



Pictured: Mark Bonnett (National B2B Centre) with Lee Blake (50FIFTY)



E-business helps to shoot football fan straight to the top of the league

Football-mad Lee Blake went to watch England beat Croatia during Euro 2004 in Portugal.

During the train journey from the stadium, he was surrounded by England supporters whose exuberant football chants descended into hatred and racism.

Lee, who is from a mixed race background, was disappointed by the chants and felt like he wasn't representing his true self with the England jersey he was wearing.

On returning home to Birmingham, he came up with a t-shirt design which combined the Union Jack with the flag of Jamaica and, two years later, at the World Cup in Germany he wore his own t-shirt rather than a replica England kit.

He was astonished by the number of people who commented on the t-shirt and decided it would make a good idea for a business.

T-shirts quickly turned into a whole range of products such as mugs, hoodies and mouse mats in a wide variety of designs that now also include football team colours combined with the UK flag.

Lee was selling them via a website that had been designed by a friend but soon realised that if the company – called 50FIFTY – was going to grow, he would need something more professional and would have to drive more traffic to the site.

Web improvements

Lee enlisted the help of Aston Science Park company Blazmedia who introduced him to an open source content management system to develop the site.

He also spoke to Mark Bonnett of the National B2B Centre and discussed ways of improving the site.

The website has been given a makeover and now includes secure e-commerce facilities through paypal which means customers can buy directly on-line.

There is also the opportunity for customers to design their own product with the ability to upload photos or logos through the website.

The item, be it a t-shirt, mug, hoodie or mouse mat, will then be made by 50FIFTY and posted out to the customer.

The new-look site has also allowed more products to be included on the web page – such as ideas for stag and hen parties. But once the look had been improved, Lee still needed to get more people to visit.

Optimisation

Following advice and assistance from the National B2B Centre, 50FIFTY moved its website to a 'dotcom' having previously been hosted at www.50fifty.eu. The new address is www.50fiftyclothing.com.

And, by using website optimisation, more potential customers are being driven to the site with the use of keywords in search engines, although this is in the early stages.

Results

Following the launch of the website at the new address, the number of hits and return visits have more than trebled.

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And sales in that period have risen by 300 per cent – a phenomenal success for a company that is run in Lee's spare time while he continues a full-time job as teacher/youth worker.

"Such has been the level of success, I may have to give up my other job," said Lee. "I would like to use my knowledge of starting this business to help young people who are not engaged by mainstream education.

"But I am just delighted that 50FIFTY looks like becoming a strong enough company for me to consider it as a full-time option. That would not have been possible without the use of the internet and the variety of e-business tools I have used."

The company has now also diversified and is creating workwear and uniforms for individuals, organisations and businesses.

The future

Lee's foray into website optimisation has only just begun and he is taking further advice from the National B2B Centre on other ways of generating more traffic.

But the level of enquiries he is receiving at this stage is enough to keep him busy while he still has other commitments.

Mark Bonnett, of the National B2B Centre – the e-business centre of excellence for the West Midlands, said: "Website optimisation is an ongoing process and there are further tools that Lee can use to ensure that he comes out high in the list when certain keywords are typed into the major search engines.

"But he has made a very positive start with this company and it is clear that the business has great potential for further success by utilising all that the web has to offer."

Further Information

Do you want more people to find your website? Do you want to promote your website to the right audience?

If you would like advice on making your website content easier for search engines to find then contact the National B2B Centre using the details below.

Tips for Search Engine Optimisation

- To ensure your website is visible in the major search engines, such as Google and MSN Live, you should populate it with keywords that match the search terms clients will use to find your products and services
- The keywords are those words that the search engines read, including page titles (the text that appears in the top left bar of your web browser), headings, link text and page text
- To differentiate from the competition you should use keyword phrases, as well as single keywords, to increase the chance of your website being found by visitors
- To see how many pages of your website are ranked in Google or any other search engine type site:www.yourdomainname.co.uk into the search engine
- Register your website with a 'co.uk' domain name if you are targeting the UK market
- The Google Webmaster page provides further information on search engine optimisation, indexing and ranking <http://www.google.co.uk/webmasters>
- To assess your website's current search engine performance use the National B2B Centre's SEO tool at <http://www.nb2bc.co.uk/seo>

