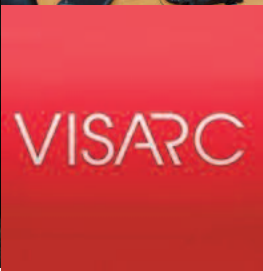




SCALEUPASHFORD



A fully-funded programme of support for businesses located in Ashford that have the ambition and capacity to grow.

www.scaleupashford.co.uk

Background and Vision

Scale Up Ashford is a fully funded programme of support for businesses located in the borough that have the ambition and capacity to grow.

The Scale Up Ashford initiative has been launched with funds from **Ashford Borough Council**, in order to support the development of economic prosperity across the borough.

The first programme of its kind in Kent, Scale Up Ashford adopts core principles from the wider national initiative pioneered by the Scale Up Institute and specific business coaching methodologies. The programme is delivered in partnership with **Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce** and Simon Teague, from **New Level Results** - a highly successful UK-based business growth coaching company. The key principle is that businesses are given access to **tailored, intensive support and expert networks**, in order to **grow** their business, **deliver jobs** and prosperity, and create a **15 percent increase in gross added value**.

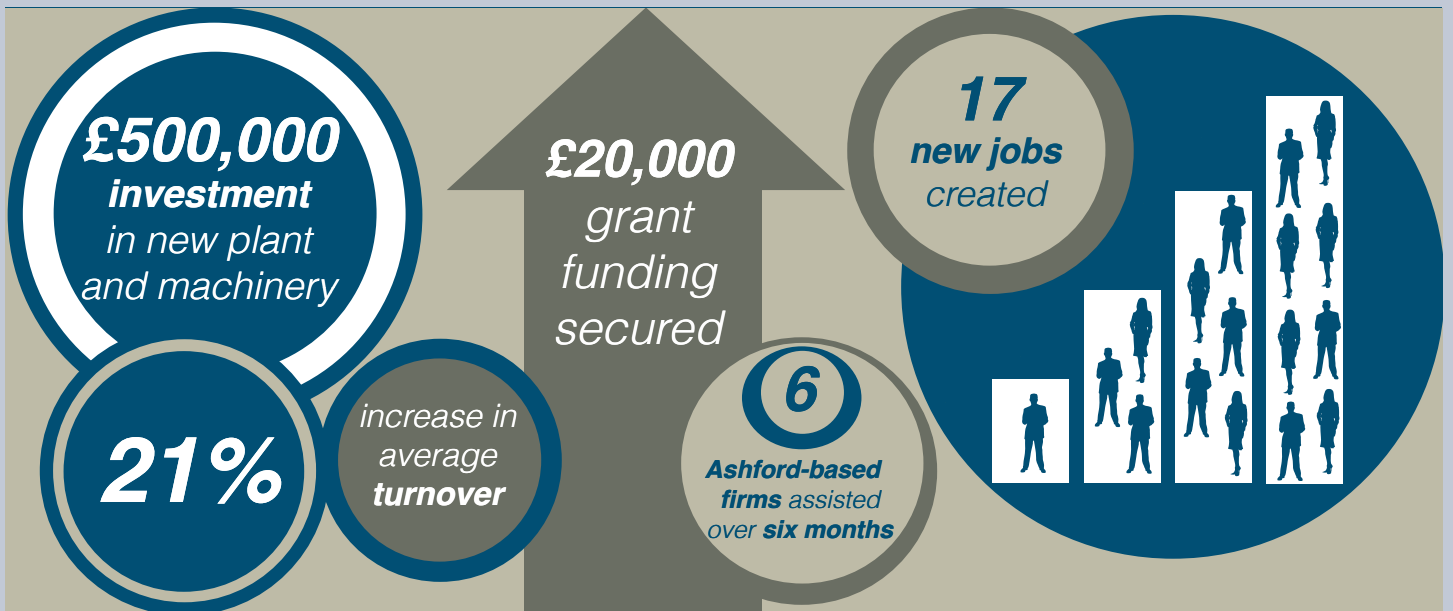
Six firms signed up to the initial pilot programme, which ran from September 2017 to April 2018. Each firm was given one-to-one intensive business coaching every month which was mapped and tracked using New Level Results coaching software, and supported by a team of experts, as well as help with grant funding applications and

access to networks and platforms to promote their business.

