

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

Newhaven — 10 September 2013

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Mr C. Dallinger, owner, Island Healing.

The CHAIR — Welcome to the public hearing of the Rural and Regional Committee's inquiry into the opportunities for people to use telecommuting and e-business to work remotely in rural and regional Victoria. I hereby advise that all evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided under relevant Australian law. I also advise that any comments made outside the hearing may not be afforded such privilege. Before we start could you please give your name and address for the benefit of Hansard.

Mr DALLINGER — Mr Chris Dallinger. I live at unit 3, 13 Steele Street, Cowes, 3922. My business is Island Healing, at 6 Forrest Avenue, Newhaven, which is just down the road.

The CHAIR — Chris, would you like questions as you go or at the end of your presentation?

Mr DALLINGER — The first part, I understand, is to talk about Island Healing, my existing business, and how I use the internet and all that sort of stuff to market it. The second half, I think I let Patrick know, is about a business venture that my wife and I are just starting, which is to do with e-commerce and the internet and all that sort of stuff. Do you want me to start with the Island Healing side of things first?

The CHAIR — Yes, whatever you are comfortable with.

Mr DALLINGER — That is good for me. I do not have a formal presentation for that side of things. I am just happy to have questions, so fire away and I will answer them as I go. The second half, the new business venture, I have a bit of a slideshow to show you guys. Fire away.

The CHAIR — What do you do at Island Healing?

Mr DALLINGER — We opened in 2005. I personally do Bowen therapy, which is a form of hands-on body work to help people with aches and pains and that type of thing. You do not probably need me to go into why I started that, do you?

The CHAIR — Why did you pick Phillip Island?

Mr DALLINGER — I was born and bred here, so I wanted to start a business here. The old Newhaven supermarket was a vacant building. I renovated it and set up four treatment rooms, a fitness room and a Yoga and Pilates studio. We have an audiology clinic that works out of there as well. That is what we do there.

Mr TREZISE — How do you use technology to promote the business?

Mr DALLINGER — Because we are off the beaten track — I am not sure if you know Newhaven, where there is the supermarket and the newsagent and stuff; you go over the bridge and turn right — we miss out on all that direct flow that comes onto Phillip Island. We do not rely on walk-by traffic and people browsing, like they would on the main street of Cowes, for instance; we need to have a presence other than our shopfront, which is this thing right here or that thing over there.

We have 200 visitors per week to our site, whether they are on a smartphone, laptop, computer, iPad or whatever. That is 200 people that I would not have otherwise. For me it is vitally important to the success of the business. That is moving only one way, which is more important as time goes on. When I first started I did not have a website. I only had a few associated listings with various massage website companies and stuff like that. I had to move into the actual website itself, and it is just becoming a big important part of the business; it is how people find us.

Mr TREZISE — Are people finding you locally, or are they coming from a distance?

Mr DALLINGER — No, they might be in Melbourne planning a weekend away. They jump on good old Google, 'I want a massage on Phillip Island', they type it in, or they might be staying at Silverwater Resort. They see a link to our website on the Silverwater Resort website, bang, they make an inquiry, pick up the phone and plan their trip away. Our core business is local, so do not think this is our only source of revenue; it is the repeat business from our local clientele that keeps us afloat. This is the very important icing on the cake, if you like. It is becoming almost bigger as time moves on. I do not know the exact figures. Around 30 or 40 per cent of our turnover would be from the tourism side of things. That is how that 30 or 40 per cent find us.

Mr HOWARD — So it is your website. Do you do any social media attached to that?

Mr DALLINGER — Yes. I have Twitter accounts, but I do not use those. Facebook is our main thing. I have about 650 followers on there, and that is just brilliant. They are all regular clients who like what we do. They have been to us before. If we put a special on, because we need to bump up a Saturday — bang — we just plug it into Facebook. That goes out to 650 people, and we get uptake from that. It is just amazing how that works.

