



Case study **Unisnacks**

A sustainable food company with an inspiring mission, Unisnacks is thriving in Central Bedfordshire

Unisnacks is not only one of the UK's leading importers and distributors of exotic snacks, confectionery and beverages from Far East Asia, it is also a trailblazer in sustainable and ethical practices. The company's home is Central Bedfordshire, where it has gathered together all the ingredients required to create a world-beating business that cares about its product, its people and the planet.

Wherever you live in the UK, it's likely that you've bought a snack that has been imported and distributed by Unisnacks. More than 23,000 retail outlets carry at least one Unisnacks product, which is about a third of the total number in the country.

So whether you prefer to shop at Selfridges, B&M, Tesco or ethnic and independent supermarkets, you probably already have a taste of what the company is all about. It brings brilliant flavours from the Far East and makes them available to the UK consumer.

The range of ready-to-eat products the company handles is varied too, and comprises confectionery, biscuits and wafers, noodles, savoury snacks and beverages. Unisnacks works with the top suppliers as well, in countries including Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Thailand, China, and Vietnam.

Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) has had the great privilege of supporting Unisnacks along its inspiring journey, helping the company in areas including its site search, planning, technology funding and training.

We spoke with the company's Head of Marketing Dr. Sharaaz Jaffar and Marketing Communications Manager, Rebecca Paulose, about the business and its operations in Biggleswade, at the heart of Central Bedfordshire.



Photo credit: Dr. Sharaaz Jaffar, Unisnacks' Head of Marketing, and Rebecca Paulose, Unisnacks' Marketing Communications Manager.

Case study **Unisnacks**

Place and people

Unisnacks today employs 65 people at its 3.5 acre head office site, which includes around 40,000 square feet of state-of-the-art high-bay warehousing space across three separate buildings. It relocated to its current centre of operations in 2021.

Sharaaz explained: "The company was actually founded down in Slough as 'Ducom' back in 2007. We started with just 428 sq ft of warehousing which very quickly trebled. Successive moves, first to Welwyn Garden City and then to Welham Green, gave us the space we needed to expand at the time."

"By 2016 though, the cost of renting commercial space in Hertfordshire had almost quadrupled and no longer made any economic sense. We needed significantly more space to continue expanding and we decided to buy our own property to begin mitigating some risk."

It was at this point that CBC first provided support, introducing Unisnacks to a variety of property options at its Stratton Business Park near Biggleswade. With the UK's exit from the EU, plans were put on hold until 2019, when CBC once more helped the company resume the property search.

This time it introduced Unisnacks to the developers of its new Great North Business Park, also near Biggleswade on the A1. The company was successful in securing the development of three new units at the site, importantly on a freehold basis.

Sharaaz continued, "With the help and support of Central Bedfordshire Council, and a slight pause for reflection in the face of Brexit, we eventually made the move to Biggleswade in 2021, to our own bespoke premises that gave us all the resources we needed to continue growing the business."

Recruiting its personnel primarily from the surrounding towns and villages of Central Bedfordshire, Unisnacks is very mindful of the important role that diversity and wage levels play in the company's success.

Sharaaz said: "As a business that acts as a bridge between suppliers in the Far East and consumers in the UK, it really pays for us to be international in our outlook. And the rich, diverse nature of the Central Bedfordshire population really is a great fit with the global nature of our business."



"And we care greatly about looking after hard-working people. Yes, we're accredited by the Real Living Wage Foundation, but more than that, we believe it's incumbent on us to monitor the true cost of living and to benchmark against industry best practice."

"We recognise that it is our people, our teams of people, that are our real power and so we nurture a very unified culture in the workplace, one that encourages collaboration and creativity – it sounds twee I know, but there really is no such thing as a bad idea here!"

Case study
Unisnacks

The supplier's friend

For a business maintaining its website in 16 different languages, it's also evident that Unisnacks likes to get close to its suppliers. Indeed, the more we hear about the way in which the company directly supports them, the more the simple mantle 'importer and distributor' seems insufficient.

Rebecca described their approach: "We currently work with 35 different suppliers and we like to take a proactive partnership approach to help break down any barriers to market entry. This might include encouraging a supplier to make a healthier recipe, to advise them on UK food regulations and standards, or make recommendations on brand identity."