High-growth small businesses play a vital role in creating jobs and driving economic growth in the UK. The ambition of the Scale Up initiative is to make Britain the most fertile ground for businesses, not only to start up but also to scale-up and grow. Research by the World Economic Forum shows that those start-ups that are able to successfully scale up their operations have a great impact on society, bringing new technology, innovative services and increased employment.

With the UK's departure from the European Union, there has never been a better time to invest in growing our domestic firms in order to create jobs and prosperity. To capitalise on the UK's long history as a trading nation and its vibrant entrepreneurial spirit, the country now needs to focus on how it supports its growing firms to scale-up.

The Scale Up Ashford initiative aims to advance understanding of how to scale up a business, and how to build the most effective environment in which scale-ups can flourish. The programme promotes best practice, providing opportunities for scale-up companies

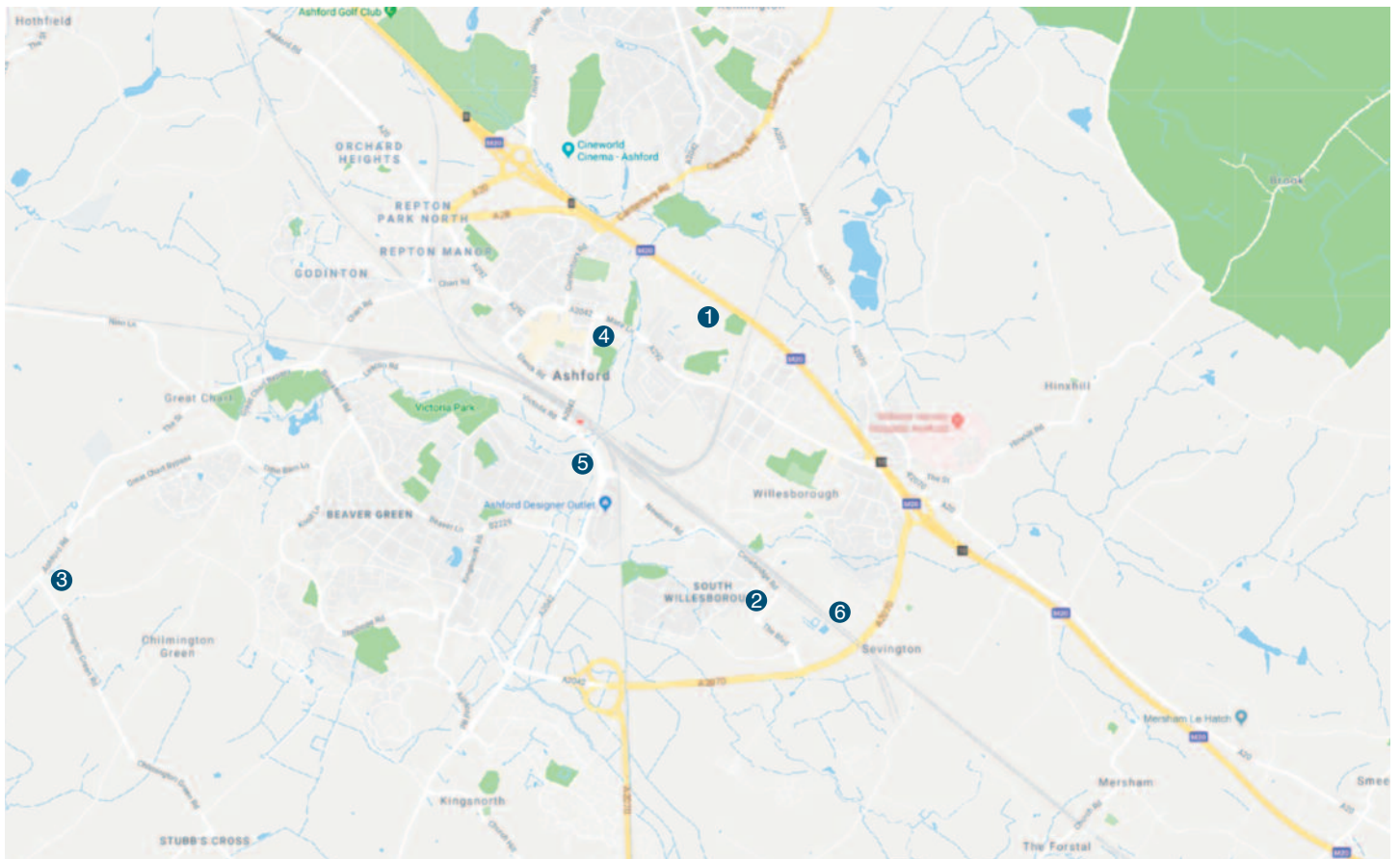


across a wide range of industry sectors to meet and share ideas.

