



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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UK

Winnovate Programme

The National Centre for Product Design and Development Research (PDR)

There are numerous ways to help companies with their product development process. In this field there is not a correct or an incorrect way, but different experiences from which we can learn. The Winnovate Programme is one of these inspiring sources for the practice of design support. This programme has been encouraging small businesses in West Wales and South East Ireland to use design to realise their ideas and be more innovative.

WINNOVATE is a project funded by the EU, under the INTERREG IIIA programme. It is set up to address the shortfall of product development capabilities of rural SMEs in West Wales and South East Ireland. Lead partner PDR - The National Centre for Product Design and Development Research deliver the programme in Wales with the assistance of Business support providers Antur Teifi. In Ireland the project is run in partnership between the Institute of Technology Carlow and The South East Business and Innovation Centre.

Interestingly, the two countries have adopted different methods based on their strengths. The Irish partner, a Design school, have developed a series of design workshops for businesses. In Wales the strength is in consultancy so an intensive support approach has been developed. This involves developing an idea for a business from a sketch to a feasible concept with a business plan, in a 3-stage mechanism called Design, Develop and Support. During the Design stage, research and planning are carried out in order to fully understand and explore the product potential and market opportunity. From this, a design brief and specification can be drafted and professional design expertise sourced. The Development stage involves an external design consultant working to the design brief to produce a number of concepts and/or a prototype. The final stage then supports the concepts with a business plan and marketing strategy.

This 3-stage mechanism employs the services of business advisors and design consultants, external from the Winnovate team that is formed by 10 people from the different partner organisations.

At the end of the programme participants have fully explored the potential of their idea and are in a position to make an informed decision whether to continue with the development or not. If they choose to proceed then the visual concepts and business plan can be used to apply for further funding assistance and/or to secure the interest of investors. By taking part in the programme participants become aware of the process and costs involved in developing new products and are exposed to the benefits of using professional design consultants. Participants also gain a valuable insight into business and market planning as well as design management and a knowledge of intellectual property.

The programme requires a fee of £500 from the participant companies to demonstrate their commitment. Before any fee is exchanged the company has a detailed work plan written for their project so they know what to expect. What may appeal to SMEs is the fact that the WINNOVATE mechanism is simple to understand and has clear objectives. Companies that join the programme have the opportunity to work with a professional design consultant



to realise the ideas into visual concepts, and this is one of the key factors for the success of the programme. Another key factor is the flexible model, which is necessary when working with different companies. The Design – Develop – Support model overcomes the biggest barrier to SME innovation – time. It allows SME managers to concentrate on running their business while their idea can be developed and managed by professionals. The Winnovate programme is an example of a short-term project, but it raises the question if it will be able to provide long term impact on the businesses. In response to this issue, Darragh Murphy, responsible for the development of the project in West Wales clarifies: “the prime aim for the WINNOVATE programme is to make companies realise how they can best engage in design for themselves. Rather than hiring a consultant, there were other routes they should also consider; whether it is employing a graduate, collaborating with customers and suppliers, accessing one of the multitude of grants and schemes available to them or invest in their own staff and equipment. We wanted to make the companies aware of these possibilities in order to continue developing their ideas.”

The programme, which was launched in June 2004 and runs until April 2006 has delivered assistance to over 60 SMEs through one to one mentoring and product development projects. A series of interactive workshops have also been provided to complement the programme. Workshop topics have included: Creating fresh ideas for your business, Marketing for Innovation, Value Engineering and Sustainable Design.

WINNOVATE tangible results will be realised as new products developed by the participant companies. The programme will be concluded with a publication that will disseminate the lessons learnt during the 2 year lifespan.

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