MADE SMARTER

Star Cutouts
Data as a blueprint for growth

> "
> *The main focus for Star Cutouts is to capitalise on this new intelligence and take gradual steps into new markets.*
> "

A manufacturer of life-size cardboard cut-outs of celebrities and official franchises such as Disney, Star Wars and television characters is anticipating game-changing growth after investing in trend analysis software, with the support of Made Smarter.

Star Cutouts, based in Ashton-under-Lyne, is licensed to print and distribute cutouts, face masks and wall decorations of over 3,000 characters.

It has identified an opportunity to invest in software which will help the business improve its speed and accuracy in reacting to trends.

Coupled with new automation machinery, Ian Ravey, Managing Director, forecasts the business can increase sales and turnover fivefold to £10m within five years.

"Big data and analytics offers a huge and exciting opportunity for us to not just be quicker to react to trends, but to influence them," Ian said. *"We predict the impact of our strategy will be huge and we are grateful to Made Smarter for supporting and accelerating the opportunity."*

The Challenge
Launched in 2005, Star Cutouts prints on demand a rich array of characters, including the Royal family, celebrities, sports stars, as well as film and TV stars. The products are popular among fans for home decor, as well as parties and events.

However, launching a successful new product takes time, effort, and is risky.

"We launch a variety of new characters a month," Ian said. *"Selecting the right character is extremely time consuming as it involves research via social media to spot who and what is trending. Sentiment also changes so*

quickly day to day. Sometimes by the time we decide to design and launch we've missed the boat.

"Ultimately, we are too reactive. Out of 10 product launches, one might be a success. When you are spending X amount on licensing agreements you need to be confident in your investment."

The Solution
Star Cutouts has identified a software which monitors media, producing real-time reports of who and what people are talking about, and how positive or negative their views are. The software, which uses artificial intelligence, is 50% funded by Made Smarter, helping Star Cutouts to accelerate their growth.

As well as searching for characters in its archive, the platform will also identify new trends and analyse other metrics including geography.

This vital business intelligence will be instantly fed to the management and design team via a bespoke platform to support decision making on product development.

"Say there is a new Scooby Doo film and it is the source of conversation on social media," Ian explained. *"The software 'listens' to these interactions and analyses them to identify the most popular character and even the most popular particular scene.*

"This will help us focus on offering what fans and customers want. It will also enable us to react

quicker to trends and popularity. For instance, Squid Game was a sudden phenomenon. Quicker access to that intelligence will enable us to react quicker to get licences for those characters so we can start marketing them.

"Also, what is trending in France isn't necessarily trending in Germany. Understanding where the conversations are happening means that we can know where the fans of certain characters are and target marketing accordingly to increase sales."

The Benefits
Real-time access to the business intelligence and analytics will enable Star Cutouts to be significantly quicker and more confident in how it reacts to opportunities.

"We anticipate that having the data to back up our decision-making process will take us from a 1 in 10 product launch success rate to a 7 in 10," Ian said. *"The increased accuracy will save a considerable amount of time and resources, and make much better use of our talented design team. We will be able to use that efficiency to focus on growth."*

The project will support efforts to increase global sales from 60,000 units per year to 300,000 over the next five years, which is forecast to increase turnover fivefold, from £2m to £10m.

The investment will also upskill the existing digital marketing manager and design team, as well as create a new role for a digital apprentice.

The Future
The main focus for Star Cutouts is to capitalise on this new intelligence and take gradual steps into new markets.

In order to fulfil the anticipated demand, the company has invested £324,000 in new automated cutting equipment which enables it to produce up to 3,200 more products per day. This investment, combined with

more informed decision making and trend analysis, will see the company go from strength to strength.

"Our strategy is to combine the latest digital tools to understand our customer and increase production through new machinery and continuously improve processes. This is a major first step."

STAR★CUTOUTS ™