

2013 International Chamber of Commerce Competition

Best International Project – Acorn Interactive

1.0 Executive Summary

Acorn Interactive has been developed to provide a compelling service to companies seeking to export or develop their export activities. It brings together innovative solutions that materially assist the client in progressing their transactions, complying with regulations, ensuring payment and developing their knowledge and skills.

It builds upon Bristol Chamber of Commerce's proven competencies in this sector and has been designed to assist other chambers to deliver this platform to their members and clients, without incurring the significant investment and risk that such a project inherently entails.

Acorn Interactive positions the Chamber of Commerce as the obvious first point of contact for a company looking to export, enhancing the Chamber's offering as a whole; providing a tool for membership recruitment / retention and an income stream.

2.0 Describe how your project originated

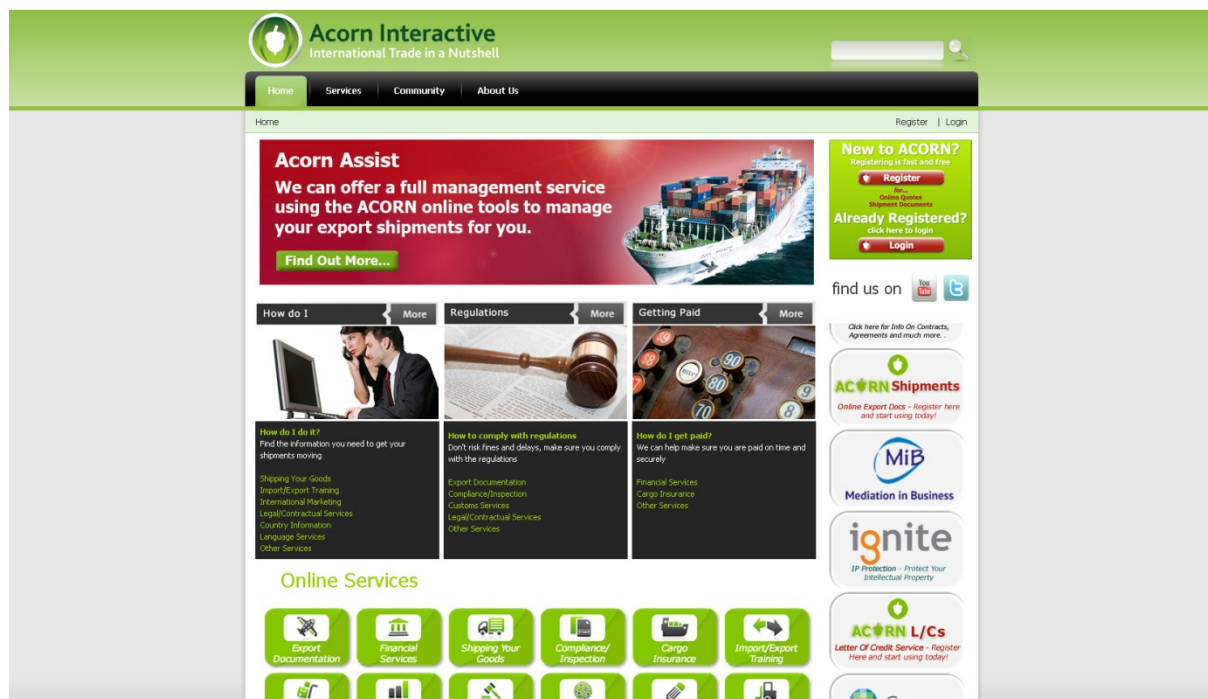
Bristol Chamber of Commerce's export clients are made up of over 50% of businesses that are new or inexperienced in export. Research found that these exporters often do not know where to go to find information, advice and in particular the tools to carry out their export processes. It was found that these exporters often do not know the most appropriate questions to ask or what processes are needed, in order to be a success overseas.

For this reason Bristol Chamber of Commerce sought to create a means to bring together all the elements of the export process and information in one place, building upon their proven competencies in international trade services, specifically addressing the needs of small to medium sized exporters in the form of an online portal – Acorn Interactive.

In order to create Acorn Interactive, Bristol Chamber of Commerce chose to partner with i2i Ltd (Innovate to Integrate) in order to develop the software required. Bristol Chamber of Commerce and i2i have a long history of partnership as they previously collaborated to create e-z cert, the online Certificate of Origin documentation and certification preparation system. E-z cert to date has been a huge success which now processes over 40% of all documents in the UK with over 10,000 users. Over 1 million documents have been processed in the UK using the system.

