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Karl Ward, Surefoot Systems UK Limited, Shepley/Huddersfield, April 2010

Karl reveals a sure-footed approach to future growth – with the help of **Business Link**

Whilst many companies have understandably struggled during the recession, it's good to see one bucking the trend, such as the Shepley-based Surefoot Systems UK Ltd.

Set up by Karl Ward in 2003, the business has delivered significant growth after a tough first 12 months. “It was all a question of getting started,” he explains. “I would visit potential clients to talk about and demonstrate the anti-slip system, and then we picked up the first big job – a large shopping centre in Huddersfield – which really kick-started things for us.”

Surefoot Ltd is the exclusive UK distributor of a unique system for the treatment of slippery floor tiles, working with primarily UK clients, such as shopping malls (including The Mall Corporation), leisure centres, hotels and swimming pools.

2009 also saw Surefoot become the number one distributor in Europe, with a contract signed with Center Parcs for a large swimming pool, whilst their French distributor has just

completed the floor tiles for the viewing gallery of the Arc de Triomphe in Paris.

Karl has worked with Business Link adviser, Philippa Coultish, since 2008 and says: “Philippa has been very useful. She initially clarified my convictions and reinforced which direction we should take.”

This clarity was distilled in a sound business plan in which all action points and objectives were carried out. “Philippa was very good at putting it into the right style and tone,” adds Karl.

An important facilitation also saw Karl directed to a franchise seminar, out of which emerged contacts with a solicitor and consultant which proved ‘very positive’.

However, a recent collaboration with Business Link looks set to deliver the greatest impact. Philippa recommended Surefoot apply for funding through the Rural Business Support Programme*, designed to provide Karl with the

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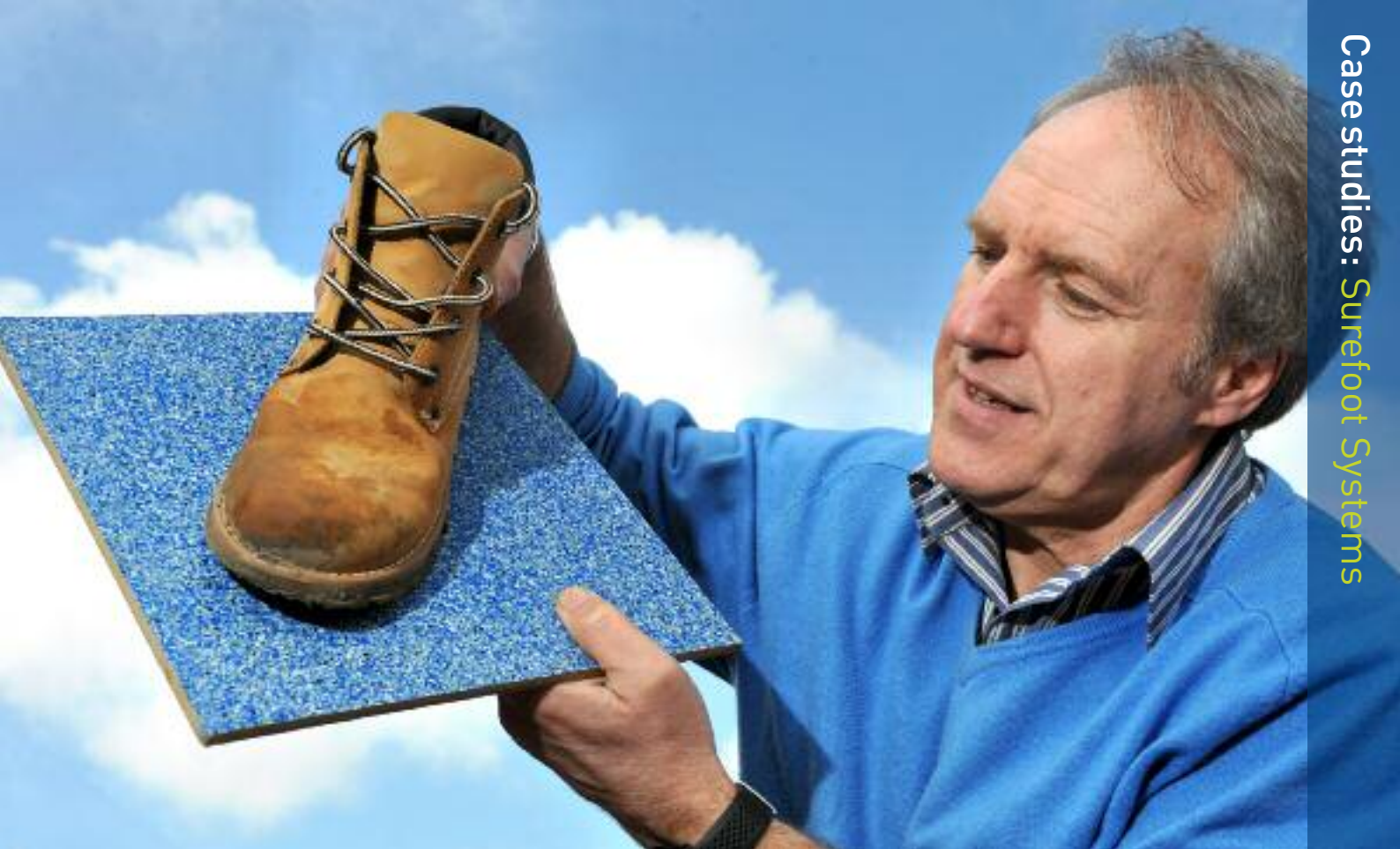
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requisite funding to enhance the business infrastructure and help to bring in a new member of staff.

