

HERTFORDSHIRE
GROWTH HUB



Annual Report 2022-2023

Part of

**Hertfordshire
Local Enterprise
Partnership**



Funded by



HM Government



About Hertfordshire Growth Hub

Hertfordshire Growth Hub is the central point of access for business support within the county. We offer free, expert, and impartial advice and guidance to help businesses to overcome barriers and fulfil their ambitions for growth.

We assist businesses at all stages of their growth journey, assessing their needs, providing relevant advice and when appropriate connecting to local or national support programmes.

Hertfordshire Growth Hub is a Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) service, delivered by a consortium of partners who pool their expertise to help businesses to succeed.



Meet the Consortium

Exemplas

Exemplas design, deliver and manage business support programmes and funding schemes on behalf of public, private and third-sector organisations. With a 30-year track record of support, over 100 business advisors and over 600,000 SMEs supported, Exemplas are the partner of choice for business support programmes.



University of Hertfordshire

The University of Hertfordshire is the UK's leading business-facing university and an exemplar in the sector. It is innovative and enterprising and challenges individuals and organisations to excel.



Hertfordshire Chamber of Commerce

Established in 1924 the Hertfordshire Chamber of Commerce is a privately run membership organisation which can open doors for local businesses and organisations of all types and size by helping them to grow their profile and connect with other businesses locally, nationally and globally.



Visit Herts

Visit Herts is the official destination management organisation and accredited Local Visitor Economy partnership (LVEP) for the county of Hertfordshire, which in 2021 welcomed 19.6 million visitors, supported 33,889 jobs and generated £1.6 billion for the local economy.



Support when it matters most

Hertfordshire Growth Hub's overarching aim is to provide practical advice and support to strengthen the resilience of local businesses and set them on a trajectory of growth.

The biggest challenge businesses have faced over the past year has come from the rising cost of living and inflation.

Cost of Living Business Support Hub

In November 2022, we launched a Cost of Living Business Support Hub.

A dedicated section was created on the Hertfordshire Growth Hub website to bring together the latest information from the Government and our partners. It included advice on boosting business resilience; reducing costs by increasing business efficiency and sustainability; as well as supporting employees through the rising cost of living. Since launch, this section has had over 1700 page views. Key pages include:

- Support schemes aimed at businesses and individuals, ranging from Government-funded support to support from energy providers and banks
- Support schemes from our ecosystem partners including available funding and advice from local, regional, and national business support providers
- Links to local authority websites detailing the support services and organisations helping residents and businesses cope with rising costs
- Hertfordshire Growth Hub and partner workshops and events covering a range of topics including workforce wellbeing, marketing, financial management, and business resilience and continuity planning



Business Intelligence

A Cost of Living Business Survey was launched simultaneously to capture feedback from SMEs on the challenges they faced, the actions they had already taken and what the Growth Hub could do to support them further. The survey was completed by 377 local businesses, representing a variety of sectors and sizes.

Survey Headlines

- **29%** of businesses reported that their business has been **significantly impacted by the rising cost of living.**
- Businesses in the **manufacturing sector** were most likely to report that the **rising cost of living had significantly impacted their business – 30%.**
- **33%** of businesses have adopted **low carbon or energy saving practices** due to rising costs.
- **Two thirds** of businesses anticipated their **profit would increase or stay the same** in the next 12 months.
- **1 in 4 (25%)** cited **staff recruitment and retention as a challenge** facing their business.
- A **third** of businesses said that the **cost of making changes/taking action was the main barrier** to addressing their challenges.
- **39%** of employers were **'Very concerned'** and **47% 'Somewhat concerned'** about the financial and mental wellbeing of their workforce.

Survey results informed the development of a programme of webinar and in-person events to support the delivery of the service.

Hertfordshire Growth Hub Events



33 events



2 business shows



25 webinars



5 in-depth workshops



delivered to over **500** delegates



96%

event satisfaction rate

delegates rating the event either 'excellent' or 'good'



97%

event impact rate

delegates saw the event as having a 'high' or 'moderate' impact on their immediate business goals

Partnering with over 60 organisations, covering topics including:

- Sustainability
- Digitilisation
- People and Skills
- Leadership and Management
- Recruitment and Retention
- Workplace Wellbeing.

