



Scottish *Thistle Awards*

Case Study

Blown Away Experiences

Winner 2010 Young Tourism Entrepreneur

*celebrating
excellence*

Category Sponsored by:



The Prince's Scottish Youth Business Trust
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TRUST**

Scottish Thistle Awards

Blown Away Experience: Case Study

INTRODUCTION

Guy and Jamie McKenzie completed their HND in Sports Coaching and Development of Sport from Dundee College in 2007. Their love of sport and the great outdoors led them to take every opportunity to do freelance work with outdoor activity companies to gain more experience. Their passion led to ambition - the idea of setting up their own land yachting experience company. Their desire and vision was to be the first company in Scotland to provide land yachting as an outdoor experience within an already competitive outdoor sports market.

GETTING STARTED

Business Gateway

Whilst in their final year at college they contacted the Business Gateway for guidance and advice on how to launch their idea. Commercial finance was unavailable, however the Business Gateway offered a £1,000 grant to help fund set up costs. Combined with the money they had saved from freelancing they invested a total of £6,500 in equipment and the necessary coaching certification to open for business.

The Business Gateway provided essential advice and access to additional sources of support and funding. This help resulted in Guy and Jamie being introduced to the Prince's Scottish Youth Business Trust (PSYBT).

Princes Scottish Youth Business Trust/Moffat Charitable Trust

PSYBT offer young people with entrepreneurial ideas advice and funding to get started. Blown Away Experiences applied to PSYBT and received a loan of £5,000 phased over a two year period. This additional investment provided the necessary capital to expand the business; the purchase of a fleet of six Land Yachts and the necessary safety equipment to operate them.

While they waited for their ordered equipment to arrive they completed their HND course. With the arrival of the new land yachts in June 2008 Blown Away Experiences was born.

As they began to trade the new company relied on the on-going support and business advice they received from PSYBT. Allied with the continued support of their Business Gateway, Guy and Jamie made good use of the support network they had built up.

FIRST STEPS

With trading beginning in August 2008, the first trading cycle lasted 6 months. In that period the company generated a trading profit, though a small one. During the first full year of trading 2008/09 they increased their turnover by 75% and net profit by 43%. The early figures were very encouraging though still not sufficient to generate salaries for Guy and Jamie.

ENGAGEMENT

Establishing relationships and engaging with the businesses that have supported and helped them have been key aspects for growth. They continue to work with and participate in the activities of their supporters; presenting at business networking and development events on behalf of Perth College Business Development Centre and Centre for Excellence, Scotland's Conference for Private Social Enterprise, Fife Business Gateway seminars, Enterprise Gym in Dundee and more recently the Scottish Tourism Forum and PSYBT/Moffat Charitable Trust Awards in 2011.

RECOGNITION

Demands for bookings were growing. They expanded the activities offered, purchased kayaks and increased their land yachts to 10. The support from PSYBT and the Moffat Charitable Trust continued and they were encouraged to enter awards as an opportunity to gain exposure and recognition within their industry. By entering awards Guy and Jamie began to think about their activity from a wider perspective, encouraging them to think tactically about their business and the objectives they were setting.

VisitScotland

Blown Away Experiences won the Perthshire Chamber of Commerce New Business Award 2009 and were a finalist in the Young Scot 2009 Awards. PSYBT encouraged them to enter a Scottish Thistle Award 2009 - their first exposure to VisitScotland's national tourism awards.

With only a few days to submit their entry before the closing date they hastily assembled their entry. They were not shortlisted as a finalist, to their disappointment but not their surprise given the lack of time to prepare.

Undeterred Guy and Jamie continued to work hard and use awards as a platform to gain recognition and generate interest for their product. They were nominated to apply for a PSYBT Travel and Tourism award in 2010 which brought their first tourism award for Excellent Customer Service. This was a measurement of their development as a business and determination to offer an exemplary experience to their customers.

Spurred on by success they entered the Scottish Thistle Awards for a second time. They requested feedback on their previous entry in order to gain insight into the process. They found this invaluable the constructive criticism highlighted how to structure their entry to ensure the strength of their business would be conveyed. Guy and Jamie also attended a Scottish Thistle Award Seminar in Perth - an opportunity that provided both helpful entry tips and a networking benefit.

The hard work and research had paid off. Blown Away Experiences were shortlisted in the 2010 Young Tourism Entrepreneur Award category. Guy and Jamie viewed their entry as a measurement tool for the performance of their business plan. They included the benefits of positive promotion as a target within that plan and sought to maximise the coverage brought about by becoming a finalist.

In October 2010 they won the Scottish Thistle Award, an "awesome" achievement as the brothers remarked. Overnight, Blown Away Experiences were catapulted to the national stage as businesses from across Scotland contacted them to congratulate them.

THE STORY OF SUCCESS

Guy and Jamie immediately saw the opportunity to promote their “award winning” business to customers - tweeting their success on the night and posting their win on their facebook page. Their award quickly made it to the front page of their website too. Guy and Jamie understood the power of marketing success to influence consumers and have taken every opportunity to correlate their business with excellence.

The media coverage generated from winning was extensive; from televised interviews to coverage in local and Scottish national newspapers. They have consciously developed a media friendly style that makes them both accessible and news worthy.

The business has continued to grow solidly. During the 1st quarter of 2010/11 the company recorded an increase in turnover to 59% of the previous year’s total turnover equating to a 105% YTD increase. Confirmed bookings continued to grow in line with consumer awareness.

INVESTMENT IN THE FUTURE

Blown Away Experiences have used their success as a platform to invest and improve.

The company took part in a pilot grading scheme for activity providers. VisitScotland tested 20 providers in this category and Blown Away Experiences received the highest marks with 85 out of 100 and only missed by one point to achieve a 5 star grading. They have worked continuously and maintaining a high standard of customer service, continually seek to improve and act upon customer feedback. In 2011 they achieved a 5 Star Grading Certificate.

One benefit to winning a Scottish Thistle Awards was their entitlement to a funded exhibition stand at Scotland’s premier leisure travel trade show, VisitScotland expo 2011. Prior to exhibiting they received support and guidance from VisitScotland to help them establish objectives and targets to measure their participation. Guy and Jamie were keen to understand the audience that would meet them at the exhibition; visitors from the UK and worldwide all with different requirements, customers and expectations.

Enquiries for their products were strong. Although too early to confirm results, there was sufficient opportunity to quote for new business leading the company to consider exhibiting at the following year’s exhibition.

Award success has lead to bottom line success for this new and innovative business.

“The expo experience was great fun and hugely enjoyable but, more seriously, a great eye-opener to the volume and style of business that can be done. We made contacts that would have been impossible in any other environment and have gained a significant increase in our knowledge of the overall tourism market.

We would like to take the opportunity to thank VisitScotland and PSYBT for the awesome prize which gave us a fantastic and unique opportunity to present Blown Away to the key buyers from the national and international tourism markets.”

Guy and Jamie McKenzie June 2011