"It's all about effective localisation, and importantly it might also include help with reducing packaging waste or moving to sustainable materials. As a form of encouragement, we are now passing the plastic tax back to our suppliers. Recognising sustainability is a global issue, suppliers accept it and it influences positive change."

"We help suppliers in lots of other ways too. A good example is a farm-based supplier of noodles that we work with in Vietnam. To meet increased demand they needed to expand their workforce. With many workers unable to fund childcare and to return to work, Unisnacks funded an on-site crèche. Workers were able to return to work and the supplier resolved its workforce shortage."

Training has also played an important role in Unisnacks' approach to overseas supplier relations, with seven staff attending a variety of CBC sponsored courses covering post-EU exit international trading. Delivered by Bedfordshire Chamber of Commerce on behalf of CBC, the courses included: Customs Declarations & Compliance, Incoterms, Tariff Classification and Customs Compliance & Savings.



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Rebecca Paulose
Unisnacks' Marketing Communications Manager

Case study
Unisnacks

Embracing technology



Talk to Unisnacks about the technology of logistics automation and control and a real sense of 'duty' shines through. It's as much about people as it is about machines, as Rebecca explained:

"Yes, investment in the latest technology is about helping us to become more productive, to save energy, to augment our service etc., but it's also about helping our people to do an even better job, using people in a more considered way and improving their quality of life as a result."

By employing dynamic cloud-based enterprise resource planning (ERP), the company ensures a seamless supply chain, with complete ordering control and real-time visibility keeping the risk of any error to an absolute minimum. This has also supported Unisnacks' BRCGS Storage and Distribution accreditation, ensuring the quality and safety of food products throughout the supply chain.

And in the warehouse, artificial intelligence (AI)-driven systems help people take care of the handling of 14,000 pallets and 800 different products, eliminating human error and minimising overheads.

Through advanced machine learning, the system recognises popular items and places them first in the warehouse aisles, and it identifies the heaviest items and places them at the bottom of the aisles. Use of space is optimised, pallet carrier collisions are avoided... It's clever stuff!

The result is faster order fulfilment, from order placement to order fulfilment typically in less than two hours.



Case study
Unisnacks

Greener logistics

As a business that imports and distributes to retail outlets throughout the UK, Unisnacks believes that its home in Biggleswade couldn't be better located. It is almost equidistant from the seaports of Felixstowe, Dover and Southampton and ideally placed for servicing all parts of the country.

Sharaaz said, "The area we're now based in is often called 'the Golden Triangle'. The A1 is on our doorstep, the M1's to our west and the M25 is due south, so logistically it's very well located. The big population centres of England and Wales are all within four hours, and the highest disposable income areas of London and the South East are easy to get to."



Setting the right environmental, social and governance (ESG) standards are important to Unisnacks. To help minimise its environmental impact, the company provides an electric shuttle bus to take its people to and from the local bus and train terminals, and its entire sales force have switched to electric vehicles that are speed regulated. Renewable energy options for all delivery vehicles are also being considered.

This environmental drive is evident in the investment in waste water recycling and renewable energy generation. Approximately half of Unisnacks' energy consumption is supplied through an extensive investment in roof top solar panels. CBC was also able to support further investments with help to secure a £15K grant from South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership (SEMLEP) to fund environmentally friendly repackaging capabilities.

Case study
Unisnacks

A bigger purpose

In talking at length to Sharaaz and Rebecca about the many facets of the Unisnacks business, it's evident that from the top down the company has a clear, guiding mission – a greater purpose that it really believes in.

Sharaaz explains, "Our goal is to make a positive change to anyone who crosses our path, whether they be customers, suppliers, employees, or the local communities and institutions we work closely with."

Unisnacks sees its profession as a noble one, with a heart and a duty of care. Like all of us, it despairs at the current international conflict and cost of living crisis; while making a profit is its key aim, the company recognises its fundamental responsibility in helping people to live not only through food but by other means as well.

Sharaaz said, "Food, after all is said and done, is a common language; it's like music, it brings people together, it connects people. When you travel through a country you try its food, you like it and it helps you build a greater relationship and understanding with that country. The world is a better, more peaceful place as a result."

CBC continues to support Unisnacks in its proud endeavours, assisting with a planning application for additional building on its existing site. Not to mention initial research into an additional site nearby to accommodate a new and exciting business venture. Watch this space.



To find out more about Central Bedfordshire as the ideal location for your advanced logistics business investment, contact our inward investment team at

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