Shipshape *talks to* Powertraveller *about its growth in the global portable power market*

Powertraveller: Going places

Powertraveller designs, develops and manufactures a range of portable chargers for devices which people use when on the move, such as mobile phones, cameras, sat navs, iPods, iPads and laptops.

Born out of plug and cable development company, IDC Plugs, Powertraveller developed its first mobile phone charger, the Powermonkey, six years ago. Since then the company has brought more than ten new portable power and solar products to the travel, outdoor and consumer electronics markets.

Diverse markets

"We have a number of interesting 'original equipment manufacturer' (OEM) and military projects on the go, with our products being tested in many different arenas," explains finance director Sonia Ranger. "We supply Powertraveller products to intrepid expeditions and challenges all over the world – including a recent record-breaking row across the Atlantic."

The Hampshire-based firm supplied many products to Japan after the earthquake last year when power became a problem. The firm's Minigorilla device kept fans running for nine hours at a time, keeping people cool in sweltering conditions. Recently, a Vodafone, McLaren and Mercedes-branded Powermonkey Discovery has been produced for the Monaco Grand Prix.

Sonia says that although the company has been affected by the recession in the UK market, it has been relatively shielded by its network of distributors and customers around the world.

"In the last few years we've faced many challenges. For example, we had a few sleepless nights recently when we were asked to supply a large multinational company with products for a promotion. It was a fantastic opportunity but the sums involved were bigger than anything we had ever dealt with before.

"We also have to contend with the usual daily issues of juggling stock, cashflow, currency fluctuations and so on."

Award-winning year

Powertraveller has just won the Queen's Award for Enterprise for the second time. Three years ago it was for Innovation and this time in the International Trade category, which recognised the increasing value of the company's export sales."This award gives Powertraveller and its products a lot of credibility, especially with our overseas customers."

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Finance director, Sonia Ranger

Hoping that 2012 will be a record year for the company, Powertraveller has just launched its range of products in the USA and is already delivering to one of the country's largest outdoor retailers. Powertraveller's manufacturing operation in Shenzhen, China is moving to a larger factory to give the firm greater capacity.

With no shortage of ideas for new products, the company is continuing to develop battery and solar technology, as well as other off-grid methods of power generation.

A helping hand from Shipleys

Powertraveller has worked with Shipleys principal Steve Foster for a number of years. "Shipleys prepares the statutory accounts, helps me with accounts issues, and deals with our corporation tax returns and statutory filing," says Sonia. "It's great to have access to top level accountancy advice as and when we need it."

Powertraveller's experience of external funding

Powertraveller secured a £150,000 loan under the Small Firms Loan Guarantee (SFLG) scheme in 2005 to develop the company, repayable over a ten-year period.

"This injection of cash made an enormous difference to us and enabled us to develop our first Powermonkey, as well as move offices and take on more employees," explains Sonia.

"The process was a little drawn out but we secured a loan of £150,000 with an option to take a further £150,000 if required. However, when we made the decision to take the second tranche, the rules had changed and we were no longer eligible."

"My advice for other companies thinking about this type of funding would be to talk to a specialist in this field as they will have up to date knowledge of what is available and should know what the necessary qualifications are to secure funding."

Further information: www.powertraveller.com