

CORRECTED VERSION

RURAL AND REGIONAL COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the opportunities for people to use telecommuting and e-business to work remotely in rural and regional Victoria

Barwon Heads — 6 November 2013

Members

Mr D. Drum
Mr G. Howard
Mr A. Katos

Mr I. Trezise
Mr P. Weller

Chair: Mr P. Weller
Deputy Chair: Mr G. Howard

Staff

Executive Officer: Ms L. Topic
Research Officer: Mr P. O'Brien

Witness

Mr G. Boyd, owner, Xpose.

The CHAIR — Graham, for the benefit of Hansard could you give your name and your business address?

Mr BOYD — Graham Boyd is my name. My business name is Xpose. I work from home. It is 30 Fairbrae Avenue, Belmont. My card says my brother's address because I do not want my home address passed around so much.

The CHAIR — Could you talk about your business and how it works, just briefly?

Mr BOYD — My business is web development and internet marketing. I work from home, so it is sort of relevant I suppose. I have clients right across Australia, as far as Rockhampton, as far as Western Australia. I have got some in South Australia, in Sydney, quite a few in Melbourne and in Geelong of course. Thirty per cent of my business is in the optometry industry, and I have got another vertical market in the denture industry and another vertical market in automotive. I find that is good because you become a bit of an expert and you can talk to your clients at the right sort of level. I love working with small business. I find most of my clients have got these grandiose ideas of being able to change all the content on their website on a regular basis and it just does not happen, so I have to keep pushing. That is an interesting point.

I picked up on the broadband speed thing. I understand you do not have any control over that, but I have got what used to be Neighbourhood Cable and it is currently 100 megabits per second. This facility runs past most residences in Geelong — in some areas it does not — and I do not have a problem with speed at all, and I am dealing with large files on occasion. That is just an interesting point.

The CHAIR — Why do you position yourself in Geelong? How do you engage with your customers?

Mr BOYD — I was born in Geelong, and I worked in Melbourne for a while. I live in Geelong, and that is where I want to work. I have got kids down here, I have got activities down here — a lot of water-based activities — so that is a good thing. Most of my clients come from referrals, and I go and put myself out there. I am here today. I will go to any sort of function that I can go to. A good example is that Sensis had a special function recently aiming to sell to small businesses. It is a competitor of mine in a sense, so I went along. That was interesting; probably about 50 businesses turned up to this little meeting, so the interest is out there. They were talking about internet, and Sensis was selling its Adwords campaigns. I always manage to pick up contacts in those sorts of environments. I had one case in Melbourne where I went to a function and got to talking with somebody and I counted something like six projects that came out of that through the referral process, from that one person. That is the way to do it.

The CHAIR — Do you employ staff?

Mr BOYD — No. I have got a chap in Pakistan who does some work for me. My daughter is a graphic designer and a web developer at Monash Medical Centre and she does things for me, but it takes a while.

The CHAIR — How do you measure the output of the person who is working for you in Pakistan, for instance?

Mr BOYD — I mentioned it earlier, it is a platform called odesk.com. You can find any sort of contractor you wish in just about anything that can be done remotely. You can interview them online. You hire them and you agree on a figure. Then once you start with the project they have to be logged in and it takes a snapshot of their screen every 10 minutes. I can have a look at that and my client diary, and if they are not quite going in the direction I want, for example, I can contact them and say, 'We need to pull back a bit'. On Sunday night it seals off, and then whatever hours they have done, that amount is taken from my credit card. On the Monday I have the opportunity to vet it and say yes or no, but that is taken from my credit card. That is the only cost, and I just pay for the hours that are done. It is a great system. I am interviewing a couple of designers at the moment — one in Romania and another one in Pakistan. Hopefully that will work out, but you can just do a little job at a time and get comfortable with them, and most of them are quite good.

Mr DRUM — And it is called oDesk?

Mr BOYD — ODesk, yes. That is an interesting point. For others who want to get into different businesses, there are a lot of resources out there; and it is knowing where to get those resources. I would have thought a bank of resources could be a useful thing — for example, I have just taken up using the accounting package

Xero, which is a cloud-based package. My BAS used to take me a weekend because you would never get around to it and would have to do the whole three months in one hit, but this forces you to do it as you go. I think my last BAS took me 15 minutes. That is a massive time saver, so there are lots of good resources out there but you need to be able to find them.

Mr HOWARD — In developing your skills then, how have you accessed or found out about some of the things you have used and how have you built up your skill base?

Mr BOYD — I do a lot of just-in-time learning. A project comes along; I say, ‘Yes, I can do that, fine’; then I work out how to do it, and that is a lot of googling. The information is out there. It is just massive. I can find anything I want. I use a platform called Adobe Business Catalyst, and there is a whole resource around the world. We have got webinars happening all the time. There is any amount of information and experts in different countries that you can access. If I have a problem, I can put it forward and answers will come back.

In relation to my learning, I had 10 years with IBM as my first job, so I learnt a lot about how to look after customers. I learnt a lot of logic and problem-solving in that process. Then I started a printing business, and we were on the cutting edge all the time. I think we had the first computer in 1989, and it was only viable in ‘89 at that time, so we were right at the cutting edge. I sold that to my business partner after 18 years and then started an advertising agency in Melbourne. Again we were working on the cutting edge and converted that into a web business, because I hated advertising. You have got to be cutting edge all the time.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much.

Mr BOYD — No worries.

The CHAIR — I know you were not listed, but thank you very much for giving us 5 minutes, telling us about your business, how you learn on the job and where we can learn on the job as well.

Mr BOYD — That’s it.

The CHAIR — All the best with Xpose.

Mr BOYD — Thanks, guys.

Committee adjourned.