

innovation case studies

[Product & Construction Innovation]

#2. Tim Simmons - Woolly Shepherd

Innovation in the product and construction sector. Tim's story is a fascinating and award-winning example of how to combine good business strategy with environmental issues to create a successful, sustainable, innovative and environmentally conscious enterprise.

The Woolly Shepherd business was created based on a product solution to what was then waste wool from the local Blackdown Hills and surrounding area.

From the very heart of the business it was producing local and sustainable products, which generated two main avenues of income, wool used in packaging and wool used in buildings as insulation.

It wasn't long before Tim and Nicky was asking themselves 'What else can wool be used for?'



Generating new ideas:

Using creative thinking and innovation, Tim and Nicky explored a number of different product ideas such as, tree mats and hanging basket liners.

Tim used his personal interests to come up with the idea of replicating the job that wool performs inside a loudspeaker cabinet.

Could it be better and cheaper than any current product? Which types of wool and wool composition achieves the best sound?

A drawing of a cloud in the shape of a sheep which became the Woolly Shepherd's logo and a Eureka moment where the acoustic cloud was born! Tim and Nicky knew the process of creative innovation had led them to a viable gap in the market.

Product Development:

They then went through the design process to create the lightweight, Mark 1 Cloud prototype. To test the product and gain valuable customer feedback Tim and Nicky took the Mark 1 to a targeted local restaurant as it was a barn conversion, which suffered from a very high level of noise due the structure of the building.

A number of scientific tests were done in order to provide quantitative figures for the product to prove the benefits, such as, qualities of absorption.

Growing from strength to strength:

Nicky had also been pushing at the marketing side of the business, submitting regular press releases and promoting their story at various local events.

Marketing paid off as it created incredible results with The Blackdown Hills Association phoning to say the BBC's Countryfile programme were looking for stories of innovation within the area to pitch their idea to BBC's Dragon Den's local Investor Deborah Meaden.

Tim and Nicky went on to enjoy a massive response, they received 150 emails in the time it took to drive home from this event and experienced 2 weeks of utter madness through the sheer number of orders.

Tim said "Sustainability is very important and as a company is non-negotiable", because of this, the business has embraced the 'Cradle to Cradle' design strategy.

What's does the future hold:

Innovation and creative design have served the Woolly Shepherd well. In the 2nd year of trading Tim and Nicky have generated a 200% increase in turnover from their first year and now having made the decision to format the business into a limited company they are projecting a 500% increase in year 3.

And so to conclude on a cloud 9 note, at the time of interviewing Tim, he was on the brink of completing a very exciting contract with one of the country's leading brand chains, so watch this space...