

Case Study:

A Healthier Nottingham Sygnature Chemical Services Ltd

Robust research is the lifeblood of innovation - which is why Sygnature Chemical Services Ltd's laboratory work led to clients filing over twenty patents last year. The company was set up by Medicinal Chemist Dr Simon Hirst, who felt limited by his role in a global pharmaceutical giant and decided to strike out on his own. In 2004 Sygnature Chemical Services Ltd was formed to provide Medicinal Chemistry research services to biotechnology and pharmaceutical firms, as well as to conduct internal research into improving chemical processes. The rapidly growing research team provides flexible resources to complete projects, ranging from routine compound handling, to full-blown drug discovery programmes.

Starting the business

Medicinal Chemist Dr Simon Hirst completed both his degree and PhD at The University of Nottingham, before spending two years as a researcher at the University of Pittsburgh. His professional career started at Astra (now AstraZeneca) and subsequently as an oncology researcher for OSI Pharmaceuticals Inc. Being an 'ideas' person, he felt constrained in the laboratories of the large employer, so Simon saw the opportunity to branch out on his own. The business is made up of several former colleagues, who are led by Simon as Managing Director and Julie Ebbitt the Finance Director.

Simon commented: "Experience and flexibility to be able to adapt quickly are crucial to finding creative answers to problems. The science is sometimes the easy part, and this means having the right people with the right skills in the team. We have worked hard at providing a supportive environment for our staff. They must feel that they have the freedom to adapt and make decisions when things don't quite work out as planned."



Benefits of being based in Nottingham

BioCity in Nottingham provides both high quality laboratories and a supportive environment to carry out research, which is hard to find outside of Oxford or Cambridge. Furthermore Nottingham universities provide a good pool of organic chemists and Dr Hirst has recruited heavily from these institutions.

Achievements

The team has a track record in delivering successful programmes to tight deadlines and creating intellectual property. Most recently they delivered a project from the initial hit stage to proof of concept in an advanced disease model within 9 months - a result that delighted the client. The addition of a Non Executive Director to the board and the flexible facilities at BioCity mean Dr Hirst can run a lean and efficient organisation. The company successfully reached its three year projected plans within the first 18 months of trading and has grown from 5 initial staff to a team of 21 in just three years.

Plans for the Future

Sygnature Chemical Services Ltd will be expanding into BioCity's R4 unit providing further laboratory space. They plan to increase their level of business in both the US and Europe, to become one of the UK's leading chemistry services suppliers.