

# Burnside of Ballintomb Furniture

Concern over the effect of the worldwide global recession on his business led Julian Schmechel, owner of long established family firm Burnside of Ballintomb Furniture, to consult his local Business Gateway officer. During 2010, visitor figures to the firm's Moray showroom dropped substantially with a knock-on reduction in orders. Julian was anxious to review his business strategy and also to investigate potential new markets.

## Reassurance

He attended an advisory session with Craig Robertson, regional development officer for Moray, and was greatly reassured to be told that, with a website, blog and advertising leaflets as well as his work featuring regularly in newspapers and magazines, his marketing was on track. Says Julian: "Craig told me I wasn't doing anything wrong but that, in the current economic climate, many businesses were finding trading difficult."



He was advised that one option for his business was to diversify and he was encouraged to investigate new opportunities and markets. He was also given useful contact information, enabling him to network with local business people.

## Fourth generation furniture maker

The fourth generation of his family to work as a furniture maker, Julian (45) joined the business at the age of 16 and served his apprenticeship under his father, Henry, who has since retired. Julian now works single-handedly in his workshop, situated next to his showroom at Archiestown, near Aberlour. He says: "I make beautiful furniture by hand from locally grown hard wood. I don't use plywood, block board or veneer. All the joints are cut by hand and I also hand sand, polish and carve. This is furniture made the way it would have been over 100 years ago." About 95% of his business is commissions, the rest being restoration work and showroom sales. He sells pieces to customers from across the UK as well as overseas.

### **Diversification into running wood carving courses**

Following Craig's advice, Julian has now approached Moray College about setting up a wood carving course and has received a positive response. He also plans to run courses at his workshop. He says: "Over the years, I've had numerous people asking me if I taught woodcarving but I've always had to say 'no' due to work commitments. The economic situation has changed, so I have to change." He is also looking into undertaking his restoration work on a larger scale and says: "I'm interested not only in restoring freestanding pieces of furniture but also architectural wood carvings in churches, castles and stately homes."

### **Marketing**

Julian has already forged links with other business people locally. Using the contacts given to him by Craig, he hopes to further develop his business relationships with a view to possibly displaying his furniture at local visitor attractions or business premises other than his own showroom.

### **Business Gateway says**

Craig commented: "We were happy to be able to help Julian look at potential new markets and to re-assess his business strategy. Sometimes small changes can make the biggest differences in how a business develops. We will continue to work with Julian and support his efforts to grow his business."

Business Gateway provides practical help, advice and support for new and growing businesses in Scotland. To find out how Business Gateway can help your business, visit [www.bgateway.com](http://www.bgateway.com) or contact your local office on 01463 713889 or 01343 563634.