

Business networking disruptor shakes up UK networking sector

Submitted by: Word Worker

Tuesday, 2 March 2021

A revolutionary business networking organisation, set up to help two businessmen get through Covid, has proved a sector disruptor and has gone nationwide.

The Cobra Club was born in the first lockdown, initially as a way for founders – Wiltshire-based Andy Hatcher and Ed Williamson - to carry on networking, while traditional face-to-face groups, at least in the early days of the pandemic, closed their doors.

The model was also designed to create an income stream. Andy, who had recently left a successful career running his family printing company to set up as a business consultant and coach, was unable to access government Covid funding support.

Ed, adviser with the FSB, saw The Cobra Club as a way of supporting the local business community, as well as creating a pipeline to attract new FSB recruits.

One year on and the business is flying. All run virtually, the Cobra Club now acts as a fully-fledged, virtual business centre for members, offering networking events, workshops, co-working space and meeting rooms.

The model has been licensed, and there are now 21 separate clubs, with a further six in the pipeline.

Each club, although meeting virtually, is loosely aligned to a geographical area, covering the length and breadth of England, Scotland and Wales. Membership is in the hundreds, with more joining every week.

“Our aim was to create a community of business owners who through the Cobra Club could continue to get opportunities that used to be accessed from face to face meetings,” said Andy.

“To get a business going and sustainable is difficult by yourself, but our members can do this through the collective power of the Cobra Club community and the platform we use.”

For Andy and Ed, the Cobra Club brings a small income but also exposure for their respective enterprises: Andy’s Swindon Consultants business advisory and coaching company; for Ed, the FSB and Operation Baseline Ltd, which develops sales and business strategies for companies.

For club leaders, the Cobra Club offers the potential of a substantial income and the ability to make real positive change in the business community.

For club members, they have a place to network online while working from home, with extensive opening hours, many weekly events to choose from, and advice, camaraderie and support on tap, all for a small monthly outlay.

There have been numerous success stories, including Hannah Matarazzo, who set up digital marketing company Cottontail Creative, and Gloucester-based Louise Maggs, who launched Graphic Design by Louise.

“I was on furlough and then made redundant due to Covid. Cobra Club was the first networking group I attended and although I tried others, this was the one I came back to because it brought so many benefits,” said Gloucester-based Louise.

“It’s really innovative and a great place to develop strong business relationships. In fact, I feel more supported here as a sole trader than I have ever done in any of my employment. Any issues I have, I can drop in and find some help because the collective knowledge in the group is incredible.”

Hannah, a therapeutic practitioner and Andy’s partner, was encouraged to start her own business. She said: “It came about because I was helping Andy with the social media for Cobra Club. Other club members wanted to chat to me about working with them, and suddenly I had a business. The support I have received has also given me confidence, so without the Cobra Club I don’t think it would have happened.”

Ed added: “I really love the Cobra Club. I love arriving in the morning, I get to work with great people like Andy, and it is such a buzz being able to help other businesses and watch them grow and flourish.”

The Cobra Club also has a strategic alliance with IBD – a national association for business advisers. There are many advisers at the club, on hand to give advice and support to start-ups and growing businesses.

For more information, visit <https://thecobraclub.co.uk/> or email andrew@thecobraclub.co.uk or ed@thecobraclub.co.uk, or call Andy on 07739 950980.