

## Arden Dies Manufacturing a Cultural and Digital Transformation

A manufacturer of dies is reaping the rewards of digital transformation after embracing strategy, technologies, and skills through Made Smarter.

Arden Dies has been a leader in the die-making and packaging industry in the UK for more than half a century.

The Stockport-based business manufactures cutting, embossing, and foiling tools. They service the carton and corrugated packaging sectors, providing tooling sets for the cutting of all types of boxes.

Lacking a digital strategy and a culture fit for change, the Marple manufacturer has embarked on a remarkable transformation.

Over the last five years, the company has engaged with all services and opportunities offered by Made Smarter: creating a digital roadmap; adopting 3D printing technologies; and developing leadership skills with seven of its team.

Sarah Poynter, Operations Director at Arden Dies, said: *"It's incredible to think how far we've come in such a short time. We have so much to thank Made Smarter for. The programme has highlighted the importance of investing in people and skills to drive technology and make us more efficient."*

### The Challenge

Five years ago, Arden Dies embarked on a digital transformation. Driving that change was former secondary school art teacher Sarah Poynter, the third generation of the family to join the business, which was started by her grandfather.

As head of operations, she was keen to understand the company's strengths and weaknesses. She found that while the business had always invested in cutting-edge machinery, it lacked the culture for change.

Sarah explained: *"We needed to respond more quickly to changes in consumer habits and demand from customers by increasing efficiency and*

*reducing the manual processes that consumed the valuable time of our experienced operators.*

*"This could be achieved through technology, for sure, but there were historical barriers to adoption which were holding us back. The issue was that we lacked a strategy and a digital culture to capitalise on the next stage of our growth."*

### The Solution

The first step was to engage in Made Smarter's Digital Transformation Workshop to perform a diagnostic of products, services, processes, and people. This helped the business identify potential solutions and develop a digital roadmap.

One key area was to create a group of digital leaders across the business to support the cultural change needed.

In 2019, Sarah was one of the first cohorts of the Made Smarter Leadership Programme, which combined leading academic expertise with practical activities to apply that knowledge to the business. For someone new to manufacturing, the three-month programme took her out of her comfort zone, but she discovered that other companies were facing similar challenges.

Sarah was able to identify several opportunities to make significant changes to benefit the business. She applied new tools and skills to real-life projects that reduced wastage, increased agility, improved quality, and enhanced delivery performance.

Arden Dies then began exploring how to adopt Additive Manufacturing (AM) into its operations.

In 2020, the company was one of a small group of Greater Manchester-based manufacturers to pioneer the

'Fast Track Additive Manufacturing – Upskilling the Workforce' programme, an innovative, high-impact initiative designed to accelerate the adoption and application of additive manufacturing.

Steve Thompson, a CNC Operative at Arden Dies, completed the 12-week course and gained a solid grounding in all aspects of additive manufacturing, from understanding the entire digital workflow end-to-end (including the software and hardware) to the range of materials that can be used to create products or parts, and post-processing skills.

In 2022, the business accessed Made Smarter's digital internship programme, which funded two highly skilled and tech-savvy graduates to work on a project to introduce AM to reduce lead times and costs.

Arden Dies then received a match-funded Made Smarter grant of £5,064 to purchase a 3D printer and training.

Since then, the business has developed additional digital leaders with the support of Made Smarter. In 2023, Steve Thompson along with Josh Wheeler, Maintenance Operative, and Jordan Saunders, Purchasing Manager, completed the Leading Digital Transformation programme. Now, along with Sarah, they make up the core of their digital transformation team, helping senior leaders develop a digital strategy and manage change and innovation effectively.

The business has also embedded a new set of digital champions across departments to support digital transformation. Four team members – Josh Wheeler (maintenance), Steve Thompson (operations), Izzy Roberts (planning and data analytics), and Mike Parker (customer services) – have completed the Leading Change for Digital Champions (LCDC) programme, which involves two face-to-face workshops, online coaching, and a site visit to an SME manufacturer to see the impact first-hand.



### The Benefits

Arden Dies is unique among Made Smarter-backed manufacturers in that it has benefited from every element of the programme's offerings.

Its digital roadmap has evolved to become the blueprint of its digital transformation, informing all planning and decision-making.

Adopting AM into the firm's rotary tooling operations has accelerated production by 75%, increased in-house productivity, and reduced external costs.

Arden has now even established a small AM department for R&D to prototype new ideas.

### The Future

The skills investment, both in leadership and at shop-floor level, has created a digitalisation team to pursue a continuous improvement approach, bringing ideas from across the business to the table.

Sarah is now a member of Made Smarter's North West steering group and is helping shape the future direction of the programme.

Sarah said: *"I don't mind admitting that I've become a little obsessed with productivity and efficiency. When you experience that first win through a small change in mindset and process, you start to see waste all around you and want to fix everything. And the beauty of these changes is that they result in a raft of benefits, saving time, money, effort, and making you greener."*

*"Our vision is to advance our position as the number one die maker in the UK, always providing a better, faster, more sustainable, and technologically advanced product. We are achieving that by aligning our workforce, getting buy-in to our transformation, and using technology as a tool."*

*"Digital transformation should be the focus for all manufacturers, and Made Smarter is the perfect place to start."*



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**Sarah Poynter**  
Operations Director  
at Arden Dies



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