



Proof of a great product

"Working with BSI is a big selling point for us: it helps win the confidence of customers. It also helps instil a sense of pride: our employees know we really do care about what we do."

Graeme Hoole,
 Founder and Product Manager
 The Sign Group

The company in brief

The Sign Group is a small manufacturing company founded in Leeds in the North of England in 2008 by Graeme Hoole and Anthony Lowe. It works to the specifications of architects, designers, shop fitters and other signage companies, and, though based solely in Britain, its products can be seen all over the world. Current annual turnover is £1.4m. In 2014, the company asked BSI to test its NeonPlus range, the first of its kind in the UK.

BSI Testing: The business benefits

The benefits of BSI product testing for The Sign Group can be summarised as:

- Increased authority and credibility when speaking to customers
- Increased employee engagement and morale
- The confidence to develop other new, innovative products.

Company background

When it launched in 2008, Leeds-based company The Sign Group, manufacturer of high-quality, bespoke signs, had just a handful of employees. Today, there are 21 people at its Morley site, south-west of Leeds city centre.

"We moved to bigger premises in 2009, and we've grown quickly since then, adding two or three people nearly every year," says Graeme Hoole, product manager and co-founder.

Key to the growth has been NeonPlus, the company's own range of LED-embedded acrylic letters and shapes that's currently illuminating shop fronts, restaurants and bars in nearly every region of the world.

"We're a small British company but many of our customers — architects, designers, shop fitters and fellow signage companies — have clients overseas," Mr Hoole explains.

Developed by The Sign Group and launched in 2012, NeonPlus is an alternative to traditional neon glass, the use of which is likely to be restricted for environmental reasons. (To produce a full range of colours, old-style neon signs combine inert gases with small, but potentially hazardous, amounts of mercury.)

"Our customers know there's a threat to traditional neon glass, and they're looking for something else — something that's safe, easy to ship and good quality. NeonPlus is low-voltage and made of material that's almost indestructible. It's also the brightest product you'll find. We've grown as NeonPlus has gained traction," says Mr Hoole.

Why BSI?

Testing started in 2015 and took about six months to complete. "Every single part for all eight NeonPlus ranges was checked and

tested, all five zones of the manufacturing process were covered. It was a long but rigorous process, and we couldn't fault BSI for their technical knowledge."

Mr Hoole says the bespoke element to BSI's service also worked well for them. "We were able to sit down with them and agree a set of tests that reflected our and our customers' needs. They took a partnership approach — and we liked that."

A motivational tool

BSI testing has provided an additional selling point for NeonPlus and made the company more knowledgeable about quality standards — both of which help build relationships with customers.

There have been internal benefits, too. "Calling BSI in has helped us underline our commitment to quality when we're speaking to our staff," Mr Hoole says. "We can say to new people who weren't with us when NeonPlus was developed, 'This is what we're trying to do, this is the kind of business we are — one that cares so much about quality we've had every part of the range tested by a respected third party'."

"It helps us get the message across that what our employees do matters. Each stage in the manufacturing process contributes to quality — and, because it was so comprehensive, the BSI testing underlined that. No-one wants to go home and think, 'I made a duff product today'. Everyone wants to think they're part of something good."

The future: quality first

Although Mr Hoole and his co-founder and co-owner, Anthony Lowe, aren't related to each other, the Sign Group has the feel of a family business — both of Mr Hoole's parents, Ian and Gillian, work for the company — and there are no plans for that to change in the near future.

"My parents have been in the signage business all their lives, and so have I," Mr Hoole says. "Anthony and I are both hands-on and we said from the start that we didn't want the company to grow to the point where we'd be forced to take on different roles. We've been lucky enough to win repeat business from some of the bigger signers and shop fitting agencies — and we think our emphasis on personal, bespoke service is one of the things that keeps them coming back. We promise fast turnaround and good prices but we're about high-quality, not high volume."

None of this means the company won't expand its range of branded products, though. In fact, BSI has helped give it the confidence for new launches. "Now we know we've got a strong base, we can go further," Mr Hoole says, adding that BSI would be 'first port of call' for new-product testing.

The Sign Group is also thinking of using BSI for certification to the International Standard for Quality Management Systems, ISO 9001. "We've had the Sedex audit [for ethical treatment of staff] at the request of one of our clients, and I think we have many of the reporting procedures already in place," Mr Hoole says. "Now we've had the experience of working with them, BSI would be the obvious choice for that, too."

Contact us to find out how BSI Testing can help your business make excellence a habit.

To speak to an advisor call:

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