



Customer story

Small Business Academy



Building a business blueprint with the ActivPanel

Starting a business takes resilience and bucket loads of determination. It also needs solid finance, marketing, and many other operational areas to be in place if a new venture is going to make it from start-up to success. This is exactly what Nikki Hesford found. As a 23-year-old undergraduate single mum, Nikki launched a fashion business and looked for training that would upskill her in these core business functions.

While Nikki found plenty of courses covering theory, the availability of practical and affordable training was distinctly lacking. This sparked her inspiration to launch The Small Business Academy, a hub that provides start-up businesses with the facilities, training, mentoring, and support needed to drive sustainable growth.

Ever the entrepreneur, Nikki has big ambitions to take The Small Business Academy nationwide as a franchise. For this vision to become a reality, Nikki knows that getting a robust blueprint in place will be critical for a scalable and profitable roll-out, so has started close to home in Blackpool.

Creating a competitive advantage

Thinking back to her early days in business, Nikki knew that the best way to create competitive advantage was through the quality of training provision. With a

sharp focus on digital marketing, Nikki was already armed with practical courses to equip business owners with the skills they need to run Facebook Advertising campaigns, interpret Google Analytics, and much more.

Available online, in-person, and hybrid, Nikki spotted an opportunity to make The Small Business Academy stand out even more: "Online was effective when everyone was online. In person was even more effective when everyone was in person. The shift to hybrid made me realise that our existing projector and screen set-up just wasn't fit for purpose in a modern training environment."

It wasn't only the practicality of managing hybrid sessions that made Nikki question the suitability of the existing presentation equipment: "Our sessions are very hands-on and practical. It's difficult to make them interactive when you're stood at the front of the room, trying to point out very detailed content on a projection screen. The definition just wasn't sufficient for our delegates to see what we were trying to explain."

As a professional trainer, Nikki is often commissioned to deliver courses for external providers, which has given her experience of other venues: "I've delivered training in hotels, conference centres, and in-house

meeting rooms around the UK. That's enabled me to use a wide range of AV technologies and more importantly, evaluate what I thought would work for us."

The conclusion was clear. To be at the forefront of practical training provision, The Small Business Academy needed to upgrade its projector and screen to a modern interactive flat panel display (IFPD). Based on Nikki's experiences, the Promethean ActivPanel was the only IFPD she wanted for The Small Business Academy.

A cut above the rest

"I had faced the embarrassment of failing to load content onto panels at other venues and having to revert to using paper-based materials," explains Nikki. "The ActivPanel was the only solution I'd found where you could walk into a room and start training without needing to call IT support."

Ease-of-use was the foundation for the ActivPanel becoming the brand of choice for The Small Business Academy. However, the final decision to choose the ActivPanel was driven by its suite of preloaded apps and cloud connectivity.

"Screen sharing has been a game-changer for us. Although the on-screen content is crystal clear to see the finite detail of a Facebook Advertising account, being able to share to individual devices enhances this even further.

"Annotate is my other go-to app. Rather than using screen grabs of clients' Google Analytics accounts, I can now do live demonstrations and annotate over their pages to talk through specific points."



The intuitiveness of the ActivPanel has also given The Small Business Academy competitive advantage over other venues, as external trainers can hire the training room and use their own materials: "Being able to connect directly to Google Drive or One Drive has been a real attraction for our training partners. They don't even need to connect to a laptop, they can just log into their accounts direct from the ActivPanel and are ready to deliver their session – which is further enhanced by access to the Instant Whiteboard app."

It's also made hybrid sessions much more effective and easier to host: "We simply connect a webcam to



the large format screen, and then use any web-based conferencing platform to bring people into the session remotely,” explains Nikki.

A robust roadmap

Since the installation of a 75” ActivPanel by AV2events, The Small Business Academy has received training and support from Promethean, equipping the team with the essentials to get started with the ActivPanel. As a trainer herself, Nikki recognises that use of its functionality needs to develop over time: “You can’t do everything from day one, and you shouldn’t try! It’s packed full of so many exciting features that I can’t wait to bring into my training sessions, but

I know it’s important to develop core skills and build on these as you grow in confidence.

“We started with screen sharing and annotating over web pages as these were best aligned with our existing course content. Now I’m confident with these tools, I’m exploring what features I should introduce next.”

Focused on delivering practical training that supports business owners with putting skills into use, The Small Business Academy always ensures a recording of training is available after sessions. This makes the screen recording functionality of the ActivPanel a particularly important feature for Nikki: “I can’t wait to bring screen recording into my live demonstrations! It means we’ll be able to give delegates a full record of their session – both prepared and in-the-moment content – to take away after. This will help make our training even more effective when it comes to businesses putting it into practice.”

Armed with a roadmap for developing use of the ActivPanel in training, Nikki is feeling even more excited about what the future holds for her national franchise ambitions: “We’ve worked hard to create a blueprint in Blackpool that will enable us to scale The Small Business Academy nationwide. Looking back on our training provision when we started, and what it’s like now with the ActivPanel, I know we’ve nailed it!”



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