



Alexander Dennis Ltd

Research and development support helped Alexander Dennis develop a new generation of fuel-efficient hybrid vehicles.

Key message

Working with Scottish Enterprise has taken Alexander Dennis from near-demise to market leader in the space of five years.

About the company

LOCATION

Falkirk

INDUSTRY

Engineering

INNOVATION CATEGORY

New product development

Neither the automotive industry nor the bus business is the first place you might instinctively look for examples of innovation. Yet, it is innovation, funded and supported by Scottish Enterprise, that has moved Falkirk-based Alexander Dennis back from a precarious position in 2004 to today as Britain's biggest bus and coach manufacturer. With a workforce of 2,000, they are a UK market leader and have a growing international market presence.

Challenge

Corporate affairs director Bill Simpson says that the small team which rescued the company, of which he was a member, knew that the business had only a short time in which to restore its reputation. "We decided that if we were going to get anywhere, this would have to be a product-led recovery," he says. "We needed to get new products and we needed to get them to market quickly."

Solution

The answer lay in the R&D Plus programme, managed by Scottish Enterprise which provided a percentage of the development costs for designing a new double-decker engineered to carry more passengers in the conventional size of vehicle. Scottish Enterprise then provided additional support for an equally innovative single-decker the following year that it believes can outperform all its competitors, ready for when London, which buys around 1,000 buses a year, goes hybrid-only in 2012.

Benefit

Bill says: "The significance of the Scottish Enterprise contribution is that this was a business that was very much in recovery, and while we were trying to resuscitate the business we just didn't have spare cash. But, within a year, we were back with a new double-decker and were then able to say that we were going ahead with a new single-decker which would be available within a year."

Alexander Dennis continues to work with Scottish Enterprise and believes the new hybrid to be capable of outperforming any of its competitors. A leading trade magazine said: 'It is quiet - at times whisper quiet - smooth-running and it consumes significantly less diesel... better than a 55 per cent improvement.'

Testimonial

"Scottish Enterprise's contribution meant that we could get to market much more quickly. The extra percentage meant that we could put more engineers on to the job and lab test things faster - and that, in turn, gave the market confidence in us."

Scottish Enterprise

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