the UK. It was hardly any bigger than we had had previously, yet we attracted a lot of attention and people remarked - 'you guys are doing well'.'

However, this was not always the attitude. When Prerana Phadnis, Design Counsellor at Business Link London North, first began to assist Ritec she felt there was a gap between the company's true activities and future potential through its innovative product range and technology and its perception in the marketplace.

With Prerana's assistance a design brief was prepared for a new corporate identity, brochures, training manuals and website development and a design consultant, OPX, was appointed. 'For a small company such as ours, this was quite an undertaking,' comments Serge.

But Ritec soon recognised that the value gained in going through this design process went deeper than the purely visual outcome - important though that was. 'It made us re-evaluate the way in which we

Design process changes marketing and technical support



provided marketing and technical support to our distributors,' says Serge.

Value gained in going through design process... led to re-evaluation of marketing and technical support to distributors

'We substantially changed the format of the information that we give them and everything is much better organised. Encouragingly we have had a lot of positive feedback from our

distributors about the improvements. And anyone who has to deal with a distribution network or sales force knows that that is praise indeed!'

Ritec now reaping the rewards

Ritec is now reaping the rewards of pioneering the market originally and

having the courage to go through a fundamental re-think of its distributor support processes. Turnover has doubled within the last two or three years and that momentum is still being maintained.

Serge concludes: 'Ritec innovated a system that provides a great range of solutions to all users of glass and other surfaces. Introducing such new

technology requires education over time for members of an industry that may originally have been conservative in their attitude towards change. But now the product is well recognised internationally. We are seen as a company that is here to stay and that perception is reinforced by the new design.'

CONTACT

FOR DETAILS OF THE DESIGN
ADVICE AVAILABLE FROM YOUR LOCAL
BUSINESS LINK, PLEASE CALL

BUSINESS LINK CONTACT CENTRE

0845 600 9 006

OR VISIT THE WEBSITE

www.businesslink.org