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UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK
SCIENCE PARK

New sustainable and ethical beauty platform launches with help from Business Ready

Counter Culture is aiming to help transform the beauty market after launching a new online platform for sustainable and ethical products.



Pictured: Wendy Martin

The site is tapping into consumers' desire to source more sustainable and ethical products by offering brands the chance to sell direct to customers through the platform.

It launched in June 2021 after support from the University of Warwick Science Park's Business Ready programme with 22 brands already selling close to 180 different products with the aim of growing that very quickly.

The Company

Counter Culture is a new sustainable beauty marketplace that will make it easier for consumers to buy affordable beauty products that are good for them and for the planet.

It is also offering independent beauty entrepreneurs and boutique brands – particularly those established by women – the chance to grow their business by selling their products on the platform.

The business was originally established by Mark Wisniewski and later saw Wendy Martin come on board before the platform launched in June 2021.

The Challenge

Business Ready adviser Gaynor Matthews had been supporting Mark through the programme, initially for another business.

Mark then helped Gaynor with her own business WOW HOW – a makeup app – from a technical perspective and this sparked his interest in the beauty space from a clean and sustainable perspective.

He came up with the idea of creating a niche market place after his research identified that his target audience wanted to buy ethically and this was then key to his business strategy.

Mark's background was perfect from a technical point of view as well as having an understanding of ethical and sustainable products, although the beauty market was new to him.

The Solution





Gaynor's role worked exceptionally well as she was able to mentor Mark and guide him through the set-up of the business and the platform based on her own experiences within beauty.

She then connected him with a key contact, Wendy – who has nearly 30 years' experience in sales, marketing and e-commerce and, after they hit it off straight away, Counter Culture was born.

Gaynor said: "I was able to offer advice and support as well as being a sounding board for Mark – especially for the areas of the business that were outside his comfort zone.

"I then introduced him to Wendy who is an expert in the field of marketing and how you build an e-commerce brand and a customer-base, so it was the perfect fit."

Mark added: "My background is in renewable energy and software development. Sustainability has always

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been important to me, as has making a positive impact on the world. Between Gaynor, Wendy and myself, we've all got different backgrounds and brought different skills and experiences to the table.

"It was a real meeting of minds around this opportunity to create something that offers beauty entrepreneurs and boutique brands – particularly those established by women – to sell their ethical and sustainable products to a market that has a real appetite for products that are good for them and the planet."

The Results

Counter Culture now has a fully developed brand and offer to both businesses that wish to sell their products on the site and for those customers wanting to buy ethically and sustainably.

It has been designed to help sellers benefit from the brand and sell more of their products. With 88 per cent of consumers stating they want brands

to help them shop more ethically and sustainable and 41 per cent of consumers feeling guilty about the environmental impact of their beauty products, Counter Culture is responding to the rise in conscious consumers. The company is also utilising the stories behind those businesses to build interest and loyalty in Counter Culture.

Wendy said: "There is not an exact definition for sustainable and ethical beauty. At Counter Culture we focus on boutique brands that create high-performing beauty formulated to be kind to people and the planet."

"Brands that are striving to do the right thing in terms of the products they create and the business practices they adopt. It's very much a journey not a destination."

"There is an individual story behind our brands and we want to be a champion for each of them. People are keen to hear about founders and what's inspired them as well as learning about the product itself so we want to tell those stories – particularly where we are working with

female entrepreneurs – so that we can become a network for our sellers as well as a platform for them to sell from.

"We are delighted that Business Ready helped to connect us altogether and, by combining our skills and experience, we are much stronger for it."

Business support for the next level

The Business Ready programme is managed by the business support team at the University of Warwick Science Park. The experienced Business Growth Advisers team have been delivering business growth and support services to technology based businesses for over 30 years.

In addition, the team are supported by a range of specialist mentors who have run their own businesses and have expertise and experience supporting, advising, coaching and mentoring other growth businesses.



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