

Bakes by Gina

Rising to the challenge with digital leadership

A Cumbrian cake manufacturer is showcasing how the future of manufacturing can be both female and digital, thanks to the support of Made Smarter.

Gina Goulding, a 27-year-old entrepreneur from Whitehaven, with a background in civil engineering, transformed her passion for baking into a thriving manufacturing business. Bakes by Gina, now produces thousands of cakes each month for retail and wholesale.

Gina credits Made Smarter for giving her the confidence and skills to lead a bold digital transformation.

As well as working with Made Smarter to create a digital roadmap to guide the company's evolution, Gina has completed the Leading Digital Transformation (LDT) skills programme. Meanwhile, two of her team members also took part in the Leading Change for Digital Champions (LCDC) programme.

"Made Smarter didn't just help with creating a digital strategy and highlighting the opportunity of digital technologies — it helped me believe in my own leadership potential," she said. "It helped me see myself not just as a baker or engineer, but as a manufacturer and business owner."

The Challenge

Gina's journey began in hospitality, where she discovered a passion for baking while working in cafés and restaurants.

While baking as a hobby, she was offered an opportunity to do a civil engineering degree apprenticeship — which included projects at Sellafield.

After achieving a first-class honours degree, Gina progressed through

several engineering roles before securing a remote planning position, giving her the flexibility to grow her cake business.

What began as a side hustle scaled rapidly. In 2024, Gina renovated an industrial unit to create a dedicated bakery, followed by the acquisition of a second unit in the same year. When one of her wholesale customers went into liquidation, she stepped in to rescue and run the café herself, preserving local jobs and expanding her own retail presence.

Despite early successes, Gina recognised that managing a growing team of 22 staff and multiple sites would require a stronger digital foundation and a more structured leadership approach.

The Solution

Gina first connected with Made Smarter through an introduction from her local Chamber of Commerce while exploring funding opportunities. With guidance from Made Smarter adviser Sarah Woodhams, she developed a digital roadmap for Bakes by Gina and was invited to join the LDT programme.

The three-month course, delivered in partnership with Manchester Metropolitan University and the University of Salford, focuses on equipping SME manufacturers with the strategies and skills to adopt cutting-edge digital technologies. It blends face-to-face workshops, online webinars, and case studies to see technology in action, and

includes a site visit to PrintCity, Manchester Met's 3D additive and digital manufacturing centre.

LDT gave Gina the space to reflect on her priorities, sharpen her leadership skills, and create a clear plan for growth.

Two members of her team then took part in Made Smarter's LCDC programme, which aims to educate and inspire others involved in implementing digital change. The bite-size, blended approach consists of two face-to-face workshops, online coaching, as well as a chance to see the latest digital technologies at an Amazon fulfillment center.

The Benefit

Through Made Smarter, Gina has developed a more structured, people-centred leadership style and laid the groundwork for digital adoption across her bakery and café operations.

The LDT programme gave her the confidence to lead change, prioritise projects, and communicate her vision effectively to staff.

Gina said: "The programme gave me space to step back and reflect. As an entrepreneur, you jump from one idea to the next — but the course helped me slow down, prioritise, and make better decisions for the team.

"It taught me what makes a great leader and helped me understand the impact my decisions have on others. I'm now a lot more confident in how I lead and where I take the business next."

With two digital champions in the team, Gina is getting support to sustain a culture of continuous improvement.



"It helped them visualise what change could look like — and brought them along on the journey with me."

The Future

With a growing order book and a growing team, Gina is now reviewing her next steps. This includes investing in digital technologies, including automation, to streamline production and manage her expanding workforce.

"When I first started talking to Made Smarter, I didn't know exactly what we needed, but I knew we needed to grow — and that's where Made Smarter

stepped in with real direction. When Sarah visited the bakery and helped us map out a digital roadmap, it was the first time I felt like someone had taken the time to really understand the business and where we could take it."

"We haven't applied for a grant yet — capital is always a challenge — but I know the support is there. I'm also really interested in the internship programme to help us keep moving forward."



“

The programme gave me space to step back and reflect. As an entrepreneur, you jump from one idea to the next — but the course helped me slow down, prioritise, and make better decisions for the team

Gina Goulding
Owner

”

