

Overview

GR8, a successful recruitment agency in Jersey, has grown significantly since its inception five years ago. We caught up with founder, Lee Madden, to discover how GR8 navigated its way through the pandemic and beyond.

In 2019, Lee spoke about the company's bright future but, like many other businesses, GR8 faced difficult times throughout COVID. Nevertheless, the team's continued positivity and innovation enabled the business to emerge stronger.

Rapid growth

In 2019, Jersey was grappling with the aftermath of Brexit. GR8 was offering crucial support to numerous businesses struggling with the rife talent shortage.

It was at this point that GR8 expanded its recruitment efforts globally, starting with Kenya. After conducting thorough interviews at Utalii College in Nairobi in November 2019, the business successfully hired a team of 150 individuals for various positions in the Jersey hospitality industry.

While waiting for a flight back home, the news came that Guernsey was also facing major recruitment difficulties due to Brexit. Quickly responding, Lee and his team provided talent to both islands within 24 hours. This success demonstrated that GR8 had limitless potential. The company began to recruit talent from various regions including Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Caribbean.

Alongside this international growth, GR8 has been working with the Government of Jersey to further support the people they hire. The business has instigated a change of policy that recognises Kenyan marriages and children for tax purposes, giving tax allowance on wages. This benefits both the Jersey workforce and supports workers' families back home, adding to the Kenyan Economy.

Fight or flight?

A few months later, the COVID-19 pandemic caused a worldwide upheaval and affected every corner of the globe. GR8's plans to bring in new recruits were thwarted. Despite the uncertainty and fear of the future, Lee's positive outlook and innovative thinking helped the company to overcome the most challenging of periods.

"I spoke with Jersey Business consistently through the initial months of the pandemic. The intent was not just to get through the pandemic but come out the other side stronger and better than before. What could we improve during this part of the business's journey? How could we play our part in helping the island get through this difficult time? Now wasn't the time to focus on the negatives, but to find the positives."

GR8 shifted its focus to fully supporting its global community through *GR8 Foundations*. The company redirected recruits from hospitality and construction to industries in need, such as retail, care, and medicine. GR8 facilitated the necessary background checks and training, placing 50 workers in the medical field alone. The foundation's efforts generated £15,000 in profits, all of which were donated to charity.

GR8 took the opportunity to tackle its own business challenges too, such as updating its IT infrastructure. During the pandemic, the company improved its website, streamlined its onboarding processes, and introduced new technology to increase efficiency.

Global community

GR8 now operates in the care industry on a permanent basis and has already placed 10 workers in the field, including four nurses.

Despite the easing of COVID-19 restrictions, GR8 faced new challenges as the construction sector saw a 65% drop in available resources due to a decline in transient workforce. However, the company persevered and approached Jersey Business for help in securing working permits for

those in construction. To GR8's delight, the request was granted, and permits are now widely available.

Using the Business Improvement Programme to keep evolving

GR8 has flourished, even amidst adversity. In the coming year, the company will establish a presence on the Isle of Man. However, sustained success requires a commitment to continuous learning, which is why GR8 is continuing to participate in the Business Improvement Programme (BIP) with Jersey Business.

"The last time I sent a member of staff on BIP with Jersey Business, they came back with an idea that will save us £100,000 on the operations side of GR8. It's this kind of innovative thinking, kickstarted by the Jersey Business programme and the team at Jersey Business, that keeps GR8 as competitive and forward-thinking as it is today."

In 2023, in the footsteps of their colleagues, Lee and the GR8 Directors will be securing their places on the Business Improvement Programme to seek further opportunities for improving the efficiency and productivity of the company.

"With the help of Jersey Business, we've increased our output four-fold. We've improved the core talent and skillset within the business and learned how to work smarter, not harder."

Relevant Links

- Business Improvement Programme