3.0 Describe your project based on category selected

Acorn Interactive is a web platform which supports exporters with all aspects of international trade. It has been developed and financed by Bristol Chamber of Commerce in partnership with i2i.

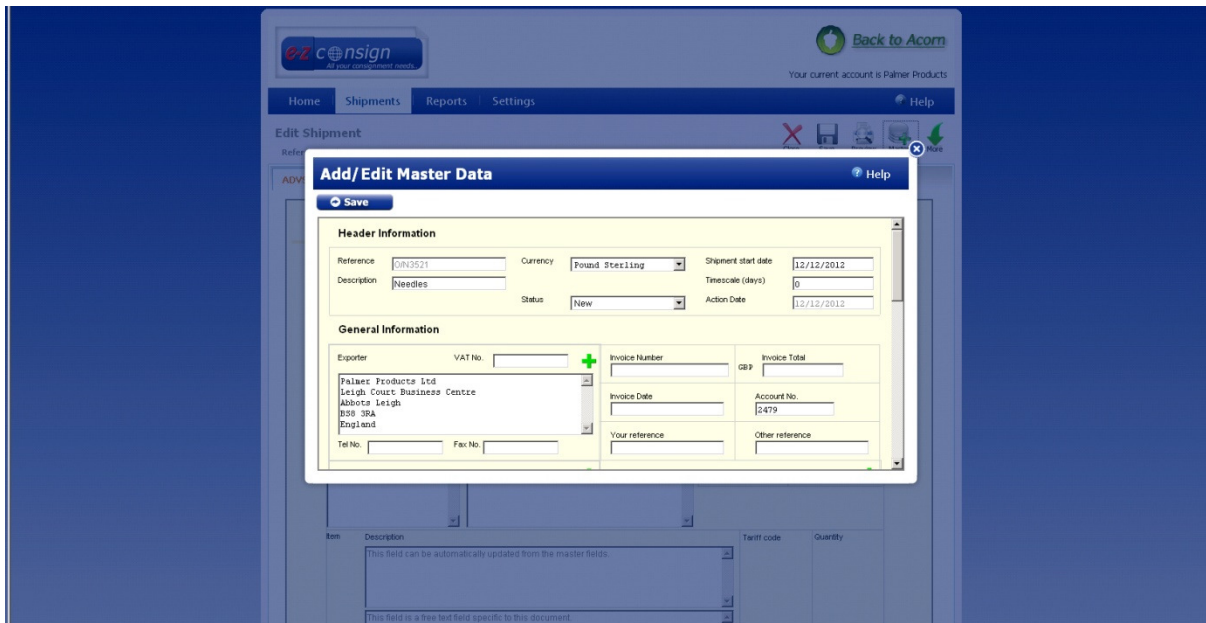


Screen Shot of Acorn Interactive

3.1 Context

Acorn Interactive using E-Consign provides the exporter with a wide range of export documentation capability which allows the exporter to:

- Create all export shipment documentation including Invoices, Packing Lists, Bills of Exchange, Shipping Notes, IATA Certificates, Certificates of Origin plus many more
- Enter data once and apply across all shipment documentation
- Copy and edit previous shipments
- Have knowledge of the status of all shipments
- Allow exporters to sign documents electronically if required
- Add a company logo to documents
- Share shipment data with other sales offices or agents overseas
- Obtain certified documents
- Access reports on shipments undertaken



Single Entry Data Screen within Acorn Interactive

In addition to these core documentation services, Bristol Chamber of Commerce through Acorn Interactive works with leading national and international partners to provide access to exemplary services for our members and other exporters; including:

- Training, both e-training and classroom
- Specialist Financial Services (formalised relations with HSBC and Barclays Bank)
- Language Translation, Marketing Regionalisation and Research
- Credit Checking
- Cargo Insurance
- Freight Forwarding
- Compliance & Inspection Services
- Legal Advice and Contracts
- IP Protection and Optimisation
- Country Information – bespoke relationship with Croners
- Market Identification

Additionally it provides a comprehensive knowledge base and glossary, for easy access to vital information and exporting terms, designed to help exporters find the information they need to grow their business overseas.

The above services have been chosen by identifying the needs our tacit experience shows are required by exporters, combined with extensive market research in conjunction with our members and clients.

