

DOT COM BOOM

From mobile phones to social networking sites, the UK's pre-eminence in the ultra-fluid world of technology and communications is unrivalled, writes Martin Smith

THE UK is one of the world's key creative hubs, with a large, receptive consumer market for new technologies and content. It spends more on consumer electronics and content than any other EU country.

The digital content industry is at the heart of this trend and it is the combination of artistic and technical expertise that drives the continued innovation in the sector.

Whether on the cinema screen or the smallest mobile devices, UK digital content developers are constantly changing and improving the way in which we are informed, educated and entertained.

Hollywood studios regularly turn to special-effects companies in the UK to create hyper-real sequences, while mobile phone operators and handset manufacturers have set up research labs to maximise the potential of their technology.

The UK Government is keen to create greater opportunities and security for the creative industries, in order to cement the country as the location of choice for the content industries. This is reflected in the views of some of the most important global content players in the digital and media entertainments business.

One fan is Colin Robinson, vice-president, EA Partners Europe, the games company responsible for entertaining a whole generation via their consoles. He says: "The UK games development industry

has many of the most experienced game designers, programmers and artists in Europe. From the first steps of 'bedroom' developers to today's cross-pollination with the UK film industry, there is a strong development tradition."

The ICT sector is extensive, spanning electronics, hardware, communications and software. There is no questioning its role as one of the largest wealth creators in the UK economy.

The sector overall contributes more than £66 billion per annum, a figure representing roughly 6.4 per cent of the UK economy, and employs more than one million people.

This is also a dynamic industry, recording one of the fastest growth rates of any sector in the past decade or so. The industry grew by more than five per cent in 2008, compared with a European average of 4.7 per cent.

Though global economic slowdown may curb the rate of progress, this is still an industry on the up, one in rapid transition as new technologies and ideas break through.

Companies active in the ICT space are engaged in a multitude of disciplines from design and production of semiconductors used in consumer gadgets like MP3 players, to development of the software used by banks and other big City institutions.

The UK is home to Vodafone, a name practically synonymous with the global ..



Case studies: SHOWCASING INTERNATIONAL SUCCESS

Breaking into the beauty business

Biox Systems | London

BIOX SYSTEMS, a spin-out company from London South Bank University, is enjoying encouraging overseas sales of its innovative skin-testing technology.

The firm's AquaFlux200 probe is a portable, relatively low-cost, non-invasive device that measures the Transepidermal Water Loss (TEWL) of skin for pharmaceutical and dermatological applications. Previous devices for such measurements needed elaborate and costly climate-controlled laboratories.

Buyers are the world's leading pharmaceutical and cosmetic companies, including L'Oréal, Unilever and Procter & Gamble. Annual sales have trebled to £180,000, with exports developing well in Europe, particularly France, and the US.

Biox has made extensive use of UK Trade & Investment services. Chairman and AquaFlux inventor Professor Bob Imhof first approached the organisation in July 2007 to find out how to market his technology more effectively overseas.

After consulting London international trade adviser Ian Paterson, the company joined the Passport to Export programme and developed an export action plan.

Bob says: "Ian Paterson was brilliant. Taking advantage of his 30 years of international sales experience in technology, we developed plans to define the company's global prospects, qualify the opportunities open to us, build distribution platforms and formulate pricing proposal policies.

"We also received help with our commercial sales plan. This gave us a new perspective on crucial areas such as active selling, how to approach different export regions and pricing."

>> www.biox.biz

Spreading the snacking habit

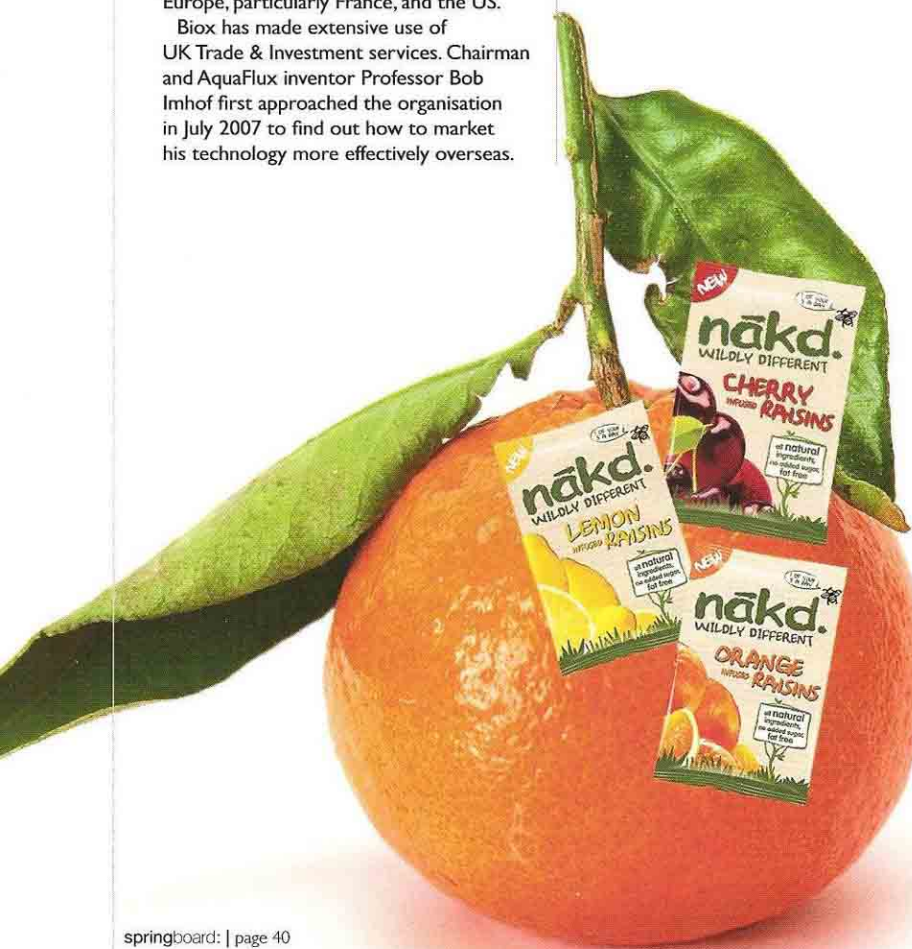
Natural Balance Foods | Thame, Oxfordshire

