

Business As Usual?

A Case Study of Experience in the Company Programme



In September 2014, the newly created Seaford Head Sixth form, part of the dynamic Seaford Head School in Seaford, East Sussex, decided to take part, for the first time ever, in the Young Enterprise Company Programme within the Brighton Hove & Lewes area – offering it as an option in the enrichment section of the new curriculum.



Young Enterprise is a national charity which aims to help young people, from primary school to University, learn about what it's like to run a business by actually building one. The Company Programme provides support through volunteer advisors, training activities and a collection of tools and resources, and is organised around competitions at area, county, regional and national level. The competitions provide a natural focus for presenting and reporting the experience and are judged by local business people with awards available for all the important aspects of a business; however, the competition is optional and the real learning is from what is experienced while actually imagining, creating, operating and selling business ideas.

At Seaford Head, that first year, a group of 9 year 12 students formed a company they called AR Enterprises. They got off to a slow start owing to a lack of organisation and motivation; they had many ideas during their weekly sessions, but very little got done between them. Rob Hargreaves, the Finance Director commented: "At the beginning we didn't keep track of who was supposed to be doing what, and we didn't clearly record decisions we made, so we tended to go over the same things again each time we met."





By December 2014, the team finally decided on a specific product – scented candles which they hoped to sell especially for Christmas and Valentine’s Day. However, by early February, they still didn’t have any stock, in fact they hadn’t managed to produce a prototype to test feasibility of production. Kyle Scudder, Marketing Director noted: “It turned out that our lack of progress was because nobody really believed in this product, it was just the least worst idea at the time. What we needed was something we could all get behind, something we could be passionate about and that we believed we could really sell.”

With the area finals looming at the end of April, the team identified images of iconic local landmarks, portraying the natural beauty of the area they lived in, as something they could all get behind. They decided on applying original artwork (photographs) to mugs, and in a moment of true inspiration, looking for something else to make this more original, came up with the idea of combining the image with a Haiku-style verse. The slightly mysterious style of the Haiku (a form of Japanese poetry) was designed to be evocative of positive memories that both residents of, and visitors to, the area could relate to.

At this point, one team member still felt that he could not support the product – that mugs bearing printed content were just used for company marketing, and had no real value; he left by mutual agreement. The rest of the team, however, were clear that the combination of original imagery and original Haiku-style verse, created something unique, transforming the value of a simple mug into something much more that both residents and visitors to the local area would want to own. As Tom Beeney, Customer Services Director, said: “We’d come up with a formula which captured the positive emotions created by these great local landmarks which people love and want to engage with. And that formula was clearly repeatable – we could create whole series of mugs, or other articles, based on the same values. What we’d really created was the basis for a powerful brand.”



The team developed their brand essence, summarising it as “Iconic, Collectible and Evocative”, and having branded the product series as “East Sussex Iconic” to reflect this, realised it was a more powerful marketing tool than their company name, since it told the customer something about what they did immediately and was far more memorable. As a result, leaving the legal company name as AR Enterprise, they started to promote their business as East Sussex Iconic.

Rob Hargreaves, Finance Director said: “At this point we were really energised to make our business work; we started setting agendas of things we had to decide on, and taking minutes of meetings, with clear assignment of actions and follow-up at the next meeting. We started meeting more than the regular once a week session, and then things really got done quickly.”

By late March the team had sourced a supplier, researched pricing and settled costs of production and had created their first image-Haiku combination, of the iconic Seven Sisters – right next door to Seaford Head.



Kallum Harding, Sales & Managing Director, noted: “Finally we were ready to sell. And we negotiated a deal with the school for an order of 40 of the Seven Sisters mugs to be used as student awards. But at that point we realised we didn’t have enough cash from our share subscriptions to make the first order for stock!”

