

BUSINESS READY

UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK SCIENCE PARK

Business Ready unlocks long-term growth for start-up

Boutique interior design business, Black Ivy Design, is the brainchild of Leanne Armstrong, who founded the company on her own in February 2021 after being made redundant during the Covid pandemic.



Leanne Armstrong (Black Ivy Design), Steve Tipson (Business Ready), Hayley Lineker (Warwickshire County Council) at the Sky Blue Tavern

Although the business got off to a flying start by working on eight projects thanks to word of mouth, Leanne – who had never run a business before – questioned how she was going to future proof the business and grow in the long-term.

Leanne worked with Business Ready to explore ways she could grow the business via online channels – including refreshing her website, generating SEO-friendly content and adopting targeted Google adverts.

The Company

Black Ivy Design is a boutique interior design business founded by Leanne Armstrong, which focuses on the hospitality industry.

The company creates iconic commercial environments via five core services including interior design, design

consultancy, computer generated imagery, virtual walkthroughs, and project management.

The company enjoyed year-on-year growth in its first two years – generating a five-figure annual turnover – having conceptualised and designed the inside of Dhillon's Spire Bar and the Sky Blue Tavern in Coventry city centre, as well as diversifying into helping dental practices in Birmingham and Hinckley to create a welcoming, 'hotel-feel' for customers.

The Challenge

Although the business got off to a positive start by working on eight projects Leanne was keen to plan for the future and look at opportunities to develop and grow.

Unlike many other start-ups, Leanne was doing the day job alongside being responsible for the company's overall success, and was in need of some

professional advice on both managing and growing the business.

Leanne said: "I had never run a business before, so I was seeking some basic approaches to managing a business and guidance on what I should be focusing on, but also what I should be doing to grow my client base."

The Solution

Around a year in to her entrepreneurial life, Leanne started working with Steve Tipson and Gaynor Matthews from the Business Ready programme on ways that she could grow the business to strengthen its long-term future.

Leanne said: "Steve and Gaynor have really helped to equip me not only with the basic approaches to managing a business, but also what I should be doing to grow my client base."

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"Anybody can have a website, but Steve has given me ideas of how I can drive customers to my online platform – including the use of content and certain phrases to boost my website's search engine ranking, as well as utilising videos and using Google advertising so I am reaching the right customer base."

Steve added: "We have advised Leanne to focus on her unique selling point, which is interior design within hospitality, alongside harnessing new routes to market online – including refreshing her website to ensure it ranks highly in online search engines, as well as pay-per-click advertising, and outreach approaches on LinkedIn."

The Results

Although the finishing touches are still be applied to the business's new-look website, Leanne revealed the impact of Business Ready stretches far beyond just the bottom line.

Leanne added: "Now I can see additional ways of generating new company other than word of mouth, I now have peace of mind to be able to focus on other areas of the business."

"I can now begin to plan longer term in terms of recruiting additional people and moving from my home office into a

purpose-built office space – something which I may have hesitated to do without the support of Business Ready.

"I'd definitely recommend Business Ready to any other entrepreneurs out there who are just starting out like me, as the help is out there if you look hard enough!"

Steve, who has worked closely with Leanne on growth avenues, believes she is an inspiration for other entrepreneurs who are currently going it alone.

Steve commented: "With a combination of word of mouth and strong online visibility, Leanne now has a really strong launchpad for growth over the coming years."

"Leanne is proof that if you have high levels of energy and motivation, and make the effort to seek the right professional support, then your start-up can thrive."

Warwickshire County Council's Portfolio Holder for Economy & Place, Cllr Martin Watson, said: "I am delighted that the Business Ready support has proved so valuable to Leanne and is helping Black Ivy Design to grow. Anyone who runs a small business has so much to think about, so to take on board the bespoke, detached expertise of Business Ready advisors like Gaynor and Steve often proves invaluable."

Business support for the next level

The Business Ready programme is managed by the business support team at the University of Warwick Science Park. The experienced Business Growth Advisers team have been delivering business growth and support services to technology based businesses for over 30 years.

In addition, the team are supported by a range of specialist mentors who have run their own businesses and have expertise and experience supporting, advising, coaching and mentoring other growth businesses.



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