



June 2007

Case Study

Joe Bananas[®]

For Ian Leonard, selling blankets at festivals quickly turned into a highly successful e-commerce venture after BT helped to hook East Martin, Hampshire onto the broadband grid.

Background:

For thousands of entrepreneurs based in remote locations across the UK, a good idea can turn rapidly into a lucrative online business opportunity, provided they have the necessary ICT infrastructure and support. That's certainly what Ian Leonard, founder of outdoor equipment firm Joe Bananas[®], discovered.

After selling blankets at music festivals across the UK for more than 20 years, Ian knew there had to be a way to get people better prepared for big outdoor events, such as Glastonbury, which did not involve hauling around loads of all-weather equipment.

His response was to create an online store which would allow music fans from around the globe to pre-order tents and other camping gear and collect it at the festival.

Unfortunately Ian's ISDN line was far from robust enough to keep pace with the huge demand created by Joe Bananas[®], innovative offer.

However, thanks to the e-Hampshire partnership and BT, a solution was found and the enterprising firm was able to connect to high speed broadband that was well up to the task in hand.

The Challenge – going online the hard way

As a highly experienced blanket stall holder, Ian from East Martin in Fordingbridge, Hampshire, knew that bad weather predictions for music festivals such as Glastonbury were usually good for sales of his main product.

However after years of watching people lugging heavy equipment for miles on end to protect themselves from the elements, he knew that offering them alternative solutions would open up even better commercial opportunities.

Ian appointed new-media manager, Mark Robinson, to set up and run an online 'shop' while Ian continued doing what he loved best – trading and camping at festivals.

Coming from Salisbury in neighbouring Wiltshire, Mark was used to the rapid download speeds of broadband. However, broadband was not yet available in the Fordingbridge area of Hampshire, where the company was located. As a result they had to make do with an expensive 64Kb ISDN line instead.

Mark who had previous experience of creating online 'shops', soon got the Joe Bananas[®], site up and running with external hosting and access to extremely powerful data management tool MS SQL provided by UK firm 1&1.

He also collaborated with renowned e-payment firm, WorldPay for the management and processing of payments leaving him free to concentrate on what lines to stock and how to get the site moving up the internet rankings.

The Solution – going bananas for broadband

With search engine optimisation high on the list of priorities for Joe Bananas[®], Mark and Ian were delighted when they were contacted by the e-Hampshire partnership to let them know that broadband had at last arrived in the area.

Although broadband was deemed not to be commercially viable prior to this, Hampshire County Council worked in partnership with SEEDA (South East England Development Agency), the area's district councils and BT to help provide this service to residents and businesses in the area.

Following a competitive tender and several months of evaluation and negotiation with various private and public bodies, BT was selected as the preferred supplier. The company provided ADSL (asymmetric digital subscriber line) broadband technology to the Martin Cross exchange which serves Fordingbridge, where Joe Bananas[®] is based, along with the Hatherden and Privett exchanges.

The partnership said “People living in rural locations are often most in need of services like the internet, but because fewer people live in these areas it has not always been viable to enable broadband in these places. Because we believe that access to these services is so important we agreed to work with SEEDA and the Districts to help make it happen and I am sure that both residents and businesses in Hatherden, Privett and Martin Cross are delighted to have joined the broadband revolution”.

Patricia Vaz, BT’s South East of England regional director, said: “This is a milestone in the delivery of SEEDA’s and BT’s objective of region-wide broadband coverage.

“Everybody in the county will be attached to a broadband-enabled exchange, but the work doesn’t stop here. The next step is to ensure that the benefits of ICT and broadband are exploited as widely as possible, across all technologies and public, private and personal platforms, to reap maximum benefit.

“We need to demonstrate to internet users that, whatever you do online, you can do it better with broadband, whether it’s ordering supplies or selling products, working from home or distance learning, accessing local authority services or simply keeping in touch with friends and family. Once people have tried broadband there really is no going back. BT is pleased to have been chosen as the supplier to work alongside Hampshire County Council to ensure that the county of Hampshire can harness the power of broadband.”

As a result, high-speed BT broadband connections can now be accessed by almost every home and business in the county.

As one of the 10% or so of Hampshire businesses which are home-based, Joe Bananas[®], also qualified for financial assistance to get connected to the service.

The future – it’s a jungle out there, but someone’s got to sort it

Since getting connected to BT broadband just before Christmas 2006, sales at Joe Bananas[®], have gone through the roof.

The company also recently became the preferred supplier for Virtual Festivals, and the site now gets around 500,000 page impressions per month, with orders in the run-up to the annual Glastonbury festival averaging 15-20 per day.

Ian Leonard – known as ‘Lenny’ to thousands of festival fans - says he has always been a big believer in getting people what they want and not leaving people ‘out in the cold’.

And he believes the firm's recently launched online service 'Sorted!' achieves just that.

However, the company recognises that this success would not have been possible without the assistance of the e-Hampshire partnership, coupled with the speed and convenience of BT broadband.

In addition to running the 'Sorted!' scheme at Glastonbury, Glade Festival, WOMAD, V Festival (Chelmsford and Stafford) and Reading, the firm is keen to continue building on its success.

Mark now hopes to optimise the site even further, while Ian hopes to streamline its offering and logistics.

Ends.