

NorWest Sea Kayaking

Shortly after setting up NorWest Sea Kayaking, Julie-Ann Macleod (Jules) felt she needed advice on how best to promote her new venture. Through Business Gateway, she gained access free-of-charge to a marketing consultant with particular expertise in e-business and website design. The Inverness-based consultant first studied Jules's business and then travelled to Lochinver to spend an afternoon with her.

What they discussed

Jules (32), was given expert advice on how she could make her website more prominent and also harness the power of social networking sites Twitter and Facebook to promote her business. She was also advised on how best to develop a brand image and forge links with others in the industry.

The Business

NorWest Sea Kayaking offers beginner and intermediate sea kayaking courses, as well as day and half-day trips, exploring the coastline and lochs of the north-west Highlands.

Trips run all season from Ullapool, Lochinver and Achiltibuie. In line with the advice she was given, Jules has linked up with local accommodation providers at both ends of the market to offer luxury lodge based tours and camping expeditions. She's also happy to hire out equipment to people with experience of sea kayaking.



How I hit on my business idea

Jules wanted to start a business that would enable her to stay in her native Assynt, an area with sparse population and little employment but a very popular holiday destination. She'd sea kayaked at school, but only thought of it as a business after meeting internationally known sea kayakers, Brian Wilson and Jeff Allan, during visits they made to Lochinver. Jules says: "It suddenly struck me as the perfect way to introduce visitors to Assynt which is an area of outstanding beauty."

Background

After graduating with a degree in Business Studies, Jules travelled across North Africa and Europe before returning home. Prior to setting up NorWest Sea Kayaking (www.norwestseakayaking.com), she worked on projects with the Highland Council's countryside ranger team and also with Culag Woodland Trust and Assynt Economic Development Group. She was one of the founding directors of the Assynt Foundation – the group that launched a historic community land buy-out in 2005. Although she offers sea kayaking trips all year round, Jules also works during the off season with Venture Trust, an organisation that runs personal development programmes in remote locations to help vulnerable people make positive changes in their lives.

How I achieved my business dream

Jules was taught the rudiments of sea kayaking by Jeff Allan during the two summers he spent in Lochinver. She then spent a year at the Ardroy Outdoor Education Centre in Lochgoilhead, Argyll, where she gained the necessary coaching and sea kayaking qualifications. She followed that up with a year as a freelance instructor before returning to Lochinver to set up on her own.

Business Gateway says

David Knight, the regional development officer for Business Gateway in Sutherland, has supported Jules as she established and consolidated her business. He says: "I first met Julie-Ann several years ago, when she was an active member of Assynt Youth for Action and Highland Opportunity was a partner in a UK-wide youth enterprise project. Even then Julie-Ann particularly impressed our London-based partners with her drive and commitment to her business which was then still at the planning stage. Now she is a fantastic role model for others who may wish to return to, or remain in, their home communities and Business Gateway is very pleased to have helped her with the development of her already successful 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 or contact your local office on 01463 713889 or 01343 563634.