



SmartKem Ltd

Head of Engineering

## 01 Background

SmartKem is a leading supplier of highperformance organic semiconductor materials for the manufacture of truly flexible displays and electronics across a range of applications such as smartwatches, smartphones and tablets.

The overall market for printed electronics is rapidly expanding and global growth forecasts anticipate that this will be a \$45 billion industry by 2018. For SmartKem, the most significant area of opportunity is the manufacture of OTFT backplanes for flexible next generation displays.

Display manufacturers such as Panasonic, LG, Sony and Samsung have stated their intent to move to printed OTFT backplanes and make the transition to lower cost conformal displays. As such, SmartKem has reached an important stage in its development with strong demand building for its technology from blue chip customers in Asia and the US.

Led by CEO, Steve Kelly, the company has an experienced management team with a strong heritage in organic semiconductors and a successful track record in building materials-based technology businesses.

In addition to this, SmartKem is supported by high profile investors: BASF Venture Capital, Octopus Investments, Finance Wales and the Entrepreneurs Fund.

With series A funding secured, the business was transitioning from the technology development phase to selling a product, with commercial adoption of its technology anticipated within the next 2-3 years. In preparation, SmartKem had begun building up its business development and customer support capability and were ready to address the product implementation strategy - which would require the transfer of a technology package into electronics manufacturers and the support of this technology as manufacturers move into mass production.

To facilitate this programme, the business needed to appoint an experienced Head of Engineering who would manage all the product transfer activities into their customers. This role would be absolutely vital if SmartKem was to establish itself as a leading provider of organic semiconductor materials.

Having exhausted their network, SmartKem retained Intramezzo to undertake the search for a suitable candidate. We have worked within the investor portfolio before and had a strong point of reference, together with a track record in display technology, having worked for Display Data, Liquivista and Plasticlogic

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STEVE KELLY, CEO/FOUNDER SMARTKEM LTD

## 02 The challenge

Identifying key technical talent can often prove difficult as these individuals rarely raise their head above the parapet and/or look for a role.

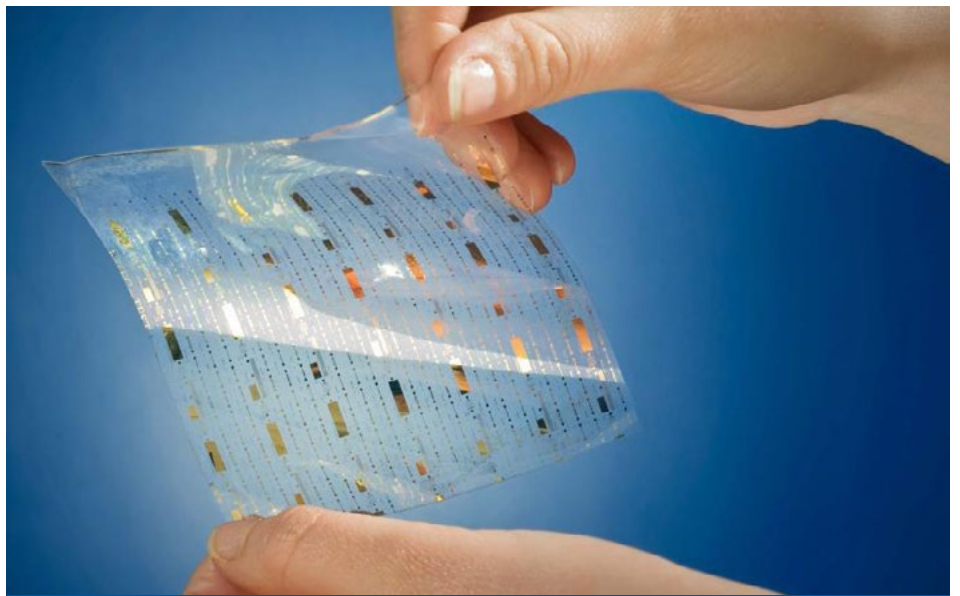
Furthermore, there is a scarcity of people with experience of transferring technology to Asia. The key challenge for Intramezzo would be finding individuals who possessed the full suite of specific skills and experience that SmartKem sought.

