



Ben Heslop

Get yourself a library card and you will have access to business databases worth thousands of pounds

Ben Heslop is the programme manager of Cumbria Business and Intellectual Property Centre (BIPC) which offers free help and support to businesses in pre and post start-up phases through the British Libraries.

Whenever you do anything regularly in life it is very easy to lose sight of the uniqueness or the power of the process. I guess that is human nature, be it overlooking a beautiful view or taking for granted how tasty that morning cuppa is or even how comfy your bed is! It often takes a change in your life to change your perspective. I had this recently when onboarding our new BIPC advisor in Carlisle.

Having to explain and show Andrew how we do what we do and what tools are at our disposal made me re-look at the worth of our offer and I found myself being really impressed with what I had to tell him, it hadn't changed, but by not 'doing' the job but explaining it, I was able to recapture the excitement and power of what was inside the process. This is great news for Andrew but also great news for you!

Anyone who has had a 1:1 with myself or the team will know how tailored we can be in our approach, in fact we pride

ourselves on how every 1:1 is totally different depending on who is in front of us and what they need. But one of the most underused tools is some of our business databases. We use them as advisors but so many more of you should too, and all you need is a library card!

We have access to Kompass, Cobra, Ibis world, Local Data online and Granfinder, all of which come with a very hefty price tag if buying privately, yet with the mighty Cumberland Library card all become instantly free.

The curse of a small business set up is, as I remember very clearly from my own experiences, that once all the dreaming, planning and start up phases are complete, often the sole task is 'being the business' and any hope of strategically looking into market research data or using databases to inform possible new client lists or areas for product or market expansion are lost. But the truth is, this is the essential life blood of not just the progress of a business, but sometimes being informed is the difference between making it and not.

I want to share one such example from a recent client, Rym Zidane. We have been helping her and her husband set up a travel business, Reemal Adventures. Rym came to us for a 1:1 to look at all areas of where they were at in the planning stages, one of the real wins for her was the data we could

help them access. 'As a business-idea owner, one of the first challenges we encountered at the start of our journey was to get a deep understanding of the market we wanted to operate in, we needed to support our ambition by facts and evidence that our idea was viable and not utopian. This was crucial to build a solid business plan and to gain credibility with our suppliers, supporters and most importantly prospects,' says Rym. That is where we stepped up.

Cumbria BIPC is a signpost and assist service, not a 'do it for you' service! Partly due to capacity but also, as anyone in business knows, if you are not prepared to do the legwork yourself then you probably won't last. Rym says: 'Our research was limited to available online resources and we couldn't afford to purchase expensive market research reports. Most of the public data and statistics we had access to were too general and not specific to our needs – the reality is that the quality and depth of the market reports the BIPC shared with us were beyond what we were hoping for.

'It saved us an incredible effort and it provided us with the most updated market data, analysing the industry from different angles and perspectives, covering all our needs to support our business case, better understand our target customers preferences and evidence the potential of our idea.'

And that is the magic sauce! We merely opened the doorway to this data, but, in the right hands, it was a powerful game changer for Rym and her husband to plan effectively from what they had learned.

I know, as a small business it is easy to put jobs like research and analysis on next week's list (or not have a list at all!) but I assure you, time spent researching your audiences, collating potential client information and looking at market statistics will never be time wasted...so what are you waiting for!



'I want to share one such example from a recent client, Rym Zidane. We have been helping her and her husband set up a travel business, Reemal Adventures'