

VISIBLE GROWTH



SiteVisibility works with some of the world's finest brands on their digital marketing and is also the company behind the influential bi-annual BrightonSEO events. Managing Director Jason Woodford spoke to Ian Trevett about the help they have received along the way from leading South East law firm, DMH Stallard

Brighton's digital hub is no longer a collection of micro-businesses and web designers beavering away in a North Laine coffee shop. The original one-man-bands have matured into serious companies gaining global recognition. One such super-growth story can be found at SiteVisibility.

"SiteVisibility helps really ambitious brands, such as Fat Face, House of Fraser and the

Goodwood Estate, to grow their business and revenue online using a number of different techniques," explains CEO Jason Woodford. "For the most part, our work centres around digital marketing strategy, delivering search engine optimisation (SEO), pay-per-click and social media to drive traffic, conversions and revenues.

"It's always really difficult when someone

says, 'What's your USP?,' because I think it is really difficult to actually have a USP. We're very famous for our Internet marketing podcast, which is the number-one marketing podcast on iTunes in the English-speaking world; it's been downloaded over 2 million times, and 40,000 - 50,000 subscribers every week listen to our podcast. The idea behind that is that a marketer who needs to keep up-

to-date with digital marketing can listen to the podcast on their way to work once a week and get a little bit more informed.

"The second thing we're really famous for is BrightonSEO, which is Europe's largest SEO conference, where 2,000 people come to Brighton twice a year to learn about SEO. It's the biggest congregation of SEOs in the UK at any one time and it trends on Twitter for two days. It's grown really quickly over the last five years and next year we're moving into the Brighton Centre.

"In internet marketing, the industry is moving very, very rapidly and it's very difficult to keep track on what's going on. And one of the key drivers for our customers is that they need to learn and become more knowledgeable so they can make better decisions about the digital marketing, and this is where our USP is as we're uniquely able to deliver that, along with the results and service which everyone expects."

Are you often perceived as being an SEO company rather than the wider aspects of what you do?

"Our heritage and our reputation have been founded on SEO since 2001. I'm very proud of that. SEO evolves every year, every week, every day. That's what we're known for, but we also offer all the other digital marketing solutions because SEO is only part of the activity that you need to apply in order to generate sales."

Being accredited as an Investor in People, your staff are obviously very important to you?

"Staff are critically important to us as our business relies on the quality of our people and their knowledge. It is very, very important for us to continue to train and develop our consultants so we stay on top of the rapidly changing digital landscape; to ensure both our strategies are effective and to satisfy our team's appetite for learning. This is critical where the battle for talent is intense and never-ending."

I guess Brighton is a good place to be, in that case, because it attracts IT talent?

"We very rarely compete against our competitors in Brighton and Sussex for customers, but we do compete with them for staff and for talent. Around 2008, we invested

SiteVisibility
Delivering Digital Growth

in becoming a founder member of Wired Sussex, with the idea of privatising it and taking it away from Sussex Enterprise, setting it up as a membership organisation to drive the digital community in Sussex and Brighton. As a small business we couldn't afford to deal with structural issues, macro issues like property or employability or policy. So, Wired Sussex does all of that for us. I'm very proud to be a Director of Wired Sussex and to help push the industry, as well as the company, forward.

"Brighton is an absolute magnet for talent,

"With DMH Stallard there's a nice synergy there because they also have a similar ambition to work with ambitious brands."

and what's changed over the last few years is that Brighton as a centre for business in digital has absolutely matured. We've got companies here like Brandwatch, which has just secured £33 million worth of Venture Capital for investment funding, global leaders in e-learning like Kineo, Brightwave and LEO, games development like Relentless, marketing agencies like iCrossing and American Express base their 450 strong technology team here in the City"

How did it all begin?

"We started back in 2001, when the company that I was working for went bust. I was made redundant and I could see that there were some ways to make this business very profitable. It was called Academy Internet and was one of the main Internet marketing training businesses in the UK, but we spent a

large amount of money every month on direct mail; we really should have been using Internet marketing techniques to promote our service.

"I bought it from the liquidator and we developed an Internet marketing consultancy business and an eLearning business. At the start it was just myself and my brother, who was just leaving Exeter University. I knew he wanted to get into marketing, I needed a marketing consultant, and so we started together and we worked with some ex-employees and a large team of experts, who supported us through those early days. We had to win business and deliver business and we're very lucky as we won some major contracts in the first couple of months, including Fish4Jobs, eBookers, the Department of Health, M & M Sports and the Institute of Direct Marketing.

"What's underpinned the whole business all the time has been really strong CRM, email marketing, keeping close to our prospects and customers and sharing knowledge with them so they come back to learn more, and when they've had enough of learning more, the desire is to get on with the work themselves.

"The company grew very rapidly for about eight or nine years and was in The Deloitte Technology Fast 50 for three years in a row. We got some angel investment on board, merged with another company, branded ourselves as SiteVisibility and developed the business to where we are today, employing 20 people and working with many freelancers and experts.