*Events delivered from 1st April 2022 to 31st December 2023

2022/23 Year in Numbers*

**3,188 businesses
supported**

98% of businesses
given high intensity
support reported
improvements in their
approach to scale up
and growth

89 jobs created
(including co-located
partner data†)

137 jobs safeguarded
(including co-located
partner data†)

* Based on May 2023 Annual Growth Hub Report for the Department for Business and Trade, covering the period 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023

† Co-located partner refers to Innovate UK Business Growth service delivered by Exemplas Ltd



Intensive Support Services

The Get Growing 2 programme, part-funded by the European Regional Development Fund, offered a tailored package of support to enhance business competitiveness and growth capacity. This included one-to-one advice, bespoke workshops and webinars, and access to a grant for consultancy.

The disruption brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic caused the programme to pivot its focus from competitiveness and growth to stability, in order to meet the immediate needs of businesses.

The programme spanned a five-year period from 2018 - 2023, providing many success stories and beneficial outcomes for supported businesses.






The Get Growing 2 programme in numbers:

Economic Impact

-  **501** gross jobs created (393 direct, 108 indirect)
-  **£34.7m** net projected savings
-  **1:7.7** return on investment (every £1 will generate £7.70)

Service

-  **96%** rated professionalism as 'Excellent' or 'Good'
-  **94%** rate of speed of enquiry handling as 'Excellent' or 'Good'
-  **98%** said they were satisfied with the support they received

Business Reach

-  **73%** have or will improve marketing/branding
-  **43%** heard about the GG2 Project via Growth Hub or word of mouth
-  **3.9 to 2.3** reduction in average number of barriers to growth
-  **58%** fully or partial applied learning from the workshop/event

Two projects that launched in January 2022 with investment from the UK Community Renewal Fund were extended to support businesses until December 2022. This included the **Building Back Better Growth Programme** and **Herts, Camera, Action!**

The **Building Back Better (BBB) Growth Programme**, delivered by Hertfordshire Growth Hub in partnership with the University of Hertfordshire, helped businesses to sustain their recovery and growth following the pandemic.

A package of one-to-one advice, webinars, grant funding for businesses to access external consultancy support, and access to specialist support via the Herts Sustainability Accelerator, helped businesses to develop vital skills and capabilities around sustainable practices, net-zero literacy, and digitalisation.

An independent evaluation measured the impact of the project, which highlighted the below benefits:

-  **91%** of survey respondents rated the BBB administration to be 'Excellent' (50%) or 'Good' (41%)
-  **81%** rated the quality of BBB referrals to be 'Excellent' (52%) or 'Good' (29%)
-  BBB achieved a BCR of **£12.20** for every £1 spent
-  **50%** have achieved new technical skills across their business since their involvement with BBB
-  **36%** have gained access to new markets since their involvement with BBB
-  **32%** have developed new to the firm products or services since their involvement with BBB
-  **50%** have increased turnover since their involvement with BBB
-  **100%** were either satisfied or very satisfied with BBB
-  **41%** reported positive impacts on costs and/or profits because of their involvement with BBB



Led by Visit Herts in partnership with Hertfordshire Growth Hub and the University of Hertfordshire, the **Herts, Camera, Action!** programme was designed to capitalise on the county's growing cluster of world-class film and TV studios by supporting innovation within the creative industry supply chain, investing in creative skills and knowledge exchange, and developing a series of screen tourism products to help rebuild Hertfordshire's visitor economy.

This three-strand support package included grant funding, the Screen Tourism Development Programme, and continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities.

Survey data revealed that supported businesses across all three strands forecasted a rise in employment and turnover from 2021/22 to 2024/25. It is estimated that the programme will have enabled a gross additional turnover of £4.9 million, and gross GVA of £12.4 million, to be created by March 2025.

Workshops and Webinars

Growing knowledge and connections

Hertfordshire Growth Hub team has engaged extensively with the business community and its business support partners, that provide services for businesses locally, through bespoke in-person workshops and webinars. The Cost of Living Business Survey results and emerging themes informed the development of a programme of webinars and in-person events to support the delivery of the service.

