

Bridging the green gap

There is no doubt that global warming is one of the principal concerns in society today and businesses are quickly realising that they will need to change to tackle this growing problem. To date sustainable and environmentally friendly innovation has mainly centred on making incremental changes to current designs, using new technologies to improve energy efficiency. However, there is a 'green gap' developing in the UK's business community as larger companies are not developing enough new technology to meet the ever growing demand for sustainable innovation.

The role that innovation has to play in tackling climate change was recently highlighted by the Virgin Earth Challenge and Richard Branson's announcement of a \$25million prize for the person who develops a commercially viable method of removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. There is a growing call for sustainable innovation, from grand schemes such as the Virgin Earth Challenge, to the pressing need for new energy-efficient technologies, and businesses must act in order to meet this demand. As well, the recent EU plans to move towards 20 per cent sustainable energy use over the next few years provides evidence that this is not a fad but a trend that is leading to business opportunities for sustainable energy providers and innovators in this area. Britain's small business community has a proud history of innovation and as we move towards a greener marketplace it is these businesses that have the opportunity to lead the way in the development of new technologies, products and services.

We have seen a growing number of innovative companies during recent years that are developing technologies and ideas which have the environment in mind and it is these small companies that are likely to bridge the growing 'green gap'. But, as well as developing new products and services in this field, small companies are embracing the spirit of entrepreneurship; re-thinking business models and adopting an innovative approach to collaborating with other firms along the supply chain to reduce their environmental impact.

In this new era of unrelenting change and competition, business models have a shorter shelf life. The fact is, no matter how bulletproof your firm's current business model; it will be challenged by new business models and companies run the

risk of stalling if they fail to continually develop their portfolio of IP, products and services. Innovation is all about the successful introduction of new ideas into the marketplace; it's not necessarily about invention and companies are increasingly looking beyond their own borders to find sustainable applications for their innovations.

This wave of sustainable innovation is particularly evident at the Sussex Innovation

Centre where a number of companies are pioneering the development of new environmentally friendly products and services. One of the small companies that is driving sustainable innovation at the centre is Ambiental Technical Solutions Ltd. (www.ambiental.co.uk). Ambiental is an environmental engineering and risk management consultancy that is working in partnership with the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and Space Agency (ESA) to develop advanced satellite technology to help monitor illegal logging activities in some of the world's most remote forest regions. The company is an excellent example of the role that small, innovative businesses are taking and testament to the idea that innovation is about the successful introduction of new ideas into the marketplace and not necessarily about invention. Dr Justin Butler, Ambiental's Managing Director says:

'Technology is likely to be one of the major weapons in the fight against climate and environmental change and Ambiental is a company that specialises in using the latest technology to help clients better understand environmental risk problems around the world.

through our expertise in remote sensing and other technologies,

and our contacts and experience in academia and research, we see Ambiental acting as a bridge between, the new and innovative technology being produced by universities and the businesses who will increasingly need to access new products and services to help address the regulatory, financial and physical impacts of our changing environment.'

The Sussex Innovation Centre (SInC) is an established and award-winning business incubator. It provides specialist accommodation and services to support the strategy, growth, investment, sales and marketing for new technology businesses.

For more information visit www.sinc.co.uk

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Mike Herd,
executive director
of the award-
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Innovation Centre.

