



UMIP®
SPIN-OUT

MANCHESTER
1824

The University of Manchester
Intellectual Property UMIP®



CASE STUDY

COMPANY FACTFILE

- > Established in 2015
- > Spin-out company from the School of Environment, Education and Development
- > Founded by Dr Richard Kingston
- > Application: Cloud-based decision support system
- > IP – Trademark, Knowhow
- > Funding: £140K UMIP PoP Energy Innovation Award, £10.5K UMIP and UnLtd Scale and Growth Award

www.tellus-toolkit.com



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Dr Richard Kingston

ABOUT TELLUS TOOLKIT LTD

TellUs Toolkit is a cloud-based decision support system that supports a wide range of organisations in the utility, environmental, construction and public policy sectors. It provides a tailored package of map-based software tools to support location based business decisions and stakeholder engagement.

The toolkit is an invaluable tool for any business that carries out projects for which location is a primary factor. A bespoke solution is tailored to meet the exact needs of a customer starting with an up-to-date interactive online base map which then builds up additional layers of information to complement the specific needs of the client.

Multi-layered location analytics, delivered via TellUs' geographic information technology (GIS), provides the client with the simplest, most cost-effective way of avoiding data gaps in the understanding of a location based problem. Through deeper, more connected insights, visually represented on maps, TellUs translates even the most complex messages into easy-to-interpret information, revealing patterns than can easily be missed in endless tables of stats.

We met up with Dr Richard Kingston to find out more about the company's journey and his personal experiences of setting up a spin-out...

At what point during your research did you realise that there could be commercial potential for your discovery?

I joined the University in 2003 moving from a research post at the University of Leeds to a lectureship. My main focus in the first few years at Manchester was establishing my independent research profile and creating teaching mainly for GIS labs, but I do recall having discussions with UMIP about how such a venture could work. This was the very early days of open source software and the associated business models were not well understood.

How did you find the process of setting up a spin-out? What did you especially value from the University during this process?

The legal and financial aspects are something I have no real knowledge of but you can't avoid them! UMIP helped me through this process and also with setting up the company. UMIP provided additional support through its Entrepreneur-in-Transit scheme bringing onboard an entrepreneur to assist with engaging with the market to validate the technology.

What would you say was the greatest challenge?

Sales and marketing has been particularly challenging. Identifying new clients and convincing them of the value of our product and how the service can add value to them as a customer has been a real learning experience.

Did you receive any funding? If so, what was it for?

Yes I received PoP funding as part of the Energy Innovation Fund to test out what we were doing in a commercial environment. The clients' needs changed over the course of the project and we were able to reflect this in our outputs and deliver a demo system for renewable energy planning. The UMIP and UnLtd Scale and Growth Award was used to explore the application of our software in the social housing market although recent changes in Government policy is making this difficult.

What were your aspirations for getting involved in the commercialisation process and being involved in a spin-out?

Receiving funding through the UMIP PoP fund provided an opportunity to explore the project with a commercial partner and further the research. In addition to this it also enabled a route to develop a strong impact case. Initially it was unclear how to develop a business model for a service company in this space but as more and more opportunities presented themselves,



it became apparent we needed a vehicle to support this. My vision for TellUs Toolkit Ltd is that it becomes a versatile tool that any organisation involved in decision making about a place or location could benefit from using.

How did you find the transition from the academic to the commercial world?

For me the transition was fairly seamless as I already worked with external partners for my research. I had also worked outside the University sector in the past.

What factors do you feel are essential in starting and nurturing a spin-out company?

Contacts within 'industry' are key and also self-belief and confidence in the product. Knowing that what you are doing can make a difference to other people will have a real influence on how you approach setting up a spin-out company.

What do you feel are the benefits to the University in engaging in spin-outs?

At a time when we often get questioned about what is the value of what a university can offer to wider society and the economy, this sort of collaboration exemplifies how research can lead to wider commercial and societal benefits.

Do you have any advice for other Manchester academics thinking of going down this route?

If you have the appetite to explore a spin-out opportunity, the University is the perfect environment in which to test the business model. If you don't succeed the process will have provided you with the tools and resources to try it again in the future should you wish to. Also, don't forget about your research – in my case it still drives and underpins what we are doing.

What's next for TellUs Toolkit Ltd?

Building the client base and expanding into other sectors. We will be evaluating a selection of current research projects which may be able to transition across to complement our commercial offer.



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