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Bulb Studios and Crowdlab Knowledge Transfer Leads To Spinout Success

Bulb Studios Ltd is a design firm based in Leicester. Working with the University of Leicester's School of Management, the aim of this Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) was to embed a philosophy of user-centred design within Bulb Studios in a way that would profoundly influence the company's creation and development of mobile and ubiquitous computing technology.

The Company

Bulb Studios is a media production and digital design agency specialising in web, mobile, and motion design. The company operates in a highly competitive sector, dominated by London and US based design houses, but identified an opportunity to develop interactive and innovative digital products for the market research and branding industry.

In the words of Managing Director Jim Willis: "We have great ambitions for the company and are very proud to be based in Leicester but we recognised the need for greater expertise to take us into a whole new area of product design and development."

- Development of an innovative, market research technology: the CrowdLab app
- Profits increased by about £300,000
- Creation of a spinout company, CrowdLab Ltd
- 12 new jobs created

About The Project

The involvement of users in the design process was recognised to be both a market differentiator and a key skill-set that Bulb required. This KTP was designed to provide Bulb Studios with access to the research within the University of Leicester's School of Management with a specific focus on user-centred design (UCD) and innovation practice. UCD is a method by which the needs, wants and limitations of end users of a product are given extensive attention at each stage of the design process.

An academic team comprising Dr William Green (Senior Lecturer in Innovation, Operations and Knowledge Management) and Professor Simon Lilley (Head of the School of Management) worked closely with the Bulb Studios design teams to help them better understand user-centred design to ensure that new software applications would be intuitive and engaging.

As with all KTPs, a recent graduate, known as a 'Knowledge Transfer Associate', was recruited to project manage the KTP under the supervision of Dr Green. The Associate for this KTP, Dr Asma Adnane, brought tremendous experience in SQL and PHP to the project and developed the backend infrastructure which powered the CrowdLab app.

"Our relationship with the University of Leicester via the Knowledge Transfer Partnership has gone from strength to strength. We continue to explore mutually beneficial ways to exploit specialist knowledge and operational practices to inform the R&D work we undertake." Jim Willis, MD – Bulb Studios.

Benefits

As a result of the collaboration, Bulb Studios were able to incorporate an Agile UCD method of working and a Test Driven Development (TDD) approach for new features being developed which greatly strengthened the company's position as a product developer.



Left to right: Professor Simon Lilley, Head of the School of Management at the University of Leicester; Jim Willis, co-founder and managing director of Bulb Studios and Dr Will Green, Senior Lecturer at the University of Leicester

The collaboration proved highly beneficial, giving Bulb Studios a new product, the CrowdLab market research platform, which significantly improves the way market research data is collected and analysed. CrowdLab's innovative bespoke market research apps for smartphones and tablets allow participants to take part in fun and intuitive surveys whenever and wherever they like – vastly improving the quality of data that is sent back to researchers.

The CrowdLab platform was very quickly adopted by several leading market research companies and this success warranted the creation of a new, spinout company, CrowdLab Limited, with a specific mission to commercially exploit the CrowdLab technology. Within two years of being incorporated, CrowdLab Limited had taken on 12 staff and opened offices in London and Leicester.

In addition, Bulb Studios and CrowdLab Limited won numerous awards and accolades for their technology innovation, including the Market Research Society/Association for Survey Computing Award for Technology Effectiveness and Innovation and the Leicester Mercury Innovation Award, amongst others. This demonstrated the disruptive nature of their technology which challenges traditional methodologies employed in the market research industry.

Results

- A new core product, the CrowdLab market research platform, which led to the creation of a spinout company and ultimately increased profits by about £300,000.
- Improved, product development and innovation management processes through the adoption of user centred design (UCD) methodologies and associated techniques, enhancing the reputations of Bulb Studio and CrowdLab Limited as product developers and leading to new business.

If you want to grow your business through collaboration and innovation, KTP is the programme that has the power you need to get ahead of the competition.

To find out more about how KTP can ignite innovation in your business, contact:

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