

Get some advice, get started

IN the latest of our features, in conjunction with Maidstone Council, to help young people discover education, employment and training opportunities in the borough, we focus on **self-employment**.

TAKING the plunge to start your own business can be a daunting prospect; even more so given statistics show that many aspiring entrepreneurs fail to turn their vision into a functional company.

However, statistics also suggest that seeking and taking advice early enough increases your chances of success and survival.

The message, then, is clear: get in touch, get advice and in the words of Walt Disney: "The way to get started is to quit talking and begin

doing."

Do this and you will be in good company because Maidstone has one of the highest start-up rates in the county. Last year more than 1,000 people registered new businesses across the borough; this is in

Here to help you

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addition to those who took the self-employment route and didn't formerly register as a company.

So, you think you have what it takes to start your own business? Your market research and business plan will have to support your belief it can work and you might like the idea of being your own boss. This was one of the many things that attracted self-made Checkatrade.com millionaire Kevin Byrne: "I liked the thought of working half a day for myself – the other 12

hours I ate and slept!" he said.

Still interested? Maidstone Council supports people with great business ideas. You can access free advice from local, regional and national experts on a wide range of issues, from laying the groundwork through to setting the whole thing up, to bringing it all together!

Here's another light bulb thought, by Thomas A Edison: "I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that don't work."

How I started my own business

We talk to **Matt Parkinson**, who set up VooServers Ltd, an IT services provider based in New Cut Road, at the age of 16.

What made you want to start your own business?

From a very early age I always had an interest in being able to make my own way in life and before I started secondary school I had already made some attempts at putting ideas into practice.

When I was a teenager I developed a keen interest in IT and the two naturally came together, in 2005, to form VooServers although in a very different form to what it is today. At the time it was a hobby alongside my sixth form studies designed to make a bit of money.

The idea grew and grew over the years to where we are today: employing seven (soon to be eight) people and with locations in Maidstone, Frankfurt and New York with an ever increasing thirst to grow bigger.

What was the most challenging part of getting off the ground?

Started the company when I was still at school often became a barrier to the company's development in the early years, not only due to time constraints but the perception of me by potential customers.

In the first few years I tried to steer clear of making my age known to anyone and most business was performed purely by phone or email but even now, having just turned 25, customers are often surprised at how long I have been running VooServers.

In the past year I have actually found this has been advantage because people like to introduce me to some high profile figures who



Matt's pizza inspiration

"Never think your idea is too small or too basic. Even the most basic of ideas can become a global product."

"I always like to make reference to the 'package saver' or, as most people know it, the 'pizza saver', which is the plastic support inside a pizza box."

"What most people would see as a relatively insignificant part of their Saturday night takeaway was patented in 1985 and millions are now used every day."

are keen to hear the story of how and when I started the company and the journey I have taken.

What's the best part about running your own business and what drives you on?

I like being able to do something I have a great passion for and knowing that every minute that I spend at work will benefit myself in the long run. A lot of people I know can't wait for the weekend to come by midday on a Monday. I am the opposite and can't wait to get back to work, although it doesn't seem like work which is just as well as I spend a lot of time there!

What are your hopes for the company during the next 5 years?

VooServers is currently in the early stages of becoming a globally recognised brand in our industry, with us having launched locations in Frankfurt and New York in the past 18 months.

We have seen significant growth since this expansion alongside continued year-on-year growth from our primary location in Maidstone.

We are continually looking for ways to grow, with our sights set on launching new locations in the Asian, Pacific and African (APAC) region as well as setting up a dedicated website and internet marketing team at our head office in Maidstone.

Geo Media celebrates fifth birthday

ONE start-up company which has seen a soar-away success is graphic design agency GEO Media.



Based in the Royal Star Arcade, it is celebrating its fifth birthday, after attracting clients such as Costa Coffee, Vodafone and KC C.

Founded by graphic design graduate Andrew Dicker (pictured) in 2009, the company maximises social media to promote its services, which include photography, logo, business card, brochure, flyer and website design.

Named "creative business of the year" in the 2013/14 Kent Independent Trader Awards (KITA), the company works closely with Maidstone Town Team as well as globally-recognised local and international brands.

The company began life in Kent House.

Diary dates

•Global Entrepreneurship Week – November 17-23. The world's largest festival of entrepreneurship. Get connected and turn your ideas into something amazing. Go to Twitter @GEWUK

•Small Business Saturday – December 6. Support, inspire and promote small businesses. Go to Twitter @SmallBizSatUK

In next month's edition:

A spotlight on residential and social care. What kind of jobs can you do in the care sector and what's involved in the job on a day to day basis? We'll be dispelling some common misconceptions.