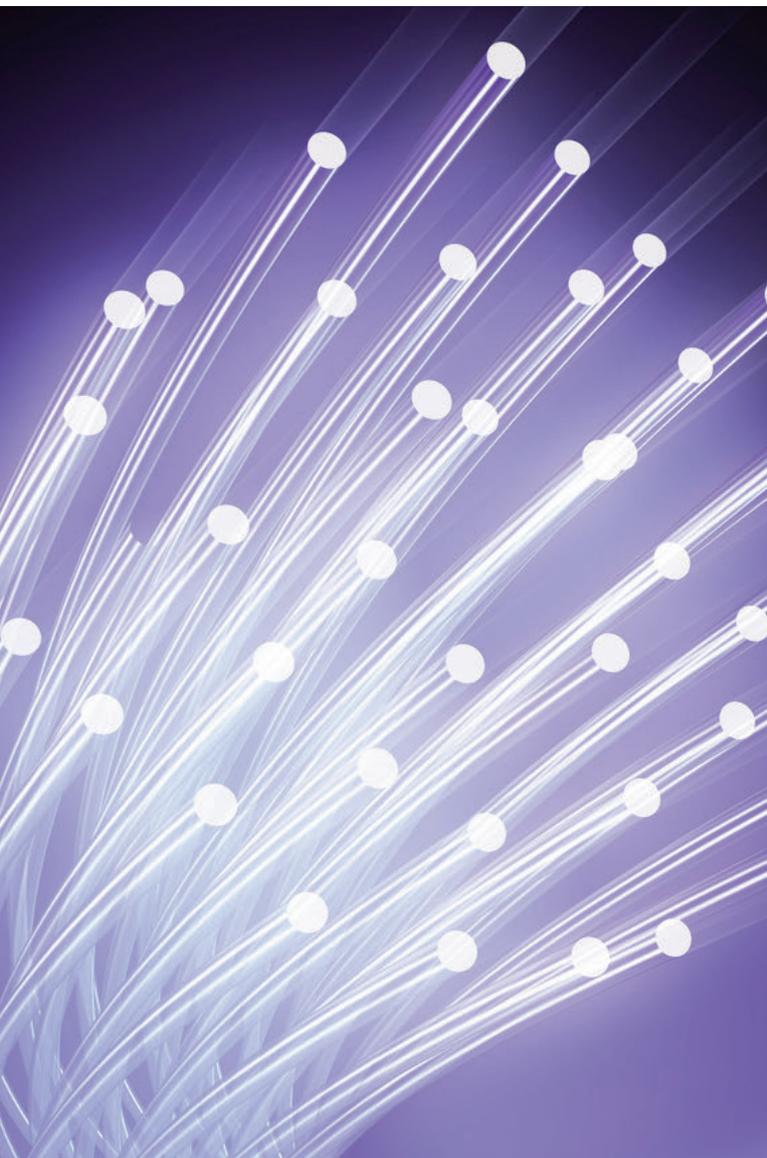




Welsh chocolatiers set for superfast broadband success



The **Wickedly Welsh Chocolate Company** opened its doors in early 2014. It's a chocolate factory and a popular tourist attraction – it's a Wickedly Welsh combination that relies on superfast fibre broadband for its success!

wickedlywelsh.co.uk

Karen and Mark Owen had successful careers in marketing and business management in the IT sector. But they decided to change direction and create a better life for themselves and their children by setting up a business of their own. Three years later, the award-winning business serves bespoke chocolates to more than 100 independent retailers and to the more than 40,000 annual visitors to its shop, café, and factory in Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire.

Breaking the mould

Karen Owen had once worked for a small Welsh confectioner as a chocolatier, so understood what was needed to run a successful artisan business.

Her marketing background helped her define and develop a range of products with a distinctively wicked twist. "If good stuff goes in, good stuff comes out. We don't compete on volume, we compete on quality. We only use high quality ingredients and we make non-mainstream chocolates," Karen explained.

It was a huge risk. Mark and Karen sold their home and put all their savings into the business. They started with an empty 10,000 sq ft warehouse in November 2013, employing 10 full-time staff but facing a blank order book.



Fortunately, their faith paid off. There was immediate interest in both the products and the chocolate factory tourist attraction. Within its first year, Wickedly Welsh was in the black and paying its own bills.

Now the company is really starting to punch above its own weight, winning contracts to provide bespoke chocolates for Ladies' Day at Ascot and for the Rugby World Cup, and responding to interest from major national retailers.



The Wickedly Welsh chocolate broadband platform

Mark's business background had taught him that efficient management and effective communications were essentials for success in any business. His experience with corporate networking, data security and storage systems led him to create a secure, resilient company network based on fibre broadband that would support all of the company's activities.

The way Mark sees it, "No-one can be in two places at once. In a small business, you must be able to do whatever you need, from wherever you are, at any time."

"You need easy access to your data. And it's not just me. Everyone in the company wants to present a faultlessly professional face, so everyone needs a fast, and secure connection to our systems, services and information."

Using two broadband lines to multiply speeds and to balance loads, Wickedly Welsh enjoys excellent telephony, network access and bandwidth at its factory, and uses cloud-based applications to manage its sales and accounts. Staff can access their own rotas online to match their availability and preferences to the business' needs.

Mark explains, "We have resilient telephony and securely store our data off-site to ensure we can continue in the event of any disaster. We manage the business on a smartphone and everything is totally portable. We make the best use of new technology to keep our costs down and manage efficiently."

Catching the eye

Wickedly Welsh's arrival has not gone unnoticed. It has quickly gained wide recognition as both a tourist destination and an artisan chocolatier, winning awards and nominations from Visit Wales, Pembrokeshire Tourism and Radio Pembrokeshire. Wickedly Welsh was awarded 'Best New Tourism and Leisure Start-Up of the Year' for 2016 in the Wales Start-Up Awards.

In recognition of its lean and effective approach to business management, the company has recently been invited to become a national ambassador for small businesses by Lantra, the training and qualifications organisation.

Mark said, "We always try to explain how systems and communications can make the difference between business success and failure."

"Of course it's about keeping costs down and broadband enables this, but small businesses need to understand that it can do so much more for you, transforming the way you run your business and serve your customers."

It's been hard work, but so far at least, a sweet outcome for the Owen family. With further growth and extended premises now on the agenda for the Wickedly Welsh Chocolate Company, fibre broadband keeps making a real difference, providing the platform that keeps the chocolate flowing!

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