



## Tradition meets technology

<b>Benefits to Business</b>	Cost savings	x
	Streamlined processes	
	Improved productivity	
	Increased sales	x
	Reaching new customers	x
	Product or process innovation	
	Improved financial management	
	Staff development	
	Supply chain efficiencies	
	Recruitment	
	Flexible working	
	Improved customer service	x

A family-run jewellers in Hull is using freely available Internet tools to provide a personal service to customers around the world.

### About Blowers Jewellers

Blowers Jewellers has been established for over 35 years. It has built a strong reputation, not only throughout Yorkshire, but also across the UK and beyond.

Blowers is a leading dealer in the world's finest and rarest wristwatches. Constantly changing stock includes watches ranging in price from £1,500 to in excess of £90,000, with world-leading brands such as Breitling, Cartier, Omega and Rolex.

Ian Blowers heads the family-run business with his son, Mark and daughter, Nikki.

## Maximising the power of the internet

Blowers has had a presence on the Internet with a website for around 13 years. They recognised early the opportunities the Internet could bring to a niche market. However, they also realised that there was the potential to do much more.

Mark Blowers recalls, "The internet introduced us to a much wider market, but it became apparent that a static website wasn't going to be enough to maximise the opportunities, especially with our European customers.

"We handle everything in house and we don't want to turn into a large faceless organisation. We sell very personal products, sometimes valued in excess of hundreds of thousands of pounds, and our clientele has come to expect a high level of personal service."

"So, we spoke to Jon Moss, a locally based online marketing consultant. We were interested in how we could build on our existing web presence without losing our personal touch."

### Keeping it personal

Blowers contacted Jon Moss at the end of 2007, specifically to look at branding and a website for the expanding diamond side of the business. When Jon looked at the business as a whole, he was impressed by the presence the watch side of the business had built on the web.

Jon explains, "Blowers had made significant moves to create a presence on the internet with its highly successful watch business. That could have been sufficient, but I was aware that there were a number of relatively inexpensive steps they could take to ensure they maximised the opportunities."

Jon recommended Flickr®, Skype™ and YouTube™, simple technologies available to all Internet users, as a cost effective way to up the ante in the online stakes.

Photo-sharing site Flickr gives Blowers a simple way to store a high quality photo album of the watches in stock on the Internet, with a straightforward link from the store's website or through [www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com).



Jon also set up a channel on the video-sharing site YouTube where Blowers can post videos and host podcasts showcasing stock and the expertise of their team. To date there are 10 videos featured on Blowers Jewellers' YouTube channel which have been viewed over 63,000 times.

Using Skype and a webcam, the shop can now be in contact with customers anywhere in the world at any time. Skype is an internet-based service that can carry both voice and video calls, at little or no cost. Using it, the team can show the actual watches in stock to customers, regardless of their location.

Mark Blowers explains, "When people are investing thousands of pounds for a wristwatch it is vital that they can see the product and where it is coming from. With Skype we can show the actual watch to the customer and answer any questions as if they were in the shop. And, often more importantly, they can see that we are a real retail set up – we are not operating from an office on an industrial estate.

"This month alone I've had Skype calls which were arranged online with potential customers in New York, Australia and Singapore. I can now do these calls at a time to suit them. I am more than happy to be available to my customers 24:7. If I was thinking about making a significant investment in a watch I would expect service second to none.

"I would estimate that now over 75% of our enquiries come via the internet in some shape or form. We are now at a level where we can be shipping out up to 30 products internationally per day."

## Maintaining an online reputation

Blowers knows only too well how companies need to monitor their online presence in order maintain their reputation. It is not only their website they need to manage, but the ever increasing number of other online outlets.

Prestige watches is a niche market area with a strong passionate following. As a result there are dedicated online chat rooms and active forums worldwide.

Blowers ensured it became a member of the most influential forums and chat rooms. The team monitors the sites on a daily basis and has set up online alerts to raise awareness when Blowers is mentioned online.

Mark Blowers explains, "As a respected retailer, it is vital to keep up to date with the online forums. If someone has an issue with a retailer, their negative experience can be online and around the world in a matter of minutes.

"We were criticised incorrectly in an online forum and if we hadn't seen it the damage could have been limitless. I personally went on to the forum and responded with our position. The original commentator in fact thanked me for my explanation and any potential damage was extinguished."

## Investing in a virtual presence

In today's financial climate, retailers may not be in the position to expand their portfolio of stores in terms of physical premises. The Internet represents a cost effective way to exploit a wider market.

Mark Blowers concludes, "A business must invest time in managing its online presence. We use the Internet to showcase stock and our expert knowledge of a niche market. It is hard work, but when my day includes Skype video calls to potential customers in Singapore and Australia, I know it is a worthwhile investment."

Blowers Jewellers  
Jon Moss  
Flickr  
YouTube  
Skype

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