MADE SMARTER

Ethical Nutrition unlocks growth through digital manufacturing transformation

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- Mark Robertson, Founder, Ethical Nutrition



Martyn Mangan, Made Smarter; Mark Robertson, Ethical Nutrition; James Cooper, Ethical Nutrition; Kieran Mara, MTC

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A premium supplements business has brought manufacturing in-house for the first time, creating new skilled roles, accelerating innovation and laying the foundations for sustainable, quality-led growth.

Ethical Nutrition, which produces premium, clean-label vegan supplements sold across the UK, has transformed its operations with support from Made Smarter West Midlands, investing in advanced manufacturing technology that has given the business greater control over quality, product development and future growth.

Before: An opportunity to take greater control of quality

Founded six years ago by Mark Robertson and Grace Carter, Ethical Nutrition built a strong reputation for producing high-quality vegan supplements free from unnecessary additives from its base in Redditch.

"We have always worked with an excellent manufacturing partner, and we continue to do so," Mark said. "Bringing production in-house was about having greater control over formulation and quality, and being able to move more quickly in product development."

"Producing in-house gives us more control over scheduling and specification, so we can respond more quickly and make our products exactly to our own standards."

Manufacturing in-house also allows Ethical Nutrition to produce supplements precisely to its own specifications, supporting its clean-ingredient standards.

Turning Point: Spotting an opportunity to take control

The catalyst for change came as Ethical Nutrition looked at how best to develop its core product range.

Mark recognised that delivering the quality and consistency the business is known for required greater control over manufacturing, quality assurance and product development.

"We decided to make this investment because we could see the difference in-house production would make to quality and consistency," he said. "To do that properly, we needed to bring manufacturing capability into the business."

At the same time, the company had already embraced digital technologies across other areas of the business. Automation was helping support customer service and back-office operations, while digital tools were helping the team plan and forecast more effectively.

That digital foundation gave the leadership team the confidence that investing in manufacturing would support long-term, sustainable growth.

With support from Made Smarter West Midlands, Ethical Nutrition secured a £20,000 grant, which it combined with its own investment.

The funding enabled the company to turn an idea into reality within a matter of months.

Mark said: "Made Smarter has been fantastic. They helped us turn around our application within a month or two, allowing us to move from having an idea in September to moving equipment in by January."

Martyn Mangan, Digital Transformation Specialist at Made Smarter West Midlands, felt the business had reached a pivotal stage in its development.

"Mark had built a successful online business and was ready to take the next step into manufacturing," he said.

"He knew he needed digital manufacturing technology that would integrate with the systems the business already uses, and we have been able to provide advice on AI and cyber security.

"The business had already invested in digital systems, and investing in the equipment they needed has brought forward their plans for growth in a sustainable way."

Transformation: Building a digital manufacturing operation from scratch

The investment enabled Ethical Nutrition to establish its own manufacturing facility for the first time, at a second site in Redditch.

The company invested in advanced encapsulation technology, a specialist clean room and supporting equipment at its new site. The new manufacturing technology allows the business to produce capsules to a consistent, high-quality standard.

For Ethical Nutrition, however, the transformation was about much more than introducing new machinery.

Mark added: "As part of our transformation, we have introduced manufacturing. It is new to us and it has enabled us to start from scratch in exactly the way we want to achieve our aims.

"Previously, our formulations included a natural rice extract as a processing aid. Producing in-house means we can keep our formulations as simple and clean as possible.

"That means we can make products exactly the way we want them and stay true to our commitment to clean ingredients."

Alongside the manufacturing investment, digital technology continues to play an important role across the business, helping Ethical Nutrition manage customer demand, improve efficiency and make informed decisions about future growth.

Kieran Mara, Senior Advisor, Digital Transformation at the Manufacturing Technology Centre (MTC) which is one of Made Smarter West Midlands' Strategic Partners, said Ethical Nutrition's use of digital technologies provided the business with the confidence to take the next step in its growth.

"Working with Ethical Nutrition has been a real highlight of the Made Smarter West Midlands programme," he said.

"What really stood out was how effectively they've embraced advanced digital technologies. By using AI to support their back-office operations, they've been able to respond to customer queries and orders quickly and consistently.

"Their considered use of digital tools has given the leadership team the confidence and direction to take the next step in their growth journey — bringing manufacturing in-house."

Impact: Faster innovation, new jobs and a platform for growth

The benefits of bringing manufacturing in-house have been immediate.

Previously, launching a new product depended on external manufacturing schedules. Today, Ethical Nutrition can move from raw materials to finished product much more quickly, with full oversight of quality at every stage.

The business has greater flexibility to manufacture larger volumes of its most popular products, respond more quickly to customer demand and expand its product range.

The transition has also created new opportunities for employees. Production Manager James Cooper joined the business after spending a decade in banking and has developed specialist knowledge in food manufacturing and quality compliance.

The move into manufacturing has created entirely new career pathways within the business, with a growing focus on developing specialist skills in-house.

Mark said: "The impact of all this is really exciting for all our staff that we're making our own products.

"Our team has developed new skills across production, quality and compliance.

"It's given the team the opportunity to learn new skills and be part of a completely new stage in the company's growth."

Martyn believes the investment has created a strong platform for future growth.

He added: "Investing in this technology means Ethical Nutrition can produce more of its range in-house and, as the business grows, it has strong foundations to build on over the next few years.

"The main lesson we've learned is that Made Smarter is not just here for long-term manufacturers, but for businesses coming from a different place who need advice on what to do and how to invest."

Kieran said that Ethical Nutrition's commitment to quality and sustainability further sets the business apart.

"Sustainability runs through their packaging decisions, including the use of recyclable materials and reducing plastic in components such as caps and seals," he said.

"That same attention to detail carries through into their products, with carefully selected, high-quality raw ingredients and formulations kept deliberately simple.

"Overall, Ethical Nutrition is a fantastic example of how combining digital innovation, data-driven decision-making and a strong commitment to sustainability can drive meaningful growth."

The investment has strengthened the company's foundations for the future, giving it the capability and capacity to support sustainable growth.

Mark said: "Bringing manufacturing in-house has completely changed what's possible for the business because we now have more control over quality and are able to make clean supplements without unnecessary additives or fillers.

"We've gained the flexibility to develop products faster, improve quality control and create opportunities for future growth as we continue to build a premium, science-backed supplement range."

SUCCESS STORY