

Phantom flits to sunnier climes

A printing company that makes merchandise for some of the biggest names in the music business has fulfilled a lifetime's dream by moving to Cornwall

Overview

When Will Pearson started his own company ten years ago, he was bringing together his two major passions – screen printing and indie music. Phantom Screen Print quickly earned itself a reputation for excellent quality and efficient service, and was soon producing printed goods – from t-shirts and stickers to back-stage security passes – for many of the UK's best-known bands. There was just one problem: the company was based in suburban Surrey, but Will had always wanted to live in Cornwall.

"I'd known Cornwall since the age of 17, when I moved to Mount Hawke on a whim to learn how to surf," Will explains. "Quite simply, I fell in love with the place. After a year or so I began thinking about setting up a screen-printing business down here. But I couldn't get the money to do it, so I moved back to Surrey and started trying to earn it. At one stage I was working about 100 hours a week, with three different jobs as well the screen printing I was doing for my own customers in the living room of the house I was renting. When I set up Phantom, I thought – naively enough – that we'd be back down here in about three years. It's actually taken ten, but we made it in the end!" Will and his partner kept the dream alive by coming down to Cornwall's north coast for frequent holidays. "I guess you could say our move was pretty well-researched!" he laughs.

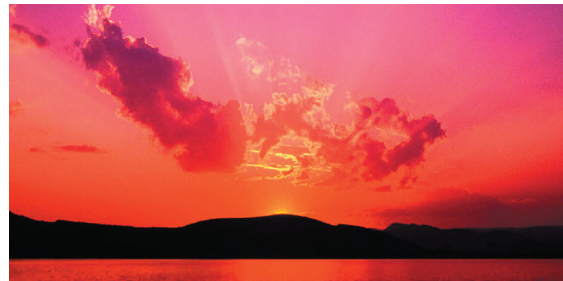
What finally spurred them into action? "Well, on a personal level, we've recently had our first baby, and this is definitely a much nicer environment for our little girl to grow up in. But there were plenty of good business reasons too."

Workforce

Phantom has one full-time and two part-time staff in Cornwall, but a lot of the firm's PR and marketing is done by a colleague still based in the South East. "He's in a band himself," Will explains, "and spends a lot of his time gigging around the country – which is a great way of getting the word around and also means that I don't have to do too much travelling myself, aside from the occasional trade fair. Down here, we've hooked up with a local designer, a graduate of University College Falmouth, which is turning out a lot of excellent creatives – a talent pool that's great for a company like ours to be able to draw on."

Clients

"I'd love to tell you about some of the big-name bands we work for, but then I'd have to kill you," Will jokes. "Not least because of the security side of things". As well as all the people we work for in the UK, we're also starting to get jobs from US bands who tour in Europe. Buying from us means that they can avoid import taxes and shipping costs on their merchandise. What gets us noticed tends to be word of mouth – particularly networking on music-related websites. But we also keep in touch with customers through newsletters and send out goodie-boxes with samples of our work to record companies. We're always looking for new customers within our niche. "



"Not having to commute in heavy traffic is a huge plus – I don't think I realised how stressful that was until I stopped doing it and gained an hour and a half a day. And I've always found Cornwall to be a very creative area. Living in Surrey, everyone just seemed beaten flat by the daily grind, which doesn't leave much time or energy for inspiration."

The process of moving was not without its sticky moments. "We'd lined up a unit on a particular industrial estate, which hadn't actually been built yet," Will says. "They'd given us a date by which it would be finished, but at the eleventh hour we were told it wasn't going to be ready for another six weeks. By which point we'd burnt all our bridges – ended our contract with our old unit and organised our house move." At his wits' end, Will phoned Cornwall Pure Business for help.

"Rachel, our Cornwall Pure Business adviser, really came up trumps," he says. "She put us on to the Parc Erissey estate near Portreath, which in hindsight has proved far better than the place we originally had lined up. It's a small, friendly trading estate, without too much traffic and noise. Compared with our old place in Surrey, its paradise! As well as being very well-designed, our new unit is about three times the size, so we have a lot more room to spread out. Basically, all the problems we had trading from our old unit have been solved. In fact, the move has given us a great opportunity to put right all of those things that you realise you'd do differently if you were starting again from scratch."

Technology

Over the past ten years Phantom has invested continually in state-of-the-art equipment, which gives them a real edge over much of the competition. "We've got something called the Wasatch RIP – the best pre-press digital system in the world," Will says. "Essentially, it pulls artwork apart, turns it into film and gets it onto a screen to be printed, and it's absolutely bomb-proof." Equipment-wise, the move was not without its worries. "Printing equipment is more than a bit 'moody', and to be honest it took a few weeks before we'd ironed out all the technical issues. The amazing thing is that we managed to carry on trading throughout – and I'm happy to say we didn't lose a single customer in the process."

Support

Will says that as well as enabling Phantom to find a new base at very short notice, Cornwall Pure Business have also been helpful in terms of local networking, with at least one of introductions that they facilitated leading to work from locally based clients.