Andrew Osborne, Economic Development Manager at Ashford Borough Council, said:

"We have been delighted by the success of our initial pilot programme, which has provided valuable lessons and insights from which many other businesses across the borough can learn."

"Scale Up Ashford is a prime example of Ashford Borough Council's continued commitment to develop growth and economic prosperity across the borough. Following the success of the pilot scheme, we are now developing the next phase of the programme, which will expand the help and support available to 10 more businesses in the Ashford area."



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Forza Industries Ltd



For Lee Smith, Managing Director of leading health supplements manufacturer, Forza Industries Ltd, involvement with the Scale Up Ashford programme came at a very appropriate time. Having enjoyed robust growth and a 255% jump in sales over a two-year period, Forza Industries was struggling to acquire the new premises it desperately needed to expand its manufacturing and distribution activities in Ashford.

Established in 2007, Forza has grown rapidly to become an industry leader in the health supplements sector. Initially Forza built its reputation around its patented T5 fat-burning formula, which quickly went on to become one of the UK's most popular slimming solutions. Since then, Forza's extensive product range has grown to accommodate a host of pioneering products for weight loss, beauty, wellbeing and sports nutrition.

Trading in 43 countries worldwide, and manufacturing for and retailing under its own brand with high-profile clients including Boots, Superdrug, Holland & Barrett and Tesco, Forza needed to expand its operations significantly to meet growing demand for its products.

Lee Smith explains: "Forza has gone through a period of rapid growth and there are so many opportunities to export our products to global markets. So far, the impact of the Brexit referendum has actually had a positive effect on our growth as we expand into these overseas markets; the weakened pound makes our GBP selling price more attractive to overseas customers, particularly in the USA and Europe.

"Many businesses aspire to achieve the exceptional growth rates we've enjoyed over recent years but, while I'm certainly not complaining, it's fair to say that such high growth brings its own share of challenges. For example, rapid growth was putting a strain on cash flow and as a result we were having trouble finding a site that we could afford to move to.

"Our involvement with the Scale Up Ashford programme could not have come at a better time; what we were looking for was support to 'open doors' and introduce us to key decision-makers, who in turn might be the enablers needed to bring about our expansion plans in the town."

The team at Scale Up Ashford identified key decision-makers at Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce, Ashford Borough Council and Kent County Council and approached each to arrange meetings in order to raise Forza's profile and explain the company's challenges and objectives.

Lee continued: "As a result of Scale Up Ashford, we have benefitted from increased awareness in the county –

essentially, we are now hot-wired in with the right people and we've developed important relationships. The key thing I've taken away from the programme is that you simply can't network enough - the old adage 'It's not what you know, it's who you know' certainly has a ring of truth about it!"

The company has now secured new premises and will shortly relocate its manufacturing and distribution operations to the site at Ashford's Orbital Park. The move will create **45 new jobs**, more than **doubling Forza's current headcount**, as the company will adopt a **24/7 shift-based model**.

Lee concluded: "Scale Up Ashford has been hugely beneficial to our business. A key advantage is that it's very flexible and tailored, so whatever you're looking to achieve, the team will find the way to extract the best outcomes.

"It's really given me a valuable understanding of how local authorities work with business, and the insight I have gleaned means I'm far better able to optimise Forza's scale and get the best from the resources we have available, while keeping our manufacturing base in Ashford."



