

The Link

Ride the recession and boost your business

March/April 2009

The wonder of Wellies

There can't be many people in Britain who don't know that the closed Woolworths store in Dorchester is now open again – as Wellworths.

The story of the reopening of the store by former Woolworths manager Claire Robertson caught the imagination of the nation's media.

In a time of gloom and recession it has been a welcome good news story.

As the Dorchester manager for Woolworths for five years, Claire was convinced that whatever the overall problems of the Woolworths chain, there was not too much wrong with the basic trading model – which was why she and the store's landlord set out to largely recreate it.

After the news broke, BBC TV, ITN, Sky News and a dozen other national radio and TV stations were beating a path to the Dorchester store.

When launch day came the shop was declared open, in the midst of a media frenzy, by TV and radio presenter Chris Evans, who had offered to do the job when he first heard the story.

As soon as he had declared



Claire Robertson on the opening day of her new store, Wellworths in Dorchester

the store open, customers were flooding in.

Claire knows that in terms of publicity no one could have a better start. But she is level-headed enough to

know that what matters most is what happens next – which is why, from the outset, she sought out Business Link's advice.

As the store's former

manager when it was Woolworths, she knew that it had been trading profitably before. But now,

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After a dream opening day Claire looks to future

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as an entrepreneur, she was aware that there were a number of gaps in her expertise that needed filling.

She said: "When I was the store manager for Woolworths, a number of aspects of the business were automatically covered for me by head office and regional administrators.

"Now I need to know how to handle those things myself, which was why I looked to Business Link for advice."

Business Link adviser Beryl Griffiths has already been talking to Claire. She said: "Health and Safety legislation was one important area – guidance to ensure that Claire could maintain processes that were operating previously, and comply with all the relevant legislation.

"Employment legislation is another. We will organise referral to organisations that support small to medium-sized businesses. The Federation of Small Business also have a useful legal helpline for members.

"To help with contracts of employment and PAYE, I signposted Claire to the Business Link website that has an interactive Contract of Employment contract and to HMRC information for new employers.

"We were discussing the issues of stock control and cashflow, and I sent Claire a cashflow template and gave advice on stock and order disciplines and the relationship of stock control on cashflow.

"Claire realises that she could benefit from more knowledge of finance, and I



Business Link adviser Beryl Griffiths is helping Claire from the outset

have asked an adviser from Train To Gain to contact her to see how they can help in training terms.

"And I have asked Vivian Dunn from Dorset Mentors (Dormen) to identify a suitable business mentor for Claire.

"I'm really pleased to help her with such an exciting project. I am sure that she will do well, and the support from Business Link at this key time should help to set firm foundations for the business."

A TV documentary crew have been following Claire's progress with the Wellworths store project, and the resulting programme is likely to be seen before long on BBC1.



Claire with TV and radio presenter Chris Evans, who volunteered to open the store

Bakery

To the casual eye the Honeybuns bakery, south of Sherborne, might look like an informal set-up, operating as it does from a thatched farmhouse and a number of unassuming outbuildings

That appearance belies the reality. Owners Matt and Emma Goss-Custard, whose workforce has grown from six to 26 people in just over six years, have a keen eye for business.

Their products feature in coffee shops, delis and farm outlets, but they are also to be found on the shelves of Waitrose and The Royal Windsor Farm Shop, and in the cafés of John Lewis, Sainsbury and Centre Parcs.

And no one appreciates the uncertainties created by the current recession better than Emma.

Demand for what Honeybuns produces is growing – unaffected, it seems, by the economic downturn. But Emma is well aware that demand, in itself, is not remotely enough to ensure the business's survival.



Adviser David Pitfield

A world of business insight, a wealth of

developing a unique recipe



Product development: Emma Goss-Custard is still hands-on



Hive of activity: the Honeybuns office is in the Bee Shack at Naish Farm.

"In a recession, things like chocolate and affordable treats can actually do very well," says Emma. "But our success doesn't just rest on what we can do ourselves. Two of our wholesalers have just gone under, and when a wholesaler goes they might have ten thousand pounds' worth of your stock, which you are not going to get back.

"There is not much we can do about that except to spread the risk by dealing with a number of different wholesalers and doing some of the distribution ourselves.

"We are all very vulnerable at the moment. We have to work very hard to be doing things better than our competitors and be aware of all the possible dangers.

"I think that is what prompted us to think, where might we need expert help,

and where do we need to be challenged? And that is where Business Link comes in."

Emma started her business in Oxford, "totally hand to mouth, with no money at all".

She saved up to buy an old-fashioned delivery bicycle on which she took her home-baked cakes to local cafés and delicatessens. She worked from the kitchen in boyfriend Matt's cottage ("saving me two years' rental on a business unit").

Matt subsequently joined her in the business as it continued to grow, concentrating on the financial side while Emma looked after product development, marketing and sales. When they brought the business to Dorset in 2002 they employed six people.

Honeybuns has been consulting Business Link now

for six years. Says Emma: "In that time we have become more focused about what we need, and I think Business Link have got better and better at what they do.

"They have helped us to raise the bar continually and be more professional, and recognise when external advice is needed and what assistance is most appropriate.

"Our Business Link adviser, David Pitfield, is really impressive in terms of listening very closely to us and asking pertinent questions, then coming back with the suggestions that he thinks will be of most help.

