

Objective One case study knowledge economy

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The projects in the Knowledge Economy investment cluster include those developing the Combined Universities and activities that support the development of much stronger links between Higher Education and business.

Developing the Combined Universities in Cornwall is considered so important to the development of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly it was the only project specifically outlined in the Single Programming Document contract. Prior to commencing the Objective One Programme in 2000, there was no such university opportunity in Cornwall.

University level provision in Cornwall and its links with business encourages graduates to start their own businesses, attracts new business and encourages innovation and knowledge transfer, thereby increasing the overall wealth of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.

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Tom Bennison is making sure the Cornwall-based company where he is employed stays at the forefront of the internet search engine world.

Tom, who graduated in media communications with psychology from the University of Gloucestershire, is working as marketing executive at Neutralize. The company, which is based at Tolvaddon Energy Park, Pool, specialises in maximising search engine potential – ie ensuring their clients appear high up in searches on the internet (such as MSN and Google).

Tom was employed at Neutralize under Unlocking Cornish Potential (UCP), a Combined Universities in Cornwall project run by Cornwall College that has received Objective One investment and places graduates with businesses.

For Tom the job is a dream come true – not only did he specialise in Media Communications and have an active interest in New Media, but he has been able to return to Cornwall and in his spare time can enjoy his other interest – surfing.

Immediately after his 2004 graduation Tom worked for Granada Television on programmes including the X factor and Big Brother. He then moved into PR, working from Bristol.

“I came to the conclusion that I was always nipping back home to surf but I had never previously considered Cornwall as a place to forge my career. I thought that was not possible. I was about to go to



Tom Bennison, who is employed at Neutralize under the Unlocking Cornish Potential scheme.

Australia when this opportunity came up and I knew that search engine optimisation was a really exciting growth sector and that I would have a unique role in Cornwall.

“I worked for Neutralize for three months and in that time the company won a couple of big awards. Then I went travelling for five months and when I got back, as soon as I hit the ground, I got a call from Lucy (Lucy Cokes, Managing Director of Neutralize).”

Tom is now Marketing Executive and is working on search engine optimised press releases and co-ordinating events.

“A lot of direct competitors have come up,” he continued. “Search engine marketing is the biggest growth area compared to other forms of advertising and I have to be very proactive to keep us ahead. I do a lot of PR and marketing at trade shows and get us speaking opportunities at conferences. All PR is in house at the moment where it used to be out sourced to a London agency.

“For me the training that is offered with UCP has been really good, with access to leading specialists in areas where I needed to improve.”

Tom has also organised an event for the Chartered Institute of Marketing, at the Eden

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Project, called 'Searching for the Future of Marketing'. This attracted more than 80 businesses as well as expert speakers in their field from London.

Neutralize, which began in Lucy Cokes' spare bedroom in London, has expanded following the relocation to Cornwall and now employs sixteen staff. Accolades, which Tom has entered the company for include the Cornwall Business Awards and the Deloitte and Touche Technology Fast 50. Neutralize is also currently (March 2007) a finalist in the Net Imperatives Digital Awards. Lucy herself was also placed in the top three in the 2005 NatWest Everywoman Awards. In the same year she was also awarded the coveted Cornwall Chamber of Commerce and HUB awards 'Entrepreneur of the Year'.

Clients include Black and Decker, Playboy, CNET, De Walt and the London Stock Exchange. Cornwall companies on the Neutralize client base include the Eden Project, heatandplumb.com and Bouncy Happy People.

"We increase our clients' visibility on the search engines," said Tom. "The beauty of the medium is that the little guys can have a big voice. With the availability of broadband and new emerging technologies, it's now possible to work from any location – hence the reason why Neutralize relocated to Cornwall."

Tom's UCP placement finished in April when he is expected to be retained at Neutralize. He is one of four UCP graduates to be employed there.

Lucy Cokes said: "Having Tom focus on our advertising PR and marketing efforts has been critical to our company's ongoing expansion and has already brought us much media attention. The UCP scheme has been a great benefit to our company, enabling us to take on more graduates and allowing the graduates to have a support network in what is often their first job."

Allyson Glover, UCP coordinator, added: "It is fantastic to have yet another success story with Neutralize. Lucy has created a dynamic environment in which graduates flourish and Tom has increased their ability to stay at the forefront of their industry. It really is an excellent example of the impact a graduate can have on a small business."

For more information about Unlocking Cornish Potential visit www.unlockingcornishpotential.co.uk.



Lucy Cokes, founder of Neutralize.