

Case Study... Clarkes Caterers

Clarkes Caterers stir up growth with UK Online Business Broadband



Mark Clarke had been working for over four years in catering when he decided it was time to work for himself. He had extensive experience from his City & Guilds training, then working at The Ritz and Dorchester Hotels, through to laying on the Eastenders 100th Edition Birthday party and Sports Personality of the Year events. However, in 1990 a visit to a cousin's wedding in Canada proved to be a revelation. During the trip, there was an exceptional wedding planner who provided a complete service from cars, venue and video through to catering, flowers and entertainment.

This idea gave Mark the impetus to recreate the same service in the UK. On his return, he handed in his notice and Clarkes Caterers was in business, providing a high-quality service with fine dining and dinner parties.

Mark developed the business – based in Walthamstow, East London - until 1997. This was when he decided it was time to take it in a new direction by branching out into corporate catering. After seven years in this niche with a lot of work at the weekend, he wanted to generate a more balanced level of income as well as work more in the week. 17 years on, this East End entrepreneur has over 40 employees serving high-quality catering to big players in the public and private sectors as well as discerning private clients - this even included catering for a privileged 10 year old's birthday party at which pop band, McFly were playing! So how did he do it and how does broadband support his business?

Clarkes Caterers' Broadband Solution

Clarke's head office in Walthamstow is the nerve centre of the business with employees managing sales, finance and online ordering - all with the help of UK Online's wireless business broadband package. The business prides itself on a fast, effective and yet, personal service.

Benefits

- Faster communication with corporate & private clients
- Broadband underpins online ordering & 1 hour response service
- 50% increase in employee productivity

75% of the business is dedicated to contract catering. One of its high profile contracts is with the London Borough of Walthamstow where Clarkes provide catering for staff canteens, and events. With over 15 buffets to organise every day just for London Borough of Waltham Forest alone, Clarke's depends on the speed and reliability of broadband to administer online ordering and underpin vital communication with customers.

Mark Clarke commented, "I make it my business to deliver a prompt, personal service and that includes making sure I see my clients regularly and maintaining these relationships. Broadband is key to ensuring that I don't have to worry about everyday communication and online ordering – leaving me and my team to provide the personal service." He added, "If we did not have first class broadband, we wouldn't be able to manage the 500+ emails and website enquiries we receive each week which range from online orders to general enquiries."

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Prior to broadband, Clarkes was using a dial up email service which in Mark's words was "slow and cost a fortune!" Bills were regularly in excess of £400 per month. Since moving to a business-class broadband service, Clarkes has slashed monthly communication costs by 40% which is not only saving money but allowing it to respond more quickly to its clients.

An added benefit is that the company now has consistent, professionally-branded, Clarkes Caterer business email addresses which they did not have before. Above all, the comprehensive nature of the professional-quality broadband package supports the day to day running of the business. It provides a fast and professional service - for example - enabling the company to achieve its one hour response and delivery time for large corporate client orders. The sheer increase in speed of communication compared to the previous dialup service has brought about a 50% increase in employee productivity whereby the team can respond much more quickly and effectively to orders and enquiries.

The Future

Clarkes has bold plans for the future in which broadband will play an important role. The company plans to achieve substantial organic growth within its existing corporate catering client base as it continues its mission to set best practice in this field.

Mark continued, "You can see why broadband is so critical when we have such high standards and goals like the one hour response service level agreement for large corporate clients, most of which come from online orders supported by broadband. We guarantee to get a buffet for up to 50 people delivered within that time. This is a key differentiator which our competitors cannot even get close to."



**Mark Clarke,
Clarkes Caterers**

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UKOL package used

- Professional-quality broadband including 24/7 freephone support, unlimited usage, business email addresses

About UK Online

UK Online is a broadband provider specialising in supplying professional grade internet connections to recreational, home office and small business users nationwide. UK Online recently identified that only one third of small and micro-businesses in the UK have an internet connection, thereby missing out on the commercial benefit the internet can offer. With a strong focus on customer service, UK Online is fast emerging as a leading supplier of broadband and internet services to the professional broadband sector. Unlike many providers to this market, UK Online's quoted prices include VAT. UK Online is a pioneer of Local Loop Unbundling (LLU) for consumers and was the first UK provider to offer a national unlimited broadband service at up to 16Mb. The company's commitment to LLU was recognised by the ISP industry with a Commendation for Innovation at the 2005 ISPA Awards.

UK Online was founded in 1994. The company was acquired in 2005 by British Sky Broadcasting group, which has a total market capitalisation in excess of £9bn. As part of the Sky group, UK Online has access to a unique heritage and a world class IP network. UK Online services are available to over 70% of the UK's homes and businesses.

For more information, visit: www.ukonline.net / Tel: 0800 053 2222