



Heads of the Valleys and Nick Hewer – fired up for innovation!

Successful businesses work hard at innovation. They are open to new ideas. They look for new opportunities. They explore new ways of doing things. And with help from HOVIP, the Heads of the Valleys Innovation Programme, businesses across the region are demonstrating that innovation really does work.

“Our direct business has increased by over 360% in the last 12 months,” explains Mike Shea, Managing Director of RCT-based Supply Only Bedrooms. “We’re also part of the Build4Wales cluster and we’re busy developing exciting new opportunities.”

“As well as on-the-ground support to develop our marketing, we’ve accessed funding for additional training and have become a founder member of Build4Wales whose website is about to go live.” says Richard Evans, Director of Jensen Blinds and Interiors in Caerphilly.

“Introducing ‘Play All Day’, an exciting and innovative new service, has been a critical part of our strategy to combat the current tough economic conditions, thanks to HOVIP and a Local Investment Fund grant from Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council.” says Sarah Draper, Director at Royvon Dog Training School.



Build4Wales

Three examples of the way in which businesses across the region have benefited from the help and support of HOVIP and partners.

“Our aim over the last four years has been to help businesses survive and thrive by increasing their capacity for innovation.” explains Phil Burkhard, HOVIP Programme Manager. “Over 251 businesses have benefited directly from at least one of the services we provide, whilst a further 186 businesses have gained as a result of joint initiatives with one of our local authority partners. And the businesses we’ve helped have generated an amazing £1,446,691, of which over 60% was in new business.”

One example of innovation in action is the development of business clusters. Phil Burkhard explains, “Clusters are groups of like-minded, yet often diverse, businesses that have a common goal. The



If you would like to find out how you can benefit from HOVIP, contact Phil Burkhard on 01685 725469 or Email phil.burkhard@merthyr.gov.uk or visit www.hovip.org.uk



All fired up at the Big Pitch

concept developed when we discovered that a number of the businesses we were dealing with operated in similar markets or could pool their resources. HOVIP acted as a facilitator to bring those businesses together and helped them to create a more formal structure so that they could develop opportunities together."

Secure Wales was the first cluster to develop with six diverse businesses involved in the security sector. As Vince Price, a lead member of Secure Wales says, "This new way of thinking about business is working - Secure Wales has already generated around £100,000 worth of business and saved money through joint marketing initiatives."

Build4Wales, a group of businesses involved in the construction and building sector, is the second cluster to begin trading, with other clusters underway for the attractions and accommodations market, performance engineering, motorsport, recycling, a cluster reducing tail pipe CO2 emissions and a potential combined visitor offer involving Rhymney Brewery, Penderyn Distillery and the Big Pit.

"Businesses of all sizes are involved in the clusters," continues Phil Burkhard. "We are delighted that a recent inward investor to the area, Rock UK is considering joining the Attractions and Accommodations cluster."

HOVIP worked with partners and the Taff Bargoed Development Trust to attract Rock UK, a Christian charity which uses outdoor activities to transform the lives of young people, to the region. This ultimately led to the opening of the new Rock UK Summit Centre,



near Merthyr Tydfil, in October 2010.

HOVIP is also working in novel ways to develop new skills and increase enterprise in the Heads of the Valleys.

"We are just starting a pilot for the SalesCo initiative," explains Phil Burkhard. "Working closely with JobMatch, Go Wales and The Welsh Contact Centre Forum Ltd. we are providing sales training to individuals in the area. These folk are then matched with businesses looking for sales support, but who have had difficulty finding people with the right skills. Potentially a real win-win situation, so watch this space!"

Providing hands-on, real world business experience is at the root of another HOVIP initiative, the Big Pitch Challenge. Teams of students from the four further education colleges in the Valleys were invited to present their ideas and costed marketing plans for the new visitor centre for Rhymney Brewery due to open in 2011. The eight teams presented in front of a capacity audience at Techniquest in Cardiff and were judged by a panel of business experts led by Nick Hewer of BBC1's The Apprentice fame.

Phil Burkhard concludes, "The Big Pitch Challenge 2010 was a great success providing the students with a real flavour of the business world whilst developing their entrepreneurial skills. The initiative, once again, demonstrated that innovation is alive in the South Wales Valleys, whether amongst our young people or in the businesses located in the area. And yes, innovation works."

If you would like to find out how you can benefit from HOVIP, contact Phil Burkhard on 01685 725469 or Email phil.burkhard@merthyr.gov.uk or visit www.hovip.org.uk

