

Sunday Telegraph

YOUR BUSINESS

edited by Richard Tyler

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STARTING OUT

You would buy a used car from this man

Ashley Winston, 33, is a second-hand car dealer with a difference – he's on the side of the customer. He's also one of those fortunate people who have turned their passion into a business.

For 10 years he worked in marketing for various banks. "The whole point of working was to earn money to buy bigger and better cars. I had a reputation as a car nut and helped friends who were purchasing cars. Then one day I decided to do it as a business. I'd been ripped off so many times that I wanted to operate on behalf of the buyer."

It took less than a month to set up Palmdale (named after the suburb famed as the home of the Los Angeles County drag strip), and after joining a local business networking group Mr Winston found his first clients. The service is straightforward. Potential customers brief Palmdale on the car they want, or get advice on what is suitable. Mr Winston's team does a countrywide search, negotiates the price with the seller and checks the car thoroughly before delivering it to the customer.

Business was brisk to begin with, then levelled out. "I realised that we needed to do more marketing, and by 2008 it was obvious that Palmdale

had great potential, but there was a lot more to do," Mr Winston said.

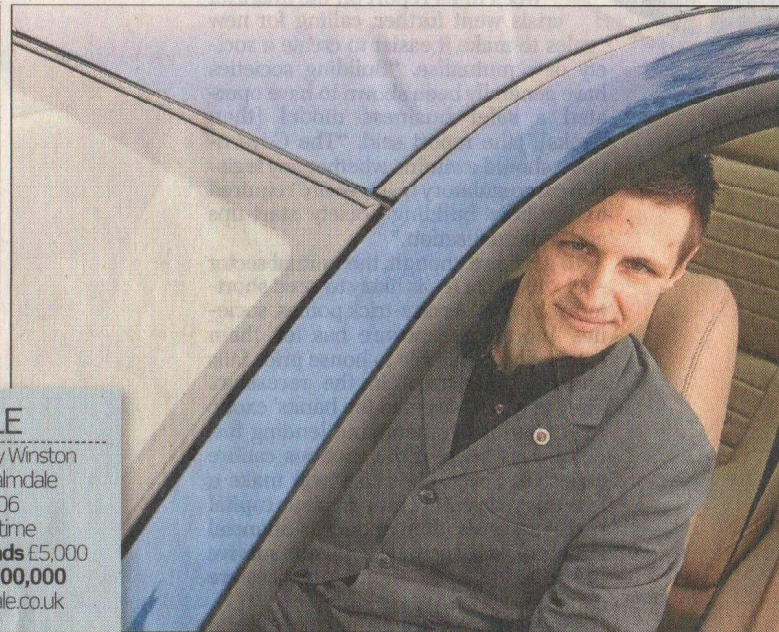
Finding good staff has been an ongoing challenge. "We've had a part-time administrator from the beginning. I came from a corporate background and knew it was important not to get bogged down by detail. If she wasn't here I'd be doing the minor tasks, and the business wouldn't go anywhere." Initially Mr Winston collected and delivered the cars, but soon realised that he needed two drivers who could travel around the country.

The hardest lesson so far has been learning to focus. "We used to sell cars, often old stock, for dealers on eBay. But it was a lot of work, and now we just source them. Concentrating on this has made the biggest difference to the company."

Business networking is a good source of contacts and he finds his most effective advertising is in *The Week*. "It's our target market – people don't have time to read the newspaper every day but are interested in what's going on, are well educated and of reasonable means. The trade car papers are for

FACTFILE

Name Ashley Winston
 Company Palmdale
 Founded 2006
 Staff 3 part-time
 Start-up funds £5,000
 Turnover £200,000
www.palmdale.co.uk



JULIAN SIMMONDS

RECESSION TOOLKIT

Focus on all business targets and review these weekly or monthly
Market strongly to existing clients to gain referrals
Concentrate on business networking
Consider paying hourly rates

STARTING OUT

DO treat every customer as if they're the only client in the world
DO focus on your key area of business and don't be distracted by other ideas when starting out
DO always show how much you love what you do
DON'T hesitate to pass admin to others so you're free to do what matters
DON'T be afraid to admit when you've made mistakes, it's how you correct them that people will remember most

car fanatics, we want people who aren't familiar with buying cars. From each monthly advertisement we'll get three or four clients." He also sends out a monthly e-newsletter to all the company's contacts.

The recession is good for

Palmdale, said Mr Winston. "Any company that guarantees to save you money will do well, though the price of second-hand cars is going up because people aren't trading in their old ones for new models."

His business plan looks just a year ahead, aiming to double their

monthly sales and then having satellite offices around the country to attract and manage clients, with sourcing done in a central hub. "Eventually the business should run itself and I can go back to doing what I enjoy most – driving the cars."

WIDGET FINN