



knowledge transfer - a treasure trove of opportunity

Become Recession Proof...Develop New Ideas...Generate Profitable Growth...Build a Diversified Income Stream...Create Competitive Advantage...Establish a Market Leading Position - all these are undoubtedly valid aspirations for any business, and ones that few would quarrel with. However, for most organisations they represent at best a distant dream of where they want to get to, rather than where they are today or even where the majority are in reality likely to reach in the future.

If only there was an easy way to achieve these aims. We are repeatedly told in the UK that innovation is the answer to our global competitiveness challenge, the antidote to our high cost economy that will allow us to continue to compete effectively with the rest of the world. Politicians, journalists, academics and various other commentators in the know all make this point, and it is probably fair to assume that they can't all be wrong.

So if so many respected judges hold this view, what is holding organisations back? Why is it that private businesses, social enterprises and public sector bodies alike struggle to be innovative or to work in innovative ways? Despite numerous public and privately funded initiatives run over many years, innovation remains a mystery to many and has been harnessed effectively by a small minority only.

For many businesses, the really tricky questions are how to do innovation and where to start?

There seem to be mind-boggling number of options and a world of expert advisers telling them how and what they should be doing, all with their own opinions and bias. Add to this a few of the other reasons why businesses tend to shy away from innovative action – concern that it won't work, fear of the unknown, loss of entrepreneurial drive, internal resistance or simply that everything seems to be going ok at the moment – and it's perhaps easier to understand why many business leaders prefer simply not to bother.

Naturally the choice of what to do for those that do take the plunge are to an extent dictated by existing competencies, resources and the knowledge inherent in the business. However, one hugely powerful but relatively little known business development resource is **knowledge transfer**. This remains an under utilised resource despite Government policy to increase the economic and social returns from the large public sector spend on HE and University research.





so what is knowledge transfer?

The Department for Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR) define it as:

“transferring good ideas, research results and skills between universities, other research organisations, business and the wider community to enable innovative new products and services to be developed”



We will refer here to the providers collectively as the 'knowledgebase'. Clearly, the BERR definition leaves a lot of room for interpretation and different approaches, and perhaps not surprisingly, there are a variety of schemes and initiatives devoted to the effective transfer of knowledge.

The approach that is closest to our hearts at Winning Moves is enabling small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) to tap into the expertise, knowledge and resources available within the knowledgebase through collaborations. On the face of it, this may sound like a relatively straightforward activity. Indeed, it could be asked why the knowledgebase do not simply make this happen directly with businesses. After all, uncorking the resources and expertise from the knowledgebase is widely seen as a key current and future driver for them and the UK economy.

Despite this aim, to date the volume of collaborations between SMEs and the knowledgebase has been disappointingly low. For example, recent research in London confirms that only 2% of the capital's SMEs have collaborated in any shape or form with the knowledgebase (source: London Annual Business Survey 2006). In the case of Black and Minority Ethnic businesses, an important target market for London Development Agency (LDA) support in the region, collaborations have been almost non-existent.



Earlier we considered some of the general barriers to innovation and they are certainly relevant in considering why this type of knowledge transfer is relatively rare. In addition, there are other issues to overcome before take up increases, such as:

- > businesses generally and SMEs particularly are not aware of the nature and strength of the knowledgebase as a business development resource
- > distinct cultural and managerial differences between SMEs and the knowledgebase creates caution on the part of businesses
- > there is limited incentive on the part of Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) and other knowledgebase providers to participate, when the resulting collaborative projects involve the perception of marginal SME innovation and relatively low levels of remuneration
- > the delays that often occur when detailed agreements have to be assembled and negotiated individually for each collaboration, covering areas such as intellectual property ownership
- > traditionally knowledgebase organisations have struggled to promote their offer to enterprise effectively or consistently
- > many SMEs simply don't look outside their own businesses for sources of innovation

our approach...

In partnership with Angle plc, we have devised a highly flexible approach that delivers a bespoke experience tailored to the specific needs of the business. Whatever the depth of the interaction, we endeavour to provide value at absolutely every stage, whether it is at initial engagement or a full-blown project being undertaken.

