



Back (L to R): The Business Clinic student consultancy team Emily Spink, Amir Aynetchi, Jiali Liu and Christina Krommyda with their clients Neil Osborne and Keith Broughton from Northumberland Spirit Company.

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## Business students help award-winning artisan gin maker craft strategy for growth

Based in Alnwick, the Northumberland Spirit Company has grown from humble beginnings, producing its first blend of hand-crafted Alnwick Gin from a potting shed in 2016, to securing award-winning status in the global spirits industry and a turnover in excess of £300,000 per year.

Well-known in its native North East, Neil Osborne, director and entrepreneur

behind the company recognised that in order to grow the business, its sales and marketing strategy needed refinement.

He approached the Business Clinic at Northumbria University for advice and briefed a team of four future marketing experts to research a strategy that would improve productivity through increasing sales and raising brand awareness outside the North East of England.

The students took on the task, which also formed part of the final year of their undergraduate degree at Newcastle Business School, replacing the traditional dissertation with a business consultancy project, which involves working for a real company to find practical solutions to real challenges.

To meet the brief, the students conducted extensive primary and secondary research into the UK market for specialist gins, reviewing brands, competitors, trends, target markets and availability through online and offline retailers.

The project culminated in a full report with actionable recommendations linked to available budget and resources that would enable the company to grow its market presence efficiently, promote brand recognition for both the business and its growing range of craft gins, including flagship products Alnwick Gin and Firestorm Gin.

Describing the business consultancy process, Neil Osborne, Northumberland Spirit Company director said: “From the outset the business has grown organically but we know there is huge untapped potential in the heritage gin market and we needed a practical approach to capitalise on it, but most importantly, a plan that would allow us to build the business in a manageable and sustainable way.

“The students have been thorough in their market research and the detailed recommendations in their report offer us a solid base to work from in order to grow both our online and physical presence outside the region.

“We have already begun to implement elements of their strategy, particularly in relation to Firestorm, which we launched in January. They addressed the brief well and gave us a lot to think about.”

Team member and final year business student, Emily Spink, age 25 from Yorkshire, said: “The practical experience I have gained has been invaluable. It was challenging taking on a real business project, we had to collaborate as a team to plan our approach and meet Neil’s brief within the agreed timescale.

“Working for Northumberland Spirit Company was a great opportunity for me to put business development theory into practice in an exciting and competitive market place. The skills and experience I’ve gained throughout the process will undoubtedly help me in future projects.”

The Business Clinic at Northumbria University is an award-winning education scheme that involves groups of business students forming a ‘consultancy firm’ to provide free advice to clients. The service is available to all types of businesses from SMEs and multinationals to charities and third sector organisations. The model enhances student employability and skills by working directly with organisations and sectors in need of consultancy advice by analysing the problem and providing up to date research and sound recommendations to help them grow.

Nigel Coates, director of the Business Clinic, said: “Northumberland Spirit Company is an ambitious small business that is passionate about the quality and heritage of its hand crafted gins. They have a great story to tell and saw the benefit that engaging with our students could bring.

“Since 2013, the Business Clinic has seen over 1,200 students work with and advise more than 300 organisations in a wide range of sectors including SMEs and multinationals.”

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