



WILTSHIRE'S LIFESTYLE BOOM

HOW ETSY AND PINTEREST HAVE SPAWNED THE MICROSHOP BUSINESS

Wiltshire's lifestyle boom

Thanks to social networking and online selling platforms for entrepreneurs, running a micro-business is becoming big business in Wiltshire.

From the cobbled streets of Marlborough, to the gentle slopes of Malmesbury, Wiltshire is a great place for shopping for unique and unusual treasures, be it antiques and art, or fashion and food. But while the historic towns compete with dedicated modern outlets and high streets, there are also hundreds of hidden 'micro-businesses' in the county, nestled away out of plain sight, and equally dedicated to providing a modern and intimate hit of retail therapy.

Kitchens, garden sheds, cellars and living rooms have become launch pads of commerce, where creative minds have turned interests and ideas into satisfying and lucrative sources of income.

And thanks to a host of social media tools, selling on a digital platform from any location has never been easier. Ebay has auctioned off attics full of forgotten belongings, and Etsy has turned hobbyists into hot shot entrepreneurs.

A host of social media tools

As an online market site for handmade and vintage goods, Etsy connects shoppers in search of something special directly with men and women who have something special to sell. Posting images of their goods on social sharing websites like Pinterest, Twitter and Facebook to increase their market reach, they have created a community which connects with consumers, and with potential - and actual - customers across the planet.



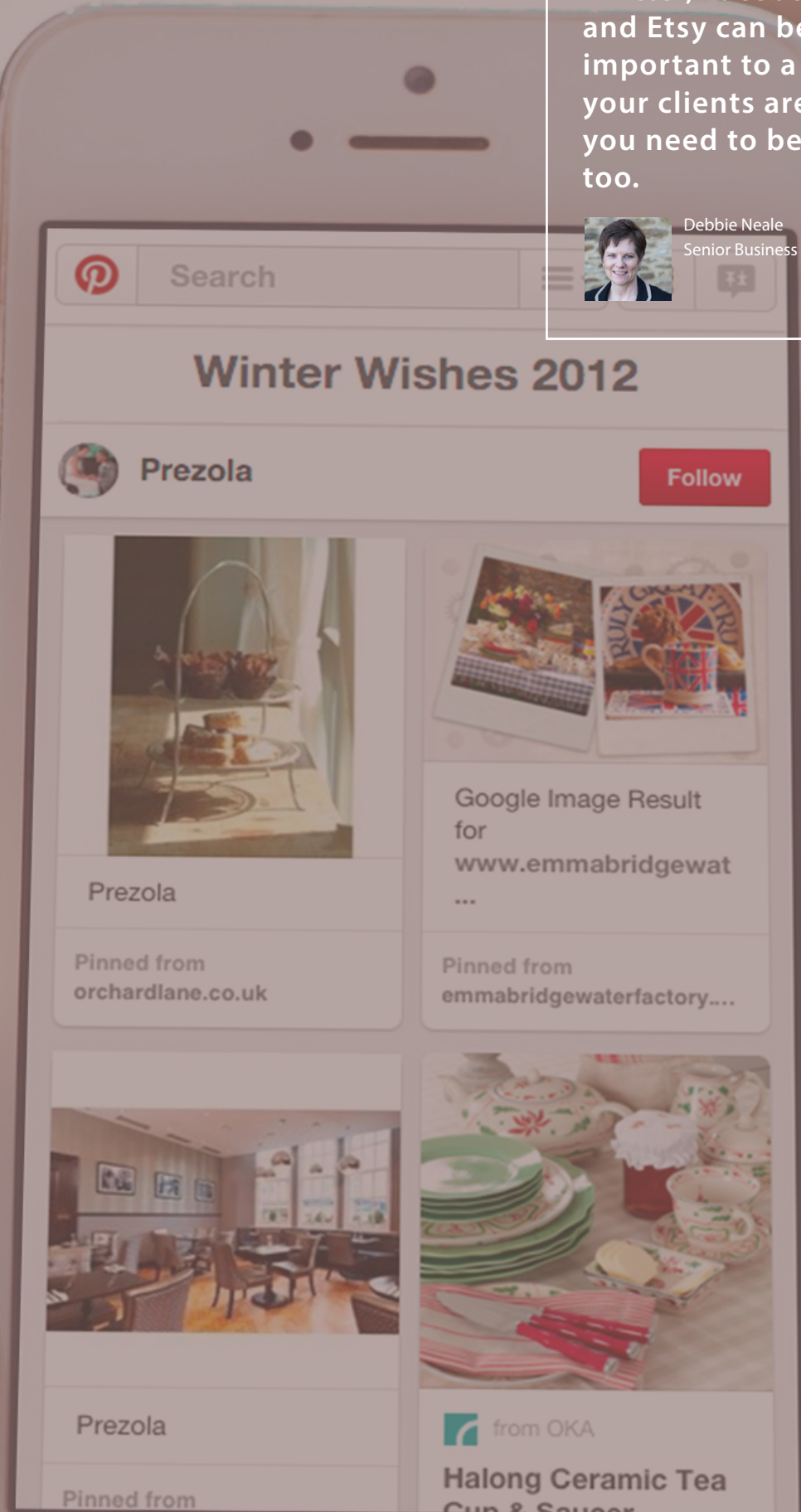
Etsy has over 50 million members, Pinterest boasts 100 million users, and Facebook over one billion.

