

Supporters thrive in crisis

Businesses are realising just how important their supporting teams really are during this pandemic, with PR, design and virtual business support groups reporting a positive shift as the crisis goes on



By Hayley Griffith of the maritime-focused public relations agency Creatively Hayley

We've all seen the headlines of how Covid has affected brick and mortar businesses – those with premises and staff. I was curious to know how a specific group of online-based businesses, those often deemed as support services, have coped. Buried among the headlines of job losses and shop closures, there have been some great moments of clarity for these support service businesses.

I spoke to some fellow business owners in these industries – those often seen as “nice to have” – namely PR, design, branding, virtual business support and marketing. I wasn't surprised to hear that there's been a positive shift – albeit not instantly.

As the nation gathered around its screens on March 23, tuning into what will become a historic broadcast from the Prime Minister ordering households to stay home, many saw an impact immediately.

Amber Badger, Hampshire-based copywriter, said: “My phone began ringing immediately with clients pausing my monthly retainers. New business enquiries I'd had the previous month had gone cold; it was a worrying time – I lost three of my clients overnight.”

This appears to be a common experience

among the Hampshire-based businesses I have spoken to. Siobhan Fox of Reveal Marketing said: “I lost all my clients and suddenly my business was a world away from where it was a year ago.”

My own company – Creatively Hayley – saw all my retaining clients, understandably, pause all contracts and agreements.

What happened next for these service-based businesses? “We had to do our own inner work,” said Tammi Heals at Shadowcat Creative, a personal brand coach “I think a lot of people were taking Covid as an opportunity to reflect on where they wanted their businesses to go.”

Amber said: “People have had space to think about their passions and build online businesses”. Something that Siobhan agrees with: “We've all had time to reflect on what's really important.”

In these moments of time and space, there has been a surge in new business start-ups. The Independent newspaper reported in September that from a survey of 1000 GoDaddy customers, 15 per cent of new UK entrepreneurs made the leap during lockdown.

Alongside these new start-ups fighting to be noticed in a world where visibility online is increasingly essential, established businesses have been soul searching for where to turn next.

The 12-week mark appears to have been a turning point for many, a fundamental shift in seeing these once perceived “nice to have” support services become a “must have”. It's

now imperative that businesses have a strong presence online, that they are telling their story effectively and marketing their products and services.

“Covid was doing my selling for me,” said Siobhan.

Karen Brooks, personal assistant with Pellings Business Solutions, suddenly saw a marked increase in new enquiries in September.

Backed up by a change in her offering to support businesses which themselves were adjusting and adapting in response to Covid.

Noticing a further shift in companies launching additional streams, Tammi was being approached by businesses struggling to get online and is now pivoting her own business to focus on supporting these companies in a coaching capacity.

This shift continued; the pace quickened during the summer. Amber has seen an increased demand in people wanting good quality copy. “I've been approached by lots of new start-ups wanting to make an immediate impact with their website copy. Covid has given people space to think about their passions – it's now or never for these people.”

Among everyone I've spoken to and myself included, late summer and into September has provided these women with their most successful months since their businesses began. Covid may have created a future of business uncertainty but it's also provided some great clarity and space for supporting the growth of new opportunities which I think is quite exciting.