

MADE SMARTER

Ashes Memorial Jewellery New engraving machine opens up huge possibilities for Burton jeweller

A Burton memorial jewellery business has opened up far more possibilities after purchasing a hi-tech laser engraver through a grant from Made Smarter.

Ashes Memorial Jewellery, founded by jeweller Julia Bochenski in 2017, creates beautiful pieces in memory of loved ones, which incorporate ashes or locks of hair within the metalwork of the jewellery, as well as messages of love or condolences.

Items are made to order for the customer in the business's workshop, and range from rings, necklaces, pendants, bangles, earrings, and much more.

Much of the business's work requires precision engraving for handwritten messages and even fingerprints on the jewellery.

However, this work had to be outsourced to the Jewellery Quarter in Birmingham as the business did not have a machine capable of this in its workshop.

This meant lead times were much longer and costs were increased, but Ashes Memorial Jewellery could not afford to buy its own machine to solve this problem.

After seeking assistance from the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Growth Hub, Julia was introduced to the Made Smarter scheme and its Industrial Digital Technology Specialist for the region, Tim Kirby.

Tim visited the business and confirmed a new engraving machine would significantly help Ashes Memorial Jewellery increase its productivity and reduce its costs.

Julia said: "Made Smarter has been the Holy Grail for us –

we knew we needed a laser engraver to help us become more competitive, but the expertise and advice given by Made Smarter in applying for a grant was absolutely crucial.

"Now we have the engraving machine here, we are producing fantastic jewellery with a much shorter lead time for our customers, and it is giving us all sorts of ideas for new creations too."

Rebecca Parker, Growth Hub Team Manager and Accredited Business Advisor at Stoke-on-Trent & Staffordshire Growth Hub, added: "It's incredible to see Staffordshire businesses thriving and expanding following the efforts of our key stakeholders and partner organisations. As a successful signposting mechanism we are extremely fortunate to work amongst these organisations with a wealth of knowledge and experienced programmes to broaden the spectrum of support we can offer to Staffordshire SMEs."

The Challenge

Ashes Memorial Jewellery is a very small business, with Julia, engraver Ruth Hallows, and three other part-time employees the only staff on the books.

While both are very skilled, the fine precision needed to engrave handwriting, fingerprints and intricate patterns onto jewellery requires the use of an engraving machine.

When customers asked for this, Ashes Memorial Jewellery had to outsource the work to contacts in the Jewellery Quarter in Birmingham who had the machinery capable of producing the patterns on the jewellery.

With Birmingham being around 30 miles away from Burton, travelling to and from the Jewellery Quarter increased time and costs for Ashes Memorial Jewellery and put a limit on how much it could produce for customers.

Julia said: "We knew what was holding us back was our inability to use an engraving machine in-house. The problem was we didn't have the spare capital to purchase the machine outright, and we were uneasy about taking out a loan as there would be a lot of pressure on us to produce enough jewellery to pay it off quickly.

"I decided to contact the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Growth Hub to see if there were any grants available. They quickly referred me to the Made Smarter scheme which seemed to be exactly what we were looking for."

The Solution

The Growth Hub informed the region's IDTS, Tim Kirby, about Julia's enquiry, and he contacted her to set up a meeting and conduct an audit of its capabilities.

He said: "When I visited Ashes Memorial Jewellery, it was clear many parts of the business were working perfectly well. As Julia suspected, the only thing holding the business back was the lack of an engraving machine.

"We organised for David Cattle from Made Smarter partner the Manufacturing Technology Centre (MTC) to visit and assess how quickly the machine would pay for itself if a grant was awarded."

David's assessment showed the Orion engraving machine, which

costs around £22,000, would soon make back the cost of the grant thanks to the time and money it would save.

Made Smarter then helped Julia apply for a match-funded grant to pay for the machine and supported her throughout the process.

Her application was successful, and Julia paid for the machine as soon as the money was in her account.

She said: "Tim, David and the team at Made Smarter were fantastic throughout the application process – I have dyslexia so while I knew what I needed for our business, filling out forms is not easy for me. Tim helped me with that part of the process which was a really nice touch.

"The application was processed in just three weeks, and I just couldn't wait to order the machine. We knew just how many doors it would open for us so I wanted it in the workshop as quickly as possible."

The Benefits

The new machine, nicknamed 'Bertha' by Julia and Ruth, is already making a massive difference to Ashes Memorial Jewellery and the products it can create for customers.

The machine is reducing lead times by around a week for engraved products and saves the business approximately £15,000 a year through not having to travel to the Jewellery Quarter and outsource the service to companies there.

With Ruth operating the machine and trips to Birmingham only needed occasionally, Julia is now able to focus her time on the other sides to running the business, such as administration and marketing.

Julia said: "Even though we've only had it for a few months, the new engraving machine has

been absolutely amazing for us. We had to give it a name as it feels like part of the team – we settled on 'Bertha'!

"The time and money it saves is crucial to us being able to grow as a company and stay competitive. The barrier we faced was having the capital to acquire it in the first place – and Made Smarter was able to get us the grant we needed.

"When a customer asks for a laser-engraved product, we are delighted to give them a competitive price and delivery time which is far better than we were previously able to offer. "It's even got our creative juices flowing too – the machine has so many functions and we're still getting used to the software to go with it. While we are able to engrave certain patterns, there are many more applications for it than we first realised.

"We are incredibly happy with the machine and how it has transformed our business, and we have to thank the Made Smarter team for their help along the way."

The Future

Julia and Ruth are looking forward to experimenting with the machine's software and finding new applications that can create new and interesting designs for customers.

And thanks to the extra money the machine will bring in, Julia is hopeful she will be able to expand the business in the long-term.

"The machine has really set us up for a bright future," Julia added.

"It will not only allow us to fulfil more orders, but will allow us to experiment with R and D too, and I'm excited to see what new techniques we come up with.

"I'd love to expand Ashes Memorial Jewellery in the future, and with 'Bertha' on our team, I think we're a lot closer to doing just that."



From left: Ruth Hallows, engraver at Ashes Memorial Jewellery, Julia Bochenski, founder of Ashes Memorial Jewellery, and Tim Kirby, Industrial Digital Technology Specialist at Made Smarter, next to Ashes Memorial Jewellery's new laser engraving machine 'Bertha'.

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