BUSINESS READY

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SCIENCE PARK

Warwickshire membrane manufacturer expands with major backing

A high-tech Warwickshire manufacturing firm, which makes ultra-thin membranes for use at the cutting edge of science around the world, is opening up new global markets after receiving major backing from Business Ready.

Pictured (left to right): Dirk Schafer, Noshad Khowaja, Peter Anastasi, with research assistant Carmen Sánchez de Rojas Candela

The Company

Silson, which is based at Insight Park in Southam, manufactures and sells its ultra-thin membranes to around 600 customers in 35 countries around the globe, which include research institutes working with X-ray and electron beam technology.

The company, which was established in 1994, recently moved into its new HQ and manufacturing centre in Southam but that move was only part of its plans for growth.

Peter Anastasi, director and founder of Silson, explains: "Our products are very thin membranes – unbelievably thin – around 100 nanometres thick. They are made like small windows that allow light to pass through and that makes them ideal for the use in X-ray and e-beam research.

"It's a very niche market – we are one of the only companies in the world making them and we sell them to research institutes across the globe."

The Challenge

The company has operated very successfully for more than 20 years but was looking to grow and diversify to help insulate the company from increasing competition in what is still a niche market place.

It moved to new premises in Southam, which required significant investment, but also wanted to invest in new, state-of-the-art equipment to allow the business to offer new products and services to its clients.

Because of the niche area it operates in, new machinery, new products and new staff come at a cost and the company needed support with its ambitious plans to grow.

It wants to add several million pounds to its turnover and increase headcount for the business in a very complex field of science.

Peter was referred to Business Ready by the CWLEP Growth Hub to see if it could support the company on its exciting journey.

The Solution

A £373,000 funding package from Lloyds Bank allowed the company to buy and set up the state-of-the-art premises at Insight Park and purchase the specialist electron-beam deposition tool that will be crucial to the next steps in its growth.

The purchase of that new equipment was also helped by a £35,000 grant from Warwickshire County Council after support from the University of Warwick Science Park's Business Ready programme.

The technology has now been installed at the company's high-tech manufacturing site and Peter said it could not have been done without the help it received through Business Ready and from the bank.

"The University of Warwick Science Park, through Business Ready, has been extremely supportive – and the grant has been very important," he said. "Lloyds Bank has also given us substantial backing and has shown a real appetite to support a high-tech business with the potential to grow."

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This project is part funded by the European Regional Development Fund, forming part of the Coventry & Warwickshire Business Support Programme

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The Results

Thanks to help from Business Ready and the bank, Silson is set to increase its annual sales and turnover by introducing X-ray filters to its range of products.

It has already taken on new staff and is looking to start working on new applications for graphene, one of the most exciting material discoveries for many years.

It all means that the high-tech, niche manufacturer now has the potential to grow because of the support it has received and can explore cutting-edge new markets that would not have been possible before.

Peter said: "As well as the grant funding, Business Ready are also helping us with our future strategy for expansion and diversification.

"That means not only attracting new customers but also using the new equipment to provide value-added services to our existing clients to help us grow. The support has been invaluable."

Dirk Schafer, a Business Growth adviser at the University of Warwick Science Park, said: "We continue to support Silson with their plans for growth. This is very exciting technology, which is really at the cutting-edge of science and that must be married with a robust plan for growing.

"Through the support of Business Ready, we have helped to draw in additional funding and to look at ways that the company can diversify and grow its market."

Noshad Khowaja, Silson's relationship manager at Lloyds Bank Commercial Banking, said: "The manufacturing sector is continuing to grow in the Midlands, and the new specialist equipment will enable Silson to expand both its product range and the business.

"We have provided tailored funding for the business, including asset finance and loans, which will help Peter invest in growth plans for the future."

Business support for the next level

The Business Ready programme is managed by the business support team at the University of Warwick Science Park. The experienced Business Growth Advisers team have been delivering business growth and support services to technology based businesses for over 20 years.

In addition, the team are supported by a range of specialist mentors who have run their own businesses and have expertise and experience supporting, advising, coaching and mentoring other growth businesses.

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