

Exchanging vital expertise in food manufacturing



Introducing Maxons

Established in 1885, Maxons is a family-run sweet manufacturer based in Sheffield, which also operates under the Dixons and Jesmona brands. Its confectionery is supplied to a range of specialist retailers, wholesalers, and cash and carries.

Maxons and the MD Club

One of the main benefits of joining the MD Club for Maxons has been the new avenues that it has opened up. Richard Pitchfork, Managing Director explains:

“I can’t speak highly enough of the MD Club. There’s so much activity at both universities, this forum provides the ideal opportunity to discover the right pathways for tapping into their expertise, talent and resources.”

“Talks are relevant and I’ve had useful conversations with specialist exhibitors. I’ve also signposted other MDs to business initiatives that we’ve benefitted from such as Sheffield Hallam University’s Venture Matrix and Design Futures.”

Academic and industry collaborations

Influencing skills through the NCFE Industrial Advisory Board

Sheffield Hallam University’s National Centre of Excellence for Food Engineering (NCFE) is a state-of-the-art centre tackling key challenges for the food industry. A notable collaboration for Maxons has been through the centre’s Industrial Advisory Board, consisting of more than 40 representatives from across the UK food industry.





Richard acts as a small business representative and alongside other members, he has had input into the development of the centre's facilities and courses. These introduce students to a range of food sector businesses, from the biggest international players to bespoke manufacturers like Maxons. Richard explains:

// The Industrial Advisory Board is an excellent way for the food industry to engage with students and outline the skills needed to be successful in the sector when they set out in the world of work."

// With our traditional and handcrafted approach to sweet making we provide a steer on how courses can be delivered, particularly for the Advanced Food and Drink Engineer Degree Apprenticeship. The course is excellent as students come out work ready and with a degree."

Developing a brand with Design Futures

Design Futures is a product and packaging design consultancy based at Sheffield Hallam University. In 2016, Maxons brought Charles Butler, their heritage brand back to life thanks to its research and brand development.

Inspired by the real 19th century Charles Butler and his recipes, the consultancy was responsible for packaging design. Lecturers in Packaging

assessed the environmental impact and packaging trends in different continents and consumer bases.

Design Futures helped tailor the brand for high-end markets across the UK, Australia and Germany. It now represents around 6.5% of Maxon's turnover and is growing steadily.

Investigating export markets through Venture Matrix

Sheffield Hallam University's Venture Matrix is a work-related learning scheme enabling students to put theory into practice through real-world projects. Maxons has engaged students for several activities including a video factory tour, social media and market research towards its export strategy.

Having struggled to export products, especially in Europe, the manufacturer realised there was an appetite for something special in markets further afield. Following the launch in 2016 of Charles Butler, their heritage brand, Maxons tasked Venture Matrix students to assess international markets. Among the challenges was how to trademark and promote the brand in different countries. Richard reveals:

// The research findings from Sheffield Hallam University students helped inform some key business decisions. It told us which markets we should enter, as well as the route we need to take as an exporter."