

Hilton Docker

Driving fibreglass manufacturing into the digital age

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Tim Docker
Managing Director at
Hilton Docker



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A fibreglass manufacturer is transforming its operations after embracing strategy, technologies, and skills through Made Smarter.

Hilton Docker Mouldings, based in Littleborough, Greater Manchester, has been producing moulds and components for commercial vehicles since 1962. The family-run business, with 70 employees and a £6m turnover, designs and manufactures aerodynamic parts for everything from vans to articulated trucks. With more than 1,000 product lines, Hilton Docker is a trusted supplier to the automotive industry, known for its craftsmanship and ability to deliver complex, bespoke solutions.

Without a digital strategy and still relying on traditional production methods, the company knew it was time to modernise, if it wanted to remain competitive. That's when they turned to Made Smarter for support.

Over the last three years, Hilton Docker has engaged with multiple areas of Made Smarter support: creating a digital roadmap, securing a grant to introduce CAD and scanning technology, accessing the digital internship programme, and developing leadership skills through the Leading Change for Digital Champions (LCDC) programme.

Tim Docker, Managing Director at Hilton Docker, said: “Made Smarter has given us the tools and the confidence to digitise areas of the business that had not changed for decades. The programme has helped us modernise while bringing people with us on the journey.”

The Challenge

Hilton Docker had built a strong reputation for quality and craftsmanship, but by 2022 many of its processes remained paper-based and manual. Patterns were still made by hand, drawings were limited, and production data was not captured consistently.

This created challenges around efficiency, customer communication, and scalability. While the business had invested in machinery, it lacked the culture, systems, and digital expertise to unlock its next phase of growth.

Tim explained: “Whilst we are still a successful business, it became very apparent that we need to adopt a digital revolution to become a much smarter business to remain competitive and grow. This meant creating a strategy with steps to achieve our goals.”

The Solution

Hilton Docker's Made Smarter journey has touched every part of the programme.

A Digital Transformation Workshop helped the business identify gaps and shape a roadmap for technology adoption, skills development, and cultural change.

With support from a Made Smarter grant, Hilton Docker invested in a new CAD and scanning capability and recruited Jake Nicklin through the digital internship programme to deliver the technology.

A Masters student in Industrial Digitalisation at Manchester Metropolitan University at the time, Jake joined the business in late 2022, tasked with implementing Solidworks CAD and Flow Simulation and a 3D scanner. The new system gave the business a collaborative digital platform for 2D and 3D data, enabling the capture of complex shapes, the archiving of designs, and faster visualisation of parts. Virtual CAD trials and in-house jig manufacture improved research, development, and quality control.

Jake quickly made an impact by producing the first digital drawings of

Hilton Docker's 1,000 -plus products and building a central repository of images, bills of materials, and sales graphics. Customers reported that these new drawings improved the accuracy and efficiency of builds. Positive feedback confirmed the value of these changes, and at the end of the Internship, he was offered a permanent role.

The investment is also helping Hilton Docker meet the requirements of the Worldwide Harmonised Light Vehicle Test Procedure, enabling aerodynamic analysis to improve fuel economy, emissions, and electric vehicle range.

Alongside this, Jake introduced QR-code tracking on the shop floor. Operators now scan products at each stage, providing real-time visibility of cycle times and bottlenecks across a wide variety of parts, from small panels to two-metre components. The data also allows the company to analyse production methods, identify inefficiencies, and highlight areas where training or process changes can deliver improvements.

To successfully embed these changes into the Hilton Docker culture, Jake, alongside James McGeown, Production Manager, and William Docker, Development Manager engaged in the Made Smarter LCDC programme, learning how to overcome resistance to new technology and lead transformation from the ground up.

The Benefits

Hilton Docker has already seen significant benefits from its digital transformation. Standardised drawings and documentation have improved collaboration with customers and reduced errors. QR tracking and CAD data provide clearer insight into production times and quality issues, helping managers understand where efficiencies can be made.

Confidence in digital tools is growing across the workshop, with employees



more open to using technology in their daily work, thanks to the incremental approach to change.

The internship route delivered a permanent employee with advanced digital knowledge, while the new CAD and scanning system has digitised design operations, cut waste, and opened up new opportunities for research and development. The bridging of theory and practice has not only benefitted Jake's career but also brought fresh thinking into the business.

Jake said: “At university I learnt the tools and the theory, but applying it to real life manufacturing has been incredibly rewarding. For me, this experience has opened the door to a career in manufacturing. For Hilton Docker it meant having focused capability to move projects forward. What Made Smarter did really well was translating what the business thought it wanted into what it actually needed, and then matching me to deliver that.”

“The Digital Champions programme has given me the confidence and leadership tools to bring people with me, overcoming resistance and showing that

change doesn't have to be daunting. Made Smarter hasn't just helped me grow as an engineer, it has given me the skills to lead digital transformation within the business.”

The Future

Hilton Docker plans to expand its use of data and CAD to strengthen design-to-production processes, with ambitions to evolve into a smarter, more customer-centric company.

The new technology will also allow the business to meet stricter industry requirements and support clients in improving vehicle performance. Crucially, the company sees digital transformation as an ongoing journey rather than a one-off project, with continuous improvement at its heart.

Tim added: “Our vision is to build a smarter factory. Digital tools are helping us improve efficiency, quality, and customer service. The support from Made Smarter has been vital in giving us the skills and confidence to get there.”