

CASE STUDY:

# COLOUR MARKETING SERVICES



## IfM ECS worked with Colour Marketing Services, a manufacturer of colour systems and samples to:

- ▶ help directors focus on strategic planning and development
- ▶ improve turnover and net profit significantly compared with budget
- ▶ increase the return on the investment made in digital printing
- ▶ improve the environmental performance and sustainability of the business
- ▶ expand the company's range of products and services
- ▶ cut the production time for some factory jobs by 50%

Colour Marketing Services develops, produces and markets colour cards and other high quality sampling and colour marketing aids.

It manufactures colour systems and sampling products in formats ranging from colour cards and swatches to point-of-sale displays and major colour system libraries. Customers range from multinational blue chip companies to local independent retailers.

Research shows that a decision made when choosing a product may take just a few seconds, and much of that is based on colour alone. Colour Marketing Services uses the best materials and processes to represent the full spectrum of colours or finishes being offered by its customers.

Stripe cards are a cost-effective way to present a range of colours. Applications in the automotive sector include showroom displays and sample packages for leather, paint, colour and trim.

The firm offers a fast and flexible approach to projects from design to fulfilment, working with customers to develop ideas and create bespoke results. It pays particular attention to the environmental impact of its manufacturing practices and uses recycled materials wherever possible.

If a customer has specific environmental guidelines, it endeavours to meet them.

The company is based in Ipswich, Suffolk, and in its increasingly sustainable business model, it works with many local firms to establish a continuity of supply.

### Working with IfM ECS

Using its efficient processes that required only modest inputs of time from the company, IfM ECS assessed the firm's priorities and practices through the Prioritisation process, a whole-business diagnostic and action planning tool.

The next step was to take the board and key shareholders of Colour Marketing Services through the IfM ECS Business Strategy Workshop process to analyse the environment in which the company is working, examine its capabilities and to develop a strategy and action plan.

This created consensus on the medium-term business plan and initiated enabling actions to achieve this plan.

Market analysis and structured internal workshops helped identify how to maximise the throughput and return on the significant investment in a digital printing machine.

Business process mapping workshops and analysis highlighted process

weaknesses and helped to facilitate specifying and procuring the necessary IT infrastructure.

The IfM ECS team provided mentoring support on key production issues, such as production planning, productive use of time, skills matrices, job cards, work schedules and instructions. These steps facilitated a change of thinking and succession planning.

A further engagement with IfM ECS has seen the company go through a 'strategy refresh' – a roadmapping exercise involving workshops and postgraduate students seconded from the University of Cambridge. The project reviewed market needs and explored improvements to several aspects of production processes.

The company is investing in training to improve the skills matrix and offer opportunities for staff to develop. Many of the newly-recruited staff complete apprenticeships at the firm.

According to Anne Harrison, Managing Director of Colour Marketing: "The workshops provided a space for the directors to focus on where the business was, and where we wanted it to be in a given period of time. It was important for us to be working *on* the business, not just *in* the business."

## Institute for Manufacturing: IfM

The IfM is part of the University of Cambridge. It brings together expertise in management, technology and policy to address the full spectrum of issues which can help industry and governments create sustainable economic growth.

### IfM ECS

IfM Education and Consultancy Services works with companies of all sizes to help create and capture value, and with national and regional governments to support and grow their industrial sectors. It does this by transferring the new ideas and approaches developed by researchers at the Institute for Manufacturing (IfM) through a programme of education and consultancy services. IfM ECS is owned by the University of Cambridge. Its profits are gifted to the University to fund future research activities. For more details on its work visit: [www.ifm.eng.cam.ac.uk/services](http://www.ifm.eng.cam.ac.uk/services)

### Colour Marketing Services

CMS designs, develops presentations of their customers' colour range and product offering, manufacturing bespoke colour sampling tools including colour cards, point of sale displays and colour selection systems. Their customers range from multinational blue-chip companies to bespoke boutique retailers in the automotive, decorative and industrial paint markets.

CMS is an Ipswich based business with clients throughout the UK, Europe, Middle East, Asia and Africa.  
[www.colour-ms.co.uk](http://www.colour-ms.co.uk)

## Making changes, seeing results

Through IfM ECS's engagement, Colour Marketing Services has been able to establish its medium-term priorities and develop a more effective strategy. The company has implemented monthly strategy meetings that keep line management up to date with plans and progress. Changes that have been introduced since the IfM ECS work, and the results they have brought about, include the following:

➤ **Strategic planning:** Directors now have more time to focus on strategic planning, developing the company and assessing options for the future

➤ **Jobs created:** Staff levels have risen from 12 in April 2013 to 17 in July 2014, an increase of 42%. There are four new factory operators and one person to assist with planning and production administration

➤ **Financial improvements:** Turnover and profit have increased significantly to levels well ahead of original targets

➤ **IT systems:** The company has engaged a local IT systems/support firm to install a new computer system. Hardware is being upgraded and all staff now use the same software. The firm plans to move to a Cloud-based system for remote access, with staff using iPads in production to allow supervisors immediate access to job information. The final stage is to have a clocking-in system and a job booking system linked to IT and payroll

➤ **Production improvements:** A change in the 'thinking' process has led to significant production improvements – jobs which took up to six months to go through the factory are completed in under 12 weeks. Production output has also increased. Innovative approaches to production efficiency are being explored

➤ **Environmental impact:** Production has risen but paper waste has decreased by 10%. Lower energy LED lighting has been installed in a larger production unit

➤ **Wider range of products and services:** The company has expanded the range of work it does, and has grown its business in paint applications on wood to create point-of-sale materials

➤ **Increased orders:** The firm has taken its biggest order ever, for 600,000 items. It also has a healthy forward order book that will enable it to meet future sales targets in its five year plan. Although the market is more competitive than ever,



Above: Hand finishing of colour samples at CMS

Colour Marketing Services doesn't feel the need to compete with the lowest price to secure every job, but can focus on where it delivers most value.

➤ **Digital printing:** Sales on the Arizona printing machine have trebled. The company is working in partnership with three local companies to establish a base turnover, and also undertakes one-off jobs

➤ **Staff training:** Supervisors now take a more active role in job planning and preparation. Further employee training is planned and many staff complete an apprenticeship at the firm.

***"This exercise has already delivered clear benefits"***

The company has gained the confidence to invest in growing the business. New premises have been obtained and fitted out, and it is even considering diversification into new business areas. Supported by a grant from the local LEP Growing Business Fund, the company is expanding into a new factory, doubling its floor space and creating seven new jobs including two apprenticeships.

➤ For more on Colour Marketing Services, visit: [www.colour-ms.co.uk](http://www.colour-ms.co.uk)



## IfM Education and Consultancy Services

Institute for Manufacturing, Charles Babbage Road, Cambridge CB3 0FS, United Kingdom

Tel: +44 (0)1223 766141

Email: [ifm-enquiries@eng.cam.ac.uk](mailto:ifm-enquiries@eng.cam.ac.uk)

Web: [www.ifm.eng.cam.ac.uk](http://www.ifm.eng.cam.ac.uk)

Twitter: @IfMcambridge