3.2 Innovative Character

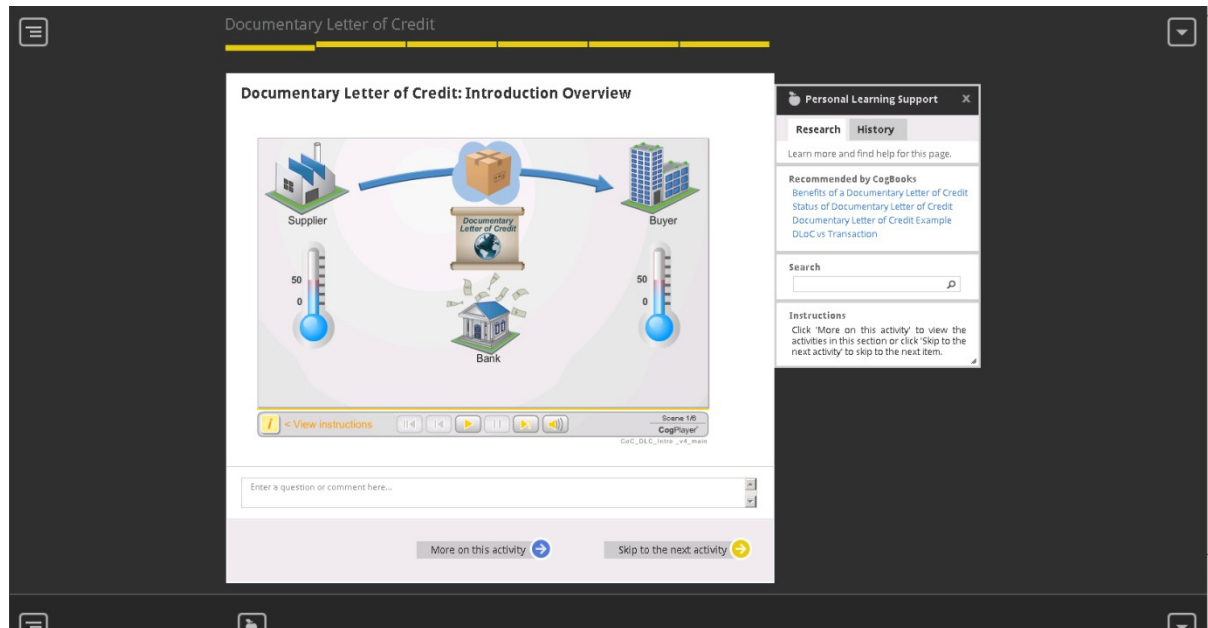
All of the above services are used by members and non members and provide the support network that is so vital to success, resulting in members viewing our chamber as their natural first point of contact for any aspect of international trade.

This unique web based system has revolutionised all aspects of international trade. It allows single data entry for document preparation, and real time access to all documents, including third party controlled access where appropriate. This is the first system of its kind and will change the way that exporters work, saving time, money and resource.

In order to provide inexperienced exporters with the support they need Acorn Assist has also been developed. This is a full management service which allows the Acorn team of experts to undertake the shipment process for the exporter. Acorn Assist includes preparation of all documentation for any shipment including those being paid for by Letter of Credit, liaising with freight forwarders for transport documents, arranging cargo insurance and where required, submitting all documents to the banks for acceptance and payment. This provides the end user with an accurate, reliable and expert service. To date, we have processed 2000 shipments through Acorn. Bristol Chamber of Commerce also undertakes the Acorn Assist Service for over 13 other UK Chambers of Commerce who do not have the resource or knowledge to undertake the service themselves. This 'white-label' solution enables other Chambers to offer a wider range of services to their exporters than they could do on their own. This is operated as a profit share arrangement, providing a financial incentive for the partner chambers, enhancing the overall positioning of the Chamber network.

A further innovation to this project was to create a range of online training courses in order to offer a cost-effective and time efficient solution to learning for exporters. This is a bespoke program which allows cognitive and adaptive interactive learning using an extensive range of learning methods including moving graphics, interactive scenarios and exercises to ensure the subject is fully understood.

The service has launched with two initial interactive modules on Methods of Payment and Letters of Credit with another 12 planned.



Letters of Credit e-learning module screen shot

The training courses provide a range of benefits to exporters such as:

- Cost effective access to up-to-date information and knowledge
- The ability to build and maintain an international edge over competitors
- A simple to use, interactive programme which is intuitive to follow and allows the exporter to learn in bite-sized chunks
- Learning from the experts – this programme is designed and approved by the leading professionals in international trade
- Reducing risk and increasing export profits by importing and exporting
- Options to learn when and where it suits, and at their own pace

Our online international training platform will be available to all British Chambers of Commerce members and exporters, offering an additional element to their international trade proposition and a source of transactional income for them.

