



Case Study : Encounter Walking Holidays



A successful Cornwall-based business that offers self-guided holidays in South West England and Wales.

Back in 2012 Evergreen were challenged to provide a custom-made website and database booking system that manages all internal administration, paperwork and systems.

The modern website and fully operational administration system allows Encounter Walking Holiday staff to:

- Make bookings with a diary system
- Email contacts and customers
- Efficiently manage internal processes and systems
- Produces internal reports and walking itineraries
- Produces quotes and customer letters

[Click here to visit encounterwalkingholidays.com](http://encounterwalkingholidays.com)

Run By Walking Experts

Encounter Walking Holidays is the largest and most experienced self-guided walking holiday company covering the South West England and Wales.

They are regional specialists for walking holidays and luggage transfers along the UK's longest and best loved National Trails and offer short break options on inland

coast to coast paths. They are staffed by walking experts who live and walk in the region.

First Impressions

Damon, Managing Director of Encounter Walking first started working with Evergreen over 10 years ago after being introduced by a mutual friend. Damon summarises the key points upon first dealing with the company "Price, competitiveness and ability to be presented with problems and to come up with solutions". Damon says he thinks of Evergreen as a "one stop shop, they can help with anything remotely related to IT, and the on-going support is great".

Success and Profit

Damon puts the continued success of Encounter Walking down to the systems that Evergreen has designed. *"The database is significant to our success as Evergreen know we keep asking for more and more things to be added to it. We have been able to hold prices on our products primarily because profit is gained from the savings we make by adapting the database to our admin tasks that are enormous."*

The website and database system combined allow Encounter Walking to attract tourists to the business, make bookings on the database and deal with all administration. They are able to keep full and accurate details of their customers, past and present, as well as co-ordinating accommodation, taxis, travel arrangements and luggage, and the system includes features such as deposit recording.

Reliable and Robust

One of the most significant issues to any company has to be reliability. Damon is particularly impressed with the *"robustness of the database, that doesn't crash with minimal downtime even when all of us are using the system at the same time"*.

Damon has been working with Evergreen for over 10 years now, and during that time the business relationship has taken a more personal turn, Andrew and Liane, Directors of Evergreen have become firm friends with Damon who doesn't hesitate to recommend Evergreen services.

"Evergreen is great at managing expectations, they suggest ideas and let businesses try them out in their own way to ensure they are suitable for their business. I would certainly recommend Evergreen to other business owners".



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Day 1	Monday, 4th May 2015
Activity	Arrive Falmouth by Train
Grade	Fast and direct trains run from London Paddington to Truro (the Capital of Cornwall) from here you take a short 40 minute branch line journey to Falmouth Town. Total Travel Time 5.5 hours We can help with timetables and guidance on how to book cheap advance tickets and reserve seats from overseas.
Activity Notes	<p>2014 - Falmouth is on a branch line so you need to change from the mainline trains from London Paddington at Truro where all trains stop. Trains take around 25 minutes from Truro and you should get off at Falmouth Town station (not Falmouth Docks).</p> <p>For public transport information covering buses and trains use the excellent Traveline South West website www.travelinesw.com which will give you up to date detail, times and directions. If you are already on the road you can call them on 0871 200 2233</p> <p>You can also contact the train operators First Great Western on 08457 000 125 (open 07:00 to 22:00 daily)</p>
Taxi Numbers for tired walkers	<p>LT Taxis - Walkers Taxi Service (recommended) 03332 10 10 10 Or email at enquiries@ltxaxis.co.uk OR book on www.ltxaxis.co.uk</p> <p>Other Options Abacus Taxis Falmouth 01326 212141 Donalds Cars 01326 313123 247 Falmouth Taxis (0) 1326 312470 Tel: 01326 312470</p>

Above: Preview of an auto-generated letter to the customer.

Our Procedures Are More Effective

To summarise Damon adds "*We want to be at least as good as the competition, and cheaper, and because of our superior database system our administration costs are lower and our procedures are more effective and we believe this has directly contributed to our success as a business*".

Time For a New Website

Since creating the booking system and the original website 10 years ago, Evergreen have done lots more work for Damon and his team. The work has included a major upgrade to a responsive website, application of a major design change and impressive database work that means Encounter Walking Holidays' staff can create sophisticated interactive maps much faster than in the past.

