



FUNDING FROM EUROPE BREATHED NEW LIFE INTO WEST MIDLANDS IT DEVELOPER KAJ-ISIS

At a time when many smaller companies around them were feeling the effects of recession, KAJ-ISIS took its first steps into Europe and has developed new capabilities and a positive outlook on collaboration as a result

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Keith Jones would be the first to admit that he turned to Europe initially as a source of funding; a way of reducing the overhead of running a consultancy business with regular staff and irregular customers. As a small IT company in the early 1990s, the idea of finding niche business opportunities in mainland Europe was attractive. Also, in a time of recession, the idea of working alongside organisations from other Member States seemed more attractive than collaborating with local competitors sharing the battered consultancy market in the West Midlands.

With funding of up to 75% on some contracts, the early projects certainly satisfied Keith's initial objective of generating some revenue from staff at times when they were not allocated to commercial work. Eventually, however, with the general business climate improving, the company began to question the real value of the projects they were involved with. *"In retrospect, we had had four years of collaborations which served as an apprenticeship in managing our involvement in these often complex projects,"* Keith says, *"but didn't deliver any of the vision."* After some hard thinking, it was decided that the company's business plan should start driving the collaboration, rather than the other way round!

The first opportunity to implement this new strategy came with the €1.25M PROMISE project, designed to transfer best practice in managing innovation from large companies into the SME marketplace.

KAJ-ISIS's primary role, as one of twelve partners from five countries, was to act as the interface to the project for UK SMEs and to collaborate in the development of a toolkit to allow SME managers to access and implement the best practice knowledge.

The result was an approach which worked, but could be improved, and which, although it required much more empirical testing, had the potential to become a successful commercial product. Most importantly, KAJ-ISIS had intellectual property to exploit from their work on the toolkit.

Keith decided to put together a new project to develop the concept further, bring fresh skills into the company and take the result into key geographical markets. He chose partners from UK, Germany and Greece that he had worked with before on other projects aimed at SMEs. The project, PIP-SCORE, is designed to provide a standard way of measuring a company's "Product Innovation Profile" based on the innovative qualities of their products, product innovation processes and ability to manage those processes.



PIP-SCORE

Is being promoted across Europe in all twelve official languages.

Keith believes that KAJ-ISIS has become a more 'rounded' company since changing its thinking about Europe. The principal business benefit has come from the new outlook as well as additional expertise that staff have developed through collaboration. After nearly ten years, KAJ-ISIS has developed an impressive product portfolio and an extensive contact network in Europe, a primary market that the company understands and in which it has little fear of its competitors. Collaboration with that network has become an essential and integral part of organisational, product and process development.



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