

GUIDING THE EXPLOITATION OF NOVEL NANOFIBRES

When the Directors of OSL Consulting Engineers became aware of a new carbon nanofibre created from natural gas, they were keen to understand the scope and scale of its potential. Recognising the challenges of researching an emerging market in which information is closely guarded and difficult to extract, OSL approached the Aura Innovation Centre (AIC) for assistance.

CASE STUDY: OSL Consulting Engineers

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THE CHALLENGE

Research and analyse the emerging market for novel nanofibres including trends, drivers, and promising applications.

The physical, thermal and mechanical properties of carbon nanofibres make them attractive materials in many industries. But while predicted rapid growth keeps the sector in the spotlight, far less light is shone on the details and insights new market entrants need.

This isn't only because existing players are protective of their technologies and plans and keep them out of the public domain. It's also because the spectrum of possible applications is so broad and their technological development so immature, that identifying sure-fire opportunities for new products is a challenging task.

"The OSL Directors knew that the high-purity carbon nanofibre developed by the University of Hull's chemistry department has a lot of benefits over existing alternatives," says AIC Innovation Manager, Dave Dawson. "But they needed to know more about existing manufacturers, suppliers and customers, and current and future uses to guide exploitation plans."

THE SOLUTION

OSL Principal Director, Alastair Robertson, approached Dave with an outline of the report he needed. Dave, in turn, engaged Dr Antonio Malfense Fierro, a senior lecturer in entrepreneurship and innovation at Hull University Business School with a special interest in market opportunity assessment.

"I guided the work of two very capable graduate students, Dr Mato Magobe and Joy Morandin Rettori," says Dr Malfense Fierro. "They used their skills in primary and secondary research and in putting together information from disparate sources in an easily accessible way to answer the client's questions. We provided OSL with a valuable internal document far in excess of what is available commercially."

The report included detailed market analysis by regions, applications, end-users and sectors as well as trend analysis and market value covering nine years (2016-2024). It also assessed the impact on the market of the introduction of a new provider, and explored the scale of opportunities associated with applications of a new product across construction, and in composites, fillers or catalysts.

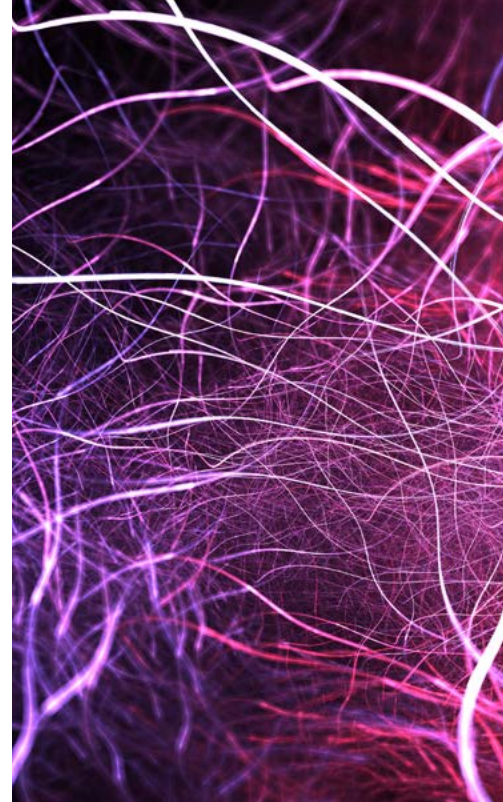
THE RESULT

OSL was impressed by the level of detail the researchers went into - particularly including hard-to-track-down financial data. It was also grateful for the insights the report offered into the technology's potential, the players in the market and the locations involved.

"The report was everything we wanted - and a bit more," says Alastair Robertson.

"Crucially, it gave us more than enough to very quickly focus on one particular application area. Our plans have already got the interest of a large organisation in the UK which is keen to invest in the next stage of commercialisation as part of its strategic focus on new technologies for a low-carbon future.

"The overall experience of working with the AIC was very good - with Dave driving the team making sure things were done on time. I would definitely look at this route again if we need information to help us make informed business decisions in areas that are new to us."



LEAD ACADEMIC/ RESEARCHER

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