You work closely with DMH Stallard LLP. How has this relationship helped SiteVisibility?

"We have worked with DMH Stallard since the very outset, initially on an informal and ad hoc basis, where they provided a variety of intellectual property and employment law expertise.

"There was a trade mark issue relating to our previous brand name which was contested by an international media group. DMH Stallard partner Tim Ashdown fought it and won the case, which was amazing. So it all started then."

"I also knew of DMH Stallard and some of the partners, so I felt that that was something I was very comfortable with. We looked at our legal outgoings on our budget, and they were fluctuating up and down and very difficult to

predict. DMH Stallard came to us and said that they were offering a new service, which was the fixed-cost retainer based service. The service is completely bespoke and is ideal for businesses that want direct access to legal advice when they need it, with the benefit of knowing that legal costs are fixed which guarantees budget certainty. We were the very first customer to take that on. We helped them pilot it and it's worked out really well for us. We get direct access to partners at DMH Stallard to deal with issues for us, and if it needs to be immediate, it's immediate.

With DMH Stallard there's a nice synergy there because they also have a similar track record with and interest in ambitious brands. "They're going places as a business. From a service perspective I definitely get what I need, when I need it, and the key is specialist expertise. But one of the things I like about that relationship is that it's more than just that they are lawyers. We actually help them in terms of search engine optimisation and we're helping them with their website.

"DMH Stallard are definitely going places. From a service perspective I definitely get what I need, when I need it, and the key is specialist expertise."

We give them feedback so that when they go out to promote themselves they're actually getting found by their target audience, and we're helping them from a marketing perspective. Of course, there's the commercial trading relationship between both parties, but it goes beyond that in terms of the partners at DMH Stallard actually helping us to generate more business. We speak at their events to their customers about what we do. That generates business for us, and DMH Stallard come and talk to us and our customers about what they do.

"I'm a real advocate of what they do. I've worked with many law firms; there are lots of good law firms out there, like there are lots of digital marketing agencies. But I think they understand the business aspects, the business drivers behind the legal issues, and they are

very pragmatic.

"One of the benefits of the retainer is it means that my risk is being managed better from a legal perspective, so my risk is not as big a concern as it could be, which allows me to be bolder in my business decision-making. I'm not suggesting I take more risks because I know the lawyers will sort it out, but I know I'm very clear about my legal framework, and it allows me to be more certain about aspects of business, which is really helpful."

How do you keep up-to-date with so much change? It must be like running against the tide.

"If you wanted to keep yourself personally updated with everything, you'd stress yourself out and you'd never do it. I do read a lot of blog sites and newsletters and listen to our podcasts of course, but I recognise that I have to keep myself up-to-date through my team, so we hire people who love learning, and have lots of different skill sets. You very rarely get me talking about some technical detail of digital marketing; I'd much rather have one of my team come up and talk about it."

Is Silicon Valley still the centre of innovation?

"A disproportionate amount of innovation is happening in the UK, a lot of it in Silicon Roundabout up in London, and in Brighton there's an enormous amount of innovation. Look at what Brandwatch has done; that was technology designed and built here in Brighton, which is selling to the USA. "There are a number of technology businesses that are based in Brighton and eLearning industries around video production, around analytics and measurement-type technologies, around gaming, where the innovation is happening right here in Brighton, let alone in the UK.

"The fact is that a lot more of businesses get more funding when they go to Silicon Valley, which is a shame. However, Britain is definitely one of the global leaders in terms of crowd funding and innovative financial resources, and that can only help. The government's R&D tax credits programme is unbelievable in terms of how much that incentivises you to actually push for an innovation and track the innovation



Tim Ashdown, Partner at DMH Stallard, helped secure the brand name for SiteVisibility, in a case that was contested in the High Court.

and measure the success of it. This isn't a political interview, but the government policies are definitely driving and solving problems and creating opportunities around innovation. It's absolutely clear that the government understands that innovation is going to drive future growth, future prosperity and tax revenue."

If you are a company that is serious about growing, can you do it without getting your message out there digitally?

"I think you can, because anything is possible. But you've got to have a plan. I think it's very rare that massive success just happens. It does happen occasionally, but you can't rely on being one of those occasionals. So you have to have a plan and a fundamental part of a business plan is your marketing plan, and these days a fundamental part of your marketing plan is: What are you doing in terms of your website, your online promotion? If more people are finding stuff through their phones and learning about stuff through their phones than they are by watching television or watching billboards, if you want to reach that audience when they're looking, you have to be online.

"If you don't consider at least what the opportunity is to make yourself visible to people who are looking for you online, you're missing a massive opportunity. But, amazingly, there are still loads of companies that don't do that properly."

www.sitevisibility.co.uk
www.brightonseo.com
www.dmhstallard.com