Feedback from businesses and business support partners, flagged that ongoing recruitment challenges were a major barrier to business growth. In response, Hertfordshire Growth Hub launched a bespoke, practical workshop in November 2022, entitled 'Recruitment and Retention: Best Practice for Hiring and Retaining Talented Employees'.

"I genuinely found the workshop very useful and have already taken several actions based on the learning. The workshop was full of useful advice, practical guidance and actionable points. The presenters were clearly experts in their fields. The interactive nature of the programme made for a good balance of theory and practice."

Helen Scott, The Garden Company Ltd



This workshop was delivered by public and private sector partners including the University of Hertfordshire, Hertfordshire County Council, Hertfordshire LEP, Infusion Group, Wagada Digital and Redway HR.

The workshop was delivered on three occasions, reaching 40 businesses, who learned how to:

- Qualify the need for a new hire
- Use marketing to attract talent
- Manage the interview, selection, onboarding and induction process
- Understand the regulations surrounding offers of employment

Further guidance was also provided on how to connect with the future workforce including undergraduates, graduates, and apprentices.

All The Help You Can Get Business Support Show

Following a three-year hiatus due to COVID-19, Hertfordshire Growth Hub held two instances of its flagship business support show in 2023: the first in March with the theme **'Staying Resilient and Competitive'** and the second **'Grow Yourself, Grow Your Team and Grow Your Business'** in December.

Staying Resilient and Competitive

This show drew 53 businesses of all sizes and growth stages, and helped to address ongoing challenges relating to rising costs, EU exit and the war in Ukraine.

12 workshops were held, focused on key topics including net zero and supply chain, leadership and management, recruitment, workforce development and inclusion, marketing, protecting your business, and finance and funding - alongside an exhibition featuring over 20 local business support organisations.



Adrian Hawkins OBE, Chair of Hertfordshire LEP, who opened the show, is pictured alongside Liza Armstrong and Matt Clark from Hertfordshire Growth Hub.



Grow Yourself, Grow Your Team and Grow Your Business

This event was aimed at those looking to start, grow or scale their business in Hertfordshire, and attended by 64 business owners.

Delegates had the choice to join 3 out of 6 expert-led workshops all based around the show's theme, covering topics including sales, green skills, artificial intelligence and financial management. 94% of attendees rated the workshops either 'Excellent' (67%) or 'Good' (27%).

Over 15 organisations exhibited, showcasing the publicly funded business support and advice services available in the county which can be accessed via Hertfordshire Growth Hub.

In addition to offering businesses the chance to gain actionable advice, discover opportunities and connect with the wealth of support available locally and nationally, the event celebrated the special partnership between businesses and regulatory services known as Better Business for All (BBfA) reaching a milestone 10 years of delivery in Hertfordshire.



Adrian Hawkins OBE, Chair of Hertfordshire LEP, opened the show.



2023/24 Service Delivery

Funding for the aforementioned programmes has now ceased and in 2023/24, the Growth Hub service continues to operate as an 'Access to All' model, providing intensive support for growing businesses.

The learning and experience from delivering funded programmes during 2022/23 (e.g. Get Growing 2, Building Back Better Growth Programme and Herts, Camera, Action!) has enabled us to build a roster of support based on best practice around specialist subjects (e.g. net zero and digitalisation), an evidence-based approach (e.g. our Cost of Living Business Survey) and alignment with local and regional stakeholders.



The service is delivered by our in-house team, which includes:

- two Business Information Advisers who provide dedicated frontline support and process initial enquiries via phone or email;
- a Marketing Executive who raises awareness of the service and encourages engagement;
- three Growth Account Managers who serve as business advisers and provide in-depth support to growing businesses;
- a Partnership and Events Manager, who curates and manages partner relationships and facilitates event delivery, and;
- the Head of Service, who oversees contractual arrangements and areas of in-house delivery, as well as the development of thematic areas linked to strategic priorities.

