

# UNLEASHING YOUR INNOVATION

A guide to accelerating product development  
for SMEs in Greater Manchester

# INTRODUCTION

**Innovation has never been more important for small and medium-sized businesses, leading to stronger turnover performance, better productivity and a higher level of competitiveness.**

But how do you turn business ideas and opportunities into sales? How does your SME challenge the status quo, to develop and progress a new, redesigned or improved product? How do you become innovative?

This guide highlights the key considerations for doing things differently.



# THE CORNERSTONES OF PRODUCT INNOVATION

## New Ideas

Encouraging creativity and innovation in the workplace delivers huge benefits to business. Getting the creative juices flowing will enable you to generate passion and excitement within your workforce, and capitalise on a broader range of ideas and perspectives, putting you in a stronger position to create clear plans to progress projects.

GC Business Growth Hub can support in getting you and your team focused on innovation and problem solving, via techniques for generating new ideas, facilitated idea generation workshops, and helping to evaluate how your culture fosters innovation.

## Research, Development and Validation

Many SMEs have lots of innovative ideas, but don't necessarily know how to filter them, focus on the best ones, and create a clear plan to towards commercialisation. By investing your time and resources in this area at the earliest stage possible, you can save huge amounts of time and money later, as well as strengthening your value proposition.

When exploring an opportunity, reflect on the need the product will meet and who the end user is. Think about that person's pain points: what task are they trying to accomplish and how does your product help?

Research the market thoroughly, looking at its size and what is a realistic share to target. Consider the drivers that are shaping the market and how these may change going forwards. Identify the current competitors and the potential for future disruption. Answer the question, what makes your product stand out?

Dig deep into legislation, intellectual property rights, standards and relevant ethical and social issues risks. Recognise, assess and mitigate the risks.

Having done all this, you'll be in a strong position to create a killer value proposition.

## CASE STUDY

### EASE FOR YOU

Entrepreneur Colin Lowe was working on an idea for a new medical gel cool pack to reduce the pain of back injuries. The Hub's innovation specialists provided expert impartial advice on how to turn this concept into reality. We identified a collaboration opportunity with University of Bolton researchers, who investigated the market and provided initial prototypes.



**Colin Lowe**

Managing Director at Ease for You

“

The support provided by GC Business Growth Hub was key to propelling my initial idea, and without this I wouldn't be where I am today. The project with the University highlighted the clear gap in the market for my product, and provided further confidence and encouragement for me to push forward. To this day, the team at the Hub are trusted advisers to the business.

”

## Collaboration

Not having the right knowledge, skills or facilities can really hold back innovation in your business. Greater Manchester is home to a wealth of expertise – including world-leading universities, and research and technology organisations – that can help address the challenges you face.

Our four universities work with industry, for example, to share knowledge and develop commercial products. Their support can help you gain project momentum, expedite research and development activities, shorten your time to market, and understand the impact of future technological change.

Options for collaboration could also exist with a supplier, customer or non-competing local business. Don't be afraid to seek external help to solve your business and technical challenges – and be open-minded to the opportunities on your doorstep.

**GC BUSINESS GROWTH HUB'S INNOVATION EXPERTS CAN HELP YOU ACCESS LEADING KNOWLEDGE, FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT**

### CASE STUDY

## GJD MANUFACTURING

**Manufacturer of perimeter security systems, GJD, approached the Hub for support on its proposal to develop laser detection systems. We helped the Rochdale business make a successful application to Innovate UK – one of our principal partners – for a grant worth £141,750, which led to a Knowledge Transfer Partnership with Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU). An additional £77,000 was secured from the Greater Manchester Export Fund for GJD's expansion into new markets.**



**Mark Tibbenham**  
Managing Director at GJD

“

We've had a long-standing relationship with the Innovation team at GC Business Growth Hub, who have introduced us to many programmes and opportunities over the years. Our work with MMU helped us to secure funding and access skills, which has led us to retaining a post-grad student as a full-time engineer.

There's no doubt that our work with the Hub has positively impacted our development, enabling us to bring our products to market more quickly and therefore generate more revenues. For SMEs that are unaware of the support that is out there, I'd encourage you to contact the Hub.

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# Commercialisation

Commercial planning is as important as the technical development you have undertaken.

Creating a robust commercial plan will increase your confidence in the likely success of your product, help you to differentiate from competitors, and improve investor readiness.

As part of your approach, identify what success looks like for your business and set goals to help accomplish this. Use market and technology insight to evaluate the benefits and drawbacks of different business models and sales approaches, and look at how you're going to manage onward development and innovation.

However, be mindful that you do not wish to be a serial R&D business. Get to market fast and don't be afraid to fail – we often learn more through our mistakes.

# Funding

There are multiple funding options available to enhance the speed and quality of new and existing product development – from government grants to Knowledge Transfer Partnerships, the Small Business Research Initiative, Innovation Continuity Loans and hundreds of competitions run by the Innovation Funding Service.

Understanding this confusing landscape will help you identify what funding is available, what different investors are looking for, and how your innovation satisfies their needs. You'll then be able to focus your efforts on funding streams where you have the highest chances of success.

Each funding body will have different rules around applying and using the funding they offer. Review the eligibility criteria and, if you're unsure, ask for clarification before applying. Having a clear narrative to describe your project and outputs is critical – so the assessors understand your idea, why it's important, what you intend to produce, and when they should expect to see results. Without this basic information, the funders won't know what they're expected to fund, why, or what they'll get out of it.



