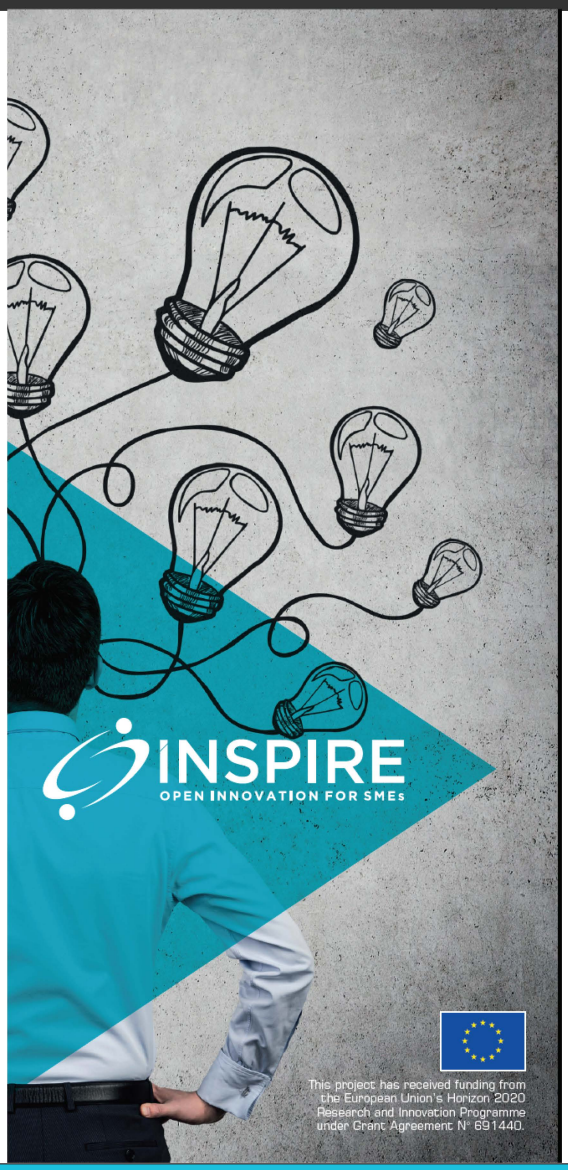

JUMP RESEARCH

United Kingdom, www.jumpresearch.co.uk

A small market research company had an innovative idea for increasing consumer participation in their surveys. They involved product design students at a local university to come up with ideas for a customized vehicle and then enlisted the services of a small vehicle outfitter to build it

Executive Summary

This is the case of a small marketing company developing a mobile market research vehicle as a platform for remote or temporary research activities. The company developed a concept and design in conjunction with a university partner and implemented the custom design in partnership with a small recreational vehicle outfitter. The project provided a significant return on the company's investment within one year of the project's completion.

CASE N°: UKI21

SECTOR: SERVICES

TECH INTENSITY: LOW-MEDIUM TECH

LIFE CYCLE STAGE: START-UP

INNOVATION VECTORS: SERVICE, CUSTOMERS & MARKETING

01 PARTNERS: PSR, OTHER SME

KEYWORDS: Market research, new research vehicle, partnership with PSR, student Innovation

- BACKGROUND FRAMEWORK
- INNOVATION CHALLENGE & MARKET OPPORTUNITIES
- OI TRAJECTORY
- BUSINESS IMPACT
- LESSONS LEARNED

BACKGROUND

Louise Fraser set up Jump Research in 2012 after 20 years in market research, including in senior management roles. She wanted the freedom to do something more innovative. Jump Research initially offered a limited number of services in which Louise would work on small consultancy projects with SME customers.

When Jump Research started to receive more requests to undertake quantitative work, another director joined the company to handle the company operations, as well as the quantitative work. This allowed the company to undertake larger projects in a similar manner to a large marketing agency. The company adopted a paperless approach in its operations, including market research data gathering processes.

The company expects to operate in a broadly similar way as it currently does over the next few years. In this regard the company will continue to look at ways to adopt new technology and innovate.

INNOVATION CHALLENGE & MARKET OPPORTUNITIES

A recognized broad industry challenge is the falling response rates in market research. Typically, people are now less keen to respond to market research efforts and the process is often seen as dull. This was seen to be an issue for Jump Research along with the operational challenge of it being difficult to run large-scale surveys from a small office in a fixed location. The founding director believed that the company needed to find a better method of gathering high-volume data in an efficient way.

A couple of years after starting Jump Research the founding director, Louise Fraser, went on a camper van holiday around New Zealand. She recognized the ease at which she could base herself anywhere and the clever way in which her camper van had been designed to meet the travelling holiday makers' needs. As a keen adopter of technology, she wondered if a camper van offered a suitable means for addressing the current strategic challenges that the company, and to some extent the market research industry, was experiencing.

The concept of using a camper van for market research had not been previously used, according to the company's own research.

OPEN INNOVATION TRAJECTORY

Concept development

The founding director approached a friend who was a product designer at Edinburgh Napier University. Her friend suggested that the broad idea could be used as a project for third-year product design students. An eight-week module was developed around Jump Research's idea. Students were provided with a design brief and they developed ideas in cardboard models of the inside of a customized camper van. This highlighted challenges the company was not aware of but which needed addressing.