Before businesses will commit to taking part though, they need to be inspired and excited by the compelling reasons to do so. We seek to appeal to their emotions and attempt to show how collaboration can work, rather than by preaching at them. Effective awareness raising and education is essential. Using powerful marketing and communications tools, we aim to change the dynamic from push to pull. We use a graphic, real world approach, communicating in the language of the receiver and essentially act as a translator between the SMEs and knowledgebase to create common understanding. Once interest has been established, collaborations develop as a result of the following key steps:



- ➔ **PREPARING THE SME FOR COLLABORATION** - *It is crucial that real need is established based on what the business is aiming to achieve. The foundation is their vision, goals and strategies for the future. Powerful proprietary diagnostic tools, including a performance benchmark and opportunity assessment, are used to understand where the business is and to prioritise areas for development and growth.*
- ➔ **CONSOLIDATING & FOCUSING THE OVERALL KNOWLEDGEBASE SERVICE** - *The foundations for articulating the offer are created by pulling together details of what expertise and resources are available and to which types of business they are appropriate, detailing specific areas of assistance available. This information is then distilled to present the knowledgebase offer in an easily understandable and appealing way, focusing squarely on how it can help.*
- ➔ **REDUCING BUREAUCRATIC HURDLES TO LINKAGE** - *This involves establishing portfolio agreements with knowledgebase providers covering multiple projects. The arguments aim to alleviate some of the challenges for knowledge providers of managing small ad hoc, discrete projects. It also means that individual project negotiations around contractual agreements, intellectual property ownership and working arrangements are unnecessary, reducing bureaucracy and delay.*
- ➔ **EFFECTIVE ONE-TO-ONE SUPPORT** - *Our highly experienced, skilled team of advisers ensure that the collaboration project is developed effectively. Their support includes helping to refine the project proposal, offering advice on the application process, and staying close to the project itself once approved to ensure it happens as planned and yields the desired commercial outcomes.*

Where our mediators provide real added value is in the 'softer' areas that research confirms are essential to success, aside from finance and technology.

These include:

- > robustness of the business plan
- > understanding market characteristics
- > locating and securing resources
- > establishing working relationships with external agencies
- > providing project management expertise
- > developing company culture

Our methodology helps to combine effectiveness, expertise and efficiency through the use of on-line resources. We seek to inspire and entertain as much as inform and educate. We understand that the human touch is critical to nurture, support and deliver success. Most of all, we bridge the chasm between the knowledgebase and SMEs, making collaboration a compelling proposition for both sides. Our long-term goal is to play a key role in mainstreaming this business development resource as an established and invaluable weapon in the business support arsenal available to UK SMEs.



case study : KNOWLEDGE CONNECT

Our approach to Knowledge Transfer is currently being utilised in a London wide project we have been commissioned to manage in collaboration with our partner Angle plc.

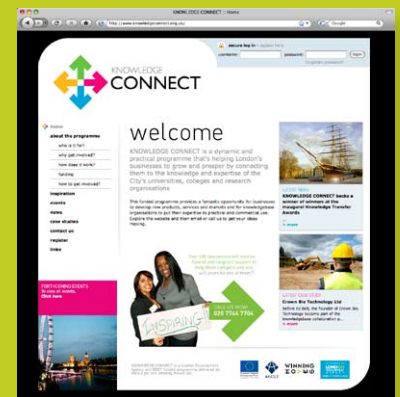
The 3-year programme is called KNOWLEDGE CONNECT and is part funded by the European Regional Development Fund. Our task is to help around 3,000 SMEs across London through targeted support from the Capital's knowledgebase.

The programme represents a real opportunity for small to medium sized businesses to access and benefit from the wealth of expertise and experience to be found in the London's universities, further education colleges and research and technology organisations. It is also aligned with 2 products that have been identified under the new BERR national framework of support available to UK SMEs. This is called 'Solutions for Business: Supporting Success', and was published in October 2008. The products that KNOWLEDGE CONNECT delivers on are 'Knowledge Transfer Partnerships' and 'Innovation Vouchers'.

KNOWLEDGE CONNECT has one simple yet fundamental aim – to help business to grow and prosper through the development of market-focused new and enhanced products and services. We help them to:

- create** *we want to get as many great ideas off the drawing board and into the hands of customers as we possibly can.*
- innovate** *we're passionate about business and we're driven to get the innovative juices of the Capital's businesses flowing.*
- collaborate** *simplicity has been our watchword as we've developed this programme, which is why doors are open, barriers are down and the path is clear to exciting new collaborations with the knowledgebase.*

Collaboration vouchers are available for qualifying businesses to help fund their work with the knowledgebase in two ways; **£3,000 Mini Voucher** – typically to support activities such as testing proof of concept, strategic or technical development, and market investigation. **£10,000 Maxi Voucher** – supporting more in-depth work, such as research and development of new products, services or markets, prototyping, software development, testing and validation.



To find out more about the knowledge connect programme please visit:

www.knowledgeconnect.org.uk

For more information...

call Mark Modena at Winning Moves on **01785 827600**
email marka@winningmoves.com, or visit
www.winningmoves.com

WINNING
Σ O > Ψ Ω

