



John Donald

Robop

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About the company

LOCATION

Tranent

INDUSTRY

Engineering

INNOVATION CATEGORY

New process and improved business model

Robop, employing fewer than 10 people directly to service an international marketplace, makes an unusual product – a robot peregrine falcon. The robot is sufficiently sophisticated to convince other species of birds that a lethal predator is on hand.

Project

Initially, Robop sought – and received – help from Scottish Enterprise in completing a self-designed and extremely complex website, designed to reduce the time wasted by staff in replying to multiple – and often similar – email enquiries. But, as work progressed, it became clear that the focus needed to broaden to encompass issues like production planning, manufacturing, component sourcing and pricing.

Challenge

Managing director John Donald says: “Our main problem was with manufacturing logistics. The product contains more than 100 parts, some of which are specially machined for us and others of which come from overseas suppliers and are only produced in limited numbers. They are not multi-sourced items.”

This made it very expensive to hold inventory, and the company had endeavoured to order parts on a just-in-time (JIT) basis. But, recalls John, “Around the turn of this year, that completely broke down because our suppliers, instead of taking a week to deliver to us, were taking 6-8 weeks. It completely messed us up and we had to turn away a number of orders as a result.”

At the same time, the company was growing concerned about the efficacy of its robot. For reasons not fully understood, it would sometimes work in one part of a site but not another, or only deter certain species of birds. These complexities will never be fully

resolved, acknowledges John: “What we need to do is improve the product to the point where in, say, 90-95 per cent of cases it works for the customer and solves his bird problem. In the remaining 5-10 per cent, we’ll say OK, and give them their money back.”

Solution

With Scottish Enterprise help, the company was able to reorganise the flow of materials through its workshop and reconfigure its office. Inventory is still higher than Robop would like, though that is in part because of attempts to expand the business. But the flow of components is much improved.

Scottish Enterprise also put the business in touch, through the Interface Network, with a bird behaviour expert, who is going to advise on ways to improve the effectiveness of its product. It also helped Robop find two young development engineers.

Benefit

Says John: “In the early part of this year we were looking at 6-8 weeks and occasionally more to deliver a customer’s order. But now all our orders are being delivered on time. Indeed, recent orders have been delivered within a two-week period.”

“Scottish Enterprise knew what doors we could open, where we could go to seek specific assistance. They have acted like a gatekeeper to all these individuals and organisations who can provide us with additional expertise that we wouldn’t even know existed.”

Key message

“A small company that’s very busy has lots of issues to address and so it’s not always obvious where you can turn for help. We would absolutely recommend Scottish Enterprise – it’s been fantastic.”

Scottish Enterprise

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