Simon Teague, New Level Results, said:

“ *One of the most influential drivers to the success of any business lies with the openness and willingness of a visionary business owner to accept that he or she does not have all the answers. Leaving their egos out of the boardroom, they focus on attracting and retaining a strong team of knowledgeable experts to work with them in order to achieve highly ambitious results. Lee is the epitome of such an entrepreneur who builds a diverse, reliable and passionate leadership team with a clear vision of where the company has the potential to go.*

This made the creation of the strategic plan within the Scale Up programme an easy, yet still valuable exercise, ensuring everyone in the leadership team is on the same page. We have been able to track the progress of several ambitious goals and ensure accountability and alignment to those goals across the business.

Difficult decisions have had to be made as there are many challenges with both the rapid growth seen to date and the high growth potential of this business. The coaching and mentoring has therefore focussed on a holistic, strategic and political agenda, as the projected growth will make the company a major employer within the Ashford district.

It has been a real pleasure to work with Lee and his team to ensure they are well placed to maximise their full potential as a business and deliver the vision.

Red Alert Telecare Ltd



Having secured contracts with numerous local authorities and commercial organisations across the UK, Red Alert Telecare has ambitious plans to roll out a national service, but required the support of the Scale Up Ashford programme to help establish a comprehensive human resources strategy.

Founded 10 years ago, Red Alert Telecare is an award-winning telecare and telehealth service provider that delivers Technology Enabled Care Services (TECS) to support local authorities and commercial care organisations. The company's services use remote sensors to monitor elderly and vulnerable users' health and wellbeing, enabling them to continue living independently in their own homes.

Clive Gawler, founder and Managing Director of Red Alert Telecare, admits: "We've always been very focussed on supporting our technicians and specialists 'at the coal face' with training and resources, and now we need to spend more time ensuring that the systems and processes we use for our back office and admin functions are robust enough.

"We've enjoyed sustained growth over the past decade as the provision of

TECS and remote monitoring has become more focussed on outcomes and personalisation. We're on the brink of winning some key contracts that could really see us take off as a national TECS company, so it was the right time to develop internal processes that will help to keep our staff motivated, manage poor performance and improve efficiency. These steps will ensure that we are in a strong position to hit the ground running when we have the right opportunity to scale up."

Over the course of four mentoring sessions, the Scale Up Ashford team worked with Clive to put a performance management structure in place. Recommendations included a switch from yearly appraisals to quarterly performance reviews, together with a redeveloped appraisal form to reward good performance and manage any HR issues at an early stage.





In addition, Red Alert has introduced weekly one-to-one meetings with members of the senior management team to review performance towards its targets and KPIs, which have been very well received.

Clive continued: "The Scale Up Ashford team advised us that early intervention is crucial to performance management, and mitigating any challenges that could potentially have a negative impact, before they develop into something more serious. This may seem obvious in hindsight, but sometimes it takes an independent expert to provide a credible and convincing argument for change.

"As a result, we now have a structured approach to performance management in place, which has already improved internal communication dramatically.

"We are also keen to share what we've learnt during our involvement with Scale Up to extend best practice to our other business, Red Alert Security, as what works in one company is very likely to work in the other.

"Our involvement with the programme has been a real game changer. Our business coach, Simon, has provided a wealth of expertise that we have been able to draw upon. His professional discipline and focus on our business ensured clear objectives were set and held us accountable to see them through. In short, we've seen real added value and a positive impact on the business."

“ *Red Alert Telecare certainly has the capability to improve efficiencies and expand significantly, but it was imperative that the company put the foundations in place that would underpin growth.*

Red Alert is very much a people-orientated business, so we focussed on strategies that would enable their management team to motivate, inspire and manage all staff in a professional, collegial and structured way.

Now that the right platform is in place, Red Alert has the capability to take on new opportunities, grow the business and realise its potential. ”



AES Precision Engineering



Over the past 30 years, AES Precision Engineering has established itself as one of the leading manufacturing companies in Kent, producing precision components for a wide range of sectors including the medical, automotive, leisure, marine, cosmetics and defence industries. In recent years the company has grown steadily due to increased demand and now has ambitious plans to become the top precision engineering company in Kent.

Run by father and son team Clive and Mark Wilson, AES recently made the strategic decision to invest in additional plant and personnel to enable the company to take on higher volume production projects, in order to appeal to more potential clients, increase output and meet rising demand.