Figures from October 2015 to April 2021

## CASE STUDY

# DUNSTERS FARM

Dunsters Farm was able to pivot from being purely a traditional distributor to boasting a successful ecommerce offer, thanks to our digital innovation experts. Through the Hub, the Bury-based food wholesaler has benefitted from a collaboration project with Manchester Metropolitan University and is working on a management KTP (Knowledge Transfer Partnership) to achieve its long-term vision.



**Hannah Barlow**  
Managing Director at Dunsters Farm

“

Working with the Hub has been the catalyst to potentially transforming our business. Especially in the pandemic, businesses have been considering new ways of working to improve efficiency and productivity, but with no real way of driving it. The Hub has so many resources available for businesses when it comes to these projects, and while still in its infancy, the introduction to the University has put us in an exciting place for the future.

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# GREATER MANCHESTER'S INNOVATION FACILITIES

Greater Manchester has a thriving innovation ecosystem, with lots of facilities designed to encourage collaboration and support your product development journey. Below is a selection of those available to businesses in the region.



## ACOUSTIC CENTRE – UNIVERSITY OF SALFORD

The specialist commercial acoustics testing team at the University of Salford delivers innovative solutions in acoustic measurement, modelling and development. The Hub works closely with the Acoustic Centre on projects including research and development, validation, collaboration and funding.

*“As we have a range of products available both in the UK and overseas, we require a number of different accreditations, and proof that our product works is crucial to securing sales. The collaboration established with the Acoustics Centre via the Hub allowed us to carry out detailed tests on both the impact sound and sound absorption of our carpets, which has lent further credibility to our claims and opened doors to international buyers we otherwise would not have had access to.”*

**Lees Whitehead, Managing Director,  
Newhey Carpets**



## PRINTCITY – MANCHESTER METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY

PrintCity is a 3D additive and digital manufacturing centre, offering plastic and metal 3D production, scanning, laser welding and laser cutting solutions. The facility is ideal for businesses that want to ‘go digital’, and collaborates with SMEs and individuals to accelerate product development – supporting new ideas, research, collaboration, commercialisation and launch.

*“The support of the Hub was central to our success – our project with Manchester Metropolitan University enabled us to prove our concept and raise credibility with several leading sports footwear brands, as well as drive the launch of our new children’s sandal.”*

**Gaynor Thomasson, Director  
It’s All About Shoes**



## GRAPHENE ENGINEERING INNOVATION CENTRE (GEIC) – UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER

The GEIC specialises in the rapid development and scale up of graphene and other 2D materials applications. The centre focuses on key areas to accelerate the development and commercialisation of new technologies, and can support with a wide range of projects across the full Innovation Pathway.

*“Through our work with GC Business Growth Hub, we’ve seen the true potential of some of Manchester’s most innovative small companies, and have been fortunate enough to have supported the growth journey of many. The Hub has been a real catalyst in driving new products to market and maximising the region’s potential.”*

**Dr Paul Wiper, Application Manager,  
University of Manchester**



## INSTITUTE FOR MATERIALS RESEARCH AND INNOVATION – UNIVERSITY OF BOLTON

IMRI is a multi-disciplinary centre designed to cultivate research and innovation activities in collaboration with industry and other academic institutions. The Institute is internationally known for its strong applied materials science and engineering applications through the development of novel smart and multifunctional composite materials.

*“Science has long been one of the hotbeds for talent in the region, but the guidance and support has not always been available for businesses when it comes to making the most of their ideas. Working alongside the Hub, we now have a structure in place to collaborate with SMEs to add meaningful value to our business community.”*

**Simon Wiggins, Dean of the Faculty of Engineering,  
Arts & Creative Technologies, University of Bolton**

# THE GC BUSINESS GROWTH HUB INNOVATION PROGRAMME

## What We Offer

From the days of the Industrial Revolution to the invention of graphene, Greater Manchester has been synonymous with innovation, powering the growth of the UK's economy.

At GC Business Growth Hub, we remain committed to driving this into the future, supporting local innovation projects as businesses look to strengthen turnover performance and improve productivity.

Our Innovation service will unlock your potential and provide a clear pathway to discovering new commercial opportunities.

Having delivered tangible benefits to 2,600 SMEs, our innovation specialists understand the difficulties in getting new ideas moving. We work with you to navigate your innovation journey, providing the knowledge, connections and support to minimise time to market and maximise success.

As well as in-house expertise, we also have long-established relationships within the region's innovation ecosystem, from the facilities specialising in supporting SMEs and the universities that drive collaboration, to the funders that can inject valuable capital.

We're here to help you respond, adapt and thrive at this time of seismic change.

**Contact us today at [bgh@growthco.uk](mailto:bgh@growthco.uk)  
or on 0161 359 3050.**

**Our innovation specialists have an outstanding track record in commercialising innovation, accelerating time to market and accessing funding. Contact a member of the team to find out how we can help supercharge your product innovation:**

**E** [bgh@growthco.uk](mailto:bgh@growthco.uk)

**T** 0161 359 3050

**W** [businessgrowthhub.com/innovation](https://businessgrowthhub.com/innovation)



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