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Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest and Etsy can be very important to a business. If your clients are using them, you need to be using them too.



Debbie Neale
Senior Business Manager





How Etsy and Pinterest have spawned the microshop business

And you can bet that many of them want to buy the unique and niche products which are being made across Wiltshire, by ambitious entrepreneurs.

And while some deliberately keep production on a small scale, others are working harder than ever - but enjoying every minute of the independence that comes with running your own business.

The micro-business mentality also allows consumers to go window shopping on the screens of tablets and smartphones, from the comfort of an armchair or on the daily commute. In a rural county like Wiltshire, this means small businesses in towns, villages and hamlets don't have to rely on passing trade and a

central location to get ahead. As one resident commented: "I never buy gifts from shops now. I always go to Etsy and specialist websites to find wonderful, unique, personal gifts."

The Swindon and Wiltshire Business Hub (WBH), which provides support to all sizes of business across the county, advises and instructs on the benefits of online selling and social media. Business Manager Debbie Neale explained: "It's an area we get asked about frequently. Our social media seminars are extremely popular, and we get a lot of positive feedback from those who attend."

The WBH advisor continued: "Social media is a good option for raising your

profile, for letting people know you're there. It also gives businesses the ability to reach further in terms of customers' locations, and they can also be used very effectively for networking. Some people are nervous about using online marketing and selling. The best thing to do is get some expert advice and just have a go."

Social bees

Doubling her turnover in the second year of business.



Claire Barker,
Hive Originals

Claire Barker, who runs Hive Originals from a converted shed at her home in Devizes, Wiltshire, is convinced she would not have had as much success selling natural skin care products made from her own honey and beeswax without the ability to communicate on social media. After doubling her turnover in the second year of business, Claire continues to use Twitter, Facebook and Pinterest to communicate - and create a buzz - with her growing number of customers.

She explained: "It's a real time engagement with my customer base. Social media means I can connect with my customers and have a conversation with them which wouldn't be possible otherwise. I can tell them about new products, they can tell me what they like, and it means I can show the personality behind the business. A good picture posted on social media tells a thousand word story. I can post pictures of the changing seasons, of Wiltshire and what we are doing here. It's a very useful tool."

Claire, who started out as an amateur beekeeper and took the leap after being made redundant from her job as a retail director, says she has been assisted by the Wiltshire Business Hub right from the start. She said: "I attended a course on how to start a business, and they've been supporting me ever since. It's very comforting to know that their expertise is only ever a phone call away."

Claire added that as the owner of a micro-business, social media has meant she is able to engage with customers across the UK, from South Wales to the Scottish Highlands, in a way that wouldn't be possible otherwise. Now in sole charge of production, design, marketing, web design and everything else associated with the business, she said: "I have never worked so hard in my life. But I wouldn't change it for the world. It's good to be the master of your own destiny."

It's a piece of cake

Fellow Wiltshire resident and entrepreneur Cathie Sanders, is a recently amateur-turned-professional cake baker and icing specialist who, together with her neighbour and friend Annie, opened the doors of the Flying Pig Cake Emporium in May 2015. And already, she says, they are rushed off their feet.

Based in a former doctor's surgery in Calne, the duo are doing their best to feed that great British appetite for baking, supplying bespoke cakes for weddings, birthdays, and any other occasion, for as much as £300 or as little as £1.85.

They also teach the skills of sugar craft to sweet-toothed students of any age in their 'small but beautiful' new studio, where they cater for children's parties and hen-dos.

