

Case Study... Starmaker Fancy Dress

UK Online Business Broadband equips Essex-based fancy-dress business with tools to develop customer base and sharpen competitive edge



What are Starmaker's business objectives?

Catherine Rouse bought Epping-based Starmaker Fancy Dress in spring 2007. She was returning to a business that in the past she had loved working for as an employee, before pursuing a career at an animal charity. Her previous experience at Starmaker meant that she knew the business inside out. Therefore, she was confident of its potential so that when the opportunity to buy Starmaker arose, she decided that she would go for it.

As its name would suggest, it provides fancy-dress costumes and accessories, both for hire and to buy. Catherine's mission is to continue to serve her local customers as well as expand and develop the customer base beyond the shop's locality via its online presence.

Starmaker is an Aladdin's Cave of party and entertainment outfits, with thousands of different costumes for hire from pirates and princesses to ghouls and angels. Its retail range covers accessories such as wigs, make-up and jewellery. Also, the business includes a dance-wear section for children and adults, selling items such as jazz, tap, ballet shoes and leotards.

This wealth of variety means that Catherine is able to give her customers expert advice on exciting and original costumes, playing to Starmaker's strength in providing a specialised, individual and creative service. A customer-focused approach is essential as Starmaker faces competition from other local fancy-dress shops. Furthermore, seasonal events such as Hallowe'en and Christmas bring stiff competition for aggressively-priced, high turnover accessories.

For Catherine, successful customer relationships are vital to the success of the business as well as to her own personal job satisfaction.

"I bought this business because I am passionate about fancy dress and entertainment and I wanted to help my customers realise their vision to look and feel their best," she said. "I get such a buzz from seeing our excited customers once they have chosen their outfit."

"Furthermore, we cannot compete with the 'pile it high, sell it cheap' mentality of our local superstore so we must concentrate on what we specialise in, that is our diverse range and expert knowledge."

Benefits

- Website and email provide new customer expansion opportunities
- All-inclusive business-grade broadband and tech support

Starmaker's Broadband Solution

Catherine is looking to develop her current customer base with the "always on" advantage of broadband email and online business as well as expand her market beyond Starmaker's immediate local customer catchment area.

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"I have to be able to spend my time and energy on my customers, rather than worrying about the technicalities of my online business. UK Online's all-inclusive business broadband service means I do not have to spend my time dealing with multiple suppliers of online tools such as a broadband service, internet security and website hosting. All these vital elements of an online business are included in one package, while still maintaining value for money."

It was important for Catherine to have a free technical support helpline, so that the business does not incur large telephone costs for support. Catherine added, "UK Online's UK-based Freephone Support provides me with quick solutions as problems occur. This is because its experts are able to pinpoint and solve issues without the need to run through a scripted list of potential problems which you often get with call centres."

More and more, Catherine is finding that potential customers are contacting Starmaker by email and expect a quick response to their queries. "These days, email rivals even face-to-face communication therefore ecommerce is vital to the success of a business. In fact, we are using email as both a marketing and customer communication tool. " UK Online's business broadband means she is able to start working on the requests straightaway. "As soon as a customer emails us, we can respond right away and start picking out the perfect outfit for each customer," she said.

Starmaker's web site is currently under construction which will feature the range of its outfits and accessories.

"Web site hosting is very important to us as we are developing our own online presence with a new web site."

Starmaker was up and running on its business broadband within a week of ordering the service from UK Online – in fact it was delivered a day early. "The total package from UK Online is proving to be very successful for us as we have all the components that we need: business-grade broadband, great customer support and at a competitive price," said Catherine.



**Catherine Rouse
Starmaker Fancy Dress**

"We have all the components we need: business-grade broadband great customer support - and at a competitive price."

UKOL package used

- Business broadband package including business email; website; internet security

About UK Online

UK Online is a broadband provider specialising in supplying internet connections to businesses with 1-10 employees 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 business sector. 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 22Mb.

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:

www.ukonline.net tel.0800 053 2222