

Living the online dream

After swapping cramped offices in central London for the space and freedom of Cornwall, leading internet marketing agency Neutralize is not looking back.

Overview

Like many successful businesses, Neutralize came into being when an astute entrepreneur realised that no-one was offering something that they themselves needed. In this case it was affordable, reliable and unbiased online marketing consultancy services, which Lucy Cokes wanted to be able to sell on to clients of her own web company.

Its ability to deliver real, measurable results to its clients meant that Neutralize expanded rapidly in its first year, bucking the dotcom trend. By June 2000 it had clearly outgrown its small offices in central London. Which is when it came up against a problem familiar to many small but growing businesses in the capital. The sort of space it was looking for was only available on long leases - and at extortionate rents.

Then, on a business trip to Cornwall, Cokes was shown a warehouse space next to one of the company's clients in Redruth. Thinking laterally, she saw the answer to their



dilemma. Cokes takes up the story: "There was space for about 20 employees, and even a separate kitchen and bathroom with a shower. It was in complete disrepair, but for just £300 a month we thought we had no basis for complaint. Two weeks after viewing the warehouse we packed all the office equipment, desks, computers and files into a van and drove to Cornwall."

It was a snap decision that Neutralize was not to regret. Cornwall has proved a great base from which to compete successfully in the global marketplace, and in 2003 the company's turnover climbed by 300%. What's more, significantly reduced outgoings have fed straight into higher profit margins.

"Most of our London-based clients actually seem quite jealous of us!" says Cokes. "Where else can you have absolute peace and quiet while you work, go to the beach at weekends and see the ocean every day?"

Workforce

Neutralize now employs eight highly skilled staff, some recruited locally and others who have moved to Cornwall. Business Development Manager Martin Dinham says: "Being based in such a great location certainly helps attract the kind of people we need. Even more importantly, it helps us hold on to them - a big advantage in an industry where skills are at a premium."

Clients

The company is constantly adding new clients across a wide range of sectors. Amongst the best known are Star Internet, the UK's biggest business ISP, internet travel agency justtheflight.com, leading finance portal Fair Investment, and Cornwall's own Eden Project.

Technology

Broadband internet access, which is offered to Cornwall-based businesses at subsidised rates through the actnow organisation, has hugely increased the speed at which Neutralize can work online. Cokes says: "It means we can do certain jobs that used to take all day in just an hour." Broadband has also enabled the company to introduce a video-conferencing facility and an extranet site, enhancing communications with clients and resellers.

Support

Neutralize is essentially a 'bootstrap' operation that has succeeded on its own merits without the need for external financial support. However, the company has benefited from participation in the Digital Peninsula Network, which pools the skills and resources of Cornwall's online professionals.