



Case Study

Seaview Bed & Breakfast

Winner: 2010 Extra Mile Award (Small Business)



celebrating
excellence

Introduction

Seaview Bed & Breakfast was established in 1990 by John Noddings who came to the Isle of Mull to fulfil a life long ambition to be a lobster fisherman. In 2000 John gave up fishing and took over the running of Seaview full time on his own. In 2003 he met his wife Jane who moved to Mull in 2005 to help John run Seaview. Jane came from a background of public service, followed by a number of years self employed, followed by project development in the charity sector and office management in the leisure industry. John & Jane established a rolling 5-10 year development and investment programme for their business with the intention of improving the quality of service and facilities at Seaview, establishing themselves as a market leader in customer experience and services, increasing their market share.

Seaview has been engaged with VisitScotland since first starting in business for advertising and marketing purposes, quality assurance assessments, business advice, information and support. John & Jane are also proactive in seeking out new ideas, promoting good practice, spotting trends, adapting current ideas, engaging with customers for feedback and 'keeping their eye on the ball'.

Objectives

The primary business objective at Seaview has been to ensure that guests – past, current, future, and potential, have a memorably positive customer experience during their stay, making every effort to meet their needs and expectations. Providing clean, comfortable rooms and beds, a warm and friendly welcome, helpful advice, great food, good value for money and making sure each 'transaction' the customer makes is easy and efficient for them. They want their guests to really enjoy their stay, quoting "***our emphasis is on good old fashioned customer care and service for the discerning 21st century traveller***". By meeting this objective and delivering on promises, their guests engage with the Seaview 'brand of hospitality, service and care' and are happy to recommend and promote them to future customers through word of mouth, sharing their experiences with family, friends and colleagues via social media, independent review sites and other forms of networking and forums.

Business support and advice has come via a variety of sources including VisitScotland, their own experiences and observations, the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB), friends, family, customer comments and feedback, membership of industry forums and marketing groups, their accountant, subscriptions to relevant websites, newsletters and magazines, competitors, etc.

Challenges

Every day is a challenge! In 2008, Seaview was upgraded by VisitScotland to a 4 star bed & breakfast. Although absolutely delighted having worked hard investing in the business they were committed to a rolling 5-10 year refurbishment programme to upgrade rooms and improve the quality of the facilities and services offered. Upgrading from 3 to 4 stars came at the same time the banks crashed, the recession started and the global economy was turned on its head!

What should have been a time to enjoy and celebrate their achievements, suddenly became a challenging double whammy! In order to continue with the investment programme which they had committed to, they found for the first time having to jump through hoops to persuade the banks that Seaview was a safe business to lend more money to. The banks had changed their lending rules overnight and despite a solid twenty years worth of custom with their own business bank, we discovered that loyalty meant zilch! Engaging more with the bank, a considerable amount of time and effort was spent undertaking a financial review and risk analysis of their business to prove that they were a solid business to lend to. Efforts paid off and they were back on track. Year on year since

2008 and despite the economic downturn their business has bucked the trend and continued to grow and flourish; turnover has increased as have their profits.

In 2009 they were awarded Gold by the Green Tourism Business Award for the third time, and in 2010 with the global economic climate still looking very uncertain, they were looking at new ways to help their business stand out in an increasingly competitive market.

They had applied some years previously to the Scottish Thistle Awards and had entered the 'Customer Care' category but had left the application far too late for any chance of success. They weren't too surprised to find they weren't short listed. However in early 2010 when they received the literature and information for the awards that year and at the suggestion of their QA assessor during their annual inspection, they decided to go for it and the **Extra Mile** category for Small Businesses. Jane attended one of the seminars at Fort William where she was able to meet some of the Scottish Thistle Award team who provided useful advice on the application process as well as meeting people from like minded businesses.

