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Business Support on Your Doorstep

SUCCESS STORY

Sniffing out partners for chemical sensor firm

British technology company Owlstone developed a chemical detection system with immense potential. But it needed a partner with access to new markets to make the most of its innovation.

"We launched Owlstone in 2004 when we were all PhD students at Cambridge University and made a breakthrough in the design of microchip spectrometer technology," said Dr Billy Boyle, Owlstone co-founder and director.

He and co-founders Andrew Koehl and David Ruiz-Alonso had developed a complete chemical detection system on a chip that is a hundred times smaller and a thousand times cheaper than existing technologies. Called FAIMS, this breakthrough makes powerful sensors available to markets where it has previously not been cost effective to use them, such as in passenger vehicles.

To find the right partner to help them exploit these markets, they turned to European Technology Adviser Dave Reynolds, from the Enterprise Europe Network at Business Link in Cambridge. The resources of the Enterprise Europe Network are formidable, Reynolds explained.

"The Network spans 44 countries, with 550 partner organisations and 3,500 staff, which makes it one of the largest technology transfer networks in the world."

The Network helps businesses get the answers to any questions they have about trading in the European Union. Reynolds worked with the Owlstone team to

produce a technology profile detailing Owlstone's expertise and the characteristics of the FAIMS chips.

The brief was then distributed throughout Europe in the Network's newsletters, which are closely monitored by its 2,000 technology advisers. "I first heard from a colleague in Luxembourg who had seen the briefing," said Reynolds. "He said he had a client company that might be interested in Owlstone's sensors. And, significantly, the firm is in the automotive sector, which FAIMS would be ideal for." The Owlstone team was soon in tentative discussion regarding a possible partnership with IEE, one of Europe's leading suppliers of sensor solutions into the global automotive market. The first stage of the partnership has been the purchase by IEE of test quantities of Owlstone's FAIMS sensors.

"The partnership with IEE will accelerate the growth opportunities of Owlstone's FAIMS technology," concludes Dr Boyle. "Without the assistance from Dave and the Enterprise Europe Network team at Business Link, it would have taken us significantly longer to find and link up with a partner with the market presence we needed."

The Enterprise Europe Network offers support and advice to European SMEs. It helps them find the right partner, technology or funding, as well as providing information on EU legislation and policies. To find your local Network Partner, visit ec.europa.eu/enterprise-europe-network