The primary focus of the Head of Engineering would be leading the successful execution of the product implementation strategy; driving the product transfer activities into the electronic manufacturers and supporting the integration of the technology as it moves into mass production.

Candidates, therefore, would need to be a proven electronics/semiconductor engineer who had spent at least 5-10 years providing field support and building a track record of managing technical services for key customer accounts (in particular, large blue-chip electronics companies in the Asian market).

The breadth of experience required spanned a number of disciplines - including product management, engineering, customer and technical sales support, technology transfer and project management.

As such, we knew there would be only a small and finite pool of individuals who met all of these criteria and that making a successful appointment would hinge entirely on our ability to find them.



SmartKem high-performance organic semiconductors enable flexible, lightweight electronics.

## 03 What we did

The first step was to work closely with the key stakeholders to define the role and ideal candidate. Once the detailed specification had been developed and agreed, Intramezzo utilised its extensive, multi-channel search approach to reach beyond typical networks.

Taking into account the company's preference to find someone from an electronics display background, our research began in this market - identifying and investigating all relevant organisations. The search was extended beyond the UK, into mainland Europe (given the display capability that exists on the continent) and included companies involved in device development, electronic materials and display OEMs. From here, we went on to dissect these businesses and their structures to uncover who within them could be relevant.

Anticipating that such individuals would be thin on the ground - and those that did exist would be difficult to find - we simultaneously worked within our referral networks alongside promotion of the position through various channels, in order to ensure our search was as exhaustive as possible. Given our experience in displays and, more broadly, electronics, we were able to draw on the expertise of a range of contacts.

This no-stone-turned methodology paid dividends and after identifying, approaching and profiling the target list of candidates, Intramezzo submitted a shortlist of six individuals who met the specification and represented a broad cross-section of backgrounds and seniority. In doing so, we were able to offer SmartKem the luxury of choice in a highly restricted talent pool. Having a range of options proved crucial - the business was moving at such a pace that the exact nature of the role and its remit was constantly evolving.

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Steve Kelly,  
CEO & Founder SmartKem Ltd

“I asked Georgina from Intramezzo to take on an assignment to find a Head of Engineering for SmartKem. The brief was tricky, not just because of the seniority of the position, but also because of the very specialised technical requirements of the role.

From the outset, Intramezzo worked very closely with us to understand the job description and to gain a clear rationale on the overall business goals and objectives. This was particularly helpful as it allowed Intramezzo to

pitch the opportunity to candidates from a broader perspective. It also helped them to narrow down prospects who they didn't feel would fit into the SmartKem culture.

The short list of candidates was delivered within the scheduled timeframe and from that shortlist we appointed exactly the person we were looking for. The candidate has since taken up the position and is already adding great value to the management team at SmartKem.

Intramezzo were excellent throughout. Their research was thorough, communications were clear and they had the dexterity to adapt to the changes we requested part way into the project. Overall we were very satisfied with the service we received and the successful outcome of the project.”

## 04 The outcome

**Following their own interview process, SmartKem appointed Chris Nice to the role of Head of Engineering.**

Chris brought with him a wealth of experience from senior process engineering positions in the Asian display sector and has a proven track record in process development and technology transfer in display and semiconductor device fabrication.

Through years of working within Asia, he had developed a strong understanding of the requirements of local manufacturers and the delivery of technology to meet their demands. In his most recent role at Huawei, his focus was on the development and yield improvement of e-beam, plasma deposition and etch processes as well as the subsequent technology transfer between UK production and Chinese based counterparts.

This experience and understanding made him a great choice for SmartKem - and will see him well equipped to effectively manage and optimise the adoption cycle of the technology platform with leading Asian manufacturers.

Having worked in various senior technical and engineering roles throughout his career for companies including CDT, Liquivista and Plastic Logic, Chris has extensive knowledge of both semiconductor and display technology markets. His additional expertise in mapping, packaging and transfer of processes for Asian manufacturers will complement the already impressive SmartKem team.

If you would like more information,  
please contact us on +44 (0)207 520 9290

+44 (0)203 874 8200 | [info@intramezzo.co.uk](mailto:info@intramezzo.co.uk) | [www.intramezzo.co.uk](http://www.intramezzo.co.uk)



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