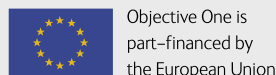


Objective One case study knowledge economy



altcom Limited
13 North Parade
Penzance
Cornwall TR18 4SL

tel 0845 056 2990
fax 0845 056 2991
email info@microseis.net
web www.microseis.net

The projects in the Knowledge Economy investment cluster include those developing the Combined Universities and activities that support the development of much stronger links between Higher Education and business.

Developing the Combined Universities in Cornwall is considered so important to the development of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly it was the only project specifically outlined in the Single Programming Document contract. Prior to commencing the Objective One Programme in 2000, there was no such university opportunity in Cornwall.

University level provision in Cornwall and its links with business encourages graduates to start their own businesses, attracts new business and encourages innovation and knowledge transfer, thereby increasing the overall wealth of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.

altcom Limited

A small company in Penzance has used Objective One investment to develop cutting edge technology that is in demand from the international oil industry.

The technology, which is based on the detection of micro earthquakes, has meant a huge boost in profile for altcom, which has been trading since 1995. Its internet-based news, information and training portal Microseis.net (www.microseis.net) has been operational since the beginning of 2006.

The company was originally set up to provide software design and development. But its directors had previously worked on the Camborne School of Mines (CSM) Geothermal Energy (hot rocks) project, which was based near the Combined Universities in Cornwall Tremough Campus, Falmouth, and carried knowledge that could be applied to the oil and gas industry.

Dr Andrew Jupe, operations director, explained: "When I worked on the Geothermal Energy project in the 1980s we started developing technology called microseismic monitoring – in other words monitoring micro-earthquakes. This happens each time water is injected or extracted from the ground and can be used to map the efficiency of oil or gas production.

"When the geothermal project closed in the 1990s we were looking at transferring this technology to the oil and gas industry but at that time it was not ready."



The altcom team (left to right): Neil Harvey, John Cowles, Richard Garbutt, David Wilcox and Andrew Jupe.

Instead, altcom was founded by former geothermal energy employee David Wilcox, now technical director. John Cowles became managing director and Dr Jupe joined in 2003.

altcom's first major contract was with Reuters news agency and since then clients for web design and other software tools have included The Department of Trade and Industry, the Environment Agency, University College Falmouth, Cornwall Enterprise, the Soil Association, Dorset and Devon County Councils (on the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site project).

"Things have changed dramatically since then," continued Dr Jupe. "The hot rocks technology that we are experts in has now started to become big business. These companies want to use microseismic technology but there are a number of ways in which it can be applied and if they get it wrong it will cost millions of pounds."

To capitalise on this altcom used the **Cornwall Research Fund (CRF)** to develop a set of design and assessment tools to help advise the oil and gas industry on how to apply the technology. This service is delivered both online through Microseis.net and via conventional face-to-face consultancy.

The CRF is a Combined Universities in Cornwall project which uses Objective One investment to support small businesses wanting to carry out research and development.

Dr Jupe himself is a world expert in the technology and, since the consultancy was set up, has

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been invited to conferences in the USA, the Middle East and Austria. altcom is also working on a major project in Kazakhstan to help modernise the massive oil fields.

“This project has raised our profile dramatically,” he said. “We have gone from a small company in Penzance with mostly South West customers to one that works internationally. We have so far employed one more person full time to work on Microseis.net and this will grow. It has also had a big impact on turnover and has definitely expanded our client base.”

As a result the company has now accessed further CRF investment for Phase Two – developing more software based tools to support and expand the consultancy.

Peter Castell, CUC business development manager, said: “One of the Combined Universities in Cornwall’s most important roles is to work with businesses, helping them to exploit new know-how and technology. The global collaborations formed by altcom make it an exemplar for the way businesses like this need to grow in the future.”

For more information about the Cornwall Research Fund contact Peter Castell on 01872 322936.



Dr Andrew Jupe, operations director of altcom.