

Dragons' Den alumni set for growth after funding deals to take heating tech global and to grow honey business

Two companies that featured on Dragons' Den are celebrating winning investments that will help them grow.

Manchester heating specialist DiscreteHeat has secured a £250,000 loan to support its expansion into Europe and North America. Meanwhile a honey firm is planning to create more jobs after securing support to invest in automation.

Family-owned DiscreteHeat, of Atherton, has developed a skirting board that acts as a radiator. It was designed to help people free up floor and wall space in their homes and also to work more efficiently than traditional radiators, meaning they work well with heat pumps and energy-efficient systems.

ThermaSkirt, was originally launched on BBC's Dragons' Den in 2008. It [was rejected on the night](#) but Dragon James Caan later got in touch with an offer that the business declined.

But despite what appeared to be a setback, [DiscreteHeat kept growing](#) and kept selling ThermaSkirt products across the UK. Founder and MD Martin Wadsworth says the business is already on track to hit £80m turnover in the next five years as housebuilders push towards Net Zero.

Now it wants to grow internationally and has secured a £250,000 Export Loan from GC Business Finance (GCBF) to help it make key hires and invest in new products. Mr Wadsworth estimates that export success could help turnover rise to £300m in the next 10 years.

He said: "After being rejected by the dragons, we wanted to make sure DiscreteHeat would be hugely successful. Now, we have a patented product that has some of the biggest housebuilders and developers knocking on our door. We want to start taking over the European and American markets, and grow the business internationally, so we reached out to GC Business Finance for an export loan, and the quick turnaround meant we have been able to make key hires and investments to begin this next stage of growth."

Andy Nichols, senior loan manager at GC Business Finance, added: "It is really exciting to see the success DiscreteHeat is having, especially given the product offering has such a strong, positive environmental impact. It's really important to give Greater Manchester-based businesses the opportunity to shine on a global stage, supporting with finance during their international expansion journey. It has been great to work with Martin and the team to do exactly this, and I look forward to seeing DiscreteHeat's future successes. Dragon's Den's loss is GC Business Finance's gain."

'Smart factory' hopes for Just Bee Honey

Just Bee Honey, based in Trafford Park, plans to double revenue and create five jobs after securing funding from manufacturing support body Made Smarter to create a "smart factory". The company – which makes flavoured and vitamin infused honey products it sells direct to consumers – is investing £41,000 in an automated system for sealing and labelling.

Just Bee Honey was launched in 2014 by business partners Andy Sugden and Joe Harper, the son of a beekeeper, to make soft drinks using honey. It turned down potential investment from Peter Jones on Dragons' Den and went on to sell products in Selfridges, Waitrose, Sainsbury's, Co-op, WH Smith and Boots.

But those sales fell during the pandemic, pushing the company

to pivot to its current nine-product range of infused and flavoured honeys. Sales have now reached 250,000 units per year.



Joe Harper, left, with his dad Ron, and fellow Just Be Honey founder Andy Sugden

Co-founder Mr Sugden said: “We have been on quite a journey over the last 10 years from handmade products in a kitchen to a factory. We are now ready for the next stage of our growth. We want to be able to do things faster, more efficiently and to a higher standard, while enabling our team to contribute their skills in other areas of the business.

“Made Smarter firstly helped us develop a vision and a digital roadmap of how to get there. This was followed up by a £20,000 grant towards the technology. It’s a major step towards our

dream of a smart factory – fully automated and digital – and we can't thank Made Smarter enough for helping us get there."

Donna Edwards, director of Made Smarter's Adoption Programme in the [North West](#), said: "It has been fantastic to have played a supportive role in Just Bee's digital transformation. Andy, Joe and the team have been eager participants of the programme, willing to engage with our experts to create a digital roadmap and identify the technology and skills they need to succeed. We look forward to offering them our ongoing support as they drive forward their growth ambitions."

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