The development process, IPR and competition strategy

The company had a limited budget to realize the concept. The product design staff member at Napier University mentioned that there might be a way to fund the work. Interface, an organization set-up to advise how companies can work with academia, was contacted about the potential project. According to Louise, it was a time- consuming process to complete Interface's voucher funding application paperwork and receive final formal confirmation of funding. In addition, the company had the requirement to complete the project for the start of summer to test the vehicle around Scotland.

The best ideas from the students were considered by the company and the company worked closely with the academic staff member at the university to develop a final design.

The company needed to find a partner to create the vehicle. It attended a Motorhome and Caravan Show at the SECC and found several custom motorhome build companies as potential partners. These potential partners were short-listed and visited. The company's selection criteria for the partner were to find a partner who would be flexible, generate ideas to overcome challenges and be happy to develop a new vehicle that was not similar to what had been built by them previously. As a result, Rockinvan, an SME, was selected as a partner.

One challenge during the project involved the working relationship between the university

partner and the vehicle builder. With hindsight, the company believes that better communication and more project management ownership by the company would have improved the process of effective collaborative working. The result was a vehicle that had aspects that were not as fit for purpose as they could have been.

The only issue the company had with the project contract with the university partner related to the IPR. The company insisted on retaining overall ownership of the research vehicle concept with a compromise that the university could retain IPR for any specific items that they designed for the project and that were unique to the vehicle. An example of this was the modular interlocking furniture system. This IPR agreement allows the company to create further vehicles, if needed, in the future without further licensing agreements.

The development of the vehicle for mobile market research purposes was unique and offered the company a way to differentiate its services from its competitors.

Commercialization and follow-up

The biggest challenge in rolling out the vehicle was how it should be used for business purposes and how to cost the use of the vehicle in customer projects. This was difficult as there was no other organization offering a similar service involving a mobile research vehicle for comparison. To overcome any concerns that interviewees might have for getting into the back of the vehicle, the company wrapped the vehicle in very brightly-coloured graphics to make it obvious it was a market research vehicle.

The company decided that projects using the van required market research interviewers from a specific demographic and who were enthusiastic about its use.

A launch party was held to demonstrate the vehicle to customers and the press. It was held at Napier University and was presented as the outcome of a collaborative project. The students who originally provided ideas for the project were also invited. The vehicle attracted general public attention while being driven around Edinburgh due to the brightly-coloured graphics on its exterior.

Following on from the project, the company's business has grown to a point at which it must decide whether to launch a second van and employ more staff.

BUSINESS IMPACT

The key outcome from the project is that the company now has the capability to tender for and undertake customer projects with the vehicle that are very different in size and scale to before the research vehicle project. Essentially, the company has now developed a different service offering. Customer projects using the vehicle have included a project to carry out a two-year project with a six-figure budget to undertake 15 000 interviews.

The project also led to a Market Research Society Industry Award in 2016 for best Data Collection (face-to-face) company. It was the smallest company to enter the awards and won in a category against large multinational companies. The judges commented that the van was innovative and that the Jump Research concept had led to helping widen participation in market research.

The company has further strengthened its belief in the importance of collaboration with other organizations with specialist knowledge. The founding director stated that she believes that without collaborating with others on the project, it would not have been so successful in creating such a fit-for-purpose vehicle.

In the first year after the project, the company learned how to best use the vehicle and create a suitable team to benefit from this new resource in delivering the company's services.

The outcome of the project contributed a 35% increase in the business's turnover in the first year after the project's completion.

LESSONS LEARNED

The company learned several lessons which could be applied to other SME projects. These were:

- look for collaborators who can contribute to any project in which additional expertise is required;
- retain a clear sense of purpose during the project;
- define and use a clear project management structure and operate to agreed timescales;
- hold frequent meetings to monitor project progress which all partners attend.

Louise, the founding director, said that some up-front training and a web-based project management tool would be useful for future projects. Areas in which support would be useful would be in managing relationships and setting

expectations with the partners, particularly those with different organizational cultures. Louise noted however that in the case of low-tech project partners a web-based tool may not be sufficient.

This case clearly demonstrates how a low-technology service company can partner with an academic organization to bring a high-level concept into use.

academic organization to bring a high-level concept into use. Also, the approach adopted by the company and university partner in which students are challenged to address ways of implementing the concept, is an unusual method for helping to achieve the aims and objectives of an OI project.

Main lessons learned:

1. A low-tech service SME can work with a university partner and a low-tech SME to implement a high-level concept in a tangible useable form.
2. An OI project can involve university students to provide ideas to fuel the innovative concept development.
3. A collaborative OI project with an SME can form the foundations of an academic teaching and project module for students in which a real-world problem is solved.
4. Careful management of IPR can lead to each party retaining the rights to specific elements of the project outcome, e.g. the SME retains rights to the overall concept and the university retains design IPR of the solution, with the SME also retaining the rights to replicate the designs.
5. The financial return on investment for an OI project in the first year can easily exceed the initial financial investment by the SME and other funders.
6. OI projects undertaken by small SME-led consortium partners can yield outcomes that are not just new to the partners but also for the market in which the SME operates.