

Formway Furniture Leaders in design

TechNZ supports the manufacturing sector to develop new products, processes and services and improve technical knowledge and R&D ability. Up to \$50 million is invested each year in New Zealand businesses to grow world-class companies through innovative technology.



The Company

Formway Furniture is an industry leader in office furniture design, with principles of sustainability embedded into every aspect of business. It began as a small-scale manufacturer of steel-based furniture in the 1950s. New owners in the 1980s introduced manufacturing techniques and design expertise. A history of producing award winning furniture began in 1989 when Formway's ZAF chair won the Prince Philip Award for excellence in product design. Prince Philip ordered two chairs as a result. Today, Formway manufactures and markets high-performance workplace products in New Zealand and Australia and licenses its products globally. It carries out custom design, project management, intellectual property licensing and contract design.

The Research and Development

In 2000, TechNZ provided \$100,000 for Formway to bring in experts to help develop in-house eco-design principles and carry out a life-cycle analysis of chairs and suitable materials. The project not only resulted in the LIFE chair, voted the best ergonomic chair in the world, but established a commitment to making environmental considerations a core part of every design brief.

"That was groundbreaking at the time," says Ed Burak, Formway's General Manager, Marketing. "American clients could instantly see that the LIFE chair was a technological breakthrough but viewed the environmental aspect as quaint. Now we sell 140,000 of the chairs a year in the US, and their sustainability is a key attraction for buyers."

"The TechNZ partnership has been really valuable. It shared the risk and made it possible for us to engage a range of expertise we didn't have in-house," says Mr Burak.

“ Design-led research and development has built an international reputation for Formway and confirmed it as the 'go to' place for inspirational and leading-edge workplace products. Principles of sustainability are embedded in every aspect of Formway's business, from design studio and workshop floor to its relationships with suppliers and customers. ”

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New Zealand Government



Fact File

Location: Seaview,
Lower Hutt

Staff: 250 in
New Zealand and
Australia

Exporting: Accounts for
around 70% of revenue

**First major TechNZ
investment:** 2000

**Value of TechNZ
investment:** More than
\$1.7 million since 2000

**Projected revenue from
latest R&D:** \$30 million
by 2011

“ Formway is a global leader in its segment of the office furniture market. Partnering with TechNZ has helped take the business to the next level. The company is important to New Zealand as a manufacturer, as a business that has excelled in design and one that is now adding science disciplines into its product development. ”

Lins Kerr, Sector Business Manager, TechNZ

TechNZ, the Foundation for Research, Science and Technology's business investment programme, has invested \$1.4 million into the development of two products – Formway's newly released HUM workplace system and another innovative workplace solution to be launched in 2009.

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With HUM, Formway set out to break new ground, talking to people at every level in workplaces around the world about their attitudes, habits and workplace culture.

When Formway's stakeholder panel rejected the initial design, saying the team had not yet come up with a paradigm-shifting product, Formway brought in outside expertise in new areas of science to provide new understanding about how people think and behave in the workplace.

Other experts, engaged using TechNZ investment, developed Formway's environmental strategy and researched and sourced appropriate materials for HUM, helping the company build a database of knowledge that will feed into future products.

HUM is the result of overlaying the learning from the scientists with customer feedback. The system improves workplace dynamics through features such

as neutral 'meet me' spaces between desks and 'see me' screens that show staff when a colleague is busy working and when they are free for a quick exchange.

"Every feature in the system is there for a reason. We don't have to convince people that what we have designed will work, as it's based on knowledge. It works because it responds to people's latent needs and thinking," says Design Manager Bob Stewart.

The Achievements

Formway's success is founded on a single, underpinning idea – 'make work better'. Its commitment to R&D has earned it an international reputation for inspirational and leading-edge workplace products.

The company's FREE system won awards after its launch in 1999, and the LIFE chair has received 11 international awards since its launch in 2002. The LIFE chair now accounts for about 20 per cent of Formway's annual revenue of around NZ\$45 million, two-thirds of which comes from export sales. Formway has signed a new licence partner in the United States to produce HUM workstations for the US market.

HUM and related products developed during the same R&D project are projected to be earning the company \$NZ30 million by 2011. Staff numbers have doubled in the past six to eight years, to 250 in New Zealand and Australia.

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Formway used experts to gain an understanding of how people think and behave in the workplace. This influenced the product design.



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