

The opportunities are endless for Peak District walking business as it thrives from ERDF project support

Paul Smith is the founder of a new walking enterprise, myguidedwalks.co.uk, which is leaping from strength to strength. Here Paul explains how his dreams to set up on his own were made a reality through the ERDF's Growing the Visitor Economy Project, led and supported by Marketing Peak District & Derbyshire.



Searching for support

“I was made redundant in December 2017 after working for 30 years in the Pharmaceuticals industry in Engineering and IT. I decided that I wanted a complete change and to see this as an opportunity to try something completely different. I live on the edge of the Peak District and knew this was where I wanted to base my company and so I started looking around for support in setting up a small business and also how best to market myself. A quick search on the internet took me to Marketing Peak District & Derbyshire. It was clear they had so much more support ongoing than other organisations, thanks to the ERDF funding. I made a few phone calls to the team who were really helpful and were able to guide me on a good start-up membership and online marketing package.”

Online success

“Marketing Peak District & Derbyshire has enabled me to improve my online presence through the visitpeakdistrict.com website, gaining much better exposure to customers but also enabling me to move my own website up the search rankings much more quickly. Before I joined, I'd had a website

in place for three months and was averaging page 15-20 in google searches. Within three months of joining, I was consistently on page one for key search terms, plus throughout 2018 over 40% of my bookings came through visitpeakdistrict.com.”

Importance of networking & learning through workshops

“Working with Marketing Peak District & Derbyshire has helped me learn how to set up and effectively grow my business. Through their networking events and also from networking at the workshops hosted by the tourist board, I’ve formed important links to many other businesses in the Peak District and Derbyshire - sharing ideas and experiences as well as potential customers.

“I’ve gained so much from the combination of ERDF-funded workshops and networking events. Since joining last April I have attended workshops on a huge range of topics which are so valuable for SMEs to understand, including how to film and edit video content, getting ready for GDPR, appealing to the German and China markets as well as PR, marketing and digital skills masterclasses. I’ve attended nine in total and each of them have been so helpful. I particularly enjoyed the National Parks Experience Collection workshop which has given my business access to international markets. Gaining the support to help me learn how to start working with the travel trade has been a key part of my learning and a huge boost in exposure for my new business.”

A BBC hit!

“The PR and Digital Skills workshop were also really useful, as these are all completely new skills to me and these days they are essential to any business. It was through the PR workshop that I was able to get my business a slot on BBC Breakfast in January, by tweeting one of the presenters a suggestion to feature my business on a piece about starting up my business last January. They took it and there I was on national TV! I wouldn’t have had the knowledge nor confidence to do this before attending these workshops.

Paul’s words of advice

“Make the most of the networking and workshop opportunities that the ERDF funding and support from Marketing Peak District & Derbyshire brings, as there is always so much to learn and so many other great businesses to work together with; whether it’s sharing ideas, learning from each other’s experiences, or linking your customers to each other’s offerings.”

myGuidedWalks is now entering its second year of success, with Paul focusing on a series of walking packages for visitors wanting to explore the Peak District on foot; including bespoke private guiding, guided walks, navigation training, and - new for 2019 - ‘experiences’, starting with a walk focusing on the Peak District’s aviation history. Find out more about Paul’s business at:

<https://www.myguidedwalks.co.uk>