

Embroidery company weaves in better productivity after new machine purchased

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Steve Hesford, Managing Director of Tailored Branding (left) and Tim Kirby, Digital Transformation Specialist at Made Smarter (right), with Tailored Branding's new embroidery machine.

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An embroidery and printing company based in Stafford has turbo-charged its productivity after a grant from Made Smarter enabled it to purchase a new embroidery machine.

Tailored Branding, located on Staffordshire Tech Park, creates a wide variety of branded garments and other apparel for various customers all over the country.

However, it had reached a size where its one machine was holding back its ability to complete projects for its many customers.

The new machine has allowed its small team of three people to clear a backlog of projects and is enabling the company to begin to grow again.

And a further portion of the grant money is going to be used to help Tailored Branding install a smarter digital system to track and process orders.

Managing Director Steve Hesford said: "Our new single-head embroidery machine has been a game-changer for us.

"After getting in touch with Made Smarter, the process of securing the grant for the machine and getting it set up was seamless. It's allowed us to hire a new member of staff, and we're confident of a bright future for our company."

The Challenge

Tailored Branding provides branded clothing for customers in all sorts of sectors, including uniforms for nearby schools, kits for regional sports clubs, and uniforms for local regiments of the Armed Forces.

It runs all of its processes in-house to fulfil orders for customers, which

ended up becoming a problem as its client base grew.

Tailored Branding only had one embroidery machine to complete projects, and it did not want to outsource other work.

Steve said: "Having one embroidery machine was fine for our business to begin with, but as we grew it started to become a hindrance to growth.

"We got to the point where the machine we had was at full capacity, which meant we had to prioritise bigger jobs and postpone some of the smaller jobs we had on our list.

"Our business has been built on the back of our excellent customer service – we've barely had to advertise our service because a lot of our new work comes in through word-of-mouth alone.

"We were therefore very keen to get a second machine in that would allow us to work on projects in tandem, reduce the backlog and give our customers the high level of service they expect from us."

The Solution

Steve came across Made Smarter through contacting the Stoke-on-Trent & Staffordshire Growth Hub around possible sources of grants to help pay for a new machine.

Steve contacted Made Smarter through its website and was quickly contacted by Digital Transformation Specialist Tim Kirby to arrange a visit.

Tim and Steve Higham, from Made Smarter partner the Manufacturing Technology Centre (MTC), sat down with Steve Hesford and discussed the potential solutions around the firm's productivity.

Steve Hesford added: "I had heard of Made Smarter but didn't initially realise it could be used to pay for capital investments like a new machine – I assumed it was all around software.

"Tim and the team agreed that a new machine was obviously needed to clear our backlog, and helped us put together the application for a £20,000 match-funded grant.

"What's great is that although some of the grant could pay for the new machine, Tim advised we could use the rest to develop a new digital system to replace our pen-and-paper methods of tracking orders.

"It meant we could kill two birds with one stone with our application instead of having to choose one thing over another, which was fantastic for us."

Tim added: "Sometimes when visiting a business, it takes time to work on a solution. But in Tailored Branding's case, the solution was clear – a new machine was clearly needed.

"However, part of our role is to help businesses get the best use out of the grant funding available, and we realised Tailored Branding would also benefit from a new digital system for its orders and accounts after seeing it still relied on old-fashioned methods.

"We were able to help Steve apply successfully for the match-funded grant, and he quickly set about ordering the new machine. We are now working

on the new digital system with him and look forward to it being implemented to further boost Tailored Branding's productivity."

The Benefits

As soon as the new machine was installed, Tailored Branding immediately got to work on outstanding projects that had been put on the backburner due to capacity issues. While one machine was continuing to create garments for bigger projects, the smaller orders could then be assigned to the other machine instead of having to wait for the main project to be finished.

Steve said: "It's already having such a massive effect on our capacity. The last thing we wanted to do was to turn down work or let down our loyal customer base due to having just one machine.

"We're now able to say yes to so many more projects because of the new machine, and it's improved our cash flow massively as we are turning around multiple orders much more quickly.

"It's also meant we can actively plan to grow the business instead of being stuck at a particular size due to this bottleneck."

The Results

Tailored Branding recently hired a new employee thanks to the extra income generated by the new machine, and is looking towards the future with optimism. Steve is also hopeful that when the new digital system is up-and-running, Tailored Branding's productivity will increase even more.

He added: "Made Smarter has been fantastic to work with – I'm so glad the Growth Hub is involved in such a worthwhile initiative.

"We had applied for grants here and there from different places before, but none have made quite as much difference as this one.

"Thanks to the new machine and the digital system about to be installed, I am confident we can grow our customer base significantly and take Tailored Branding to the next level."

Steve Higham from the MTC said: "It was a pleasure to work with Tailored Branding alongside Made Smarter to help them along their journey and provide access to the funding they needed.

"This project is an excellent example of what can be achieved collaboratively when SMEs look for the support and have a vision for what they want to achieve. We are there to de-risk potential solutions and guide them towards that vision."

And a spokesperson for the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Growth Hub added: "We are delighted that Tailored Branding have been able to obtain the correct advice and guidance from Stoke-On-Trent and Staffordshire Growth Hub business advisors to signpost them to the most appropriate grant funding and fully funded support, enabling them to automate processes, increase productivity and create jobs.

"Staffordshire firms are benefitting hugely from exploring digital transformation solutions through initiatives like Made Smarter to implement smart digital systems and capital investments, a great example of what can be achieved through collaboration.

"Businesses keen to understand if they are eligible to benefit from fully funded support should contact the Stoke-On-Trent and Staffordshire Growth Hub."