

## Darwen Terracotta Sculpting a digital future

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**Siddique Rasul**  
Digital Project Manager



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A leading manufacturer of architectural terracotta has accelerated its digital transformation while preserving heritage craft skills, with the support of Made Smarter.

Darwen Terracotta, based in Blackburn, has accessed digital strategy advice, skills programmes, a digital internship and technology consultancy to adopt new digital tools.

The approach has improved efficiency and accuracy, reduced waste, upskilled staff and supported growth, increasing turnover and creating new jobs.

Siddique Rasul, Digital Project Manager, said: *“Made Smarter gave us the space, support and expertise to explore new technologies in a structured way, while bringing our people with us on the journey.”*

### The Challenge

Darwen Terracotta is the UK’s largest manufacturer of architectural terracotta and faience, delivering bespoke ceramic solutions for the restoration of historic and landmark buildings, as well as contemporary architecture across the UK and internationally.

Since launching in 2014, the company has blended heritage craftsmanship with a gradual move towards digital technologies.

Its detailed 12-step manufacturing process, from survey and digital design through moulding, casting, finishing, firing and final packing, ensured quality and consistency but was labour intensive and time consuming.

As demand grew, this limited how quickly the business could scale without placing additional pressure on skilled teams.

Darwen Terracotta needed to preserve and transfer legacy craft knowledge as the workforce evolved, reduce manual repetition and inefficiency without compromising quality, and introduce digital technologies in a way that was trusted, practical and understood across the business. At the same time, it needed to create capacity for growth while producing large volumes, sometimes between two and three thousand units per project, across multiple buildings.

*“Everything we do is rooted in craftsmanship and heritage, but to protect those skills for the future, we have to evolve how we work,”* said Steve Allen, Director.

### The Solution

Darwen Terracotta first engaged with Made Smarter in 2018. An initial digital transformation workshop, supported by Technology Adviser Clare Scott, identified opportunities around 3D scanning, robotics and additive manufacturing.

The programme facilitated visits to the Virtual Engineering Centre and Manchester Metropolitan University’s PrintCity, followed by participation in the Fast Track Additive Manufacturing programme, covering the full digital workflow.

Through the digital internship programme, the business worked with an MMU student studying Industrial Digitalisation to explore how 3D scanning and printing could be integrated into manufacturing without immediate capital investment.

Further development came through the Leading Digital Champions programme, helping to build confidence and digital leadership on the factory floor.

More recently, Made Smarter-supported robotic additive manufacturing events, including demonstrations by CNC Robotics, helped accelerate adoption.

The company’s digital progress strengthened with the appointment of Siddique Rasul as Digital Project Manager. His R&D-led approach focused on testing the company’s CNC robot, demonstrating value and building confidence before major investment.

*“For us, digital transformation isn’t about replacing traditional skills,”* Siddique said. *“It’s about understanding what the tools can do, testing them properly and building confidence before scaling.”*

### The Benefits

The company has achieved measurable efficiency and consistency gains by expanding its use of digital tools including AutoCAD, Fusion 360, digital sculpting, 3D scanning, CNC and robotic production support.

Digital workflows have accelerated design-to-production, reduced rework and material waste, improved accuracy and shortened prototyping and approval cycles. Structured digital files have improved coordination across design, production and delivery teams.

Since engaging with Made Smarter, turnover has increased from £2.3m in 2018 to £6.7m in 2025, while headcount has grown from 43 to 51 employees.



Four staff members have been upskilled in key digital capabilities, strengthening in-house expertise across CAD, digital sculpting, CNC and robotic workflows.

By introducing technology through testing and skills development rather than imposed change, the business has built a digital culture that preserves heritage craft while embedding knowledge into modern workflows. Teams are now increasingly multi-skilled, with expertise shared across generations.

### The Future

Darwen Terracotta continues to work with Made Smarter as it enters the next phase of its digital journey.

The business aims to reduce its manufacturing process from 12 to six, expanding digital modelling, scanning and robotics,

while maintaining quality and craftsmanship.

Future plans include testing AI-enabled manufacturing tools, continuing leadership development and internships, and sustaining a balance between traditional craft and digital manufacturing.

Siddique added: *“Made Smarter helped us grow in a controlled way. We didn’t invest in technology for the sake of it, we built capability, confidence and consistency across the business, which has allowed us to scale while staying true to our craftsmanship.”*

**DARWEN**  
TERRACOTTA