Prior to launching the business, the business partners spent seven months working on market research, website development, account planning, and premises development.

Aided by advice from the WBH, the Flying Pig Cake Emporium (the name came to Cathie in a dream) has so far been growing well by word of mouth, but the pair are embracing social media to widen their reach. "We take pictures of our cakes and post them on Facebook," says Cathie. "If they get liked and shared and forwarded, that's obviously a great way for our business to grow and reach more customers."



CATHY SANDERS
FLYING PIG CAKE
EMPORIUM

"Facebook is a great way for our business to grow and reach more customers."



Copyright Flying Pig Cake Emporium 2015

“When you start your own business, you do it in the knowledge that you’re going to have to be totally committed. We’re working evenings and weekends, but six months in, we still love baking cakes.”

Cathie went on: “Annie and I were both enthusiastic home bakers. We talked about starting a business together for a long long time. WBH have been very helpful. They’re always there for help and advice and we went on one of their social media courses. We’ve been totally amazed at how busy we are.”

La crème de la crème

Prezola is now the UK's largest independent wedding gift list service.

Another go-getting Wiltshire duo, husband and wife team Dom and Ali Beavan, set up their successful business after discovering a gap in the wedding market.

Rather than making their own products, they have created a unique digital platform which allows couples to create their ideal collection of wedding presents from a huge range - 30,000 and counting - of high-end brands including Selfridges, The White Company and Le Creuset.

They launched their company in 2010, after sketching out their business plan on a piece of paper at the kitchen table, where they come up with the name and registered the trademark on the same day. Prezola is now the UK's largest independent wedding gift list service, with over 30 members of staff supplying the gifts for over 5,000 happy couples last year.

Being an online service means Prezola can base themselves in Westbury, Wiltshire, where they recently used assistance from WBH to win a Gateway for Growth grant of £50,000 to enhance their digital presence.

Attention to detail and customer service have led to industry awards, bigger premises with extra warehousing space, and a successful business for the couple who both previously worked separately in Bath, Somerset in interior design (Ali) and publishing (Dom).

Dom says the pair married their different skills to come up with a combination that has taken the wedding industry by storm. The former publishing executive explained: "Ali is an interior designer with a huge knowledge of the homeware market, while I managed web strategy for charities. The combination of Ali's passion for products and my tech background have proven to be pretty formidable."

Puzzling it out

Another Wiltshire-based business which has embraced the internet in order to thrive is Wentworth Wooden Jigsaw Puzzles, based near Malmesbury. The company founded in 1994 makes wooden jigsaw puzzles of every conceivable size and subject - and ships them all over the globe from their converted dairy farm.

Online shopping has transformed what used to be a very traditional mail order business selling a very traditional product, albeit one made with state of the art computer controlled lasers. It now sells 150,000 puzzles a year, and with a recent overhaul in design and packaging increasing availability, business is booming.

In fact, according to Managing Director Dominic Lewis-Barclay, who is contemplating a move to bigger premises to allow for growth over the next 20 years, there is probably a Wentworth Wooden Jigsaw Puzzle customer in every country in the world, thanks partly to their effective website which makes ordering from afar much easier than it used to be.



We probably have customers in every country in the world.

Social media sharing is something the company is embracing, having just appointed a local agency to develop its marketing strategy and grow their customer base in the UK and overseas. And like a jigsaw puzzle, it seems that for a lot of businesses in Wiltshire, everything is fitting together perfectly

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It's amazing to look back and see how we came from an idea to be the UK's biggest independent wedding gift list service.