As a result, the business has made a significant capital investment in new machinery and its staff headcount has risen by 50% over a 12-month period. The Scale Up Ashford team were asked to advise the company on how to overhaul its internal processes and to provide guidance on accounting best practice and management reporting.

Clive Wilson, Managing Director at AES, explains: "We'd always used our intuition in the past and based a lot of our decisions on our gut feeling of

where the market was going. However, with the increase in demand that we've seen over recent years, we were faced with a decision to either invest, expand and take the company to the next level, or to carry on as we were. We took the plunge and we're going from strength-to-strength as a result.

"Our involvement with Scale Up Ashford has been invaluable. In fact, we've made the decision to keep working with Simon for another six months at least. The team have provided an expert sounding board which has encouraged and reassured us that investing in our business was the right thing to do."

The Scale Up team worked with Clive and Mark to set monthly tasks for the business, including targets to boost turnover, improve its marketing to potential clients and complete projects



within a specified time period. The team also advised on changes to AES's accountancy practices to develop a more robust and accurate management reporting process. As a result, AES now holds monthly management meetings to review its objectives and analyse profit and loss figures.

Mark Wilson, Director at AES, said:

"The Scale Up team has a great deal of expertise and are very knowledgeable about accountancy and finance, which has helped us to get an accurate financial reporting system in place and to use that data to better inform our strategic planning and decision-making."

"They also helped us to apply for a number of grants and to date we've been successful in two applications, including funding for a new compressor machine and an energy efficiency grant which has enabled us to install energy-efficient machinery that will help cut our bills and carbon footprint."



"Many ambitious company directors know exactly where they want to get to but don't always know how to get there, especially where there are significant opportunities for growth that can only be achieved through substantial investment in additional premises and plant and machinery."

"In our experience companies don't grow in straight lines, they grow in steps. AES was ready to take that step and the coaching enabled them to do so in a structured and well-managed way. Monthly coaching using our online software to map and track progress gave the directors confidence to make quick decisions and invest in the long term growth of the company. This is a real success story."



Directline Structures



Leadership transition can be a challenging time for many family-run businesses, but for Duncan Murray, Managing Director of Ashford-based Directline Structures, and his daughter Katy Barker, the transfer of managerial responsibility provided a fantastic opportunity to develop the business into new areas.

Having founded the company in 1988, Duncan was ready to take a step back from managing the business and hand the reins to Katy, but getting a framework in place was proving challenging. The Scale Up Ashford team provided a bespoke mentoring programme that has enabled Directline Structures to put a formal succession plan in place.

Duncan explained: "The real challenge we faced was that our handover planning was simply too flexible and *ad hoc*. We hadn't set aside the necessary time to really plan for the future and establish some goals and objectives to help guide the handover. We needed to bring about more structure and formality to the whole process, and the mentoring we've received from the expert team at Scale Up Ashford has been instrumental in helping us to put a comprehensive plan in place."

A fully-integrated Design and Build company, Directline Structures offers specialist consultancy services, particularly in the construction of steel-framed buildings for a wide variety of uses, from industrial units and offices to education and sports facilities. With a team that combines engineers, architects and project managers, Directline Structures' approach

provides clients with a one-stop-shop for the whole construction project.

Duncan continued: "I've been in the business for three decades and the handover to Katy provides a fantastic opportunity to take the company forward and think about what we want to do in the next 30 years. Katy brings fantastic energy and ideas to the business and I know that she'll do a fantastic job.

"The challenge is to transfer my 30 years of knowledge to her during the transition period, but I feel confident that we now have the tools to do so effectively. As a result, Katy now takes strategic decisions about all operational aspects of the business, which has enabled me to take a step back and focus on early client engagement and developing engineering solutions.

"Growth has never been a problem for





the company, as we acquire many new clients organically and we enjoyed record turnover this year. Our long-term goal is to maintain our established working principles, continue to offer clients our expertise and deliver quality and value for money.

"As a Chartered Architect, Katy taking the helm means we have the chance to gradually integrate more architect involvement into our projects, which is a key USP for the company, as it is a far more effective model for projects and can reduce clients' costs by up to 30%."

