

Capturing Energy

A University of Exeter, CUC graduate, is looking to take the renewable energy sector by storm with his new business.



Overview

Nathan Billings grew up in Newcastle, but his enthusiasm for renewable energy brought him the 460 miles to Penryn to study on what was then the only BSc course in the subject, offered by the University of Exeter at the Combined Universities in Cornwall (CUC) campus.

The course proved inspirational, as Nathan explains. "It's really exciting to be involved in what is not yet a fully mature industry, because so many answers have not yet been found. There's so much room for new ideas and possibilities, and by putting in your own thoughts you can actually contribute to that!"

Nathan graduated with a first-class degree in Renewable Energy in July 2006, one of the first eight UK graduates ever to gain this qualification. It was an especially remarkable achievement given that, during the last year of his degree, Nathan had set up his own business – Capture Ltd.

Technology

Demand for renewable energy is growing out of all proportion to supply, particularly with the introduction of new building regulations that require developers to meet specific energy ratings. Capture offers a truly professional advisory, design and installation service for customers interested in small-scale, on-site generation systems using either solar, heat pumps or wind power.

It also runs training courses in installation and maintenance to heating engineers in Cornwall and beyond, and supplies equipment to the trade.

Support

In planning the business and refining its strategy, Nathan and his four co-directors benefited from various forms of support available in Cornwall. Enterprise Edge, the county's dedicated market research service, produced an in-depth report on the domestic renewables market. Nathan also pays tribute to the specialised business mentoring that he received via Exeter University (with help from the Sainsbury-funded GATSBY scheme). And Cornwall Pure Business came up trumps by helping to locate premises in the shape of a 1,700sq ft industrial unit in Pool, where Capture has now built a small house to demonstrate different types of domestic renewables systems.

Basing the business in Cornwall was a key decision for the company's future. "Cornwall is a huge growth area," Nathan says, "because there's already a great awareness of green issues and a commitment to achieving local targets for sustainability. It really is an ideal place to start a company like this."

