

Case study

UK Postbox



The internet may have revolutionised the way we communicate, shop and do business, but it still has some significant drawbacks as Dorset entrepreneur Allan Chester discovered when he spent time overseas.

Like millions of people living or working abroad, Allan wanted to order goods over the internet from UK websites but found he could not get them delivered outside the UK. When he returned home, he often found a large pile of mail blocking the front door.

Allan came up with the idea of an online post office based in the UK which would allow ex-pats to take control of their post wherever they were

in the world – securely scanning letters and documents so the user could view them online, as well as handling mail and signing for and forwarding packages.

He said: “Companies used to have a post room where they sorted the mail and then the ‘post boy’ walked around putting envelopes on people’s desks.

“Now they are scanned and uploaded to employees’ computers. UK PostBox takes this a stage further and uploads the documents to a secure web server, where you can log in to view and download your mail.

“There is also huge scope for hard copy documents to be scanned and sent electronically to executives while they are on the move, or to mobile workers.”

Poole-based UK PostBox went live at the end of 2008 and since launching has enjoyed rapid expansion.

BUSINESS ISSUES

While UK PostBox was initially aimed at ex-pats and Brits working abroad, Allan quickly realised that there was demand from the corporate market for this type of service.

The main challenge was working collaboratively with an IT contractor to devise a secure system for handling digital mail.

As nobody in the UK provided a similar service, this meant starting from scratch.

From the start Allan realised that the system would have to be developed to cope with significant increases in mail volumes.

SUPPORT FROM BUSINESS LINK

Allan went to Business Link for advice before launching UK PostBox. He is delighted with the support he received and continues to enjoy from Business Link adviser Mike Donner.

He said that Mike consistently delivered sound and impartial business advice and introduced him to contacts who have already had a positive impact on the business's development.

Mike said: “Allan quickly realised that he would need outside help to support his own efforts to develop the business in the UK and overseas.

“The business is growing fast and the objective is to harness and customise the appropriate mix of business support services to enable it to become a market leader in the UK and Europe.”

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EVALUATING SUCCESS

Allan now has more than 1,000 customers - a number that is growing each day.

The success is due in part to online marketing campaigns, attracting attention from journalists through the use of public relations techniques and using search engine optimisation on Google to boost the company's profile and solidify its brand recognition.

FUTURE PLANS

UK PostBox is to launch mobile applications that will allow iPhone and Blackberry users to access their UK PostBox account directly - a move that could prove invaluable to the corporate and business communities.

Allan is also looking to licence or set up partnerships with other European postal companies, particularly in countries with large ex-pat communities and further afield in Dubai, Singapore and Hong Kong.

This complete online system - iPostalMail - will be offered to companies to partner or licence in each country.

iPostalMail will also be marketed as the ‘internet-powered online post office solution’ to medium and large UK businesses as a stand-alone online system that they can buy and run internally on their intranet, or licence to have their own system on the internet.

UK Postbox will also be launching iSecurePost, a completely paperless, online system providing companies with a protected alternative to email or traditional postal mail.

