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**Actisense**<sup>TM</sup>

## Leading by design

A brand new  
beginning

### Client

Active Research

### Designer

Ozone

### Project summary

How does a relatively unknown marine research and product development company make greater waves in the markets it works in? Rethink, rebrand and remarket with the help of Leading by Design and Ozone.

The South West Design Programme has grown out of the Leading by Design programme. Building on the goodwill and reputation established under Leading by Design, we continue to work with funding provided by the South West Regional Development Agency, helping small and medium sized businesses in the South West realise their potential through high quality design advice.

## Client summary

Founded in 1997, Active Research designs innovative electronic equipment for the marine industry. Led by Managing Director Phil Whitehurst, this Poole-based company has been the force behind thousands of marine innovations, including the first smart undersea depth sensor.

Being at the cutting edge of the industry is essential to Active Research's success – it's the reason it invests over 40% of its revenue on new product development each year. It's also the reason it launched its brand name 'Actisense' in 2001 – to help promote its growing range of marine interconnection devices and smart sensors.

Active Research's Phil Whitehurst is passionate about his business and is keen for the company to become a leader in the field. It's this passion that prompted him to attend one of the Leading by Design workshops.

## Designer summary



Ozone is a Bournemouth-based design company set up five years ago by Tony Ridgway and two of his colleagues from the graphics industry.

Blending hard-core design skills and project management and marketing know-how, Ozone works with small businesses in the South East and South West who do not have an in-house creative team.

Ozone works remotely and face-to-face with clients, providing creative solutions at affordable prices, so that businesses stand out in their marketplace.

# Design process

Although Active Research has shipped over 40,000 products to marine companies around the world - and is the name behind a number of leading product designs - they used to be relatively unknown in the marine industry. Why? Because over 90% of its products were incorporated into other manufacturers' equipment or sold unbranded.

Driven by a desire to move forward in the market, Active Research decided to make some changes. It developed a wide range of marine products to release under a new Actisense brand, with the aim of building recognition and awareness. And for that, professional marketing and branding was needed to make sure it got noticed. With no real in-house studio or creative promotional skills, Active Research turned to Leading by Design.

Through the Leading by Design facilitator, Active Research's Phil Whitehurst was introduced to three design companies who pitched for the business. This matching-up process saved both companies time and hassle. As Phil Whitehurst explains:

"We were able to quickly prepare a precise brief, which was quality assured by Leading by Design, and then have the benefit of deciding which company we felt we could work with best - in the knowledge that their design capabilities had already been assured through the Leading by Design process."

Ozone won the pitch and got to work re-branding Active Research, making the brand stronger and more dynamic and giving the company an eye-catching new logo. Once the company's new look was agreed, Ozone redesigned everything that Active Research planned to use for marketing, including letterheads, business cards and presentation visuals.

The overall objective? Creating maximum impact for Active Research, nationally and internationally, when it rolled out its new products.

The final designs certainly made an impact at Active Research:

"We very much liked the fact that the new designs gave us a more market-focused and less insular image. We felt liberated by the design process and were keen to test it out with potential customers."

## Outcome

The company's new image was a hit in-house, but how would customers respond to it? The perfect opportunity to test the new designs came at a major marine exhibition in Amsterdam, where Active Research was planning to exhibit. Tony Ridgeway from Ozone reflects on what happened:

"Customer interest at the exhibition really improved. Typically, at these events, delegates randomly pick up piles of product catalogues and data sheets, ending up with bags of stuff which are then often dumped in a corner of the office. We were able to redesign the company branding into a much smaller, pocket-sized catalogue that went down really well at the show. Footfall responses and enquiries about Active Research were much greater than they had been previously."

And as it turns out, the initial rebrand's success saw Active Research triple the size of the project, commissioning new information sheets and packaging to create a more premium feel. With Ozone's help, blank white boxes became brand-building opportunities, with the aim of increasing both products' perceived value and marketplace awareness of the Actisense brand.

Did it work? Without a doubt.

High-quality design has played a real part in a success story that's seen turnover up from £235k in 2005 to £384k in 2006 to £600k in 2007, with two new members of staff joining the Actisense team. Larger volumes have seen an improvement in margins and reduced production costs, and the business is moving from strength to strength.

Phil Whitehurst sums up the experience:

"The new look has been very strong and has helped the company present a more professional image and appear larger than we actually are... we have achieved 60% growth each year and a large change in the profitability of the company"

# Key learning points

- No business is too niche to reap significant benefits from good design.
- Coming together through Leading by Design has delivered great value for money for both designer and client.
- By working to a clear, prepared and costed brief, there were no invoicing surprises on the way to a successful outcome.
- Strong design and professional presentation makes the move from local player to national - even international - success story much more of a reality.



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If you would like more information on the South West Design Programme, please call

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[design@businesslinkwessex.co.uk](mailto:design@businesslinkwessex.co.uk)

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