



Freddy Bourne, right, has plans for more global distribution deals

Saddling up for success

Andrew Cave hears how a British Airways UK Opportunity Grant oiled the wheels for online bicycle retailer, Capital Cycles

Freddie Bourne is in no doubt that his British Airways UK Opportunity Grant has been vital in helping take his online bicycle retail business to the next stage of development.

A philosophy graduate, Mr Bourne, 28, got the idea for the business when he got a job selling luxury teas in London. Unable to afford a car, he decided to cycle to work – but found buying a decent bike both costly and requiring research.

So, in May 2006, he set up Capital Cycles with the mission of providing affordable, well-built bikes for people who can't afford high street prices.

The firm is deliberately lightweight: with a staff of one, space and distribution capabilities are leased when needed at a serviced warehouse in Essex.

Its Dutch- or “sit-up-and-beg”-style bicycles, which are imported and sent to customers in simple assembly kits, range from £155 to £330; the business has sold 2,000 units since opening its doors online at www.capitalcycles.co.uk.

However, keen to build a bigger business, Mr Bourne

entered the competition for an Opportunity Grant, saying he wanted to meet suppliers with a view to securing distribution deals and new export markets.

Flights to Poland have helped him achieve the first objective with Kross, the second largest bicycle manufacturer in Europe:

it's factory in Przasnysz, 70 miles from Warsaw, has agreed to give him exclusive online distribution rights in the UK.

Mr Bourne is also hoping to use flights to Australia and the US to set up distribution deals.

“Thanks to British Airways’ UK Opportunity Grant, I have been able to expand the business in ways that I could not have dreamt of,” he says.

“Going to the supplier in person made a big difference. The company was really impressed that I made the effort to go there twice.

“We are selling 800 bikes a year at the moment, but I think the business is capable of selling between 1,800 to 2,000 a year. The Opportunity Grant is enabling me to take it to the next level: it's priceless.”

UK Opportunity Grant – the facts

Organised by British Airways and promoted in conjunction with *The Daily Telegraph*, the programme offered dynamic SMEs prizes of business-class travel for a year to help their business compete for overseas work.

Launched last year and judged by a panel of experts, the programme gave 12 return Business-Class tickets to 100 companies who could demonstrate that face-to-face meetings with potential clients or suppliers

overseas would help take their businesses to the next stage.

More than 4,500 companies entered the competition; and the winners are now at various stages of using their travel prizes – and beginning to reap the rewards.

Find out why face-to-face contact is a better way to do business at telegraph.co.uk/ba