

Final Report for Digital Challenge Fund Cornwall –April 2015

Touch - Digital High Street Launch Events and Engagement via social media and Partners

We originally chose to work with BID towns in order to:-

- Provide training for retailers and other small businesses, with the exception of national stores BID members.
- Benefit from a ready group of people; the BIDs have ready databases for their members to they could be contacted easily
- Deliver an activity as part of business support that had been identified in their business plan as being needed
- Use evaluation of the project to develop future digital skills initiatives

We then decided to change our marketing strategy to include all major towns across Cornwall and not just the 7 BID towns, in order to reach the widest possible audience. We worked with a number of partners, including Federation of Small Businesses (FSB), Business Cornwall Magazine, Superfast Cornwall, Cornwall Chamber and Local Town Chambers to promote this project.

It also became apparent that we needed to look at how we would reach those businesses owners who were neither affiliated to any of the various business networks, nor were digitally savvy. We distributed the flyers by hand in the major town centres; this approach was very successful and feedback from many businesses suggests that they would not have heard about the project without it. Feedback from the launch events also makes it clear that the flyer distribution and the 'Tweet Bus' have been instrumental in raising awareness with town centre businesses.

The decision to broaden the programme to include other towns and change our marketing strategy has worked well. The wider range of towns chosen to host the launch events has fitted in well with Cornwall's geography, with businesses preferring to attend events in their local area.

Engage – Delivery of Training Sessions and Launch Events

A total of 70 businesses registered for the 3 training modules and evaluation after the training has been really positive. Moreover, we continue to receive calls from a range of businesses and we have a list of businesses who expressed an interest in the project.

We have made good use of the Digital High Street programme materials, which are sufficiently generic to be applied to a range of small business types, beyond retail, although this branding made it more difficult to attract non retail businesses. People 1st have in fact just re-branded 'Digital High Street Skills' to 'Digital Business Skills' which will support future delivery programmes. The resources from People 1st certainly helped the effectiveness of the programme and our delivery process, under some genuinely challenging time frames.

One of the most important outcomes was that all participants now have a much better understanding of the scale and complexity of a digital business.

Shift – Digital High Street Challenge Fund of £40k

Cornwall Development Company has taken over responsibility for the application process and 59 applications were received by the closing date. Only those businesses that attended the training were eligible to apply, so we have an 84% success rate in businesses applying for the vouchers. The applications are of a high quality and clearly demonstrate what they have learnt from the training and the actions to be taken forward within their business.

Offer letters to the applicants, together with claim forms, will be sent out week commencing 20th April, 2015.

Evaluation / Feedback from Partners

What worked well?

“I think the general approach worked very well and hopefully a reasonable amount of value was received by all involved. The interactivity of the groups was very valuable where everyone shared their own thoughts and experience.”

Phil Allatt – IT West

“The project was well received at a professional presentation at the Chamber of Commerce Cornwall Big Breakfast in February by our members. We have recently held the first Cornwall Town Chambers Conference and the feedback received about the project was excellent. We are aware that our members would welcome further support in this area in the future and would like to congratulate the programme in enhancing the skills and potential for profit generation by small businesses in Cornwall.”

Mel Colton Dyer, Cornwall Chamber of Commerce

“I think this type of funding scheme is very much needed again as it helped to address a fundamental weakness that many businesses suffer from – namely, knowing that they need to do something with their website but are not sure what and are afraid it will entail a high cost. I think this scheme helped to address these issues.”

Ewan McClymont, Bishop Fleming Chartered Accountants

What could be improved?

We tried to make the participants experts in a massive range of complex areas. With a planned follow on programme of work, the initial sessions could have been kept higher level as a strategic starting point.

“One of the challenges within the format was the different skills in the room. As a trainer we needed to balance the complexity level based on the people in the room so everyone got value. Everyone would get more value if their skill levels were similar to others in the room.”

“On a similar subject the variation on business type was also a challenge. Although I know it was not possible due to time constraints on this project but having broad categories would be beneficial e.g. ecommerce/retail, tourism, service. The sessions could then be more specific to the needs of the participants if they came to a session that was more specific to their business.”

“One recommendation would be to give (the scheme) a different title – “Digital high street Skills” implied that it was for retail businesses only and made it difficult to communicate.

Phil Allatt - IT West

Sustainability

With more time and funding this would be a fantastic foundation for a larger programme of investment/match funding. This could be the first stage of a five year programme that provides matched funding for on-going programmes of work based on this important strategic foundation.

A common request from the participants was a one to one follow up around specific business issues and some of the businesses are applying for a voucher to pay for this one to one specialist support.

We have set up a Google Digital High Street Cornwall Community where businesses can get support and advice through a peer to peer network. We are also looking to set up a group on LinkedIn. Businesses that attended the training now also have access to People 1st Portal where there is a number of resources available.

We have only touched the surface in supporting some of those small businesses who are in real need of digital skills support.