Case Study: Freefoam Building Products Ltd

Challenges:

Freefoam is a leading manufacturer of innovative PVC-U and PVC-UE building products including a wide range of fascias, soffits, rainwater systems, external cladding and interior decorative paneling, with production sites in Ireland and the UK. Freefoam has been on a sustainability journey since 2019.

Freefoam produce long-life, long-lasting construction products, with guarantees of up to 50 years offered. After their first life these products can be simply size reduced and re-used in the production of new profiles, up to 8 times.

Given Freefoam are in the plastics industry, it's obvious that when doing a SWOT analysis on our business you could view Sustainability as a threat. But, at Freefoam, we see competitive advantage opportunities. We are embracing the opportunity to differentiate ourselves and be market leaders in Sustainability and pursuing good business practices to achieve that.

We constantly strive to reduce our environmental impact, with our sustainability team working on increasing efficiency in our processes and increasing our use of recycled/recyclable materials, including our PVC and packaging. Both of our production plants have their own product reprocessing facilities, where our PVC product can be size reduced for reuse in the production process.

Impact:

Freefoam have been members of the school since 2024, with over 42 hours of active time on the platform since then and 51 resources accessed. We have used the school to assist us in closing knowledge gaps and the development of a number of internal policies around sustainability. The knowledge gained has assisted in the initiation and implementation of projects across our production plant.

With many sustainability projects running across the organisation at any one time, from changes to packaging, waste heirarchy projects to efficiency in our utilities usage such as energy and water.

In late 2023, energy monitors were installed on all machines, so that we can capture detailed information on energy use in the production of various products and then invest in and deliver projects to reduce the energy used to produce them. The monitors allow us to verify the success of any projects undertaken to reduce energy consumption.

Fact box

Company

Freefoam Building Products Ltd. (Ireland)

No of employees

150+

HQ

Centre Park Road, Cork

Website

https://freefoam.ie/professional

Main contact

Patricia Hegarty

Services

Manufacture and distribution of uPVC fascia and soffit, rainwater systems, internally panelling and external cladding across Ireland, the United Kingdom and Mainland Europe

About

Since trading began in Cork, Ireland in 1990, Freefoam has grown into a multinational organisation operating from multiple sites across the UK and Europe.

The company was founded by entrepreneurs Tony Walsh and George Cronin, who saw market opportunities within the building industry and the potential for large-scale PVC extrusion. Freefoam is proud to still be an independently owned company today.

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One project example is the implementation of lagging jackets on the heater bands on both the extruders and co-extruders. This has reduced our energy consumption on all production lines. The jackets speed up the heating process and hold in the heat for longer periods. The consistency of the heat also stablises the process, and the jackets also protect the heater bands from external elements, meaning they last longer and need less maintenance.

Value gained:

Through engagement with the school, we have increased our sustainability knowledge. It has embedded the importance of tracking the use of resources, such as water and energy for example. This had a substantial impact on our decision to install an energy monitoring system. This now enables Freefoam to to easily track and monitor the usage across the plant. Energy efficiency projects can now be easily measured, with a more accurate Return on Investment calculated. This enables smooth cross-deployment of activities across the plant and to our sister plant in Northampton.

We have a reduction in our energy usage across the plant, which in turn has a cost saving for the company. Through the increased use of recyclable/recycled materials in our processes and our efforts on energy and water reduction, we have made a positive impact on our carbon emissions.

Looking ahead, Freefoam will continue to use the resources available on the school platform to increase our knowledge and to help us advance in our sustainability journey.
Resources from industry such as case studies and workshops have already played a vital role in our efforts to improve our resource efficiency.