Joint UCL/LBS team helps Photoedge to sharpen its focus on the future

Preparing his company to attract potential investment, Peter Rosen sought advice from those with far less experience than he – students from UCL and London Business School (LBS). Put together by HELO and led by MBA student Sebastian Sutherland, a team of six looked at all aspects of Photoedge’s eco-friendly canvas and photo prints business and suggested lowering the cost of production and formalising Peter’s business partnership.

Peter Rosen has worked in manufacturing for nearly 40 years, long enough, he says, to know when fresh ideas are called for to take a business forward. Since 2009 he has been Chief Executive of Photoedge, which produces a ‘green’ alternative to traditional canvas and photo prints using a unique printing technology. The prints are mounted onto recycled board and folded into a patent-pending box construction ready to be hung on a wall.

Peter was aware that a “complete rethink” of the company’s business model was necessary if Photoedge was to be in a position to attract investment in the future. Familiar with the work of UCL Advances, Peter approached the HELO team to see how they could help. Essi Niittymaki (HELO Project Manager) put together a team of six, two from London Business School and four from UCL, with backgrounds as diverse as Ancient Greek and Neuroscience. What they had in common, says Peter, is “the ability to think innovatively and adapt to any situation.”

The team was led by Sebastian Sutherland, an MBA student at LBS who had previously worked as an electrical engineer in T-Mobile’s product development unit. The team analysed Photoedge’s business plan and assessed its operational risk, and made recommendations including lowering the cost of producing the prints to increase profit margins and formalising the ‘gentlemen’s agreement’ between Peter and his business partner of many years.

Peter adds that students need to find out how the real world works – that sometimes production delays or IT issues can affect the best-laid plans. “HELO doesn’t just focus on a single issue, like leadership or training. Students work on an amazing variety of issues, from building a prototype for a scientific invention to drawing up a business plan for an SME,” he says.

The team also helped Peter to plan a social media campaign.

Sebastian says: “The team had the opportunity to get hands on practical experience with an exciting start-up. I got to test the theory I learnt on the MBA and felt that I really benefited from the time working with the team. I acted as the liaison between Essi, Peter and the team – an easy role, as everyone was committed to making the most of the opportunity.” He maintained his connections with start-ups over the year, finishing with an internship at Facebook in their London office.
About UCL

University College London was established in 1826 and is ranked seventh in the world’s top universities. The university is a modern, outward-looking institution, with more than 4,000 academic and research staff committed to engaging with the major issues of our times. It has a global reach, with 34% of its students coming from outside the UK, from almost 140 countries.

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About UCL Advances

The centre for entrepreneurship at UCL, UCL Advances, offers training, networking and business support for staff, students and external entrepreneurs to encourage and enable new enterprises to get going. Unique in the UK Higher Education sector, its primary role is to promote a culture of entrepreneurship on campus and engagement with entrepreneurs and small businesses beyond UCL’s boundaries, and currently delivers over 30 activity programmes.

UCL Advances is affiliated with UCL Enterprise, which provides UCL’s structures for engaging with business for commercial and societal benefit.

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About Business Support

UCL provides direct business support for internal and external organisations through a variety of programmes, such as grants, space provision, advice and problem solving. The HELO programme is one of these programmes.

HELO (Higher Education London Outreach) is an innovative programme that matches up small and medium sized businesses (SMEs) needing to tackle specific problems with students and academic staff who have specialist knowledge and skills in relevant areas, for short-term consultancies. The HELO project is delivered by UCL Advances and supported by London Business School. The project is part-funded by the European Union.

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