

Suffolk man goes from setback to start-up

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Property and IT professional, Mark Smith, has embarked on an exciting new chapter in his life with the support of the Learning and Skills Council's (LSC) *nextstep* advice service.

In June 2009 Mark, 43, from Martlesham Heath just outside Ipswich, found himself out of work. Instead of panicking, he saw this as an opportunity to radically re-think his career and has now started his own web design and property management company.

Mark qualified as a chartered building surveyor in 1993 and from then until 2009 he had a number of property-related jobs in both the public and private sectors. During this time, he became increasingly interested in the IT side of the business and would invariably find himself the resident expert on everything from Computer-Aided Design to installing the office printers.

When his most recent job came to an end Mark signed on at Jobcentre Plus in Woodbridge and they recommended that he go along to *nextstep*, the LSC's advice service on learning, training, courses and jobs for people aged 20 and over. Katrina Evans, who is employed by Suffolk County Council as a *nextstep* advisor, explained: "When Mark came to see me we talked about the possibility of self-

employment and I gave him some advice on the options that were open to him. I also suggested that he make an appointment with a local Business Link advisor.” Mark said: “*nexstep* was brilliant for me. Katrina gave me lots of really useful information and explained how to go about setting myself up as self-employed or as a limited company. She also introduced me to Business Link which has been equally helpful. They have given me lots of one-to-one help with my business plan as well as running really informative - and free - seminars. They really know what they are talking about.”

With all this information and advice on board, Mark decided to take the plunge and start a new business, PWD Services (East Anglia). Having spent so many years working on the IT side of the property business he was ideally placed to provide a website design service for property-related companies. He now offers everything from building a brand new website from scratch, complete with e-commerce facilities, availability calendars and account management tools to refreshing existing sites that are in need of a little extra sparkle. In addition, he is working in partnership with a Florida-based maintenance company to offer a complete rental and property management service for holiday homes in Florida.

Mark said: “Although it’s really hard graft starting your own business – particularly in a recession – I am so pleased I am now working for myself. And I can’t thank *nextstep* enough for all they did to help me get to where I am now.”

Judith Mobbs, Area Director of the Learning and Skills Council, Suffolk, added: "Mark is a great example of how useful *nexstep* can be and I'm delighted we were able to help him. It is a very popular service and I would encourage people to make use of it to help them identify all the financial support and learning opportunities that are available to them."

Notes for editors

1. The LSC exists to make England better skilled and more competitive. We are responsible for ensuring the availability of high-quality education and training for everyone. We have a single goal: to improve the skills of England's young people and adults to world class standards. Our vision is that young people and adults in England have knowledge and skills matching the best in the world and are part of a truly competitive workforce. We work nationally, regionally and locally to deliver this ambition on behalf of learners and employers. www.lsc.gov.uk/
2. *nextstep* is funded by the LSC to promote learning and work to all adults aged 20 and over in England. Whether those adults want to improve their career prospects, get a qualification or just make the most of their job, *nextstep* is available for information and advice on learning. The service is provided by advisers based in colleges, careers centres, libraries and other community locations throughout England.
3. Business Link is the Government's free business advice and support service, through local advisers and online at www.businesslink.gov.uk
4. PWD Services (East Anglia) is web design and online property management company. For more information go to: www.pwdservices.com

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**For pictures, to set an interview with Mark, or for more media information
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