Living and running a business on an island came with additional challenges, not least the forward planning and ordering of supplies and goods plus added cost of their transportation. Participating in the Scottish Thistle Awards also had its challenges – the time commitment and cost involved (travelling costs, distance, over night accommodation etc), in attending the seminar in Fort William, the Finalists Evening in Inverness and the Award Ceremony itself in Edinburgh made it an expensive exercise. They had to re-arrange guest bookings and put into place temporary staff to cover. Committed to the process of being involved in the Scottish Thistle Awards they factored in costs and time required to do themselves justice. It was time, effort, energy and money well spent – not only because we won but it was a valuable learning exercise from a business perspective too.

Engagement

Seaview is an established business and over the years has developed and established a number of formal and informal relationships including the FSB, local marketing groups Holiday Mull, Oban & Lorn Tourism Association, VisitScotland, Green Tourism Business Awards, Tourism Intelligence Scotland, Passion and Pride for Scotland, Mull & Iona Community Trust, Responsible Tourism, Glasgow University, The Carbon Centre, Historic Scotland. Also working closely with other B&B's, local suppliers, attractions, restaurants and farms.

The opportunity to attend workshops and seminars are limited for them because of the restrictions of time, travel, distance and cost. However Jane was fortunate enough to win a place at the recent UK Customer Experience Conference held in Edinburgh at the EICC at the beginning of October and took advantage of this great opportunity by attending.

Inspiration for entering the Scottish Thistle Awards came from knowing they had a great product and wanted to let everyone know! Entry into the STA provided them with an ideal opportunity to scrutinise and review their own business– they looked at their practices and identified what they did really well and where they could improve. They looked at what they had achieved over the years and were able to highlight any weaknesses. Some of the tangible benefits and opportunities they have received as a result of entering the Scottish Thistle Awards include increased exposure, invitations to participate in events, enhanced share of the market, and their views and opinions are actively sought. They are also in every salesman's email address book!

Recognition

Recognition from industry peers has been rewarding and heart warming. They received a plethora of congratulations on their success at winning their category and have no doubt that winning the

award and being recognised for excellence within the industry has identified them as a business whose practices are worth replicating. Engagement with the Scottish tourism industry has definitely increased over the past 12 months – they are conscious of their responsibility as ambassadors of excellence and good practice within the industry and are happy to promote this at all times. Their advice and opinions is often sought wherever they stay and are always happy to share experiences – they hope their story will go on and inspire others to be the best they can be and achieve similar recognition for their own businesses.

Success Story

They promote success using the winner's logo on their website, promotional & business material; engage with TripAdvisor encouraging guests to review them; use social media to keep their business profile. They have received coverage from local and national press. Winning the Scottish Thistle Award and as an established and successful 4 star bed & breakfast, business increased credibility amongst peers and validated their market position. Expectations from guests can be unrealistically high 'testing' to see just how many 'extra miles' they will go for them but overall guests enjoy being part of their success story.

Investment in the future

The global economic situation remains a concern for everyone in business, regardless of industry and it is the same for Seaview, they are committed to their investment programme, reviewing the last 12 months business performance, then making an important financial and policy decisions with regard to advertising, marketing, refurbishment, pricing, special offers, additional services and upgrades of facilities etc for the forthcoming season and beyond. They carefully monitor business news, trends, the euro zone, review sites and opinion polls, as well as the views of guests to try and understand and to meet the needs and expectations of customers next year.

“Although we are a small lifestyle business, our simple customer centric philosophy to running our business has meant national recognition and achievement, and on the back of that success, winning the Scottish Thistle Award has enhanced and secured the future of the business in a tough economic climate and competitive market. Advance bookings for 2012 are strong and very encouraging”

Top Tips

- Research your category before entering the awards; give yourself plenty of time to complete your entry form and make use of the website for information etc
- Attend one of the seminars and don't be afraid to approach any of the past winners - we all want people to be successful and will be happy to pass on advice, information and support
- Use the experience as a useful learning tool - you'll be amazed at what you learn about yourself and your business in the process and this can very often inspire you even more
- Don't enter the awards if you are not serious about your business, want to share your success or want to celebrate excellence. This is a genuine awards process and should not be regarded as a cynical marketing exercise only. You need to be passionate about and believe in what you do - because if you don't, why should anyone else?

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