



SEE DESIGN

Sharing Experience
on Design Support
for SMEs

Case Study of Good Design Support Practice

This case study is a snapshot of activities taking place during the lifespan of the SEEdesign project from 2005 to 2007. For updated information please contact the organisations directly.

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www.designwales.org

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**PROJECT PART-FINANCED
BY THE EUROPEAN UNION**

UK

One-to-One Advisory Service

Design Wales

Design Wales was established in 1994 by the Welsh Assembly Government (Wales/UK) to provide a free and independent design advisory service for Welsh industry, in particular SMEs. Since then, Design Wales has made more than 5000 advisory visits to companies and delivered more than 200 seminars and workshops. Design Wales is entirely funded by the Welsh Assembly Government.

Design Wales employ a team of specialist design advisors who can work with Welsh companies to help address their design related issues in one-to-one meetings. The design advisors help companies understand how design can support their business development and/or address specific issues and then facilitate them in achieving these objectives. The focus is on providing practical support, particularly for first time users of design. Design Wales acts as an independent advisor, to raise awareness of a company's aims and to guide them through their chosen route, whether this is to find an external consultant, develop their own internal expertise or recruit experienced designers. Design Wales does not undertake any of the design work.

Design Wales offers four levels of advice to its clients: a general advice line via telephone/email; regular, regional workshops for start-up companies entitled Brand Essentials workshops (featured in a separate case study); a programme of specific activities for the food, product development and fashion and textiles sectors; and a one-to-one advisory service to help companies address specific issues. All advice (including participation at workshops and seminars) is provided free of charge, in line with the objective of ensuring that every company based in Wales has access to design advice.

Design Wales currently employs eight design advisors covering the following areas: product design, website design, fashion and textiles, graphics, ecodesign,

food and branding. Almost all of the design advisors employed since the launch of the initiative have been experienced designers who are seeking to understand and influence the wider business context of design.

Companies complete a 'first enquiry' form, providing information about their current position and their objectives, which enables Design Wales to assess the level of support that they require (as outlined above) and, if appropriate, the most suitable design advisor to help them. The design advisor will then meet with the company to discuss their objectives and requirements. Advice given to companies usually falls into the categories of support for design management (such as project planning, creativity facilitation, sourcing external expertise) and help in resolving specific technical issues (such as material selection). Design Wales aims to act as an independent advisor to the company, to raise awareness of their options and to then facilitate them through their chosen route – whether this is to find an external consultant, develop their own external expertise or recruit experienced designers.

All Design Wales clients, whether attending an event or receiving one-to-one advice, are asked to complete client satisfaction forms. For one-to-one support this process is being developed to include measures of change within a client company in the time between the start and six months after the intervention. In delivering the Design Wales initiative on behalf of the



regional government the effectiveness of the service is regularly assessed by independent external consultants.

As a result, the three greatest benefits experienced by client companies through support from a design advisor are shown to be industrial experience in how to manage a particular issue; an independent perspective in understanding the options available and the context in relation to their business ambitions; and confidence in working with external consultants and making appropriate decisions.

From the Design Wales perspective, the success factors for the programme are linked to the consistency of funding from the regional government and the recruitment of experienced designers as advisors. Focus is also an important consideration – design is a broad subject area but small and medium sized businesses only usually respond to specific issues they might be aware of or are actually facing during a particular period. As with any service that offers such intense and individual support for clients there must always be a balance between promotion and the ability to provide an effective service – too much promotion can raise expectation beyond the capacity of the available resources.

For further information about the Design Wales One-to-One Advisory Service please contact:

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