However, having the invoice for a firm order, from a blue-chip, credit-worthy customer as security, they were able to raise a loan to pay for the production of the stock, which was then paid back, with interest, from the proceeds of the sale, leaving them with a tidy profit. And with the excess stock they had ordered they visited Brighton Open Market, outselling on their retail début, on that very cold day, every other stall on the market!

In the short space of time to the Brighton, Hove & Lewes area finals in April, the team had lined up a range of other prospective business customers, and identified other trade fairs and markets for retail sales.

The judges in the competition recognised the value of the product and brand that had been created, and were particularly impressed with the resilience shown by the team in coming through the early chaos, and the low point reached after the candles were abandoned.



In fact, East Sussex Iconic swept the board, taking the awards for best governance and best product as well as winning the overall competition for best company! At the next stage of the Sussex finals the team picked up another award for best governance, and were highly commended with a special award for most improved company in the county, recognising their real growth through the programme.

Trading on beyond the competitions, to the end of the Programme in July, the team secured a financial return for their investors of over 50% – rather better than the 0.5% or so offered by the banks on savings! Commenting on their success, Kallum Harding, said: “We were really proud of what we achieved – we surprised ourselves with what we could do – and throughout the whole process we learned many new skills involved in running a successful business, such as teamwork, what leadership really means, the value of getting organised, systematically recording and monitoring activities and what it takes to sell successfully.”

Some were content to leave it at that, but four of the original team were inspired by their experience and the strength of the brand they had created, to want to continue it on as a standalone business beyond the end of the Young Enterprise Programme. Kallum



Harding, Kyle Scudder, Rob Hargreaves and Tom Beeney, together with their YE Business Advisor, Jonathan Wood of Haven Ventures Ltd., have since formed East Sussex Iconic LLP –

a partnership in which to continue the business started with the help of Young Enterprise.

East Sussex Iconic LLP has re-launched with a refreshed website, produced a new item in its collectible series of Mugs (featuring the Cuckmere Haven) and is continuing to sell at local retail events. It is preparing to sell online via Amazon, and has launched complementary services for individuals and businesses.

One such service offers a brand development and presentation exercise for each client business, using the East Sussex Iconic image + Haiku format to create genuinely unique and powerful marketing merchandise for those businesses. Another offers a partnership approach to the managers of major attractions in East Sussex and beyond, providing a service to create the East Sussex Iconic style of mugs with content exclusive to those attractions for sale by both parties - a win-win with the local community. At the time of writing, such a deal has just been signed with Newhaven Fort "Where history comes to life".

Each of the founding team members has a "day job", either in continuing education at technical college or University, or in full-time apprenticeship or employment. As Kyle Scudder, Marketing Director commented: "We run East Sussex Iconic in our spare time, with board meetings at weekends and making sure that between us we can cover customer enquiries at any time during the week. This business has the potential for substantial growth, and while we don't expect it to be the next Nike or Unilever, it forms a significant part of what we see as being a 'portfolio' career, and we aim to grow it to generate an important source of additional income for each of us over time."



Commenting on the experiences of the group at Seaford Head Sixth Form, Wendy Gorham, Young Enterprise Manager for East Sussex said "Young people have the opportunity to develop their employability and entrepreneurial skills through the Company Programme. These young people have demonstrated this, going through the ups and downs of running a business and developing resilience and the entrepreneurial skills needed to run a successful business. If you would like to be part of this exciting YE programme then do look at our website."

After a remarkable experience in the Young Enterprise Company Programme, which was anything but "the usual" school fare, for the East Sussex Iconic partnership, life after the sixth form now very much incorporates "business as usual"!

For further information on the companies and organisations involved, and to read more about what East Sussex Iconic are now doing, see:

- www.eastsussexiconic.com - Now East Sussex Iconic LLP
- www.seafordhead.org/sixth-form - The Seaford Head Sixth Form
- www.y-e.org.uk - The Young Enterprise Organisation
- www.havenventures.com - Volunteer Business Advisors, YE Company Programme