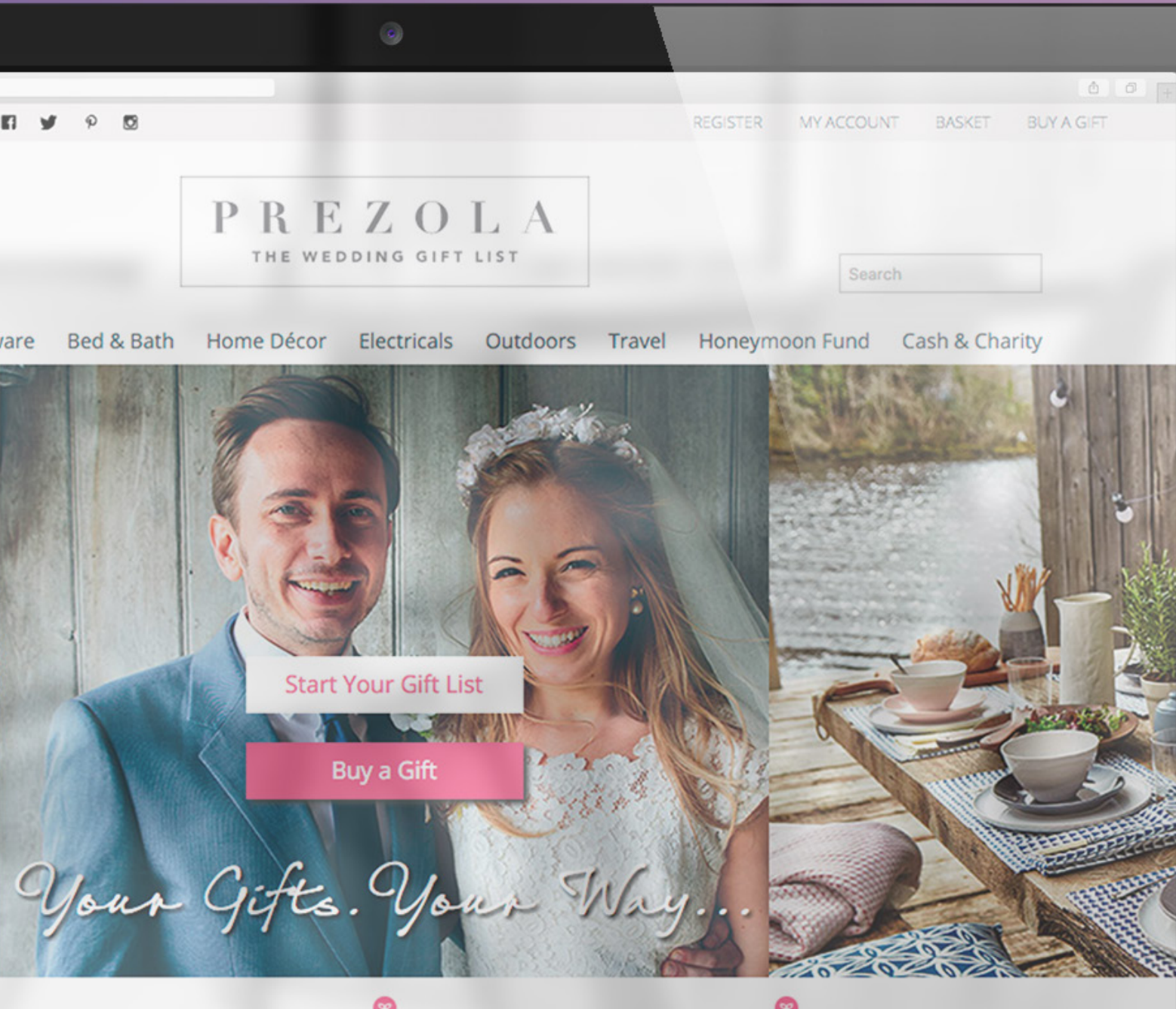


Dom Beavan
Prezola

Tips for starting a micro-business with the help of social media

- 1. Share your passion** - That passion will show through on social media and enthruse potential customers, who will hopefully enthruse you in return.
- 2. Post regularly** - Stay in touch regularly with your customers. A regular flow of interesting news and snippets keep you in mind.
- 3. Be visual** - A high quality picture of your product is advertising gold.
- 4. Respond to feedback** - Customers will appreciate the personal touch and feel more engaged with your brand. Engaging with customers is part of the fun!
- 5. Be realistic** - Online marketing success does not happen overnight. Give yourself time to build.
- 6. Get expert advice** - Tap into expertise and advise from people with experience of getting the best out of social media platforms!





Swindon and Wiltshire Business Hub

How we can help you

The Swindon and Wiltshire Business Hub provides publicly funded, local, unrivalled and unique 360 degree service to enhance your business.

If you are looking to improve productivity and efficiency, increase sales and identify new channels to market, find new premises, develop your employees, or capitalise on the benefits our new digital world has to offer, then why not

take advantage of this support, as these businesses have done, and directly tap into the Swindon and Wiltshire Business Hub?

Contact us to secure up to £1,000 worth of Business Support and take advantage of this unique network of support. Extra funds are available now for use through to March 2016.

The Hub has an outstanding track record of success providing impartial,

confidential business support without obligation and opening the door to many ways to develop your business!

Visit www.wiltshirebusinesshub.co.uk to arrange a meeting, or drop us a line on 01225 402 096 to find out how we can help.