

KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER PARTNERSHIPS CASE STUDY:

Ben Marsh | Aircharge / CMS Industries



Project duration: 29 Months

End date: 31/01/2018

Please could you provide us with a little background about your business and your role within it?

CMS industries is 25 years old and I joined as Finance Director 5 years ago. CMS provide office furniture components, but about 4 years ago the owner decided he wanted to branch out to the tech market, so after a short reconnaissance trip, Aircharge was born; a sub company that specialises in wireless charging for mobile phones and accessories. We also supply charging infrastructure solutions for multiple public spaces, i.e. fast food and hotel locations.

How did you first hear about Knowledge Transfer Partnerships?

This is our second Knowledge Transfer Partnership, the first coming right at the start of our Aircharge journey. The first time we came across KTP as a concept was at a peer to peer meeting with someone from the local government innovation centre who explained the benefits to us.

What attracted you to apply?

The benefits of a KTP being outlaid to us made us realise it was the right move for the initial growth of our business. Because of the success of our first KTP, we knew the help and support we needed for the next stage so it was a no-brainer to reapply for our second one.

Could you please talk us through the application process and the support given from the University of Reading?

Having previously completed the application for our first project we already knew the information we needed to include and how to put it all together. Having said that, the process had changed and was for a different project, so we quickly built a great relationship with the KTC and the Academic who all lent a helping hand and guided us through any parts we were having difficulty with while generally supported the entire process.

How would you describe your project to someone who doesn't know this area?

Aircharge is about wireless charging of mobile phones and other supporting accessories. The project revolved around wireless power charging from one metal coil to another, similar to what happens inside a transformer. Not only is it the technical aspect of wireless charging, but also ensuring that we are working parallel with the industry standard of this kind of technology. The core part of the business model is to stay competitive and cutting edge in a market that's becoming more and more saturated, so the point of the project was to take the industry standards and ensure what we're producing stands out as an innovative and viable product which will remain competitive.

How has the company benefited from the partnership so far and how do you foresee the project will continue to add value to the business when it ends?

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The key benefits for us at the moment are the IP that it's enabled us to imbed in the designs; this will help us have control over our product and how they will be distributed into the market moving forward. On the infrastructure side there's the simple wireless charging element, but there's also layers of data that we're going to be putting into the chargers themselves which will help us interact with the customer. Our interactive technology, especially as it will be relevant to the customer's immediate surroundings (i.e. Costa Coffee, McDonald's, etc.), will give us that competitive advantage which is something we didn't envisage at the start of our KTP; this is as a direct result of the experience and knowledge our KTP Associate has brought to the project.

What have been the biggest challenges so far and how have you overcome them?

Our biggest challenge was with recruitment; we went through three phases of interviews. The KTC team at the University gave us some invaluable advice and said that the project simply wouldn't be effective if we didn't have the right candidate, and if we haven't found the right person then we continue looking. We were delighted to appoint our 4th interviewee who ticked all the right boxes and fulfilled our criteria. Our KTP Associate has been superb, so we're really glad we preserved and waited to appoint the best candidate to the role.

What new expertise has the KTP brought to your company?

The biggest advantage has been the focus and the guidance to help us resolve technical issues without solely having to rely on supply chains and our supply partners. Bringing that level of control in-house allows us to push the project in the direction we want and within the timescales we need it to be in to stay competitive and to stay cutting edge.

How important is the relationship with the academic team from Reading?

For KTP the relationship is key; it's a three way relationship between the Academic, the Associate, and the company. The support the Academic and the University give when the Associate hits a road block is critical to making the whole process work.

Overall, how would you describe your KTP experience so far?

It's a challenging project, but it's really rewarding. The challenge comes in ensuring you put in place the time, resource and energy from the company side that's required to keep everything in the right direction, and the University team are always readily available to help us with that.

Is the KTP currently meeting/exceeding your expectations?

It's absolutely exceeding our expectations; the way the focus of the project has evolved over the last year, and the ability of the KTP Associate to move with that, plus the support of the University even though the landscape is changing all the time is working really well. It's such a new technology and there are continuous new competitors arriving on the market meaning it's ever changing, so the fact that we can stay on top of that because of the KTP is critical to our success.

Would you encourage other companies to collaborate with a university? If so, why?

The access to the University facilities, and the breadth of experience from such a broad range of experts is amazing, and it adds a completely different perspective on how we can push the project forward as a business. We found the right University (which is really important), and matched that to the appointment of the right KTP Associate, it becomes an easy and important decision.

If you could give one piece of advice to a company considering KTP, what would it be?

Don't underestimate the amount of planning and company time which is involved in keeping on track. It would be really tempting without the right advice to just let the project run of its own accord and hope for something positive to come out of the other end,

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but it's really important to remain integrated to the business and running alongside it as opposed to something separate.

Could you please give me one line to sum up why you love KTP?

I love KTP as it adds another dimension and challenge plus another benefit to the day to day running of the business.