



ST JOHN'S INNOVATION CENTRE

Guy Newcombe from Archipelago Technology Group Ltd on the Cambridge inkjet cluster and being a vital part of the resurgence of engineering and high value manufacturing in the UK: St John's Innovation Centre Tenant Spotlight



St John's Innovation Centre, the regional Centre of excellence supporting high growth businesses, had the pleasure of interviewing Guy Newcombe of Archipelago Technology Group Ltd, who talked about the Cambridge Ink Jet Cluster and being a vital part of the resurgence of engineering and high manufacturing in the UK.

Why did you decide to be an entrepreneur and set up your company?

It was a combination of things. First, I'd lived through, and really enjoyed, the start-up process at The Technology Partnership (TTP). Second, some really good people said they'd like to join me. Third we could see that as a team we'd create and deliver something special.

What is Archipelago?

We're an inkjet company. We are part of the Cambridge inkjet cluster, a group of ten companies that have led the world in taking inkjet out of the office and into the factory environment. The Cambridge inkjet cluster is the largest concentration of inkjet expertise in the world.

Why has Cambridge built such a dominating position in inkjet?

Inkjet requires a combination of skills and people. You need to combine precision engineering, micro-fabrication, electronics, fine chemicals and software into a system and get the whole thing working. Cambridge has been very good at attracting people with these skills and putting them into teams both within individual companies and between companies in the cluster.

It's creating a new industrial revolution. It's interesting that, 200 years ago, Britain had the human capital needed to create steam engines: now, 200 years later, we're using comparable traits to create advanced printing machines that are making Britain a manufacturing hub once again.



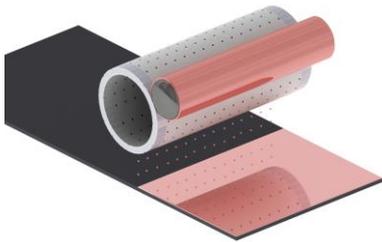
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How did you personally come into this world?

As a student I worked in Domino Printing, met Graeme Minto and saw how he was building both his team and a world class company. I then joined TTP when it too was a young company and saw Gerald Avison, using similar techniques, grow that organisation into a world-leading business.

At TTP we created two very powerful inkjet platforms, one that made very fine drops and another that created very detailed images.

So are you now working on your third inkjet platform?



Yes. When we started Archipelago we recognised that people wanted to use the inkjet philosophy with existing paints and glues. Today, large-scale painting is done with spray guns. The problem with that is, the spray guns put half the paint into the atmosphere. It's wasteful – and also harmful to the sprayers and the environment.

With glue it's even worse: you need to add organic solvents even to get glue through a spray gun at all, so then you're spraying both glue and solvent into the air. It's a huge cost on all levels.

Inkjet, on the other hand, is really good at getting drops of fluid to where you want them. But if you put conventional paint or glue into a conventional inkjet head it blocks it up, in seconds. So you need to use a completely different approach. We've combined our knowledge of materials together with our inkjet experience to create a totally new platform, which is our Powerdrop platform.

Who is in the Archipelago team?



At the moment our team is a mix of experienced technologists and less experienced (but fresher!) engineers. The mix works well. We're lucky in that talented people are coming out of the engineering schools and in that they want to work in companies like Archipelago. We're very much part of the resurgence of engineering and high value manufacturing in the UK.



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Why St John's?

The St John's Innovation Centre is a great place for growing technology companies; there's so much experience and expertise on tap. In particular, Penny and Kirsten have really helped us access finance through the St John's Enterprise Europe Network. There is an atmosphere of informed optimism in the corridors – success is in the air here.



If you were asked to advise a new entrepreneur, what would be the top three things you will tell him/her?

Surround yourself with critical friends. Great ideas aren't born perfect: they're hammered into shape by critical colleagues and customers. Communicate. You'll need an army of supporters to succeed. Make sure your circle have what they need to help you. Finally, keep control of your direction and destination. Listen and then lead.

www.architechgroup.com