Summarising working with Evergreen, IT-co-ordinator Rich Brown says: *"Let them get on with what they do brilliantly while you get on with running your business. Be confident that you'll get what you want. We did and so will you!"*

In particular, the long-established self-guided walking holiday specialists faced Google's threat to penalise websites that weren't mobile friendly. The Encounter website was a traditional static site that had served the business well since the late 2000s, but change was urgently needed.

Everything I'd heard about them was true

The project went to Rich Brown, who had just joined Encounter as IT-coordinator.

"I quickly realised why Damon was so impressed with Evergreen. When I started working with them, I quickly realised that everything I'd heard was true, from their approachability and clear communication to the human touch they bring to delivering databases and bespoke software. And just how easy they are to work with."

An updated design too

Rich Brown combines seasoned coding skills with design flair and previous professional web design experience. These were soon deployed as he and Damon decided to use the upgrade to give the website an updated, contemporary look. If there was ever a glitch with the project, this is where it briefly appeared.

Rich Brown again: *"The existing design had served us well, but we felt it could be improved. We briefed Evergreen and they developed a new design with signature professionalism. While it was a perfectly good design, and Evergreen were clearly a little surprised by our thoughts, we felt that there was further scope to improve it and fully reflect our creative vision."*

At that point, Rich revisited the concept and created the spacious, airy integration of design, colours and photography that they wanted.

Their considerable strength is in databases and online applications

*"I can understand how this may have touched a bit of professional sensitivity. To Evergreen's credit, they understood and accepted our input with good grace. While they're capable designers, I suspect they'd agree that their greatest – considerable – strengths are with **databases and online solutions**."*

"What really impressed me, particularly after this minor hiccup, was how Evergreen respected my design skills. And how they encouraged my input so we could apply

two complementary professional minds to the project. We hit it off quickly and never fell out during our collaboration."

The "Wow!" moment

Rich highlights work that Evergreen did on a database-driven interactive mapping app for the website. *"We'd developed some code for creating interactive maps, but it was time-consuming. So we gave it to Evergreen to develop a database solution. When we saw the result, it was the project's "Wow!" moment. Five years ago, developing maps like this for the site would have taken days. Now we do it in 20 minutes! We were very impressed, but not surprised. It was Evergreen at their best."*



"The human touch"

When he describes Evergreen's work with the perspective of another IT professional, Rich Brown describes them as probably the best database developers and designers he's ever met. *"Best of all, they have a human touch that's often lacking with highly-technical people such as coders."*

The new site runs beautifully

Two years after Rich joined the Encounter team, the new site runs beautifully. As, arguably, the UK's best-looking, best-performing walking holidays website, it gives prospective customers a wealth of information, while making it inviting and easy to plan and book holidays on any device.

Clear benefits

Thinking about quantifiable benefits, Rich reports significantly increased dwell times (up 50% from two years ago) for site visitors. Daily site visitors have also increased noticeably along with the number of bookings made through the site.

"The interactive maps are another very useful, highly visible, addition. They help walkers see the extent of the walks and the routes' locations in South West England and Wales. And they help prospective clients to imagine themselves enjoying their walk, which helps sell the holidays.

Additionally, an improved FAQs page enables visitors to quickly answer their questions on the website, where they'd previously have contacted us."

"We're thrilled with Evergreen's achievement"

Responses to the new website have been universally positive. The design that Rich and Damon gently, but firmly, insisted on is consistently praised for its inviting spaciousness.

And how it effectively portrays the areas through which the walks pass. The team like being able to set up interactive maps very quickly indeed. And, of course, customers love using them.

Rich Brown again: *"We're thrilled with Evergreen's achievement and their **approachable working style**. We still have some minor website tweaks to do, using the robust, easy-to-use content management system. And more development is planned for the site. This includes further database development to help our administration and give customers an even better experience."*

We'd definitely recommend them

Would he recommend Evergreen? *"Absolutely, without a doubt. I know Damon has done so over the 10 years or so that they've worked with us and I would too."*

So how does Rich sum up the Evergreen experience and what's his advice to anyone considering them?

"You'll get what you want"

*"Don't hesitate. **They're good listeners, so tell them what you want**. Then let them get on with what they do brilliantly while you get on with running your business. Be confident that you'll get what you want. We did and so will you!"*

'Because of our superior database system our administration costs are lower and our procedures are more effective and we believe this has directly contributed to our success as a business'

Damon Willcox, business owner

To ensure your software project delivers, call
Evergreen on 01454 269 087