

# KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER PARTNERSHIPS CASE STUDY:

Jim Ward | Safe Training Systems Ltd



**Project duration: 2 years**

**End date 17/04/2013**

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

STS have been going for 25 years and my role is as the Operations Director, so I oversee everything including marketing, sales, production, design and manufacturing. STS manufacture and sell instrumentation for the training of workers involved in the handling and identification of radioactive material through a range of realistic simulated instruments.

**How did you first hear about Knowledge Transfer Partnerships?**

Sometime before I joined the company we had someone on board who had previously been part of a KTP, and having understood that this happened and was effective, we actively searched for something and someone of a similar nature. We were referred to the team at University of Reading who provided us with more information and explained how we as a business could benefit from a project.

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

The application process was brilliant. The staff at the Knowledge Transfer Centre went through everything with us very thoroughly, helped us with the application process, helped us to complete the documentation, helped us really think about what we wanted out of the project and discussed with us how we would physically manage it internally. We're a very small company so understanding how we could manage dedicating time, effort and resource to ensure our KTP project was a success was key. The KTC made it simple for us, and we're grateful for that.

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

Part of what the company does is making a range of training devices, and that original design at the time we started our first KTP was 15 years old so we needed and wanted to update it. This is a device to help people in the nuclear industry train without an exposure to radiation. We knew what we were trying to achieve which was a better product that we could sell more of, but we also knew that the resources we had available to us at that time was not enough to take the new design forward.

**How has the company benefited from the partnership and how will the project continue to add value the business now the project has ended?**

The company have benefited from the project hugely; directly as a result of the design work we did which has opened new markets for us, go back to existing customers with a new product, and enhance the overall offering to our target market. That kicked off pretty much as soon as the project finished and has continued. We are now also expanding on those products as a result of the project success so it's been a great benefit. The biggest benefit was being able to employ our KTP Associate at the end of the project and add his expertise permanently to the business.

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## What was the biggest challenge and how did you overcome this?

Time is the biggest challenge for us. Our KTP Associate had to get himself up to speed very quickly, and although we knew we would need to invest time to the project, we perhaps didn't take into consideration the quantity of time needed. But the crucial thing and the reason why it worked so well for us is because we made an active decision to sacrifice our time and dedicate ourselves to the project to make sure that we weren't just leaving the KTP Associate to the project, but also involving him in all aspects of the company. It was important for us that our KTP Associate felt fully involved and an active partner.

## What new expertise has the KTP brought to your company?

The KTP has brought a massive level of new and innovative expertise to our company. We were always a business that outsourced to subcontractors, which of course carries a large amount of overheads and a lot of time spent waiting on other people. Taking on our KTP Associate meant that we had someone in-house with a huge depth of technical knowledge and ability, and meant the outsourcing work we still do can be managed by someone of a technical nature. It's been a game changer for the company, and saved us a huge amount on external cost and project times.

## How important was the relationship with the academic team from Reading?

It's very important as much for the KTP Associate as it was for us. Our Academic team were very involved with the project; always available on the phone and regular meetings took place to ensure that the technical knowledge was there for our KTP Associate and he had someone on-hand to answer any questions. From the company's point of view, having someone slightly divorced from the 'nitty-gritty' of the project who can ask which direction the project is going in, can often point out details that perhaps we as a business may have missed.

## Did you offer the Associate a permanent role with your company at the end? If so, why?

We actually didn't wait until the end of the project, but was within the first 9 months that we began discussing how we can ensure our KTP Associate stayed with us after the project had finished. It wasn't long after a year we began speaking to the KTP Associate directly and asking how might he look to stay and be integrated within the company which was a boost for him so he could see what he was doing will develop outside of the project, and also allowed him to focus as he didn't have to worry about finding employment once the project finished. It also gave us the continuity knowing our KTP Associate would be involved in other areas of the business once the KTP project finished.

## Overall, how would you describe your KTP experience?

Rewarding. There were so many pluses that came out of it for us; we got a new product we could sell to existing and new markets, we got a new technical manager, and we got a huge amount of technical expertise into the company. We also built some great relationships with the University of Reading that are ongoing. KTP for us has been positive on all fronts.

## Did the KTP meet/exceed your expectations?

It was difficult to know what we were going to get to be honest, so that relies on a good strategy from the offset and ensuring you employ the right person as the KTP Associate who will be a good fit into the company. It all flowed really well, and we're delighted with how successful the project was and what we got out of it, plus this continues to be the case and is ongoing. .

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

Absolutely. There is a resourcing cost to you to do it and some financial costs, and in our case it's more than paid for itself even

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within the first two years.

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

Be thorough with the recruitment of the KTP Associate and ensure you're taking the right person on. You need to ask yourself is it just a project or do you have a grander scheme you want this person to be involved with. We very much started off on the project, but we knew we needed technical help and it was really a catalyst to us taking the project and employing our KTP Associate on completion of the project.

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

I love KTP as it really has brought a new dimension to the company. KTP enabled us to take on more technical work, and to really expand our product lines.