WHOLEFOOD SNACK business Natural Balance Foods has come a long way since it was founded by American brothers Jamie and Greg Combs in 2004. Not only has it proved a real success in the UK market, selling its products to leading supermarkets and health stores, it is also a successful exporter to mainland Europe.

The company makes Amazin' Raisins, bags of fat, cholesterol and gluten-free raisins, and two brands of energy bars, Nakd and Trek, which use fresh wholefood ingredients with no added sugar. These have been particularly popular with British athletes, who took a stockpile of them to the Beijing 2008 Olympics.

The Combs brothers decided to set up in the UK as a gateway to Europe. "We thought that the health and weight problems experienced in the US would come to Europe and felt we could have a positive impact in the UK," explains Jamie.

>> www.naturalbalancefoods.co.uk





Breaking new ground

Flowcrete UK |
Sandbach, Cheshire

A UK company has just completed a huge contract in the Middle East, providing flooring for the new Terminal 3 and Concourse 2 at Dubai International Airport.

A total of 366,000sq metres of Flowcrete's decking system Deckshield has been installed across all five levels of the car park. Deckshield was also applied in other high-traffic areas, including service roads, the baggage-handling areas and plant rooms. Flowcrete's easy-to-clean Flowfresh system was used for the kitchens and 40,000sq metres of its Isocrete K-Screed was installed in the departures hall.

Flowcrete's sales director Alan Dean says: "The range of products used at Dubai International Airport, and the sheer scale of the installation process, demonstrate our ability to undertake the world's largest and most prestigious construction projects."

The company, which has a regional office in Dubai, has enjoyed great success in the region. Recently, it secured a large-scale contract for its sound performance system Isocrete Acoustic K at the luxury Fairmont Palm Residence Hotel and Resort, which is being built within the exclusive Palm Jumeirah Development.

>> www.flowcrete.co.uk

Thai chicken

CP Merchandising |
Kidderminster, Worcestershire

CHICKEN PRODUCER CP Merchandising is one of Thailand's largest companies, exporting between £10-15 million worth of poultry each month.

It acquired one of its best UK customers, Kidderminster-based Fusion Foods, in 2001. Since then, the UK operation has gone from strength to strength, with employee numbers rising from just seven to around 100 people.

CP Foods UK has major sales in the retail sector, supplying multiples and independents. Foodservice is another important area for the firm, which also has a successful business selling quality ingredients to be used by other food manufacturers.

Managing director Pisit Ohmpornnuwat praised the help he received from Steve Buckley, head of trade and investment in Bangkok, when setting up in the UK. "The move has been great for us," he says. "We started with a £300,000 investment and now have a turnover of £100 million and growth of between 10-15 per cent each year. Our local employees have an excellent knowledge of their home market and we have used the UK as a gateway to Europe."

>> www.cpfloods.co.uk



Rising-damp remedy

Safeguard Europe |
Horsham, West Sussex

SAFEGUARD EUROPE found business in Spain for its damp-proofing product Dryzone after using the services of UK Trade & Investment.

Dryzone is injected into the mortar lines of a damp wall to form a damp-proof course. The company identified particular potential for its product in Spain, where many properties are built without a damp-proof course and are therefore subject to rising damp.

After commissioning two Overseas Market Introduction Service (OMIS) reports from UK Trade & Investment, the firm, which won the South East region Passport to Export Award in 2006, investigated leads in Madrid and Barcelona.

Managing director David Lambert says: "Our interaction with UK Trade & Investment was very positive. Its teams in Madrid and Barcelona contacted a number of potential Spanish partners to market and distribute Dryzone, and forwarded us detailed particulars on the firms, including an indication of the level of interest they had in our product."

"With UK Trade & Investment's help I met three contacts in Barcelona and three in Madrid, which enabled me to gain insight into the market. One of the Barcelona contacts phoned me on my return to the UK and requested a visit to our factory. We subsequently received an order and are now negotiating a distributor agreement."

>> www.safeguardeurope.com

