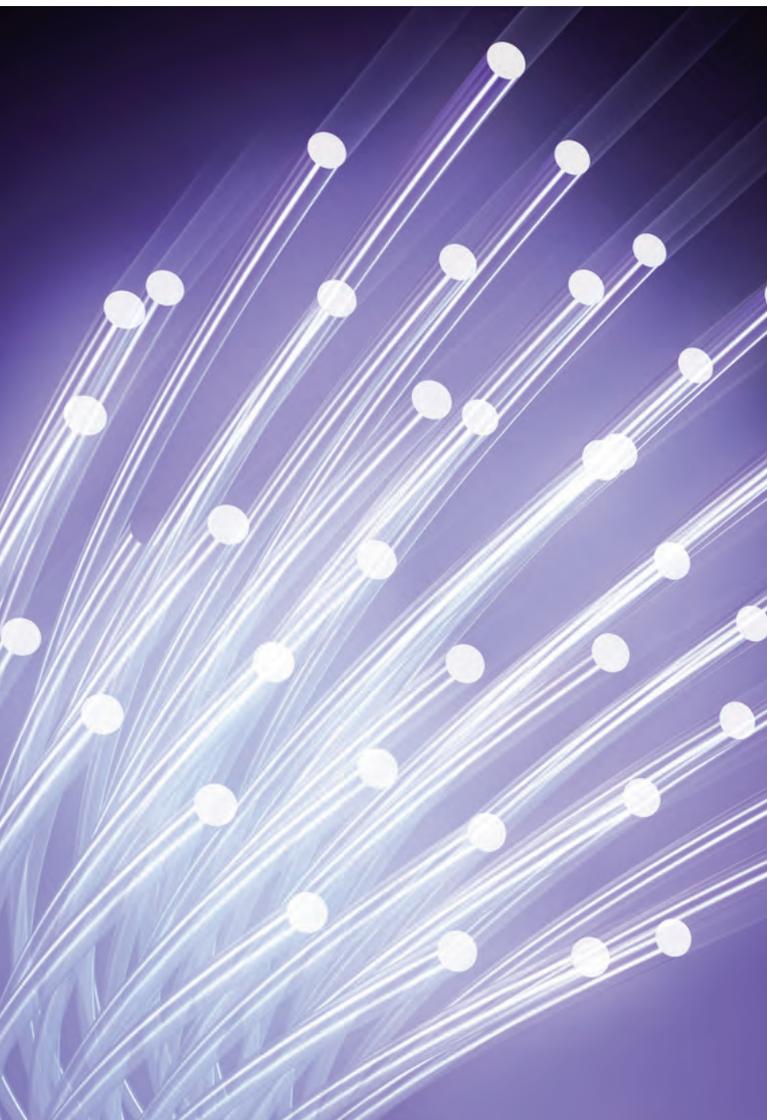




Walking through the landscape with superfast broadband



You might not immediately associate the North East of England's largest walking provider business with fibre broadband communications, systems and services, but you would be wrong. **Shepherds Walks** sends 3,500 people out each year on walks, events, courses and walking holidays.

www.shepherdswalks.co.uk



Providing bespoke tours to suit the individual needs of each walking party means you need systems and services you can depend on. Jon Monks, Shepherds Walks' Proprietor, explains how superfast broadband has helped improve customer service and support business growth and expansion.

"I set up Shepherds Walks in 1999 while I was still a full time hill shepherd in Northumberland. I started shepherding people around the hills, rather than sheep. We now employ three full-time staff and six part-time guides, and have a turnover of half a million pounds. We moved the business up the road into lovely rural Rothbury just because it had superfast broadband.

Shepherds Walks is run by people who live in the region and work in the countryside. Our specialist knowledge and affinity with the landscape means we give our walkers a unique and enjoyable experience. Each guided walk is tailored to the needs and interests of the group on the day.

Over the years, we have grown in size, but we have kept to the fundamentals that motivated us in the first place. We have never lost our personal touch and we intend to remain a small, focused company that gives 'second to none' service. We rely on our online systems and services to drive the business forward."

Growth and expansion with fibre broadband

"Every enquiry and booking is different, and we want every customer to be sure they are making the right choice. It used to take time, lots of it. Customers had to wait on the phone as we loaded up and searched our database for information to match their needs. Now, all our booking systems and databases are online and with fibre broadband access is instantaneous.

We used to get download speeds of 6Mbps, with only 0.5Mbps for upload. Now we can download at 90Mbps and upload at 50Mbps. We can stream video, download professional photographic images, and use any online services we need without having to worry about bandwidth constraints.

As well as supporting all aspects of our walking business, superfast broadband has helped us expand into new markets. This year, we took over GPS Training, which is now the largest GPS training provider in the UK, delivering courses nationwide.

Our courses, DVD and book have been endorsed by mountaineering legend Sir Chris Bonington CBE, and our expertise in products and services is second to none. Our website is our shop window and offers customers top-quality GPS products, a range of online resources, and booking services for face-to-face training courses.



Our third business is Capricorn Mohair Socks, the second largest mohair sock producer in the country. Via our website, we sell directly to customers and sell wholesale to more than fifty retailers. Twenty per cent of our sales come from exports to Japan, as they prefer the quality of UK made products.

Each of these businesses relies on the internet and web-based services to deliver the products, services, advice, support and guidance that our clients expect. When you contact us, you may be looking to book a one-off walk for yourself, or maybe a group tour for friends, family or work colleagues. You may want to buy a new GPS, or just learn how to get more from the one you already have. You may even want to order mohair socks wholesale!"

"Superfast broadband has completely changed our business, enabling us to grow in a world market"



EUROPEAN UNION
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European Regional
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Generating added business value with fibre

"Fibre broadband is helping our people get more from their jobs too. Before superfast broadband, our three staff shared the same slow connection, making it frustratingly hard for any of them to do the best job for the customer, in the way they wanted. That's no longer the case, and our people are happier at work, as well as so much more productive.

"Staff can work to their full potential without being held back by our connectivity"

Shepherds Walks has also seen financial benefits from fibre broadband, as well as operational ones. We scrapped our own server – together with its endless maintenance and upgrade schedule – and everything is now held securely 'in the cloud' on the web. It's both easier and cheaper to access, and we're no longer tied into expensive IT contracts. Using Voice over IP (VOIP) for a second line also helps save on our communications costs.

Where slow broadband used to hold us back, we are now an effective rural business growing because we have world class connections."

"Superfast broadband has been life-changing for us. It has literally revolutionised our business, and we plan to grow by another fifty per cent in 2014"



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