

Case study

Trees For Rent

Christmas is big business for Jo Hunt and Peter Inch, who have hit on an innovative and environmentally-sound business idea.

Every year, seven million Christmas trees are bought across the UK and many end up as rubbish by the New Year.

So to make Christmas a little greener, the couple came up with the idea of offering trees in pots for rent, which they deliver and then collect and bring back to their farm at Charminster after Christmas.

When the trees get too big for the Christmas market they are given to the Army for use on its land.

The scheme, trialled with just 300 trees, proved to be a great success. Now several thousand potted trees are growing in nurseries for Christmases to come.

Jo and Peter had such faith in the business they sold their free-range egg farm to support it. One day they hope to franchise the concept across the country.

Jo said: "We know there is a big market out there. We are also proud to have created an environmentally-friendly business.



“For most people, having a real Christmas tree means needles on the carpet and the hassle of getting rid of it after Christmas. We solve the problem and as our trees are alive, the number of needles dropped is significantly reduced too.”

BUSINESS ISSUES

Jo and Peter have been running successful businesses for many years, so felt confident about taking on a new challenge. But marketing a new product was new to them and one of the reasons they contacted Business Link.

They met Business Link adviser Christine Collins to explore how to take the business forward and how develop an effective marketing strategy.

They also wanted to meet potential UK-wide demand by developing as a franchise operation. Jo explained: “We’ve had a lot of local interest, as well as from places like Hull. But to transport a tree to Hull wouldn’t be environmentally-friendly and would go against the ethos of the business. However, we want to take the concept nationwide. Our plan is to turn this into a franchise business so people can grow their own trees in Hull and elsewhere and deliver them locally.”

OBJECTIVE SUPPORT FROM BUSINESS LINK

Business Link adviser Christine Collins has worked closely with Jo and Peter on the shape of the business and has helped them develop a plan to take it forward.

Christine said: “Trees For Rent is an exciting concept with the added benefit of being environmentally-friendly. Jo and Peter have positive and powerful messages to convey and part of my role was to help them find ways of

communicating them effectively through their website and other forms of marketing.

“I analysed the opportunities for them to raise awareness of their business through various channels and have given them introductions to people in the media, chambers of commerce, local authorities and environmental groups who will help them generate the right kind of publicity for the business.”

EVALUATING SUCCESS

Finances were tight during the first year as the business started with a small number of trees and had to absorb set-up costs.

The business has become profitable and plans are underway to double the number of Christmas trees for rent.

Jo said: “There’s a pretty big market in Poole and Bournemouth which we should be able to tap into, especially as we are the first business to set up such a service in the area.”

FUTURE PLANS

Looking ahead, Jo and Peter want to make Trees For Rent work as a franchise business and achieve their dream of creating a truly national Christmas tree rental service.

They are also aiming to work on the marketing strategy and action plans that Christine helped them devise.

Jo said: “Christine helped us identify a long list of actions which we are working our way through, with her ongoing advice and assistance.”

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