



Design is becoming a key weapon for management teams looking to compete by adding value, not cutting prices. Now a new government-backed programme is helping them exploit it. Jessica Hinchcliffe explains.

product or service development to add styling to an offering. The programme, comprising a series of services delivered through and funded by Regional Development Agencies, then pairs firms with Design Associates, design managers who examine the business's strategy and objectives in detail. As well as the service which JS Humidifiers used, there are ones for larger, more mature businesses, which get up to 18 months of mentoring, and hi-tech ventures working to get emerging technology to market. The only cost to businesses taking part is the design services they commission to implement their projects.

#### a competitive edge

Even before the current recession, low-cost competition from countries such as India and China was forcing firms to rely on innovation or added value to compete, and it's here that design can provide an edge, not just by improving appearance but rejuvenating brands, sharpening processes and trimming costs. That's why Designing Demand has become part of the government's new Solutions for Business package. It's welcome news for manufacturers – aside from JS Humidifiers the success stories include a Yorkshire clay pipe maker who has generated annual sales of £6m by diversifying into plant pots, and a Suffolk cleaning products business that now has a 30% share of its sector in the UK after rebranding and repackaging its products.

For more information on the programme and the benefits, go to [www.designingdemand.org.uk](http://www.designingdemand.org.uk) ■

Jessica Hinchcliffe – The Design Council

## putting design first

■ **Back in 2007 JS Humidifiers had a problem. The Sussex manufacturer had a firm grip on the UK market for industrial humidifiers – the sort used in environments from print works and pharmaceutical plants to textile mills and art galleries. But for the business to grow they would have to boost export trade and go up against much bigger competitors.**

Faced with the same challenge, most firms would probably drop their prices or increase their marketing budget. But not JS. They chose to redesign their key JetSpray product range instead. It turned out to be a good move. When the new JetSpray was launched, it immediately generated 300 sales leads and orders worth £1m.

#### design and substance

Customers weren't just buying a better-looking product. The new JetSpray has twice its predecessor's capacity and its enhanced workload is handled from a single control panel, not the two needed previously, therefore keeping running costs down. In addition, energy consumption has been halved, boosting the JetSpray's sustainability credentials.

As well as dramatically improving the JetSpray's visual appeal, capabilities and specifications, the design project also slashed

manufacturing costs by 25%, boosting profitability. Technical director Tony Fleming says: "We've improved the way we manufacture through factors like supply chain management, inventory and commonality of components. We've also used our CAD (computer-aided design) software more fully, which has improved efficiency. And we use it to prototype more rapidly."

#### stimulating sales

Not surprisingly, Fleming is an eager advocate of what design can do. "Good design sells, without a doubt. If you can put a well-designed product in front of your customer that's half the battle. As a manufacturer you've constantly got to look at the design of your products as well as manufacturing processes and material costs. By investing in modernising your products you stimulate sales, and that's certainly happened here."

Like around 1,500 businesses in the UK, JS Humidifiers has reaped the benefits of design with help from Designing Demand, a support programme developed by the Design Council. It introduces businesses, mostly SMEs, to the value of design as a part of strategy rather than something introduced late in