

ARCHIVED FEATURE

BRAND NEW

After five years as a web author for financial services company **Scottish Life**, Sarah Robertson realised that her plans of going to Uni was obsolete. Sufficiently versed in web design, marketing and e-business, last June she decided instead to fulfil her entrepreneurial ambitions and started her own company – **Creative State**. Now she's providing new business start-ups with full brand, design and online makeovers. *Malcolm Jack* finds out how Sarah got an eye for the new guy.

It's a family affair

"It made sense to put everything together and do something on my own, which is something that I had planned to do from a young age," says Sarah. As much as she was enjoying her job, with further full time education ruled out, it already seemed time enough to strike out on her own. It was in her blood after all:

"Running businesses is something that's in my family," she says. "Not necessarily creative services - my brother runs a finance company, and my dad was an hotelier - so different lines of work, but certainly similar in terms of ambition. With my experience, and the opportunities in Edinburgh – the amount of help young people in business can get these days – it just seemed like an opportunity I couldn't pass up."

Design crimes

It was while hunting around for a little inspiration from other fledgling businesses that Sarah stumbled across what would be her main target market. "I'd had a look around at various businesses that had started up – mainly how they had got going, and how they were marketing themselves, really just to see what they were doing," she says. "It occurred to me that there was a lack of good design out there. After speaking to some people who had spent hundreds and thousands of pounds on things that they didn't really need at such an early stage – and also on things that shouldn't have cost nearly as much – I thought, 'this is a really good market to get into.'"

Start me up

Sarah saw the perfect way to capitalise on this gap she had spotted by offering a complete starter package: "I not only do graphic design, developing a logo or brand identity, but I do web design as well. The design is then put across a variety of different mediums, ensuring consistency. That's what young businesses need, and there's a lack of out there. They're going to various different people for a variety of different things, whereas here you can come and get the whole lot.

"I think having a professional looking website is a huge thing for a business in this day and age. More and more people are using the internet, and generally speaking, if a company has got a professional looking website then it's perceived to be professional. If their image is consistent across everything else – their print design and their stationary – it's seen that they care about the way they're perceived."

Go with what you know

Sarah initially set about establishing her first business relationships by falling back on the things she new best. “I started off with three clients,” she says. “I had an interest in property and I’d worked in financial services, so the people I initially targeted – from a revenue perspective – were using my own experience: financial services customers, and property developers that I knew.

From there, the confidence and kudos she gained allowed her to try new approaches. “Since then things have really snowballed,” she says. “From referrals and networking, my client base is now around 30 people. I go to a networking event, which has been good for meeting people. It’s not really brought me a lot of work, but certainly going out and doing the whole face-to-face thing has got me more established. And it’s given me the confidence to do cold calling. Which is something I didn’t think was going to work, but for every eight calls made one bit of business is generated.”

You scratch my back...

With her focus being principally on start-ups – while essentially running one herself – Creative State has been able to establish unique relationships with other businesses, based on a sort of mutual empathy: “It’s kind of a really good way of getting the work, speaking to people who have been pretty much in the same boat as me.”

She cites one example in particular: “My most recent client, who’s probably my biggest, was referred on to me through the Princes Scottish Youth Business Trust, which is who I went through as well. So she’s going through all the same things as I did – going to panel to try and get funding and things like that. So I’m able to offer her support in that sense, and we’re also getting work out of it as well. While her brand from start to finish had been done for her, having the support there has been like an added bonus.”

It’s not the size that matters

With her own brand, site and identity getting a makeover for a new launch on its first birthday in June, does Sarah have any plans of trying to net bigger clients anytime soon?

“I do want to,” she replies, “but it’s certainly not in my plan in the next four years, because – for one thing – I enjoy working with the smaller businesses. I get so much satisfaction out of creating something for someone like me, and seeing them be happy with that. It’s almost like starting lots of businesses over and over again. I get enough satisfaction from that.”

RELATED LINKS

[Creative State](#)

[Scottish Enterprise](#)

[IFS: Oh Brother ...](#)

[IFS: Body Builders](#)

[IFNI: Small is Beautiful](#)

[IFNI: Grand Designs](#)

[IFWM: Software, Internet etc ...](#)

© 2006 Channel 4 Television Corporation