Meet the Team



Liza Armstrong
Head of Service



Steve Armitage
Growth Account Manager



Wendy Gibbs
Growth Account Manager



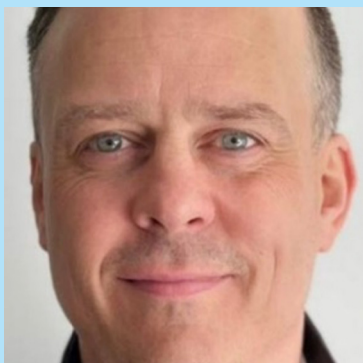
Kieran Thorpe
Growth Account Manager



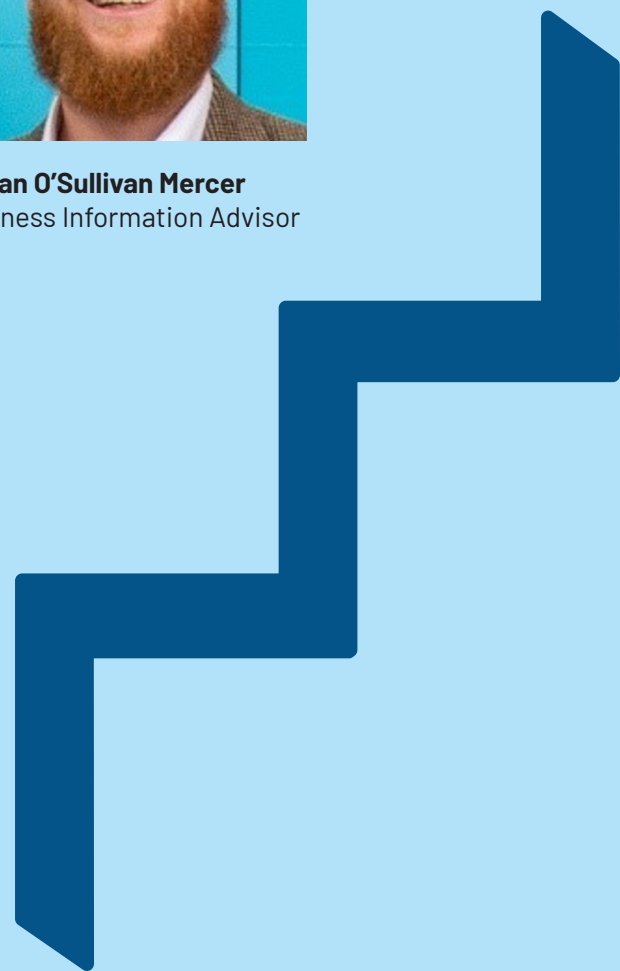
Carl Utley
Business Information Advisor



Kieran O'Sullivan Mercer
Business Information Advisor



Matt Clark
Partnership and
Events Manager



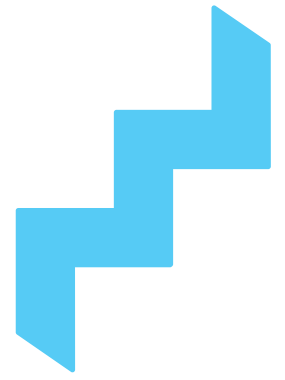
Looking ahead

As ever, Hertfordshire Growth Hub remains committed to helping our businesses to flourish and thrive as they navigate the changing economic landscape. Help is available to businesses of all sizes and from all sectors.

We look forward to strengthening the bonds we have cultivated with our support partners to provide a highly valued service – one which monitors, understands, and responds intuitively to the needs of local businesses.

Our experienced and knowledgeable Growth Hub team will continue to provide one-to-one advice by telephone, online or in person, complemented by our comprehensive schedule of webinars and workshops, to broaden our reach and ensure businesses can access support in the way that works best for them.



