



PROFILE
TONY PALMER

TITLE
FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR

WEBSITE
CRYSTMOUNTAINGLASS.CO.UK



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PROFILE TONY PALMER



Aged 52, Tony Palmer was made redundant. He applied for jobs, but was never granted an interview. Tony suspected this was due to his age and health issues as he was suffering from Myalgic Encephalopathy (ME). The Job Centre agreed with him and told him that his chances of paid employment were slim.

Tony and his wife sat down and discussed the situation, and decided that self-employment seemed *'the only option'*. On the 1st September 2008, the business was launched. *Crystal Mountain Glass* sells engraved awards, wedding gifts, decanters, bowls, and paperweights, as well as rock tablets with multilevel carving, and Swarovski crystals. Tony bulk buys the glass from a supplier in Scotland, and engraves it in a 12ft x 15ft workshop in his back garden.

Tony cashed in his pension to buy his equipment and start the business. The equipment was initially hard to get hold of, and had to be imported from America. By giving up his pension, Tony runs the risk of relying on job seekers allowance if the business is unsuccessful. Yet Tony is confident in his ability, and so far, all is going well.

Tony's first step to becoming self-employed was to *'get advice'*. Tony attended HMRC workshops on tax returns and VAT. This helped Tony decide whether to be VAT registered or not, and helped him understand about accounts and bookkeeping. Tony is now thinking of taking on an accountant to save time, but is clued up enough to know what is what.

Tony took part in Business Link workshops, which focused on starting in business, and creating a website. He plans to attend a further course on increasing website traffic, and has requested an information factsheet (or Cobweb) on the same, from The Prince's Initiative for Mature Enterprise (PRIME). Tony's main tip in becoming self-employed is to get as much advice as possible. It is *'free and always valuable'*. You can find details of free workshops in your area by going to www.primebusinessclub.com/category/events.

Tony and his wife attend craft fairs each month. A pitch can cost anything between

£70 and £170 for a 6ft area. The fairs are a way of spreading the word, and can often bring in large orders a few months down the line. Tony says *'people will talk to us at an event, then a sports day or award ceremony will pop up, and they'll remember and give us a call'*.

Tony wanted to employ a website designer, but every quote was 4 figures so he did it himself instead. Tony went to www.123-reg.co.uk and bought a domain name. It was then about £70 for a software package, which allowed Tony to upload information via already formatted templates.

When looking for a glass supplier, Tony made a shrewd move with *The Glass Scribe International* in Scotland. As well as getting a good deal on wholesale glass, Tony became sole distributor for *The Glass Scribe* in London. This meant that Tony got a free listing as a stockist on *The Glass Scribe's* website, as well as being able to show off his collection to those picking up orders.

Tony attends a small local business club, once a month. *'It is good to mix with businesses that are in different stages of development'* says Tony. People share knowledge and tips, and it is also a good chance to gain contacts, and talk about your own product.

Tony suffers from ME which can cause severe fatigue and malaise after mental or physical activity. Tony's old job demanded long periods of visual processing; about 60% of the time dedicated to looking at a computer screen. Tony would go for so many weeks, but then have to take time off to recover. Now his own boss, Tony can have what his specialist calls *'a modified living style'*. He breaks up his time in front of the computer, interchanging it with other aspects of the business. As a result, Tony's ME becomes more manageable.

With the business now thriving, what Tony really wants is enough profit to support a showroom or a shop. That way, people could peruse the collection first hand, just like they do at the craft fairs. With an increasing customer base, and regular marketing, it is surely just a matter of time.

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