

hotseat Markerle Davis



ON TOP OF THE WEB: Markerle Davis who set up Soap Media with his brother, Adam, in 2005

Photo: IAN ROBINSON

Untangling the web

It was 13 years ago that Markerle Davis started riding the wave of the internet revolution, DAVID COATES finds him still on top

STICKING to conventions has never really been in Markerle Davis' ethos ever since he was born.

"When I was born, one of my parents wanted to call me Mark, the other wanted to call me Earl," he says getting the explanation of his unusual Christian name out of the way.

But the ambition to be different does not stop there, when he finished his studies at Priory Technology College in Penwortham back in 1997 he chose to jump straight into the world of work at the age of just 16.

He was living in the village of Longton where entrepreneur Steve Jackson had launched his newreg.com empire, riding the crest of the dot.com bubble wave, and Markerle saw something he wanted to get involved with.

The 28-year-old explains: "I had met Steve a few times and I saw what he was doing and wanted to be part of it, so I just badgered him and kept asking him for a job until eventually he gave in."

He started off involved in the sales team at the business which sells personalised car registrations through the internet, but by 1999 it became apparent that Markerle's talents lay in getting the most out of the world wide web.

He began to take on practices including search engine optimisation, pay-per-click marketing and linked up with some of the biggest names in the online world including the then relative newcomer of

Google along with MSN and Yahoo!

"We were doing deals with major websites like, for example, Autotrader.co.uk where we would display our database of number plates through their website and pay them by the sale," he explains.

"The next thing I know I am being invited to various conferences by some of these massive companies; one which springs to mind was in San Jose, California, when I got to go to the Googleplex, the head of Google.

"Everyone there was very wealthy, everyone was driving limousines, it was an exciting time to be there."

By this time, he had taken on a role with newreg.com's sister company, UKIP Internet Consultants, which managed a huge portfolio of websites owned by Steve Jackson and it was this experience which convinced him he was ready to go into business on his own.

In 2005, Markerle and his brother, Adam, combined their talents to set up Soap Media.

Even in those days, when the power of the internet was unquestionable, the brothers still came up against brick walls of people within the small business community which did not recognise the benefit of having a website.

Markerle explains: "They thought if they had their advert in the Yellow Pages that was enough and they did not recognise that for every one person who found them there, there were another five that would find them if they were in the first



“I think people have woken up to the fact that they cannot afford not to be online

page of a Google search.

"I think people have woken up to the fact now and part of that is down to the fact it is so measurable; we can show that being the first search on Google for your industry can increase the number of people reading about your company by 50% then that is very powerful."

It is this kind of sales pitch which has seen Soap Media land clients including Pontin's, American Golf and Slazenger in services including pay-per-click advertising and search engine optimisation to get websites top of search engines.

Now the company has digital in its DNA and believes the future for all businesses is online which makes Markerle very concerned about recent news that 21% of small firms do not have a website – an attitude he intends to change.

He has grown the agency to one now employing seven staff with its own premises on East Cliff in Preston city centre and has started working to promote the region's booming digital industry through sector champion's North West Vision and Media.

He said: "When I look back at starting out in 1997, I could never have imagined the growth the online industry has seen, but I still believe there is more to come."

"Attitudes are changing and now it is the norm to be online whether that is a website or social media and that is the only way I see forward.

"I want to make sure that here in Lancashire, we are leading the way."

Builders target care deal

A BUILDING firm is in talks about a raft of new care home projects, its boss has revealed.

Steve Burke, managing director of Construction Partnership UK (CPUK), said it was in talks with several other operators about "ambitious projects."

It has completed the first phase as part of the £3.5m construction of a dementia care centre for North West-based Melton Health Care and has been involved in a number of major deals including the £1.3m new health centre at Cottam Lane, Preston.

Mr Burke said: "We hope to have positive news on these shortly, health care is an area we are targeting for expansion, with some success."

The firm has also landed a new £500,000 contract to build 5,000 sq ft Sainsbury's supermarket at Whitegate Drive, Blackpool with Lytham-based Windmill Investments with which it built a Tesco in Radcliffe, Greater Manchester.

Small firms are driving NW growth

A STUDY has shown small businesses are driving growth in the North West economy.

The Barclays Business Regional Impact Index, which spoke to 1,000 business owners in the region, showed 63% of companies get their supplies from within the region with nearly one third (32%) selling outside the region to generate extra revenue.

However, the study also showed more than two-thirds of sales were within the North West, more than any other part of the country.

Ian Aitchison, the bank's head of local banking, said: "We hear a lot of rhetoric around the importance of small businesses, but this analysis illustrates just what that means."

"Businesses in this region are using local suppliers and have also been instrumental in creating local jobs."

Floor firm hires agency

PRESTON marketing firm Stage 9 has been appointed by global flooring brand Super Click to deliver a campaign to raise awareness its brand.

The campaign sees it carry out a promotion at the Domotex European Flooring Show in Hannover, Germany, in January and launch a trade public relations campaign together with social media activity.

It recently worked with the agency to launch its new vinyl flooring system at the Harrogate Flooring Show last month.