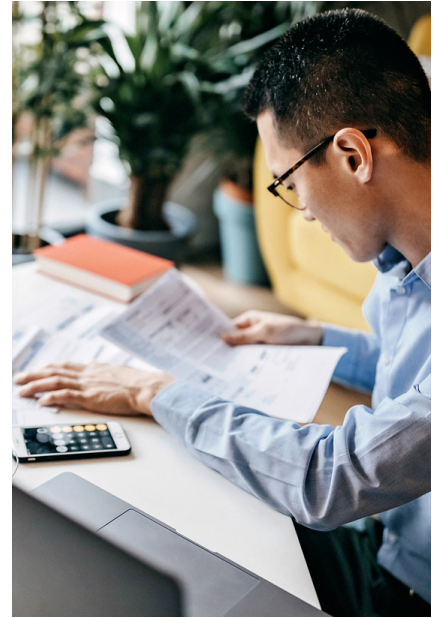


CASE STUDY 1

AIMS Consultancy

AIMS Consultancy is a 10-year-old business based in East Herts that provides ISO support services. ISO, the International Organisation for Standardisation, develop and publish international standards for businesses to ensure they conduct their activities in line with regulatory requirements. ISO Standards help businesses of any size and sector reduce costs, increase productivity, and access new markets.

Company founder, Colin Jennings, discovered the Hertfordshire Growth Hub and the Get Growing 2 (GG2) programme through an online search for local business support in Hertfordshire. Get Growing 2 is a structured and comprehensive package of business support designed to help small and medium-sized businesses in Hertfordshire overcome barriers to growth. The Get Growing 2 Programme is funded through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).



The Challenge

He joined the programme with an initial objective of optimising the firm's organisational structure and hopefully improving its prospects. By his own admission he did not know exactly what that would look like.

The Solution

An action plan, developed with the help of a Growth Account Manager, contained an aspiration to achieve Health and Safety (SSIP), and Cyber Essentials accreditation. Colin also reviewed and updated the internal workings and the structure of the business. The action plan outlined clear steps that were necessary to achieve this. The support was carried out over twelve sessions. Contact with the Account Manager was regular, and the support offered flexibly. Colin received coaching support and advised on the phone and via online meetings, and e-mail.

The Impact

Since joining the programme Colin reported a 23% increase in the company's business activity, which he partly attributes to support.

As a direct outcome of the programme Colin believes he is now able to recruit more staff because of the improvements made to the structure of the business. These included health and safety accreditation and updated internal policies and a staff handbook. He hopes to recruit from within the area, which will have a positive effect on the local economy.

Hear what Colin had to say about receiving advise and support from one of our Growth Account Managers:

"The Growth Account Manager who supported me on the programme came from industry, so they had a lot of background knowledge and experience. They were the one point of contact with whom I engaged with throughout the programme, which made the process straightforward and efficient from my perspective"

"It was good to be able to take a step back from day-to-day business of serving clients, to focus on the structure of the business and our business ambitions."

CASE STUDY 2

Gardamed

Gardamed is a medical equipment supplier, established in 2016 and based in North Hertfordshire District. The company distributes a wide range of medical equipment to the NHS, hospitals, pharmacies, and clinics across the UK.



Mandy Wright – Director of Gardamed – found out about Get Growing 2 (GG2) through an event with the Hertfordshire Chamber of Commerce. Get Growing 2 (GG2) is a structured and comprehensive package of business support designed to help small and medium-sized businesses in Hertfordshire overcome barriers to growth. The Get Growing 2 Programme is funded through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)



The Challenge

During the height of the pandemic, product sales and operations were almost halted to the NHS supply chain and other healthcare services. As a result, the company had to re-assess its target market and moved towards selling directly to patients, and not just nurses and hospital procurement and other professional staff. Covid meant that the usual face-to-face meetings with healthcare professionals stopped.

The Solution

Gardamed's focus moved to the development of its social media platforms and general online presence. Gardamed received a grant from the Get Growing 2 (GG2) programme to explore support from marketing agencies, enabling it to access the advice they needed. Mandy found the knowledge and expertise shared by Steve Armitage (Growth Account Manager) to be invaluable. He kept in regular contact with the

company throughout the project, particularly during the grant application process.

The Impact

As a result of the support, Gardamed were able to create a new position in the company, focusing entirely on online promotions and implementing the actions advice developed from the GG2 Programme. This extra post allowed the company to embark on social media influencer campaigns and the development of the company website. The grant from the programme also allowed for some in-house training around digital marketing.

These new sales added to the company's turnover and broadened its customer base. Looking to the future, Gardamed would like to continue with what they learnt on the programme. Mandy said she was 'very satisfied' with the support they received and is working to improve its approach in selling directly to private customers.

