

# THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX

AT ITS NEW GREENVILLE  
HQ, SOFTBOX SYSTEMS  
CRAFTS PACKAGING TO  
KEEP PHARMACEUTICALS AT  
THE RIGHT TEMPERATURE


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PHOTOGRAPHY

When pharmaceutical companies need to move their products from one location to another, they must maintain strict temperatures. Enter Softbox Systems, a U.K. firm with a new headquarters in Greenville. Softbox designs and manufactures temperature-controlled packaging for the life sciences sector.

“Let’s say you need to get a diagnostic reagent from the U.S. to China, or insulin from Denmark to Brazil,” says Softbox Systems President Wayne Langlois. “We’ve produced packaging which can get large quantities of commercialized goods anywhere in the world.”

The company participates in two major sectors of the pharmaceutical economy. One is clinical trials. Drugs that are being reviewed by the FDA and need to be transported for use in clinical trials need specialty packaging to be transported. The other sector is, naturally, the commercial pharmaceutical sector: drugs being shipped from such household names as Pfizer and Merck.

The company offers both off-the-shelf and customizable solutions. They have a pool of products they’ve developed over the years for one client that others might see a use for, but they also offer custom solutions to deal with changing industry requirements or unique situations. Pharmaceutical packaging is rarely one-size-fits-all.



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Softbox General Manager | **John Hammes**



"You don't go into FedEx and pick out the third-biggest box and tape it and ship it," says Langlois. "You can have millions of dollars of pharmaceutical products on one pallet, and if it goes outside temperature range and a million dollars is lost, obviously the biotech companies are smart enough to know they don't want that kind of waste and risk to patient safety. They'll invest in the right packaging solution."

Typically, clients come to Softbox Systems because their current packaging solution isn't working or they are exploring other, more cost-effective options for their specific trade lane or product life cycle.

"They might decide to go by boat instead of plane, and they need our expertise to help them design the right packaging solution for the shipping route they might have," says Langlois.

The company, with worldwide headquarters just outside Oxford, England, opened its first U.S. production site in Greenville in September 2013. This past June, they opened a new 65,000-square-foot facility on Park Commerce Road, more than doubling their space and capacity. The new facility expands the company's global technology base by including a 2,000 square-foot laboratory for client testing and the advancement of packaging solutions, temperature-controlled packaging operations, a large training center for staff development, and the company's finance, quality, customer service, and management teams.



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The new facility is meant to be an "atmospheric center," with more space, more talent, and more technology in the labs. With the acquisition of companies in Colombia, Panama, and Mexico, the Greenville facility will now be the headquarters for Softbox Systems' Americas division.

Although Langlois jokes that the area's climate is what lured him and Americas General Manager John Hammes to Greenville — "I'm from Toronto, he's from Michigan. We said it's too cold up here, let's go south" — the truth is considerably more complex and complimentary of the area's amenities and business environment.

Softbox Systems' largest product requires a specific size of machine to create the molded parts. At the time, there were only two vendors nationally that offered this machine. One was in South Carolina, the other in Georgia.





"We ended up going with the Georgia molder because of their machine capabilities, quality standards, and national footprint," says Hammes. "Subsequent to that, when we began looking where we wanted to put our headquarters, we looked at several states, but South Carolina, Greenville County, the GADC [Greenville Area Development Corporation], we worked with them and they put together an inviting packaging together to keep us here and open the new headquarters."

Langlois agrees.

"I have nothing but positive things to say about how the Greenville government constituencies, the builders, the business development community came together to help us," he says. "We're not a huge company like BMW, but we needed to feel like somebody was interested in us."

As it happens, South Carolina—and the Upstate—are very interested in companies like Softbox, which add to the state's burgeoning life sciences sector.

Hammes praises the efforts of SCBIO, with whom the company works, for really bringing the industry to life.

"I love the fact that they've got a lot of incubation going on," he says. "They've got a great foundation today and a good vision of where they want to go, and they're executing it."

Softbox Systems is playing right into their vision.

"We're part of that vision for Greenville that has a good history of attracting innovative companies," says Langlois. "At the end of the day, our mission is the same as the pharmaceutical companies or the healthcare system in Greenville: making a better life for patients."