The successful application delivered funding to enable Karl to expand the business. He explains: "The grant represents a major breakthrough. We have built a new office adjacent to our home and the grant will be primarily used for internal IT equipment and software, phones, furniture and training.

"The new person will handle customer contact once I have agreed a sale and then handle the subsequent client relationship to help us deliver repeat business. They will also generate appointments for sales and handle the increased level of day-to-day admin and internet leads, with a new IT infrastructure in place to handle the latter.

"The combination of a totally independent working space and a new member of staff – plus a major investment in our website presence which has generated positive leads – represents a tremendous platform for a business that has huge potential."

A key element of this potential is the franchising opportunity that Karl is developing, having recruited a selection of 'very good business partners who have purchased a considerable amount from the Surefoot range'. The emphasis on 'products' is significant as Surefoot is already diversifying into other safety, anti-slip systems, courtesy of the company's strong reputation and branding.

For example, major product development for 'slip prevention in any environment on any surface' is underway. In addition, DDA compliance for ramps and disabled access also features highly due to the requirements of the Disability & Discrimination Act.

Optimising the website as a vital 'shop window' for the business, attending network meetings and continuing to work with Huddersfield University on product testing are all in hand – with Karl continuing to work with Business Link on exploiting the 'phenomenal growth potential' by increasing penetration across the UK.

"I'm still looking at other ways of expanding nationally however," he says. "And that's why I will continue to work with Business Link in the future.

Business Link adviser, Philippa Coultish, comments: "It has been great to work alongside Karl and see the business develop. We worked on the vision for the business and on options for growth. I know that Karl appreciated the contacts and information given and to receive the recent funding was the icing on the cake."

* The Rural Business Support Programme (RBSP) is part of the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE). Yorkshire Forward is responsible for the delivery of the socio-economic elements of the RDPE and has appointed Business Link Yorkshire to administer RBSP. The programme is funded via the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and Defra and will run from 2007-2013.

NB: All case studies have been signed off by the subject and Business Link Yorkshire. All details are accurate at the time of publication, but please check with Business Link's PR team before using this case study, as details may have changed.

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