The Scale Up Ashford team provided a series of mentoring sessions with Katy and Duncan to set objectives and establish a formal timeline for the transition. Duncan and Katy were also assisted with identifying areas of the business that required additional employees and provided with support to recruit the right people for the new roles. **As a result, Directline Structures has taken on three new members of staff and invested in new, more efficient design software.**

Katy said: "The sessions with Simon and his team were very useful, as they have really given me the confidence to take over the business when the time comes. I've learnt plenty of additional skills that will help me to manage the business proactively and bring the values of the company to life."

Duncan concluded: "Being pushed to get a formal structure in place by which to transition has been incredibly valuable. It's important to give yourself time to put plans in place and to review those plans regularly to ensure progress towards key objectives."

"We also met with the other companies on the Scale Up Ashford programme, many of which were family-run businesses like us. It was actually very reassuring to see that we're not the only company facing these challenges, and to discover that there are people out there with the expertise to help."

“ *There are many challenging aspects to handing over the reins of a business from one generation to the next, while at the same time maintaining healthy growth and integrating new systems and technology to modernise the business. Doing so requires careful and considered planning. The use of The Curve Coaching software proved invaluable as it has enabled Katy to focus on driving and improving key areas of the business and align the coaching and mentoring to ensure a smooth handover. This has also resulted in the successful achievement of all the core business objectives set at the outset of the Scale Up programme.* ”

Further growth and modernisation is planned and I look forward to continuing to work with Katy as we develop her business acumen and leadership skills. ”

Medash Signs



Family-run Medash Signs has been producing high quality signage in Ashford for over 40 years, serving more than 2,000 clients all around the country including high street restaurant chain Subway, civil engineering giant Balfour Beatty and National Rail.

For the senior management team the Scale Up programme was just what was needed to steer the company through an important transitional period. Founder John Hobbs was retiring after four decades at the helm, leaving his son and Managing Director, Jonti Hobbs, full control of the business.

In addition to structural changes, the business was also looking to breathe new life into its operations. Jonti Hobbs explains: "We weathered the recession, but we lost a few important contracts and the company remained stagnant for a while, so it was important for us to look forward and start putting a strategy in place to help the business grow and gain new clients. The fall in the value of the pound after the EU referendum also resulted in the cost of our raw materials going up, so we wanted to look at ways to make financial savings in the company to ensure we remain competitive in the market place."

Scale Up mentor Simon Teague

attended meetings with Jonti and the senior management team. They worked with Simon to set achievable company objectives which included:

- The successful retirement of John and handover to Jonti
- Expansion plans, new clients, staff and workshop equipment
- Money-saving initiatives and investigating grant schemes available
- Refreshing the company website
- An overall new approach to thinking differently and being open to new ideas

One of the aims through Scale Up was the expansion of Medash's production facilities in order to serve larger clients and win new business. Medash's current site occupies prime industrial land adjacent to the Ashford International Station near the town centre, which offers great potential for growth. Jonti said, "We are very lucky





that we have a workshop that can be expanded – one of our Scale Up objectives. In order to grow the business, we have employed a new sales executive and are also actively recruiting for several roles in our production team."

The rejuvenation of Ashford town centre and surrounding areas also provides great opportunities for the business. Indeed, Medash has already secured a contract to produce the signage for the McArthurGlen Designer Outlet extension.

Medash's new website went live in November, and there has already been a noticeable spike in website traffic thanks to a dedicated enquiries portal and easy-to-navigate structure.

A significant initiative for the company was applying for grants to fund saving initiatives, which will help to lower Medash's operating costs. A grant from LoCASE and one from Carbon Trust Business Green for energy efficient LED lighting systems and installation have both been approved, and the management team is in the process of submitting information for a fourth to help purchase new plant equipment.

Jonti Hobbs said:

"Our business has blossomed as a result of taking part in Scale Up Ashford. Having an external source to come in and look objectively at the way we run our company and offer recommendations on how to grow was the best thing we took away from the scheme.

"Our internal policies have been strengthened as a result, and whilst it took some time for all staff to get on board with the scheme, we are now all pulling in the same direction and are better placed to push the company to further success.

"None of this would have been possible without the guidance, advice and input from the Scale Up team."

