



## CASE STUDY

Innovation Voucher used to access specialist marketing and PR support, providing a range of new expertise within the business to assist the launch of a new product portfolio.

**Airguard Filters, established in 1985, specialises in the manufacture of permanent cleanable air filters for power generation and industry.**

The business, based in Walsall, manufactures a range of air filters, coalescers and high efficiency filter bags, as well as complementary holding frames and housings. These are provided for any application where clean filtered air is a design requirement, using modern materials and methods.



## Challenge

Airguard Filters, prior to engaging with the Innovation Vouchers Programme, had commenced development of a new product portfolio focused around high efficiency filters. This not only provided the opportunity to introduce new products to the business, but also the ability to manufacture them directly in-house. However, having funded the initial development of the new product portfolio, Airguard Filters utilised its liquidities in delivering a large contract; this led to the company's inability, in the short-term, to invest in the equipment to manufacture the products.

Whilst the manufacturing of the new product portfolio has been on hold, Airguard Filters recognised the need to develop its marketing and promotional functions, in order to support the product launch.

The business' liquidity difficulties meant it was not in a position to fully fund the required external expertise. Positively, in speaking with a Black Country Growth Hub representative, Airguard Filters was made aware of the Innovation Vouchers programme led by Aston University. This was very attractive to the business, which subsequently applied successfully to the programme. Maqq Rafique commented:

“Support from the Innovation Vouchers programme makes a big difference to a small company like ours in terms of receiving 50 per cent of the funding for the support we needed. The application process was extremely straightforward, we had no difficulties with it.”

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## Innovation Voucher Solution

Following its successful application to the Innovation Vouchers programme, Airguard Filters appointed Bridge PR and Media, in late 2017, to help develop its marketing and PR activities. The support provided has been varied, with examples including content for the new product launch, development of a LinkedIn presence, creation of case studies, provision of press releases, technical data sheets, and support with presentation design.

In addition, Bridge PR and Media has also provided advice to Airguard Filters regarding the potential to enter the rail market, utilising its knowledge and contacts within the sector. It was evident to Bridge PR and Media that Airguard Filter's products were very relevant to the rail sector, and its supported the business to join the Railway Alliance as a platform for further opportunities.

Airguard Filters has been very pleased with the quality and effectiveness of the support provided through the Innovation Vouchers programme. Key to this has been the benefit of having an external organisation to take a fresh view of the business. Maqq Rafique commented:

“ Sometimes I find that if you have the right partner they can really understand what you do and what you are looking to achieve. Bridge PR are very good with lots of all round skills. They provided lots of useful advice and information. Support has been exceptional and very good value for money.”



## Impact

At the time of writing the support from Bridge PR and Media is ongoing. However, Airguard Filters referred to a series of benefits as a result of the assistance already received. In particular, the business now has a marketing strategy which it will use to support the launch of their new product portfolio. Maqq Rafique commented:

“The support through the Innovation Vouchers has made us aware of the need to put ourselves out there and how to do it. For example, we now know the importance of things like press releases and how to put these together.”

In addition, the business has a series of positive case studies to use in its marketing and promotional activity. The key to this activity is not only increased understanding and awareness of marketing activities within Airguard Filters, but the availability of 'ready-to-go' marketing and PR when the new product portfolio is launched. Maqq Rafique commented:

“We are ready to go. We have all the marketing and PR lined up. This puts us in a strong position to move forward.”

Furthermore, the business expects to use skills acquired for its burgeoning export activity.

Airguard Filters is expected to purchase the required equipment and machinery to commence manufacture of the new product portfolio over the next six to 12 months. Once this is achieved, and the products are launched through use of new marketing collateral, it is expected that a series of additional impacts will occur. These are likely to include increased sales and profitability, as well as the creation of jobs. Maqq Rafique referred to his confidence in the likelihood of these impacts occurring:

“I am very confident...the industry we are in is very important due to the need for clean air. It is a growth industry. It will definitely create jobs when we launch the products. We are also in a strong position because of Brexit, whereby clients are looking for more locally based providers.”

Moving forward, Airguard Filters is keen to increase its collaboration with universities, recognising the expertise they can provide for all types of businesses.

“I would definitely recommend the Innovation Vouchers programme to other businesses. It provides really good value for businesses like us.”