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Accelerator Case Study

LANGS
Designed in Derbyshire

Richard Lang & Son Ltd



Sector: Wholesale & Retail

Location: Derby

Size: Small

About the business

Richard Lang & Son Ltd is a third-generation giftware import and wholesale business with its headquarters in Derby. The business was founded in 1949 originally trading cuckoo clocks imported from Germany. Today Richard Lang & Son design, source, import and distribute decorative giftware, home décor, seasonal products and accessories to independent retailers, garden centres and national accounts across the UK and Europe.

There are approximately 30 employees at the head office who are supported by 11, UK and international sales agents.

Challenges faced

Richard Lang & Son has operated in a challenging economic climate while maintaining steady growth within the UK wholesale market.

Like many businesses in the sector, the company has faced rising operational costs, including sustained increases in energy prices, Employer National Insurance contributions and the National Minimum Wage. Inflationary pressures have also affected both suppliers

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and customers, creating a more complex trading environment and placing additional greater focus on financial resilience and planning.

Despite these headwinds, the business has continued to grow its UK customer base. However, expansion within a competitive and price-sensitive market has required careful strategic positioning. Increased competitor activity, particularly from suppliers offering low-cost, overseas alternatives, has intensified pricing pressure and reinforced the importance of differentiation through service levels, product development and long-term supplier relationships.

Internally, continued growth highlighted structural limitations, legacy systems and manual processes which reduced operational efficiency and limited scalability. As order volumes increased and product ranges expanded, the need for greater automation, data visibility and systems integration became more apparent.

In addition, the company identified the need to strengthen capabilities in data analysis, digital marketing and systems integration - key capabilities required to support sustained growth and planned expansion into new European markets.

The central challenge therefore became not survival, but transformation: modernising a long-established wholesale business to ensure it remains competitive, scalable and resilient in a rapidly evolving marketplace.

Solution - Support Given

Richard Lang & Son has received a combination of targeted strategic and innovation support through regional and national programmes to accelerate its transformation and expansion plans.

This includes:

- **EMCCA Growth Hub & Accelerator Projects**

Through the East Midlands Combined County Authority (EMCCA), the business has accessed structured growth support and advisory services aligned to its long-term strategy.

- **One-to-One Strategic Advisory Support**

Ongoing guidance has been provided by East Midlands Chamber Business Adviser Sonny Lakani. This support has focused on operational efficiency, structured growth planning, digital transformation and productivity improvement, helping to formalise roadmap planning and prioritise scalable investments.

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- **High Growth Accelerator Project**

The business received support to develop and structure its medium-to-long-term growth strategy. This included formalising plans around leadership development, systems integration, export readiness and international expansion positioning. The programme strengthened governance, planning discipline and performance tracking.

- **Export Accelerator Project**

Support was provided to strengthen the company's post-Brexit European trading strategy. This included advice on EU trading structures, VAT considerations, and market-entry readiness. A £2,000 grant supported the company's first entry into the German market, helping to fund market research, trade show participation and targeted marketing activity, laying the foundations for formal EU expansion.

- **Innovate UK Business Connect Engagement**

Engagement with Innovate UK Business Connect supported the development of an innovation strategy, data-driven decision-making capability and collaboration with external partners.

- **Innovate UK Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) – Award Secured**

The business successfully secured funding through Innovate UK's Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) programme. This will see an academic Associate join the business in 2026 to design and implement, enhance data integration, improve forecasting capability and decision-making processes. The project will embed advanced forecasting, data integration and strategic decision intelligence into core operations, accelerating digital transformation and strengthening long-term competitiveness.

- **Made Smarter East Midlands**

Through Made Smarter East Midlands, the company has adopted smarter warehousing and operational practices, modernised internal processes and increased digital adoption to improve productivity and efficiency.

- **Growth Hub & Derby City Council Support**

Additional engagement provided access to funding guidance, peer networks and best-practice insight to support sustainable scaling.

Impact - The Difference it's Made

Support provided has had a significant and measurable impact on the business. This includes:



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- Improved competitiveness through improved use of data to support customer understanding and commercial decision-making
- Streamlined internal processes, reducing manual administration and duplication.
- Increased productivity in warehousing and order processing through digitalisation and automation.
- Greater resilience and confidence in planning for UK and EU growth.
- Upskilling of staff and improved engagement through training and involvement in change.
- Safeguarding existing roles and supporting sustainable job creation as the business grows.

The business reports the following quantifiable impacts:

- Significant reductions in administrative processing time (moving processes from days to minutes).
- Improved warehouse throughput, enabling increased operational capacity without proportional cost increases.
- Reduced paper usage (now approximately 98% paperless), supporting both cost savings and sustainability.

A word from the business:

“The support we have received through the Accelerator projects has been invaluable. It has helped us step back, challenge long standing ways of working, and implement changes that genuinely improve efficiency and resilience. As a long-established family business, this support has played a key role in modernising our operations while protecting our culture and people.”

Steve Parker, CEO & Joint Managing
Director

Support provided:

- 1 to 1 Advice
- High Growth Accelerator
- Export Accelerator
- Innovate UK
- Made Smarter East Midlands
- Workshops

Impact to business:

- Improved Competitiveness
- New Market Entry
- Streamlined Processes
- Increased Productivity
- Upskilling Staff
- Safeguarded Jobs
- Cost Savings

This project is funded by the UK Government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and delivered by East Midlands Chamber.

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