BGP Stories from the front-line

Data Image Group Ltd

"Within a week of attending a BGP briefing, I had sacked 42% of our customers – the profit killers!"

Robert Farfort is not a man to let the grass grow under his feet. The decision to attend a Business Growth Programme briefing breakfast several years ago led to swift and dramatic changes in his Leicestershire-based business, Data Image Group. On Friday 4th February this year he returned to Cranfield to share his BGP experiences with the latest cohort of BGP participants.

Rob frankly admits that when he chose to take part in the programme he was at a low point. Despite having founded Data Image over twenty years before, he was blocked. The business, which prints images on diverse materials and fabricates exhibition materials for end-high retail clients, was stuck, and he himself was filled with self-doubt. "Am I good enough?" he asked himself repeatedly. There was no cohesion in the firm and staff were running in all directions. Rob's attendance at the briefing and signing up to the subsequent programme were, he says, the best decisions he has ever made. The inspiration to change and improve the business that he drew from the briefing was just the start of the journey to regenerating his passion.

When he arrived at Cranfield in January 2018, Data Image had no website – just a holding page – and no social media presence. The digital world was a mystery. Challenged by his BGP counsellor and his fellow-participants, Rob swiftly hired a specialist to promote the business online, which has generated a stream of new opportunities. It also soon became clear that although he valued his employees, he simply didn't understand their needs. Today everyone in the firm has a board on which they set out their aims and ambitions, both personal and professional, and a plan for achieving these: Data Image even supports its staff with a financial adviser who can help with big-ticket issues such as pensions and mortgages.

The renewed focus on the business and each individual's contribution to making it successful has similarly sharpened everyone's minds. "I spent a lot of time on the programme really getting to the nub of what we're about," says Rob. "It boils down to selling time: days, hours, even minutes. That's what we do and, everyone understands that." To support and improve internal communications, Rob invested in new software systems, so there is as much real-time visibility as possible across the business. This has gone a long way to cure him of his tendencies to act as hero and meddler, and freed him up to do what he does best: create new ideas and explore new opportunities. He described how the firm responded to a client's enquiry by developing a revolutionary exhibition stand which can be assembled in a fraction of the normal time and is easily transported across the world, saving the client time and money, and reducing their carbon footprint.
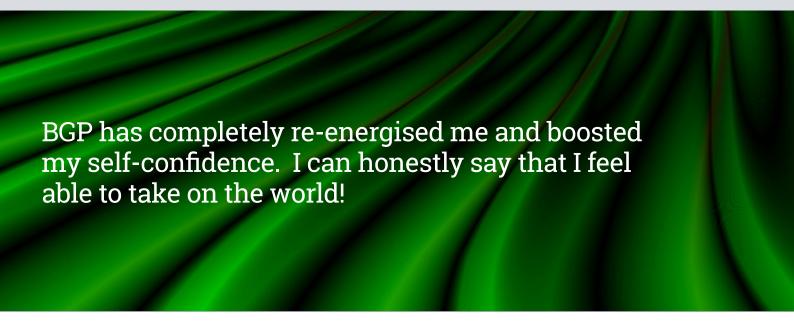
Data Image was founded originally to supply print materials for retail brands, point of sale and promotion. Post BGP, the time that Rob freed up has enabled the business to expand into new areas of demand for print, such as tensile fabrics – mainly awnings – and 3D objects. By experimenting on social media, the business has learned that it wins more business through showcasing concepts, rather than finished products, that allow customers to conceive of new possibilities.

A major revelation on the programme was that Rob learned to love numbers. "I had no interest before," he says. "If our finance department told me we had a million pounds in the bank, that was, oh, okay." Now Data Image has the reporting systems that enable him to understand exactly how and where the firm is making money, almost to the nearest penny. "Numbers tell a story," he says. "BGP taught me that, and now I can't get enough data!"

The single biggest change, however, was the personal one. "At last I was able to share and talk to other owner-managers like me," Rob says. "And to offload to my counsellor, who I continue to see after the programme. BGP has completely re-energised me and boosted my self-confidence. I can honestly say that I feel able to take on the world!"

BGP has completely re-energised me and boosted my self-confidence. I can honestly say that I feel able to take on the world!

About the companies

Cranfield Executive Development

Cranfield Executive Development is consistently ranked as one of the top two providers of customised learning development in the UK, and among the top 10 in Europe. Its programmes draw on the expertise of faculty from Cranfield School of Management, which is one of an elite group of Schools worldwide to hold the triple accreditation of: AACSB International (the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business), EQUIS (European Quality Improvement System) and AMBA (the Association of MBAs).

W: **www.cranfield.ac.uk/som/execdev**
T: **+44(0)1234 754500**
E: **execdev@cranfield.ac.uk**

Data Image Group Ltd

Data Image Group are a large-scale print production house working with global brands across a wide range of market sectors. Printing directly onto virtually any rigid surface or rolled material, examples of their work include; bespoke ceiling panels; custom flooring; custom wallpaper; illuminated graphics; stretch fabric graphics and 3D display units.

Established in 1991, they have a team of over 60 dynamic, forward-thinking individuals operating from an impressive facility in the centre of the UK, Leicester. They trade on reputation of excellence, built on long-term client relationships, driven by continual reinvestment in leading technology to allow them to constantly push the boundaries of digital print.

W: **www.dataimage.co.uk**
T: **+44 (0) 116 284 4900**
E: **hello@dataimage.co.uk**