We are currently engaged with rolling this provision out via UKTI and other commercial intermediaries.

3.3 Invested Resources

Significant resources have been invested into this project. Initially a £100,000 capital investment from Bristol Chamber of Commerce launched the project. To date approximately £300,000 has been committed to the project. This has been a significant commitment from Bristol Chamber of Commerce into this commercial venture putting its international trade activities to the fore.

A dedicated team has been set up to implement the project, made up of 4 full-time professionals, who between them have over 60 years experience in international trade, marketing and commercial project management.

The wider international trade team (made up of 50 employees) provide support to the project through processing and certifying the documentation and promoting the platform to members and other export clients.

All employees participate in regular training and development to ensure knowledge and skills are current. The Chamber regularly up-skills employees and therefore all members of the export team can provide support across different specialisms, which allows us to provide an unrivalled level of customer service to our clients.

3.4 Difficulties met

Working within the field of international trade and particularly the online market we have encountered a few difficulties in this changing market. Below are some of the most significant problems:

- Export is a complex subject and how to include all the primary elements of exporting in one platform was a challenge
- All partners needed to demonstrate that the services offered by them were of genuine benefit to the end-user and some wanted exclusivity on the site. We want to offer exporters choice and therefore no exclusivity is given
- As the platform will always develop and evolve we had to decide at what point we could go to market bearing in mind that we were and are aware of further enhancements that we want to add but also being aware that we needed to get our platform to exporters as soon as possible
- Accordingly some Chambers wanted to embellish or alter the site to reflect their own bespoke needs or for the site to have additional functionality; we too would like to embrace this approach but need to balance against deliverability and commercial viability. We aspire to continually evolve and develop the offer
- Suspicion from one or two Chambers that we were attempting to take away business from them required us to reassure them that we wanted to enable them to serve their customers better
- Some Chambers have been reluctant to embrace modern technology, claiming that their clients are 'happy with existing services'. We feel that the technology is advantageous and compelling to both the Chambers and their existing clients whilst providing a compelling reason for new users / exporters to engage. Accordingly Chambers are at complete liberty to only engage should they desire

4.0 What have been the results and influence of this project?

We surveyed all of our exporters before creating Acorn to identify their needs to enable them to develop their markets, knowledge and understanding of the exporting processes. An overwhelming 88% stated that they would be interested in a platform which assisted in all aspects of international trade. This is exactly what Acorn has been set up to do. We have also held workshops to gain feedback and insight from exporters to further develop the site.

There are currently 500 exporters using the Acorn Assist service. These exporters can view their records and access data at any time. Over 2000 shipments have utilised the services of the platform.

Barclays Bank are offering elements of the platform to all their exporting companies and those that they are encouraging to export.

A recent survey by Barclays of all their customers revealed that over 60% would be using the document preparation element of the platform.

British Chambers of Commerce are in talks with us regarding how to give 52 UK Chambers access to both the Acorn platform and the on line training so ensuring a consistency of services throughout the UK.

The UK Government through UKTI have shown strong interest in the platform and are considering looking adding the platform to all their International Trade Advisors' inventory of support they can offer.

Bristol Chamber has recently been awarded the National Award for Excellence in International Trade Service by the British Chambers of Commerce with Acorn Interactive being a major part of our entry submission.

5.0 Can your idea be applied to other parts of the world?

The idea can be successfully applied to other parts of the world as the problems encountered with export throughout the world are similar to those within the UK. As this is an online international trade platform the concept could be adapted to suit exporters within any country because the need for the same process tools and documentation is worldwide.

6.0 Why do you feel your project should be selected as a finalist and presented at the 8th World Chambers Congress?

Bristol Chamber of Commerce is widely regarded as one of the leading chambers providing its members and those across the network with a comprehensive range of products and services to facilitate and enhance their ability to trade internationally.

Over recent years we have substantially invested in this core competency to combine traditional levels of service and customer care with modern technology and innovative solutions for the exporters (and members) of tomorrow.

We have been instrumental in developing innovative international trade services for our members, namely e-z cert, our Letter of Credit service and currently Acorn Interactive and our online training service. This shows we are at the forefront of export technologies, supporting chamber members throughout the UK.

We have consulted extensively with members, chambers, government agencies and partners to ensure our resources are being allocated to products and services that will make a significant impact, with three core objectives:

1. Drive an increase in International Trade, benefiting our members and exporters and the economy as a whole
2. Generate robust income streams for our own and other chambers
3. Make the Chamber the first port of call for first time and experienced exporters, when looking for advice and market leading services – providing a complete export solutions package