



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Innovation

Dacey Limited

Innovation funding fuels expansion for Welsh orthotics specialist.



(L to R) Tom, Bob and Paul Cooper, pictured with one of Dacey's customised 3D printers

South Wales-based Dacey Limited specialises in the design and manufacture of bespoke orthotic products to help correct and support the function of human limbs. It also provides orthotic services to NHS hospitals across Wales and West England, via a team of healthcare professionals known as orthotists.

The family-owned company has recently acquired new premises, created 10 jobs and more than trebled its manufacturing capacity after receiving support from the Welsh Government's innovation team.

The company operates in an increasingly competitive marketplace, supplying custom-made orthopaedic products including footwear, insoles and supports, to NHS patients right across the UK, as well as exporting to Ireland and Denmark.

After identifying a 'bottleneck' in its manufacturing process, the company investigated the potential for automating its leather cutting process. Leather components for the majority of its footwear was patterned and cut by hand, but the owners were convinced that the introduction of a computerised cutting table could significantly increase productivity, while maintaining the all-important level of quality.

The Business Key Achievements:

- Introduced innovative new technology to reduce production times and cut costs
- Increased employee numbers and won new commercial contracts
- Expanded geographical reach and improved competitiveness

Dacey has built strong links with the Welsh Government's innovation team over a period of 20 years, and after discussing this recent issue, successfully applied for a £25,000 innovation voucher, which it match-funded to complete the purchase of a state-of-the-art "Atom" cutting machine. Existing staff were retained to operate the machine and the company soon started to drive up productivity, to the point that it now produces the equivalent of four days' worth of leather components in a single day.

Dacey also investigated other ways to enhance its design and manufacturing capability by introducing innovative new technology and removing some of the more labour-intensive steps in the process. Additional match-funded investment from the Welsh Government means that, rather than using traditional 2-dimensional measurement charts or time-consuming casts, portable scanners with computer imaging software are now used to create 3-dimensional digital images of patients' feet. The digital file can then be used to build what is known as a "last", the unique shape that forms the template around which bespoke footwear can be assembled.

The company now has the option of producing each last on its new, high-speed milling lathe or, when a patient requires more complex surgical footwear, on one of three customised 3D printers. All four pieces of equipment have been introduced into Dacey's expanded manufacturing facility in the last 18 months, with financial support from different Welsh Government and EU-managed funds.

The impact of Dacey's investment in technology has been far reaching. The increase in productivity has enabled the company to grow its turnover, win new contracts and open new clinics in a number of NHS Trust areas. The company now employs 95 staff but expects to top the one hundred-mark in 2018.

Dacey's Managing Director, Bob Cooper, said; "Our focus on innovation and investment in technology has enabled us to speed up product design and production, cut costs and, importantly, to produce the level of quality products that is essential in winning new business. The support we've had from the Welsh Government has been instrumental in securing the investment we needed to meet the growing demand for our products from throughout the UK."

Dacey Ltd shares its manufacturing facility with sister company ACE Orthotics, which provides specialist podiatry and sports injury biomechanical services.

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