Then someone comes in, has a great treatment, puts it on Facebook and the next thing the phone is ringing for that practitioner. It is quite amazing how it all works. It is very important. The Facebook page is basically just our website information put on Facebook. The beauty of Facebook is that in doing the posts and the updates you just instantly communicate with 650 people and potentially their friends as well via the click of a button.

Mr HOWARD — How big is the business? How many people do you employ?

Mr DALLINGER — I think there are about 20 different subcontractors who work out of the centre. None of them are full-time. There are probably half a dozen or so, maybe eight, that are permanent part-time, if you like, and then the rest just filter in and do bits and pieces here and there. So, yes there are quite a few on the books.

The CHAIR — Okay. We might talk about Mooka Mobile.

Mr DALLINGER — Mooka Mobile; yes, no worries. As part of this whole thing with Island Healing, probably about two months ago I came across the opportunity to convert my existing website to a mobile-friendly site. I am not sure if you guys know how that all works. Do you know how it works? This Island Healing desktop website, when viewed on this phone, is very small. Everything is really small. Have you heard of the terminology ‘pinch to zoom’? It means you have to pinch in and bring the screen out. It is really hard to find the navigation buttons. You quite often click on the wrong one, then you get frustrated. You have to go back to the original page and try to find the next one. To find a phone number, you have to find the phone number and you have to remember it and type it into your keypad to bring it up.

One of the features of the mobile device is that there is a big click-to-call button. When you land on every page, it is as wide as the screen and as big as your thumb. You just click on it and — bang — it is ringing the business. For the last two and a half months since I have had that site I have noticed an increase in calls. I get analytics sent to me about how many people are clicking on that button and how many people are viewing our site on these phones now. It is 25 per cent of my total web traffic that is now on one of these things, and just two years ago that was 4 per cent or 5 per cent or whatever it was.

That leads me to my next part, which is the presentation. Basically the whole pitch to the potential business is that we can get more customers by using this technology. That is a mobile-friendly site that has been built. You can see the little ‘Call Us’ and ‘Find Us’ buttons; again, just that click right in front of you. It is very easy to use. People are not turned off by the old version of the website. This is not our website, by the way, it is a different site. That is basically the whole pitch behind what we are going to be doing — so more customers, more sales, go mobile. Mooka Mobile, that is us there. The agenda for the slideshow will be that smartphone usage is on the rise. I do not need to tell you that; everybody here would know what that movement is doing.

Mobile search behaviour helps businesses. New customers come from mobile searches, mobile websites. There is increased convergence. We will go through all those things there. Usage has increased by 57 per cent from 2012–2013. That is phenomenal in terms of smartphone use. You guys would probably know all about this stuff, but we will move through it anyway. Eighty per cent of users do not leave home or the office without their device. I think the current statistic is 65 per cent of Australians own a smartphone and 80 per cent of those use it everywhere. They are on it on the toilet, they are on it in front of the TV, they are on it in the bus and on the train — wherever. It is everywhere. They are becoming much bigger users.

From my business example, customers live in Melbourne. They are either down here or they are on their way down here. I have a sore shoulder; bang, I want a massage. They type ‘massage Phillip Island’ into their phone, and up we come. The statistics here are that if I have a mobile-friendly site as opposed to not having one, 57 per cent are more likely to visit the store because of the ease of use. It is easy to read, easy to navigate, easy to call and easy to find all on that phone. I think that says 39 per cent are more likely to call a business, again because of that click-to-call feature. I am not fumbling around on the site; it is right there in front of me. That one is that

51 per cent are more likely to make a purchase. These are all statistics. The source is Google Nielsen, the Nielsen research company. Fifty-one per cent are more likely to make a purchase.

I have experienced these results in my own business with the mobile-friendly site. That is very beneficial to me, and hopefully we can get that to our potential customers as well. One in five visits to a mobile website results in a call to the business, again, because of that click-to-call feature. I am not sure if you guys know what that is. Do you know what the click to call is? It might be on this next page.