"He has been great at very efficiently taking a snapshot of where we are, listening to our needs, and matching that up with the relevant advice.

"As of January this year, he has also arranged for us to work with a business mentor through the Dormen scheme. At the moment we are looking in particular at strategic brand planning and brand development, to establish where we want to be over a longer time frame.

"Mike Collins, the Dormen mentor, has been very good at challenging our thinking

and helping us with a revised business plan, looking further forward than we might have done otherwise. We are now looking five to 10 years ahead."

What is the current challenge – survival or growth?

The answer, says Emma, is both. They are planning for the further growth of the business over the next five to ten years while at the same time building in as many safeguards as they can against the setbacks the recession may bring.

One new development is on-line mail order, launched in October last year. Another is a joint venture – a lip balm – with honey producer Filberts Bees at Muckleford.

"The business year just ending has been our best to date, and we want to keep on growing," says Emma. "In fact, we are projecting a 15 per cent growth in turnover this year. But we are not complacent. And despite getting offers, we have no thoughts about building the business up and selling it.

"As long as the business model can be sustained and we continue to make a profit we will continue to do what we love doing."

local knowledge... that's the link

Talk to us

about how to boost your business

Regular Business Link clinics:

Bournemouth University Every other week	Dorchester Every other week	Poole Every week
Bournemouth Arts Institute Every other week	Weymouth Every other week	Bridport Once a month
Ferndown Every other week	Sturminster Newton Once a month	Sherborne Once a month
	Christchurch Once a month	Lyme Regis Once a month
		Swanage Once a month

For more information, and to book a place, call 01202 607532

Business Link seminars and other events

Leading For Success

Kingston Maurward College, nr Dorchester
26th March 2009 16.00 - 19.30

Learn what diversification can do for your turnover, profits and security, and if you qualify for funding through the Leadership and Management Development Grant.

In times of economic downturn many businesses' strategy is to spend less and sell more. However, some turn to new markets, or new products and services to help them survive and even grow.

This seminar will give you advice on how to plan for business growth through diversification, avoiding the risks to continue to improve your business success.

Guerrilla e-marketing

Carrington House Hotel, Bournemouth
21st April 2009 08.30 - 12.00

There are over 300 social networking sites on the internet, some of which are focused on building business to business relationships.

We will show you the most popular sites, explore the opportunities available and look at how your business can gain commercial benefit from social networking.

This workshop also explores email marketing, looking at how to build your subscriber list, creating attractive and informative emails and how to avoid being classed as a spammer. Designed for business owners with a basic understanding of the internet.

Simple Ways To Beat Your Competition

Connaught Hotel, Bournemouth
23rd April 2009 16.00 - 19.30

Understand how your business can be sharper and better able to beat off the competition.

This interactive seminar will allow you to look at your business to find ways to increase your market share, forecast the cash available

in your business, ensure your offering is comprehensive, market smarter for greater rewards and enhance your business profile.

Guest speaker Mark Pitcher is a renowned business owner and business strategist, having run three successful businesses in the past 16 years and worked with businesses to improve their strategic standing.

Real Help, Right Here, Right Now

Royal Bath Hotel, Bournemouth

12th May 2009 08.20 - 14.00

All the free support, information and advice you need under one roof in one day. A practical toolkit for business success in difficult times. Seminars include:

'Profiting in competitive times: are your sales dropping? Is the competition hotting up?' This seminar will explore areas of opportunity available to all businesses in spite of the market conditions.

'Making the most of your website' - a whistle-stop tour to enable you to look at your website from a customer's perspective to make it work harder for you.

'Making every penny count' - save money on the marketing you need.

'Business finance options: surviving the downturn by financing your business growth'. This seminar will show you how.

'Right skills'. An untrained workforce can make your business 2.5 times more likely to fail. Find out what funded support is available.

'Find your way' - help for employers from Jobcentre Plus re: support and advice for recruiting and for people to return to and remain in work.

Business Link Advisers will be on hand all day to discuss one-to-one the issues you are facing in your business right here, right now. Free information, advice and support... it's what we do at Business Link.

BUSINESS UPDATE

Matthew Butcher,
Economic Development Manager for Business Link in Dorset



In the current economic climate all business owners need to be focusing as never before on where the business is going.

We all know the value of stepping back just occasionally to get the best possible perspective on the problems and the opportunities - but how many of us really make sure we do it?

At Business Link we do all we can to enable you to look at what is happening in your operation and identify the areas which most need your attention - and then locate the practical help and advice you need to take things forward.

At our regular business clinics which take place across Dorset you can sit down face-to-face with an experienced adviser and talk through the key issues affecting your business. It's a chance to take one step back from the day-to-day running of your business and really focus on its longer-term health and development.

Business Link's advisers bring a wealth of business experience and can help you to survive and thrive. Our network of clinics covers the whole of Dorset, so you should find one conveniently placed. And we are now expanding the number of locations, with new venues at Lyme Regis, Bridport, Sherborne and Swanage.

To book a place, or for more details, call us on **01202 607532**.

Don't forget to check our diary of forthcoming special events (see left) at which experts in many different fields offer advice and insights which might benefit your business.

Because we are funded by government our advice services, seminars and special events are free of charge, and whatever your business question, we aim to help you find the answer. For more information about any of the services Business Link has to offer, call 0845 600 9966.

To book your place at any of these events, call 0845 0707 747