Hear what Mandy said about the GG2 programme and support received from Hertfordshire Growth Hub:

"With the help of this 45% matched grant, we were able to access digital marketing advice. Without the support, a lot of these agencies would have been beyond our budget. In fact, we would not have even thought about taking this kind of support from the marketing agencies."

CASE STUDY 3

The Stickleback Fish Company Ltd



Stickleback Fish Company Ltd was established in 2005 and located south of Hatfield at Welham Green, the Stickleback Fish Company provides wholesale seafood to hotels, restaurants, pubs, catering companies and to the education and healthcare sectors. The business employs 50 people, is committed to sustainable practices, and was recognised by the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) as the 'Fresh Fish Foodservice Supplier of the Year' for 2020.

The Challenge

Ross Arnold, the Managing Director, had been looking for support to grow the business and found out about the Get Growing 2 programme through the Hertfordshire Growth Hub website. Having been in business for many years, Ross felt that what he needed was specialist support to help his business develop a communication strategy to help them communicate effectively with their customers, suppliers, and colleagues. He did not need any general business support which was available but wanted more specialist input. He joined the programme with a clear vision of what the company needed to grow which he communicated with his Growth Account Manager.

The Get Growing 2 Programme is funded through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

The Solution

After meeting with the Growth Account Manager both Ross and his Growth Account Manager set

about agreeing an action plan together which included working with a branding specialist to develop a service communication strategy. Through the Get Growing 2 Programme the firm received a grant towards the development of a stage one branding strategy that allowed the Stickleback Fish Company to communicate much more effectively with their customers, suppliers, and colleagues.

The Impact

With regards to the commercial benefits, Ross stated that Get Growing 2 (GG2) played a part in accelerating the growth of the business beyond the 15% per year achieved over preceding years. This growth in turnover will ultimately lead to the recruitment of new employees, said Ross.

Moving forward the future priority for Ross and the company is to continue growing, so the business will be seeking further support from other similar programmes to maintain their expansion drive and build on the momentum achieved to date.

Overall, Ross felt that his experience of the programme was a positive one and would recommend Get Growing 2 (GG2) to other SMEs wanting to grow their business.

Hear what Ross had to say about his support from our Growth Account Manager:

"I felt the understanding and expertise in business management of the Growth Account Manager was really good and the support was just what I was looking for."



CASE STUDY 4

Indigo Tree Digital

Indigo Tree Digital is a Tring-based marketing agency specialising in bespoke WordPress websites. The SME first approached Hertfordshire Growth Hub in 2014 and has used our services many times since, securing invaluable advice, support and access to grants of around £100,000.

The Challenge

Over the past decade, Indigo Tree Digital has looked to grow sustainably, develop new products, strengthen its leadership and survive the challenges of Covid.

Founder Louise Towler first used the Growth Hub when she was looking to develop the company's mission, vision and values. She was put in touch with Growth Account Manager Wendy Gibbs, who built a strong relationship with Louise. She not only advised her when Louise was looking for help, but she also proactively contacted Indigo to let them know about various schemes and grants.

The Solution

Wendy initially helped Louise access a grant for leadership coaching. This supported her and other members of her senior team to lay the foundations for the future of the business.

When Covid hit, Wendy approached Indigo Tree to let them know about the various funding schemes available and to help them secure the money they needed to build back stronger. As with many businesses, the Covid

period was a difficult and often confusing time; Wendy was able to bring clarity to what was an ever-shifting support environment.

Wendy also helped the company access a consultancy grant related to sustainability, which will enable them to pursue B Corp status. She also connected Indigo Tree to Innovate UK, which 50% funded an R&D project in conjunction with the University of Hertfordshire, to develop a new software product. At the same time, Louise secured a Women in Innovation Award of £50,000 to help further fund the product's development and marketing.

The Growth Hub not only allows businesses like Indigo Tree to access direct advice, but also to find a wide range of support from other providers. For example, through the Growth Hub, the company was able to secure funding for new equipment and consultancy, which has all helped to accelerate growth.

The Impact

Indigo Tree Digital has enjoyed almost a decade of support through the Growth Hub. Wendy has been by their side every step of the way, providing advice, support, training and access



to funding that has helped the company thrive and grow.

