

# Business Stories Edgcumbe

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## **Background**

Edgcumbe was founded in 1981, originally to supply high quality loose tea to the hospitality industry. The company now also provides coffee and associated products and services to a wide range of industry sectors, having become one of the leading tea and coffee merchants in the south east. Managing director Alice Rendle, who successfully traded through the last recession, was keen to be in fighting form for the current economic downturn which she had anticipated two years previously.

## **The challenge**

To differentiate Edgcumbes from intensifying competition by emphasising its quality and expertise, and building a brand capable of driving sales in new and existing markets.

## **The response**

Development of a modernised brand image that reflects the knowledge, experience and quality of Edgcumbes; incorporating that new image into clearer, harder-working marketing materials – from literature and packaging to vehicle livery and website.

## **The outcome**

The project has already increased sales and maintained profit margins, attracted new clients and motivated employees. One satisfying client win is the Goodwood Hotel in Chichester where Alice attended the Designing Demand workshop. The coffee served was poor so she offered her company's services – to no avail. Following the rebrand she approached the hotel again and won the contract.

Father and son team Frank and Christopher Rendle launched Edgcumbe from their kitchen table in 1981 after they spotted a gap in the market for good quality loose tea for the hospitality sector. Five years later Christopher's wife Alice stepped in to head up the flourishing company and in subsequent years the Arundel, West Sussex-based business has evolved into one of the leading wholesale tea and coffee merchants in the south east. The business has two distinct strands. It supplies around 100 tea and coffee products, including unique coffee blends, along with 300 associated items such as sugar, biscuits, cups and coffee-making equipment.



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It also offers a consultancy service, advising not only on coffee machine purchase but also offering training how to make perfect coffee and maximise the equipment’s performance. The service extends to helping clients install, maintain and repair the equipment.

The five-strong Edgcombe team has gained extensive knowledge and experience and now provides its products and services to over 200 cafes, hotels, restaurants, conference and educational institutes. However, having traded through the last recession, Alice recognised the signs of the current economic crisis nearly two years ago. Seeing a downturn in the company’s traditional sectors she re-focused her efforts on stronger, less recession-prone sectors whilst also improving coffee quality and capitalising on market trends for fair-trade products.

Significantly, she also took part in the Designing Demand business support programme. Developed by the Design Council, funded by SEEDA and delivered by South East Design, it provides the services of design experts to help businesses increase their competitiveness, performance and profitability.

Design Associate Gavin Pryke was assigned to Edgcombe in July 2008 after Alice attended a Designing Demand workshop. “Alice is an articulate and decisive entrepreneur heading up a specialist company with fantastic product knowledge that simply wasn’t reflected in the design of their communication materials,” he said.

He introduced Alice to a number of design consultancies from which she chose Surrey-based Visual Assets to rebrand Edgcombe. The new corporate image, complete with a new logo, is now incorporated into signage and stationery, with the company website next in line for the Visual Assets’ treatment.

“The workshop was a real wake-up call for me,” said Alice. “I could see that our branding of 25 years’ standing was in need of an update but I lacked the expertise to drive the project forward. Gavin’s professional approach really gave me the confidence to go for it.”

Armed with her new corporate image, Alice made targeted sales pitches across a range of sectors and won several new clients. A particularly gratifying win is the Goodwood Hotel where Alice attended the Designing Demand workshop. Noting the poor quality of the coffee she offered Edgcombess’ services. She was turned away but following the rebrand she approached the hotel again and this time won the contract.

The success of her revised business strategy, which includes employing a full-time member of staff as Business Development Manager, is evident in Edgcombess’ renewed business confidence.

The company has moved into a newly-refurbished, dedicated set of offices, while Alice anticipates taking on two extra employees over the next 12 months and forecasts a 15% rise in turnover in the same period.

“Along with my team, I have an increased pride in Edgcombess, and this is reflected in a much higher awareness of our products and services in the business community,” she said.

Jackie Walker, regional programme manager for Designing Demand in the South East, pointed out that Alice attended the workshop despite having previously poor experience of design.

“At the workshop she became convinced that joining the Designing Demand programme would be a sound investment that could move her business forward,” Jackie said. “The subsequent upturn in business showed that her faith in design was fully justified.

For further information or advice

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