The CHAIR — I have never used it.

Mr HOWARD — We can understand from what you have shown us.

Mr DALLINGER — There we go. It is right here on the next page. You can see the website on the left-hand side on a smartphone. Everything is quite small. The pinch is there, the text. It is usable. You can zoom in, the whole lot, but — bang — this is what comes up on a mobile friendly site. That is ‘Call Us’. The way we would build our sites would be that the whole ‘Call Us’ button would be the width of the phone and a little bit higher as well. That other little button there is a ‘Find Us’ button, so that goes straight to Google maps on your phone. With directions, you can get Google to talk to you on your phone — ‘Turn right here’. That is what can happen now on your phone. It is quite amazing. The logo is better. The photo is much clearer. We can put image sliders in here, and you can just flick through images of the business. There is a contact form a bit lower down. That is a basically a very brief description of a mobile site.

You know that is what we are going to be trying to do. There are just a few details as well. That is what Mooka Mobile is and that is what we have just started out doing. We have access to some conversion technology from some associates in the States. We can plug a URL into our software and it converts the site for us. We can play around with the editor, mess around with it and move things into different positions and create sites.

Ms TOPIC — Is that you there?

Mr DALLINGER — Yes, that is me there. That is a Google Places listing. If you were to click on the website there, we would come up in our mobile-friendly version on the little button there. That is why we have started this business, because of how it has helped my existing business. That is why I got into it.

The CHAIR — Have you started here because this is where you live?

Mr DALLINGER — Yes. The whole world is now a market. Island Healing really has Phillip Island and tourists as our main customer base. With this business, the whole world is our market. With the conversion rates of the dollar, Americans are also our potential clients for this type of thing if we are priced competitively. Yes, that is a big change from what we were.

Mr HOWARD — Are you driving that business, or do you have some other tech whiz who is helping you with it?

Mr DALLINGER — I am the wannabe tech whiz. I have been googling and watching YouTube, and I have created the site from scratch. We are probably two-thirds of the way to launching the actual website, but we can create sites right now. We are ready to go. I have a few clients on the books already. We have access to the editor; that is all up and running. But it is our brand. We need to finalise our website — all the copy and all that sort of stuff. I am doing that myself and I really enjoy it. I like doing that sort of stuff and creating it from scratch. It is a bit of a challenge and good fun.

Mr TREZISE — Do you have competitors, Chris, in that business?

Mr DALLINGER — There is a competitor. There is a company called GoMo, which is Google associated. I am not sure how it all works exactly, but Tourism Victoria did a presentation down at Inverloch on tourism and all that sort of stuff for the local businesses. Most of the topics for that two-day conference were on the internet and mobile technology. They have a bit of an affiliation with those guys, but we hope to perhaps be another provider for them as well moving forward. They have just finished a mobile-friendly site for Tourism Victoria and all the businesses that are associated with them. But hopefully we can maybe get to the next level, to the actual businesses themselves and help them to convert their sites to drive business.

We will start with Phillip Island as our target market, and probably south-east Melbourne, because that is where we live and where we are affiliated. But we will look to grow and expand. Like I said, potentially the whole world is our market. It is quite easy to convert a site to another language and go from there.

The CHAIR — Are you quite comfortable that you can service the world from Newhaven?

Mr DALLINGER — Yes, absolutely. The internet is a bit of a problem. This is my modem at home. Do you know about that — tethering or hotspotting your iPhone through your computer? I am not sure if you know, but Telstra's 4G has just become available down here. Instead of a little 3G coming up here on your phone, you have the LTE, which is like the Telstra 4G — a faster internet, which is great. Working on things like that is a whole lot quicker. But I know that the broadband and whatever it is down here, even the wireless, are not as good as, say, Melbourne. That is one potential hurdle. What I would like to see is the most optimised internet access — the fastest and most secure would be great. If that is going to happen down here on Phillip Island, it would help the business. But currently, as it stands, to answer your question we can do it all from here, all from Phillip Island.

