

Case Study: Lopo Innovation

Entering the UK Market

After a year as an Academic Visitor with the Robotics Group at the University of Essex, Prof Baodong Lou's biomimetic fish, LopoFish, was nearing the final stages of development. In 2014, Professor Lou decided to found a UK company to commercialise the technology.

Professor Lou was introduced to Milner Strategic Marketing Ltd through Innovation Martlesham, an established tech cluster at BT's R&D campus. Over the course of 9 months, Milner advised and supported Professor Lou at all stages of the business process. This included coming up with the company name (Lopo Innovation), advising on Innovate UK grant funding, analysing the market, setting the strategy and implementing a website to communicate with the target audience.

About Lopo Innovation

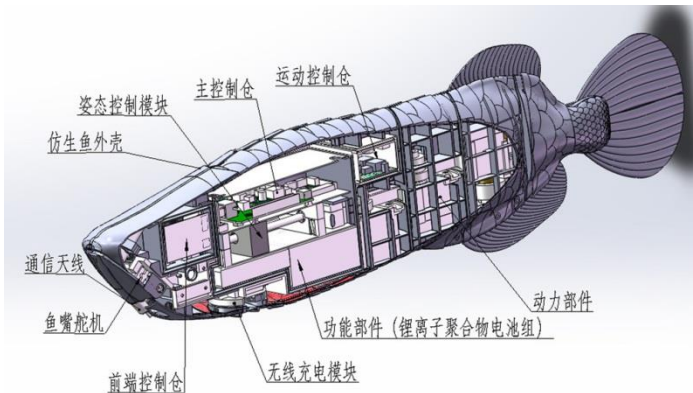
Lopo Innovation Ltd was founded in the UK to commercialise a robotic biomimetic fish, LopoFish.

LopoFish is a robotic fish that mirrors the shape and swimming motion of fish for maximum efficiency. It is fitted with a range of sensors to detect key water quality parameters, and it recharges at a base station that uses a new wave energy solution to generate power. LopoFish offers distinct advantages over traditional AUVs and ROVs for monitoring the oceans, and is targeting the oil and gas and scientific research sectors.

Lopo Innovation's Requirement

Lopo Innovation wanted to understand the best route to market for its new LopoFish. As this was a new innovation within the marketplace, Lopo needed a thorough understanding of what the market for it would look like. In particular, as a Chinese national, Professor Lou needed to understand UK business customs and processes in order to roll out LopoFish.

Milner's expertise in full-service marketing meant it could provide valuable inputs into all areas of Lopo's planning, from understanding the market and deciding which customers to target, to setting the strategy, to communicating with the target audience. In terms of communication, Lopo Innovation needed a website refresh to build credibility with its target customers, as well as with government funding bodies.



Milner's Solution

Milner employed its proprietary methodology to help Lopo Innovation in all areas of marketing.

Understand the market

As a new innovation, the market opportunity for LopoFish was uncertain. There were a number of potential applications for the technology, including entertainment, scientific research, port management and the oil and gas industry. After discussing the potential options, Milner recommended that Lopo Innovation applied for Innovate UK's Proof of Market grant (which is 60% funded) to gain an in-depth, robust and detailed understanding of the market. Work under this grant would quantify the future technology roll-out, analyse the competitive environment and enable Milner to make data-based recommendations.

Milner's proposal for the Proof of Market work fed directly into the application, saving Lopo Innovation time and effort, and the team at Milner reviewed the application to provide some objective feedback. Lopo Innovation was successful in winning the grant funding.

Set the strategy

Milner had in-depth discussions with Lopo Innovation about which segment of the market they should target, taking into account the estimated size of the segment, potential revenue, and possible pricing. As a result Lopo Innovation decided to narrow its focus to 2 core sectors: oil and gas and scientific research.

Implement marketing programmes

Once the market was understood and Lopo Innovation had decided which segments to target, it could tailor the product development path to customer needs. It could install the sensors the oil and gas sectors would require.

Milner overhauled Lopo Innovation's website to accurately reflect its capabilities and target market. This included a video of LopoFish in action to showcase the technology.



Lopo Innovation's Benefits

1. Anglo-Chinese understanding and skills

Milner's in-house Chinese language and cultural capabilities meant that it understood both UK and Chinese business customs and could advise Lopo on how to negotiate the UK market. Meanwhile, Milner could communicate with the client in Mandarin which ensured that all parties had a full understanding of the conversation.

2. Flexible access to marketing experts

Using Milner for its marketing and strategy enabled Lopo Innovation to focus on the product development, drawing on Milner's expertise when necessary. The flexible nature of the arrangement meant that expert support was available as and when required, without the commitments of employing a permanent member of staff. Milner worked collaboratively with Lopo Innovation to provide new ideas and input, acting as a sounding board and an extension of the in-house team.

3. Full-service marketing

Milner's services cover the full marketing planning process, from market analysis through strategy formulation to marketing programmes. This meant that Lopo had one consistent touchpoint for all its marketing services, and did not need to spend time with multiple agencies getting them up to speed. The whole team was up-to-date with the strategy as it developed, and understood how all the work packages fitted together and fed into each other.

4. Saved time and resources

By gaining Milner's advice on the correct route to take with the product at company foundation, Lopo Innovation could take the most efficient approach from the outset. This meant that it did not waste resources pursuing segments of the market that would not be profitable, or develop features that were not needed by target customers.

“When I was setting up my UK company, I came to Milner for guidance on entering the market. The team discussed the best strategy for my product, advised me on the best segments of the market to target, helped me win Innovate UK grant funding and refreshed my website. As they have employees from both the UK and China, they provided me with invaluable knowledge of the UK market but were able to communicate with me in my native language. I look forward to continued co-operation with them in future”

Professor Baodong Lou

CEO

Lopo Innovation Ltd