



Revolver Cooperative Limited

Innovation voucher scheme used to develop the packaging required to bring an innovative product to market, resulting in new sales and customers, and increased turnover



Revolver Cooperative Ltd is a coffee brand, established in 2010. It is a multi-stakeholder cooperative, organised as an Industrial and Provident Society. Its products are sold to other businesses, predominately the Co-operative, which then sells the products in its individual stores. All products are Fairtrade certified, with the majority also being organic. Revolver Cooperative Ltd began by producing a range of ground coffee, before launching a 'Revolver Nespresso' Capsule range, compatible with all Nespresso coffee machines.

Challenge

Paul Birch, Director of the company, described how Revolver Cooperative Ltd was keen to launch an innovative range of 'coffee bags'. These are used in the same way as teabags (although contain four times the content) – they are added to a cup, hot water is poured in, and the coffee is brewed. At the time of development, there was only four other brands with 'coffee bags' on the market. This was compared to approximately 20 brands with Nespresso capsules, and approximately 80 brands with ground coffee. Bringing a new and innovative product to market was viewed as an opportunity to diversify the brand and stand out from competitors.

“The more we innovate the more we stand out from other brands.”

The first challenge was developing a cost-efficient packaging solution which would also meet retailer requirements (e.g. appropriate size for shelf). As the company was not creating a brand-new product, it needed to ensure consumers could afford it. The second challenge was funding this phase; initial product development had reduced the amount of revenue available for this.

Innovation Voucher Solution

Paul had previous experience of engaging with Aston University, as Revolver Cooperative Ltd had provided business placement opportunities for its students. He was informed of the Innovation Grant Scheme by the university's Business Support Coordinator for the programme.

“Aston University has significant outreach into the business community in the local area.”

Paul described how the Innovation Grant Scheme seemed like a ‘fantastic opportunity’. He had an initial telephone conversation with the Business Support Coordinator who outlined what funding was available and how it could support Revolver Cooperative Ltd getting the coffee bags to market.

Paul found the application process very straightforward. He received ongoing support from the project manager who advised him how to produce a successful application.

“They guided us throughout the whole process – they were very supportive.”

Impact

The packaging style was designed in house, and the box architecture was developed from scratch by the Walsall Box Company, who Revolver Cooperative Ltd worked closely with to: design the box which holds the ‘coffee bags’; confirm the amount of coffee to be included in each bag; decide the size of the box (informed by market research in stores and reviewing competitor products); and design the outer cartons which would be used to transport the individual boxes to stores.

Revolver Cooperative Ltd was awarded the Innovation Grant in October 2017, and by January 2018 the product was successfully launched in approximately 70 stores, covering Wiltshire, Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire, Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire, Northamptonshire, Warwickshire, Worcestershire, West Midlands county, Staffordshire and Shropshire.

“We came to market much earlier than we would have done without the project’s support; the chances are, without it, we wouldn’t have come to market.”

Since launching the product, Revolver Cooperative Ltd was approached by Midcounties Co-operative to a Joint Venture to pilot the running of a café in their Old Town store, Swindon. This would support the company’s vision to be the UK’s first truly ethical high street coffee shop chain. It is currently looking for investors to support achievement of this vision. Paul felt that the launch of the product had helped Revolver Cooperative Ltd become a more visible brand, and therefore to attract new business.

To summarise, since accessing the Innovation Voucher Scheme, Revolver Cooperative Ltd had brought a new product to market, resulting in new sales and customers, and an increase in turnover. These impacts were largely seen to be as a result of the company’s engagement with the scheme; Paul would definitely recommend the scheme to others.