The CHAIR — And you can have people working for you?

Mr DALLINGER — Yes, we have made some minor plans and provisions for that. If it gets a bit bigger, we will need to employ people to do the work. Customer support will be something we want to pride ourselves on. You need to be able to answer phones and emails and get back to people. Yes, it is a bit of a long-term plan for us.

The payment side of things will all be done on the internet. They make the decision, we send them a preview of their site, they want to go ahead with it, they just click on the PayPal 'Subscribe now' button and it takes a monthly fee out of their bank account. That is how it will work, and it can all be done from the website as well. There will be no ringing up and trying to pay for it over the phone or us having to invoice them and wait for a cheque to come in the mail. Our plan is to get it all up with the times.

The CHAIR — Very good.

Mr DALLINGER — That is what we are doing. Is that helping you guys out?

The CHAIR — Yes, it is. Do you have any other people in the same industry down here? Is there a nucleus of you?

Mr DALLINGER — There are obviously web designers and all that down here. People have helped me with my site — a few mates of mine and some other businesses down here. There are probably six or eight that I know of — core ones. There are probably more who do it as a bit of a hobby or whatever. But in terms of this technology, no, 1 per cent of websites are mobile-optimised globally — I think it is probably in the Western world. There are what are called 'mobile-responsive' websites now. Does anyone know what that means? My website was built three or four years ago, so it is just built for desktops or laptops; that is how big it is. But 'mobile-responsive site' means that it actually shrinks as the device gets smaller, so it recognises that you are on an iPad or an iPhone and it is built so everything shrinks in. It is better than what was there previously, but it is not as good as a purely mobile-optimised site. The people down here on the island have not really tapped into that technology yet. I have approached a few of those guys to see if they want to work together with us with their clients as well.

The CHAIR — Is there an advantage if there is a group of you, a network, rather than individual businesses?

Mr DALLINGER — That is what we thought when we approached a few of them. One of them was not too happy with everything. But, yes, that is what I would think: working together is better than working on your own to try to help the greater good basically. The more people you can get to the better. As I see it, if the other web people down here are not onto this, that is a disadvantage to their clients. I have already had a few people say, 'Why isn't my web guy?'. They have said it to them in front of me, 'Why haven't you got onto this? I am paying you thousands of dollars and you haven't let me know about it'. To work with those other web guys, they would then filter it out to all their clients and it would be more people having the technology.

The CHAIR — If there is a good network, would that attract more people to the district, because of the support in the network?

Mr DALLINGER — Yes. Even weekly people say, 'We've just moved to the area'. They are professionals in Melbourne and they can work remotely now because of the internet. I guess if the people down here providing any technology websites services are up to speed with everything, then yes, it would be an advantage to the area. Is that all right?

The CHAIR — Yes, that is fine. Do you have any final things you would like to leave us with, Chris?

Mr DALLINGER — I am not sure if it is appropriate, but with the business we are obviously looking for customers. I do not know whether any of you guys or any of your departments are optimised mobile friendly, but I would like to leave you with that option. The government needs to be seen to be moving forward with the times, and if all their websites are optimised and user friendly, then it will be good for you guys and good for the larger community to access and use or get the information that is on government websites.

The CHAIR — Very good. Chris, thank you very much for taking the time out of your busy schedule to be here today to give us an informative presentation.

Mr DALLINGER — Thank you.

The CHAIR — In about 14 days you will get a draft copy of the transcript. You will be able to make corrections to obvious errors, but other than that it will be as it is and it will be on the record. Once again, thank you very much.

Mr DALLINGER — Thank you; a pleasure.

The CHAIR — That being the last witness, I thank the Bass Coast Shire Council and everyone else for their hospitality today.

Committee adjourned.