



Lisburn based Marturion, was one of 15 local companies that participated in a recent Invest Northern Ireland initiative to develop their understanding of design and how integrating it into their business strategy can create competitive advantage. As part of the scheme, Invest NI partnered firms with specialist design consultants who provided advice on engineering, product design, graphic design and branding. In picture is Stephen Ellis from Marturion with Invest NI board member Bryan Keating, and Jill Tennyson from Marturion.

Better Business By Design

In ever changing and rapidly evolving markets, staying one step ahead of the competition is vital to ensure business success.

From relatively simple measures such as revamping a sales brochure or updating your packaging, through to a full-scale brand redesign or developing completely new products, effective design is a powerful business tool which can deliver real bottom line value.

All businesses, from small, early stage start ups, through to larger, established ones can, and are, benefitting from a wide range of design advice, tailored to their individual needs.

Invest NI's Design Service is an initiative which has the goal of demonstrating and promoting to businesses the commercial benefits that can be gained with effective design management practices. It aims to raise awareness especially among SMEs, of the importance of using design strategically and as an innovation tool.

At entry level, companies can avail of professional design advice. This can take the form of one-hour Regional Design Clinic appointments at the Invest NI local offices with a professional design adviser or for more in-depth advice one of these advisers can visit the business premises for a one-to-one session lasting for up to half a day.. The advice is wide ranging from project specific issues to high level strategic advice. This could be as straightforward as learning up-to-date information on design trends in graphic design, packaging or material selection through to guidance on environmental impact, regulatory compliance or intellectual property.

For many businesses, the next stage is to start putting some of this knowledge into practice through one of Invest NI's Design Programmes.

Invest NI's Mini Design Development Programme seeks to create understanding within businesses of the importance of design in developing commercial success. It offers an introductory insight into the value of design and gives company participants an opportunity to work with experienced mentors and

design professionals on their own small scale project.

With a maximum 15 participants in each programme it ensures a high level of individual engagement through one group workshop to highlight the importance of design, a one-to-one mentoring session from a Design Adviser to support development of a design brief, followed by up to four consultancy days per client company with design professionals related to their specific design need.

The Main Design Development Programme is a well established programme that is delivered over a four-month period, and comprises two key elements. Firstly a series of one-to-one consultations with an assigned mentor, followed by workshops and networking opportunities to promote better understanding of design in terms of strategy and applied knowledge. Finally, this knowledge is brought to life when participants are paired with an experienced design consultant (for a period of seven days) to develop their own concepts to meet their specific design need.

Again, there are a maximum 15 participants in each programme,

with the company commitment consisting of attendance at two full-day interactive sessions, followed by four afternoon sessions, including a hotel-based residential session, a mid-term review session and a final exhibition. Six months after completion a reunion session is held to evaluate progress.

Lisburn-based, Marturion, which specialises in electronics and software development is looking to expand its business into new areas after taking part in the programme. Through the design programme the company wished to look at the design of their website to clearly communicate the nature of the services offered and to ensure that there was a strong link in to well presented publicity material for corporate brochures, newsletters and special events fliers.

Although the company undertakes most of its work in the medical sector, Marketing Manager Stephen Ellis says they're hoping to win further work from new areas. "We were on Invest NI's Design Development Programme to upgrade our website and our Managing Director has decided to take a more strategic look at our sales and marketing, so as hopefully when we come out of the economic downturn in a year or eighteen months time, we will be well positioned."

Crawford Contracts was started in 1992 initially carrying out mainly civil engineering contracts, but subsequently identified an opportunity to become a specialist sports surfacing contractor and have now become a leading player in this field. The company now specialises in the design, construction and installation of artificial sports surfaces and children's play areas and also carries out minor civil engineering works.

Currently trading under three identities, the company used the programme to establish whether a complete redesign of the company identity was required or whether they could improve, streamline and better utilise the already established identities.

These are just a couple of the more than 500 local businesses, in sectors as diverse as software development, construction, pharmaceuticals and food, which have used the service and incorporated design as an integral part of their business model.