

**BUSINESS
READY**

UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK
SCIENCE PARK

Support on the menu for new technology firm

Comesto is a new company that has had support from Business Ready to launch an online platform for independent food and drink businesses selling their produce into restaurants, pubs, bars and cafes.



Pictured (left to right): Paul Triggs, Valentine Smith, Carolyn Smith (all Comesto) with Ian McFarlane-Toms

The Company

Valentine Smith, Carolyn Smith and Paul Triggs come from a range of backgrounds in technology, marketing and PR.

They spotted a need for discerning food and drink buyers to be able to source, compare and order from high quality independent suppliers efficiently; saving them time and money.

All three have a real passion for high-quality, locally sourced produce – from sauces to seafood and from beverages to bakery.

So they decided to launch Comesto – an online platform that could match independent suppliers to food and drink outlets.

The Challenge

The team behind Comesto, which is based in Elizabeth Court in Stratford-upon-Avon, knew that their new platform had the potential to disrupt the way eateries can purchase from smaller suppliers.

And while the team had expertise in marketing and technology, they needed to go beyond their passion for food and drink and tap into people with knowledge of the sector in order to create a tool that would bring benefits to its target market.

The company also needed to be certain that it had made the necessary preparations in order to launch the business in the right way and give it the right foundations for success.

Comesto approached Business Ready to find out what support was available in order to help them in their quest.

The Solution

Business Ready assigned industry experts to the company as mentors but only after it had given initial guidance on the business strategy.

Valentine said: "Business Ready has been incredibly helpful. Initially, the programme challenged us to be ready to receive the support. It made sure we'd got the right business plan and the necessary financial planning in place.

"We were then assigned a mentor who had worked in the hospitality industry and, again, he challenged us. It was exactly what we needed at the time and it really sharpened us up as a business.

"Following that, we tapped into the knowledge of a second mentor who had a wholesale background. That was very insightful and gave us a great picture of the industry."

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It was just the tailored support and advice the company needed and meant that it could hit the ground running with the new online platform.

The Result

The platform went live in August 2018 and is free to trade buyers. It offers a mix between an online marketplace and a dating app where, for a small monthly subscription, suppliers can display their products and services to and do business directly with potential clients.

Prior to launch 200 suppliers – from craft beer makers through to locally farmed meat – had signed up to the service and the aim is to reach at least 1,000 clients by January 2019.

The company is also in the process of developing an app that will make the service even easier to use – and again it's had help with that too.

"We were helped in applying for grant-funding to develop the platform and the app and were successful," said Valentine. "We received £3,300 which was a big help in bringing us forward to where we are today.

"The company has a sales manager on board and we've been out to trade shows where the feedback we are getting from both suppliers and buyers is very positive.

"It's an exciting time and we can see great potential for Comesto in supporting the food and beverage sector across this region and beyond."

Ian McFarlane-Toms, a Business Growth Adviser at the University of Warwick Science Park, said Comesto had identified a gap in the market.

He said: "They've clearly researched this market and have developed a service that has the potential for growth and development.

"The support we have been able to offer has helped them to move forward at a faster pace and to focus on the most important aspects of launching a technology business.

"With the right support the business has the confidence to invest in their brand marketing and employing staff, and we wish them every success with the launch and in building on what they have already achieved so far."

Business support for the next level

The Business Ready programme is managed by the business support team at the University of Warwick Science Park. The experienced Business Growth Advisers team have been delivering business growth and support services to technology based businesses for over 20 years.

In addition, the team are supported by a range of specialist mentors who have run their own businesses and have expertise and experience supporting, advising, coaching and mentoring other growth businesses.



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