

Economic Development and Covid Recovery Plans – Improving Connectivity

The Kitesurf Centre

Growing On-line Business – A Case Study from Camber



The Kitesurf centre is run by three brothers Thomas, Tristan and Rupert Cawte. The business, comprising of a school and retail shop is based in a corner of Broomhill Sands Car Park next to the beautiful Camber Sands. The shop, classroom, storage and equipment are housed in a new eco off grid 'all singing and dancing' facility built during the Covid Pandemic lockdown. The shop also operates on-line retail and has the back-office facilities needed to package and dispatch their high-end kit and accessories to customers in the UK and abroad. Currently the business employs 8 year-round full-time members of staff with many more employed during the summer months to meet demand for instruction and kit. Due to the proximity to London and the high spending nature of their customers The Kitesurf Centre has had a positive impact on the economic viability of Camber village.

The brothers initially set up the school in 2008 opening the shop in 2009 as ancillary to their teaching business. Initially they sold online through a generic web based third party facility

that charged commission on sales. However, as on-line sales grew and commission mounted, they decided in 2018 to launch their own on-line shopping facility embedded in an upgraded website.

Merging the teaching and retail elements of their business into what is effectively one portal marked a dramatic growth of retail sales. While the website was expensive to build, it is now maintained in-house which means that the brothers are able to respond quickly to business risks such as notifying students that a class is cancelled due to weather conditions through to changes of marketing focus due to BREXIT.

The CAWTE brother have created an impressive eco business which continues to grow. BREXIT has been challenging for a business that exported 30% of its online sales to the EU. However, a drive to attract new business in the US and Australia is beginning to pay off.

Here are their top tips for business who might be thinking of dipping their toes into on-line sales.

- Using an online shop with commission charges is a good way to test the strength of the market but once sales take off consider developing your own platform to cut out third party agency costs.
- Make sure you draw up a business plan. Developing an in-house online sales platform is not cheap and the cost has to be set against savings in commission charges. The business plan also needs to factor in how back office space needs to change as turnover grows.
- Bring everyday maintenance of the site 'in-house' so you are not reliant on a third party to update the content.
- Understand how website's work especially SEO (Search Engine Optimisation). Rother District Council has funded courses for businesses to learn more about how to successfully market your business online. For more information contact Melanie Powell: Regeneration Officer on 01424 787506 / melanie.powell@rother.gov.uk