“ *One of the biggest challenges facing well established family firms occur when the second generation is ready to take control of the business from the first generation who founded the company. However, no timeline, structure or handover procedures are formally discussed and agreed and the clock keeps ticking. This can create frustration and ultimately hold the business back from scaling up. In addition to the need for the new managing director to develop financial acumen, it is essential he develops the skills needed to lead and develop a strong management team to work with him.*

My introduction to the company was perfectly timed and has allowed such a transition to successfully take place in a very short space of time. We have established a culture of holding monthly management meetings which holds everyone accountable to specific goals and objectives. ”



VISARC



Visarc is one of Kent's leading integrated marketing agencies, with an enviable roster of prestigious national and international corporate clients, including leading automotive manufacturers like Fiat and Kia, and luxury car brands Maserati and Ferrari. Since weathering the impact of the 2008/9 financial crash, the agency has gone on to enjoy impressive growth averaging 20-25% per year, marking Visarc out as a prime candidate to benefit from the Scale Up Ashford programme.

Franc Gamberini, Visarc's Managing Director, explains: "As a marketing agency, we've always felt very confident that we approach our own business with the same strategic and analytic tools that we apply to a client's account, so at first we were a little uncertain about how our involvement with the Scale Up Ashford programme would assist the business. However, you don't know what you don't know, so we kept a very open mind, and I'm pleased to say we've gained significantly from our participation, which will be invaluable as we look to grow.

"We've enjoyed strong growth in recent years. The key challenge we've faced has been controlling the quality of our output and maintaining our excellent service levels to clients as we expand the team. Much of our new business developed organically as we broadened our involvement with existing clients, so we were also conscious that we needed to spend some time thinking about how we can bring in new clients.

"The Brexit decision has also had an initial negative impact on our ability to win business internationally, particularly

with clients in Europe which was previously an expansion target, so increasing our visibility with potential clients has been a key objective."

Over the course of six, three-hour sessions, the Scale Up team provided a **comprehensive programme of mentoring and support** to Visarc's senior management team, which took the form of one-to-one meetings to review the business and identify areas that could be improved upon.

Franc continued: "**The support we received was almost like a therapy session**; we often knew what it was that we needed to do, but having access to an external team with considerable business experience meant we could really work through and review our thought process and develop a cogent and strategic plan to take the business forward.





"In many ways Simon and his team acted like our conscience; they were able to look at our business and apply their experience objectively, which was a really powerful driver to put steps in place to progress."

A key element identified by the Scale Up team was the need to evolve Visarc's website by expanding the variety and volume of content. Franc explains: "Our website really needs to serve as our shop window and digital sales brochure, but it's so often true in marketing that the last thing you work on is your own website."

"We were advised to focus more attention on the products we sell as well as the services we provide, and by adding new content we evolved the website from a handful of pages to a fully functioning sales tool to support enquiries and assist search engine optimisation."

Weekly mini-mentoring sessions have also been extended to the rest of Visarc's leadership team. The intensive 15-minute sessions provide regular opportunities for staff to review their role within the agency and help to identify team members' individual skill sets and competencies.

As Franc explains: "The aim is to develop the wider team as much as possible, so they can take a greater role in managing the business and building their knowledge and abilities, which can only be of benefit to the agency as we move forward."

"Through our involvement with Scale Up we were able to **re-focus our attention** on key objectives and activity that was perhaps being neglected in the daily hustle and bustle of managing the agency," said Franc.

"The key thing I've taken on board is how invaluable it is to take time away from the day-to-day and focus attention on the company's strategy and direction."

“ *As businesses grow it can become increasingly difficult for entrepreneurs to break away from working full time in their company and take valuable time out to work on their company. Like many business owners running successful companies, Franc questioned why he would need any form of business coaching, when he already has a successful business model. The very nature and approach we adopt through Scale Up Ashford that has had such incredible success with so many companies, is to look at things holistically, ask different questions and then map and track the solutions, giving the business owner complete control.* ”

The programme is funded by Ashford Borough Council as part of its continued commitment to developing the economic prosperity across the borough. The programme is delivered by Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce.

Selected businesses will receive an agreed number of hours of free consultancy, access to free business growth tools, access to funded and part funded local expertise.

Your appointed consultant can clarify the details of the programme and the council's expectations prior to joining the programme.


SCALEUPASHFORD

If you are interested in taking part in the next Scale Up Ashford programme, please visit our website to find out more

www.scaleupashford.co.uk