

Media start-up firm's word spreads

A FRANCHISE business launched just nine months ago in Swansea has exceeded all its targets and resulted in scores of new business start-ups throughout the UK.

Mike Dickerson and Jonathan Gibbs are the entrepreneurs behind *Community Times*, a UK-wide franchise offering people the opportunity to own and operate their own high-quality, glossy A5 magazine and online business directory for local communities.

Their business plan originally anticipated they would sign up 10 franchisees in the first eight months – but they have signed up ten times the expected number.

Mike Dickerson said that whilst the popularity of the franchise had taken many industry professionals by surprise, *Community Times* staff, systems and support had been fundamental to the ongoing successful growth of the company.

He said, "We are getting more than 100 inquiries a day, resulting in the dispatch of up to 70 franchise prospectuses a day, and are delighted with current growth."

According to the *NatWest Survey 2006* report commissioned by the British Franchise Association the average number of franchises sold in the first two years is nine.

The new company, based in County House, Beaufort Road, Swansea, has created eight jobs and was supported by the Welsh Assembly Government with an Assembly Investment Grant.

It now anticipates that by

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Community Times sees business boom

March 2007 it will have more than 160 franchisees making *Community Times* the largest monthly magazine by circulation in the UK.

The business receives inquiries from all over the UK, including rural, suburban and metropolitan communities, while existing franchisees range from return-to-work mums, people who have given up full-time jobs to run their own *Community Times* business and others who want to earn a few thousand pounds extra each month in their spare time.

Mr Dickerson said, "The majority of our franchisees have never worked in publishing or run their own business before."

"The systems and support given to each franchisee allows them to focus entirely on growing a successful business while we provide monthly templates, design, proofing, printing, distribution and even accountancy support."

Mike and Jonathan, who have a background in web-based business systems and new media, de-

veloped robust and comprehensive online systems which enabled them to scale up production successfully

The magazine is designed for communities of up to 10,000 households and each franchisee is issued with a carefully formatted and structured monthly magazine template which includes all the design, articles, editorials, features, recipes, puzzles and competitions.

Franchisees source local advertising, return the template to *Community Times* who carry out online proofing before arranging printing through a network of national printers.

Each edition is proofed, printed and delivered to national distribution companies that deliver each edition to a minimum of 3,000 households in each community.

Each edition is also published on the internet within an online local directory website. Each franchisee also owns a bespoke email and SMS system that allows them to send emails and text messages on behalf of their advertisers to opted-in members of the community.

Each monthly edition averages 40 pages and, although each monthly template arrives complete with articles, puzzles, recipes and editorials, franchisees have the opportunity to tailor the content to suit and reflect the interests of their specific community.

