



CASE STUDY

Noel Vance

Worcester Business School and Institute of Education
BSc IT for Education (2005-8)



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Q: Tell us about your background. Where have you previously worked or studied?

A: "After leaving College I'd been in the motor trade for 12 years and got fed up with that and left my job aged 29 to come to the University of Worcester to train in IT and Education with the view to becoming a school teacher. What first brought me to the University was that I dropped a customer from the garage off here and that got me thinking. Over the last few years two of my friends, a civil engineer and a roof tiler, had also done their degrees at Worcester and I envied their lifestyle. Then I had a prospectus in the post and decided to sign up."

Q: How did you get involved with enterprise at the University of Worcester?

A: "That was the most bizarre set of circumstances of all. In year 1 and 2 of my degree I'd been working two days a week doing the job I've always done but for a different garage over in Hereford and they were in the business of wholesaling large quantities of surplus car parts. I got timidly involved in that and they decided that they wanted out of that market and they were fishing around for people to take the business off their hands and also a 6,000ft² warehouse full of stock. Two days later I was sat in a lecture saying to a friend that I'd love to find a way to start a business and then we were told about Student Placements for Entrepreneurs in Education (SPEED). Obviously the timing wasn't perfect as I was half-way through my degree but I thought clearly this was meant to be. I didn't get involved in the other enterprise activities because I wanted to distance myself from the business work I'd done all of my career and focus on the teaching side. It was only when I got involved with SPEED that it kindled an interest in going into business for myself."

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Q: Did your studies and enterprise activities complement each other?

A: "A lot of what I learned in the third year became important because I was learning about business information systems, data flow, business structuring and that informed my business. I've also done a few modules about web site design and creating e-commerce web pages. At the time I was wondering why I was learning this stuff then it all started to slot into place. The business structuring lectures we were doing had me wondering why we were doing this because I wanted to be a teacher not a businessman but that's really paying off now."

Q: What were your greatest challenges and how did you deal with them?

A: "Besides my degree and my business I've also got three young children. My wife works part-time to supplement our income and I've had to learn to plan my week, day by day."

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Q: What's happened to you since graduation?

A: "Hopefully I'll graduate this year but in my first year of trading I've turned over somewhere between £45,000 and £50,000 and this is only with giving it two days per week alongside the final year of my degree. My business plan originally

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was to have a warehouse, a pallet truck, a van and a computer to keep the business as simple as possible. I know there's bigger money to be had by branching out but I want to offer a relatively personal service to people and try and keep in touch through proper emails."

Q: What has been your impact on others?

A: "I try to be confident in what I do and try to get that to rub off onto other people because there's a lot of people I've met over the last three years who are timid people and hate doing presentations and getting involved with discussions. I encourage people to get involved."

Q: How do you measure your success?

A: "Obviously money in the bank equals that you're doing OK. When I'd just left College and was working in a parts department I was talking to my boss at the time and I was trying to be clever about figures. He told me that it's not the turnover but the leftover that matters and that's stuck with me ever since! In 12 months I've not borrowed a penny as the business has been in the black from day one. I also think I'm a success if I can balance my life which is quite difficult with three young children at home. So I will consider myself a success if by the time I get my results back that I've passed the degree, kept the business going in its first 12-months, and I'm not divorced! The Ebay feedback system is also a confidence booster if people are saying nice things about you."

Q: On reflection is there anything you would have done differently?

A: "I would probably have just let the business tick over rather than work to get busier as it's burned me a few times, having to be in three places at once because I was getting opportunities I just had to take. I got the bug a little bit and I put a lot of pressure on my studies and all of the other things as well."

Q: Where do you go from here (2-3 years)?

A: "My longer term plan over the next five years is to expand the business by supplying parts from a wider range of manufacturers. I'd also like to get the packaging and postage burden off me because I think I can do a better job doing the front end sales work. I'd like to expand but also get the right people in place, maybe one or two employees."

Q: Who would you like to thank for their support and encouragement?

A: "I was talking to some of my university friends last week because it's the last time we'll probably see each other in the near future and we were debating what we'd actually learned. I think I can sum it up pretty easily in that I've learned how to learn. Because knowledge is so fluid these days as everything's changing so quickly, coming to university has shown me that I can change direction in my life and do it properly. Anton Polan in Education has been quite an inspiration, his teaching style fitted in with me and we got on really well. Hugh Somervell, Richard Henson, and Viv Bell. Susan Richardson in Student Services who really helped me to keep afloat financially and gave me really tangible support. Also the Crèche who've looked after my daughter."

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