

# How are makers using emerging technologies to respond effectively to COVID-19


To respond to premises closure

To enable remote working

To capitalise on increased demand

To modify operations or product lines

To support continuity



Digital tools to change your everyday

# SMARTER

## How emerging technologies are enabling makers to respond to COVID-19

From remote working to diversifying due to increased demand, the impact of the global pandemic on manufacturing operations is emerging in a variety of ways. Manufacturers are reacting and adapting to the different circumstances they find their businesses facing.

Made Smarter has been able to continue supporting them as they adjust to the present situation. Many are utilising new technologies to advance and grow their businesses, and, in some cases, digital tools have proven vital in allowing them to adapt to the outbreak.



Here, Made Smarter Programme Manager Alain Dilworth explores how our clients have effectively responded with the help of digital technology.



## Responding to premises closure

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### Closure opens the doors to digital growth

Some manufacturers have unfortunately had no choice but to either close their factories or scale back their operations. This is a difficult time for many of them, but some businesses are seizing the opportunity to prepare and plan for the future in order to enable their business to come back smarter.

One enterprise we've helped, DA Techs, recognises the importance of digital technologies – it proved key in them winning a three-year contract and scaling their growth plans. Even though they've had to close their operations temporarily, they still value technology as essential. They've just had the second phase of their digital strategy approved, and will be receiving support from Made Smarter for this too.



"During this time, we are building on the technology adoption we have already introduced into the business. The next phase will enhance the systems architecture to enable data-driven decisions and forecast future demand. Now more than ever I think investment in smart working and greater efficiency is going to be vital, and we are delighted to be working once again with Made Smarter."

– Jamie Baxter, Director of DA Techs



## Enabling remote working

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### How emerging technologies are enabling remote working

For other businesses, they're able to maintain continuity by moving some of their operations to remote working. This can be challenging at first, but by knowing how to collaborate effectively, these challenges can be overcome. We cover some more tips for business continuity in our piece on [future-proofing your manufacturing SME](#).

Made Smarter has specifically helped Alphabond Technologies Ltd, a glue manufacturer, during this tough time. They successfully implemented a new ERP system through our advice, funding and support. This enables them to connect systems for increased data visibility and automated reporting, resulting in a boost to their efficiency and allowing for real-time decision-making. However, it's also had extra benefits as they've had to adapt to working from home.

"Not only has the new technology reduced manual and duplicative processes, it has also increased our response rates to customers. An added benefit we have seen through these challenging times is our ability to adapt and work remotely. Remote working wouldn't have been possible otherwise!"

– Dylan Shaw, Managing Director of Alphabond Technologies Ltd.



## Capitalising on increased demand

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### To capitalise on increased demand

Not every business is experiencing a downturn – for some, it's the very opposite. NutreeLife ([see the full case study](#)), manufacturers of plant-based nutrition products, has experienced a substantial surge in its orders (private label from £1,000 per month to £6,000 per month), and they haven't even increased their marketing activity. The enterprise's core source of these new sales has been through Amazon (direct or via retailers). As a result, they've had to hire extra people to fulfil the demand.

Responding to this additional interest has been possible because they had the ability to do so. Shortly before the lockdown began, they completed the first phase of a project with Made Smarter to boost their capacity. They are looking to fast-track the second stage due to the benefits they have already seen from implementing technology, and how it has supported them with increased demand. NutreeLife is even currently considering new product lines.



"With other food producers cutting ranges to focus on volume, customers are looking for alternatives, which has created an opportunity for us. Orders from all areas of the business have increased, which means we are producing more. There is no doubt that without investing when we did, in the way that we did, with the help from Made Smarter, we would not be able to cope with this unprecedented increase in demand. The technologies we have adopted have enabled us to develop new products quicker and we are now taking pre-orders for the first time, such is the demand."

– Patrick Mroczak, Co-Founder and CEO of NutreeLife



## Modifying operations or products

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### To modify operations or product lines

On a similar note, we're seeing that some enterprises have adapted their businesses to respond to the vital equipment and PPE needs across the UK. Take, for instance, the gin manufacturers who are now creating hand sanitisers instead. Textiles manufacturer Tibard, who we work closely with, was forced to close its operations producing uniforms for the hotel and leisure industry. But they reopened and are now making PPE equipment and scrubs for hospitals.



The project that we helped with involved replacing Tibard's two-decade-old CAM cutting machine with a modern IOT-connected machine – one of several emerging digital technologies. They now have access to advanced features which minimise downtime and guarantee predictive maintenance – something that proves immensely helpful when making such urgent items.

"Given the current impact on our customers, we have changed our production to focus on responding to the vital needs of the NHS and carers for protective clothing during these difficult times. It is rewarding to see our business responding to help to support our medical professionals and key workers whilst they are working tirelessly to support people across the UK."

– Ian Mitchell, Managing Director of Tibard

Another enterprise that is reacting to the country's crucial need for equipment is Fabricon. They usually employ advanced manufacturing methods to produce innovative plastics, aluminium and steel component designs for a range of different sectors. However, they've now switched to printing headbands to use in protective wear for NHS employees. Fabricon is also supporting Tameside Hospital by designing and manufacturing a respiratory port for their CPAP machine.

"We wanted to use our internal expertise and technology to help with the call for vital equipment. We already utilise 3D printers within our operations. They are incredibly effective at prototyping designs quickly. It's fantastic that we have been able to utilise them to print headbands which will support the protection of NHS staff. We are also looking at other options such as using our injection moulding machines which can produce over 7,000 of these components a week."

– Mark Bushdyhan, Director of Fabricon



## Support for continuity

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### To support continuity

Manufacturing is still an essential part of the supply chain. Although those within it aren't officially 'key workers', the government has acknowledged that it's important they maintain their operations. Their recognition was outlined in the letter to those working in UK manufacturing from the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, Alok Sharma.

I'm aware that some non-key workers' friends and families may question or comment on them going into their business premises. However, in some areas, stopping production is not an option. To keep employees safe, those who do need to stay open are doing everything possible to ensure this.

A good example is ATEC Solutions, who are still running their production as a vital part of the defence supply chain. Managing Director Andrea Hough is very supportive of Made Smarter, and is a member of the Made Smarter National Commission which represents small business owners.

"I am so proud of my team at ATEC. They have responded to the current climate with dedication, energy and compassion. In addition to maintaining the smooth running of our existing operations, the team have adopted remote-working tools such as Zoom to enable social distancing. We have also utilised our 3D

printers to produce protective visors for local care homes and care home trusts."

– Andrea Hough, Managing Director at ATEC Solutions

Get virtual support from Made Smarter  
As for Made Smarter, whilst our offices are closed, we are very much still continuing to operate and are available virtually. Our business advisers can hold a virtual meeting via Skype or telephone, so you're not hindered from starting your digital journey. If you'd like to book a virtual appointment, please email [madesmarter@growthco.uk](mailto:madesmarter@growthco.uk)

Our advice is fully funded, meaning you can understand the digital tools available to help boost processes and grow your enterprise without the financial barrier. On top of this, you can apply for up to 50% match-funding for technology implementation and access a digital technology intern to support you with the research, development and implementation of emerging technologies. Many of our interns are currently supporting manufacturers remotely during lockdown.

We understand that leading through these testing times may feel lonely, so we've created a [Made Smarter LinkedIn forum](#). This will be a space specifically for the manufacturing community to share their challenges and help solve problems with the support of peers.