

Birdon



Innovation is often associated with start ups and the disruption that they can bring to established industries. This narrow definition neglects the fact that companies at the top of their field only stay there and maintain success from constantly investigating new approaches and methods. Birdon is one such example of a company that engages with their workforce to embrace change and constantly improve their processes.

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Briefly describe what it is that the business, company or organisation does?

Birdon is a diversified engineering and services business offering innovative solutions to the military and marine industries. We have operations across Australia, the United States of America and Europe.

Established in 1977, Birdon is a proudly family-owned company dedicated to industry leadership across each of our business divisions: Marine, Engineering, Dredging and Disposals.

What is unique or innovative about the approach to delivering this service or product?

Birdon offers turn-key solutions for our clients – from design to manufacturing and maintenance. We are strongly focused on product development which allows us to offer our clients customised solutions for their needs.

Our most significant bid wins – including the \$259 million US Army Bridge Erection Boat program – have been a direct result of our unique product offerings.

How is innovation addressed within the organisation?

All personnel are encouraged to find new ways to solve problems – no matter what level of the business they are involved in. Our managers are quick to listen and our executive team is quick to identify new business opportunities. We frequently work with external industry experts to develop specific solutions for customers during the EOI and tender phases of projects.

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Our innovation approach has led to new business opportunities through product development. These include the development and manufacturing of our Bridge Erection Propulsion Boats for the worldwide market and the retrofitting of a new NamJet propulsion system developed in the US to the Australian Army boats.

Key examples of innovation within our business include:

- The purchase and further development of a US-based company producing proprietary propulsion systems (Namjet) after identifying that product as the best solution for our bridge erection boats
- The development of iNav – a state of the art, fully integrated electronic control system that is highly compatible with most navigation hardware and sensors. iNAV can control engine throttles, transmission, waterjet bucket and steering as well as provide an intuitive user interface for navigation and full vessel control on a touch screen glass helm.

Does the company currently collaborate with other organisations and industries within the Mid North Coast?

Birdon is an active member of Industry Mid North Coast and the local Chamber of Commerce.

Yes – we collaborate with a number of local providers including:

- Stebercraft (fibreglass boat manufacturer)
- Island Trader – to provide slipping services / wharfage
- HF Hand
- JPF Welding
- Amertech (air conditioning)
- Oxley Electrical
- Rodgers Marine Contracting
- JR Richards
- Hytec
- Mid Coast Cranes
- Hillards Haulage
- Weismantel
- Macleay Valley Transport
- PACE Contracting

What have these collaborations resulted in?

Collaboration has allowed us to create a “one-stop shop” for customers looking for all aspects of design, fit out, maintenance of vessels. It has also allowed us to add value to contracts by sourcing and providing products and services outside of our expertise or capacity.

Why were these collaborations formed?

These collaborations primarily evolved through discussion and a mutual desire to see the region benefit from projects such as these. Relationships formed over time are a key driver of successful collaborations.

What roadblocks or problems have you had to solve for the business, company or organisation to be successful?

Problems in the past have included industry downturns, a "low profile" on the national and international stage, as well as high costs associated with securing larger government contracts (through EOI's and tenders) as a SME.

Being flexible, innovative and persistent has been part of the solution, but there is no substitute for getting the right advice and having experienced, skilled staff.

Has the company had any assistance from government or local council?

The operation of the Island Trader from our commercial wharf would not have been possible without the support of Council and has been of great benefit to our region. We also utilise the support of the federal and state government to try and get in front of key decision makers to deal with opportunities and threats to our business.

What needs to be improved on the Mid North Coast?

Access to external markets is critical to our future growth and success, whether that be through communication or transport. The difficulty and the reality of operating in a regional area such as ours means both of these areas are often a challenge. Given the unique nature of our business, matching specific skill-set requirements can also be challenging sometimes.

What are the advantages to the company being based on the Mid North Coast?

We are located between the key markets of Brisbane and Sydney with a burgeoning population and skill set. The area is still relatively affordable in terms of the costs of operations and we have a fantastic, stable, local team.

In regard to your business, company or organisation what are your plans for the next 12 months?

Our primary focus is to continue developing unique and innovative products in response to industry and customer need. We believe this is what will continue to set us apart in the marketplace.

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