

Baking on the Internet - A sales opportunity

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Elizabeth Botham & Sons have been a family run, Craft Bakery, in the ancient sea port of Whitby for the past 131 years. Nestling on the North Yorkshire coast, with the North Sea to one side, and with 20 miles of the North Yorkshire moors on the other, it is a very pleasant place to live and work. The Bakery was started by Elizabeth Botham, a farmer's wife, in 1865. She had 13 children, and a husband that we know very little about. Perhaps he was worn out! She built up a very successful business, and the family still produce over 400 lines in much the same way as Elizabeth made them all that time ago. We insist upon using traditional craft methods, we will not compromise our craft for the more modern methods taken by so many bakers nowadays, because we wish to keep our identity as a high quality craft bakery.

This all sounds idyllic - I wish that it were. The trouble is, that the geography of the place in which we live, means that it keeps us in! Also, Whitby is a very seasonal Town, very busy in the summer weeks, and terribly quiet in the winter months. Whitby has a population of 14,000 people. This means that we have a lot of highly skilled bakers, to find wages for every week. It takes many years to train a baker, you can't just take them on for the few busy weeks in the season, and lay them off during the rest of the year.

These factors of uneven trading conditions, geography, and overheads, made me look very carefully at other markets.

We already had some Mail order business from Expatriates living overseas using Botham's to send cakes to their friends and loved one's in Great Britain. We also have a small business supplying hamper companies with decorated cakes for stores overseas. This was one area that I wanted to build.

I considered producing mail order brochures and mailing these out to potential customers. The costs and expected take up were not encouraging! I priced a simple brochure to printed and it came to stlg4,000 and that's for a pile of printed material stood in the corner of my office!

So Stamps will have to be bought- at least stlg2,500, and that's for delivery in the UK! And the purchase of a good mailing list had to be considered. Botham's are not a cash rich business, and the thought of the initial expense, then aware of the likelihood of many of the expensive brochures skimming straight over someone's desk and straight into the water paper basket, made me realize that there had to be a better and more cost effective way.

The trouble was, the customers I already had, were expensive to deal with. I regularly had to correspond by fax with my customers who lived as far away as Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. I knew there had to be a better way. It occurred to me, that perhaps E-mail was the answer.

A few days later, I returned home one evening, and my three daughters were watching Blue Peter, (A children's program on BBC) They were making a model, and during the course of the program they advertised their URL and E-Mail address, so the children could look up their pages on the web, and follow the instructions to make the model - This crystallized my

thoughts. If children were using the Internet now, and let's face it, it's not new to them, it's just another communications tool, just as the 'phone or the fax are to us. The Internet has to be the way for companies to communicate with their potential customers in the future.

I realized that only 6 years ago, there were only 2 fax machines in Whitby, now there are many.... Surely that would be the same with Internet!

I looked into who would be able to provide me with Internet access, and I found an excellent Company in Middlesbrough called Octacon Ltd. I already had a very clear idea of how I wanted to market my products, and I found Susan Benger, Octacon's web Page author at that time, helped me realize my ideas by producing some excellent work I think she has done a wonderful job. Indeed, I have received comments from a questionnaire to my Internet customers, about, not only the quality of goods and service Botham's offer, but to the user friendliness and the general overall feel for our web site. All of them said how much they enjoyed our pages.

Our pages have been on the W3 since May, last year. Selling Plum Bread, Block Gingerbread, Biscuits, Hampers and Iced & decorated celebration Cakes around the world. Since then, we have had over 19,000 potential customers drop in to my site. I wish they were all orders! At the moment, we receive around 10 to 12 orders per week, I think that this is most acceptable. We are able to build up an excellent mailing list from our customers, and we send out special offers and ideas for various seasons. For instance, just before Easter, I sent out a simple email suggesting that our customers try a Simnel Cake, (A traditional Easter Cake), with postal information for all parts of the world. We also did the same for Mother's Day. We get a positive response from our E-mail customers, so much so, in fact, that they regularly re-order.

We have regular orders from Japan, from Businessmen, who order special cakes for family and business associates. We even sent a wedding cake to Japan!

We have recently added some Retail/Wholesale pages with information of Pack weights, bar code details, Cubic Capacity, boxes per pallet, language, ingredients and packaging specifications.

We also have a [Botham's Kids W3](#) site with fun recipes for various age groups, and a downloadable Botham's branded game in both PC and Mac format. The Kid's pages are not for direct selling, but made deliberately to be a "Cool" site, for brand building, raising the awareness to the Craft Baking Industry to possible future bakers, and to ensure the Botham's name is synonymous with excellent quality food and service; also that it can be fun too!

I think that the Internet has vastly increased customer awareness to our company and our products.

It has helped in not only finding individual sales, but prospective retailer's and Wholesaler's too.

It has helped in informing our customers of their local stockist of Botham's products, so they can carry on buying our Plum Bread and Biscuits locally.

It has also made the changing price information, or even whole pages, for that matter, something that can be done quickly and cheaply.

Marketing our Bakery on the web, has been a most useful marketing tool, and a happy solution to what was a sticky conundrum for a small family firm in Whitby.