Having set out their mission, vision and values, Indigo Tree survived Covid, emerged stronger and are now ready to take their business to the next level through the launch of their new product. Digital sustainability is a growing area of concern, so this new product, Kanoppi, measures the carbon footprint of a website, helping clients meet their environmental targets.

“Wendy really got under the skin of our business. She’s really knowledgeable, really calm and if she sees something out there, like a specific grant that’s relevant to us, she’ll help us get it. The Growth Hub is proof that there is help out there for small businesses.”

Louise Towler, founder of Indigo Tree Digital Ltd

CASE STUDY 5

Dampcure Woodcure

Established in Watford in 1959, Dampcure Woodcure is a fourth-generation family business providing specialist damp-proofing and wood-treatment services for commercial and residential properties.

Without the support of the Growth Hub or access to Get Growing 2, Nick says the company would not have been able to reach its objectives as quickly or efficiently.

The Challenge

After being appointed as Head of Operations, Nick Sperrin wanted to modernise the company by replacing out-of-date systems and improve its approach to digital marketing.

Nick heard about the Get Growing 2 business-support programme and so approached Hertfordshire Growth Hub for help.

The Solution

Our dedicated Growth Account Manager, Steve Armitage, spent time getting to know the business, the challenges it faced and its goals. We then helped Nick apply for a business support grant that enabled him to access

specialist advice to develop a comprehensive digital marketing plan, which included the redesign of the company's website.

The Impact

The new website has led to greater exposure for Dampcure Woodcure, a 25% rise in enquiries and an increase in the number of clients. As a result, turnover has been boosted by 15%.

Nick is now looking to use the marketing advice he accessed via the Growth Hub to increase partnerships with housing associations and carry out more condensation surveys. He's also planning to digitise business processes and reduce the use of paper files.

"The support we've had has been excellent. It was good to work with someone focused on the growth of the business and not just trying to sell me something."

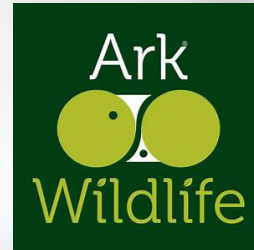
Nick Sperrin, Head of Operations, Dampcure Woodcure



CASE STUDY 6

Ark Wildlife

Ark Wildlife is a Hitchin-based company that sells high-quality food, feeders and other products to attract, stimulate and nurture garden wildlife. The company was founded by Sean McMenemy, a landscape gardener who spotted a gap in the market after clients sought his advice on creating wildlife havens.



The Challenge

Initially growing steadily through word of mouth, Sean ran into problems during the Covid pandemic, with high levels of sickness affecting his workforce and isolation amplifying the day-to-day challenges of running a small retail business.

For help, he turned to our consortium partner, Hertfordshire Chamber of Commerce, which put him in touch with Hertfordshire Growth Hub and the Get Growing 2 business programme. Through the programme, Sean was able to receive funded support from our expert advisers.

The Solution

Sean accessed professional training courses and worked closely with external consultants part-funded through the grant element of the Get Growing 2 programme. This enabled him to develop a fresh new brand for Ark Wildlife, which was more in line with the company's values and customer ethos. The funded support also gave Sean the space to focus on key priorities and next steps, which led to the development of a detailed, four-year marketing strategy and implantation plan.

The Impact

The plan anticipates a 20-25% a year increase in turnover to around £10m and a substantial increase in full-time employees. Sean has already taken on one new employee and plans to add another three in the near term. The company has also outsourced some of its sales and logistics functions, creating efficiencies and further local employment opportunities.

Having a structured plan in place gives Sean and his team a clear roadmap for growth and the tools to measure performance.

"Get Growing 2 has provided a practical solution to problems that I was aware of but wasn't sure how to address. Being able to claim financial support took away the element of risk which otherwise would have been too great."

Sean McMenemy, founder and Managing Director of Ark Wildlife





This report has drawn on elements of the May 2023 Annual Growth Hub Report for the Department for Business and Trade, the Get Growing 2 Project Evaluation, prepared by KADA in October 2023, the Building Back Better Growth Programme Evaluation, prepared by KADA in January 2023 and the Herts, Camera, Action! Evaluation prepared in January 2023.