

## Self-employment: Making it happen CASE STUDY

**Name:** Dean Vale  
**Business:** DV8 Creative Solutions  
(Graphic Design and Copywriting)  
**Location:** Enfield  
**Unemployment Period:** 10 months  
**Assisted by:** Business Link in London  
& Enterprise Enfield



This case study highlights the journey of a previously unemployed individual who has taken positive steps to become self-employed after participating in the Jobcentre Plus six month self-employment offer

**Date: February 2010**

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After losing two jobs and a relationship break-up in just seven months, life, says Dean Vale, resembled a car crash. But out of the wreckage he decided to seize the initiative and launch his own marketing and design business; 2010 he says, will most definitely be his year.

The 36-year old now runs DV8 Creative Solutions, a creative consultancy based in Enfield offering marketing, graphic design, website design and development, branding and copywriting services. Dean says it's still 'early days' for his business, but in just a few months he's already building and copywriting for websites and designing logos. DV8 is the culmination of all his skills and work experience, he says, and setting it up has been an often arduous but ultimately rewarding journey. In less than 18 months Dean has moved from local estate agent to design consultant.

His journey started when he was made redundant from an estate agent after four years in September 2008. Before leaving he had several job offers and found a new job as a Sales Manager at a catering equipment hire company. 'But', he says, he 'knew this job wasn't for him' and within seven months was laid off. His long-term relationship also ended abruptly early in 2009, so the year became a 'rebuilding project'.

Dean says he's always been interested in setting up his own business – it was simply a question of when and what. He had mixed feelings about going it alone during a recession. 'It was a daunting prospect. People were losing their jobs and going into marketing was not a great prospect. Teams were being downsized, probably when businesses needed marketing the most, and budgets were being cut'. But he says the jobs market wasn't encouraging either. 'I continued to look and plough on with it. I registered for jobs sites and perfected my CV but there was a huge difference between the amount of jobs available and the people looking.' He says losing his job

gave him valuable time to stop and think and he realised that for him a job would be simply be for 'bread and butter' and he'd end up settling for second best if he'd didn't take a risk now.

On deciding to set up a marketing and design consultancy Dean says there was no 'lightening bulb' moment. After training in design management and graphic design at De Montfort University, he temped and freelanced, worked for Coca Cola's publishing department as a New Media Manager and various other sales and marketing roles before working as an estate agent. He says people have always remarked on his creativity and the fact that he's was not utilising it enough. So after much encouragement from great friends, which he describes as like having your dad at a football match cheering you on, he decided to go back to graphic design and become self-employed. On a practical level, Dean's skills were rusty and graphic design had moved on since he had last worked professionally. 'At that stage I was limited, it had been a number of years since I'd last sat at a desk creating professionally.'

He says he spent all his time refreshing his design skills, sourcing information, learning from the internet and watching web tutorials. He also started to look into web design and through trial, error and determination built his own site. Dean felt he was lacking in some business know-how, so after contacting Business Link in London, he was referred to Enterprise Enfield for advice. 'I had an imagination of a business, but I lacked some understanding of how to run one single-handedly,' says Dean. 'I knew how to be a graphic designer, but not how to prepare a business plan or understand the legalities. You have to wear six different hats as a business owner.'

Through advice and seminars Dean says Enterprise Enfield gave him a more structured format and he was able to move forward with his business idea. He also joined the BNI Business 4U chapter, a business-networking group in his area, which meets weekly to pass on business referrals and contacts. He says there are 30 business people in his group including building trades, a solicitor, a florist and a photographer. They meet and make a note of what kind of business each member is looking for so that they can pass on business recommendations.

Dean had just one final hurdle to clear before launching DV8 in December. A few months previously, with the business primed and ready to go, he suffered an assault whilst in a city bar. An unknown man attacked Dean, breaking his nose and shattering his two front teeth. The unprovoked assault dented his confidence for a short period. 'Thankfully' he says, his friends rallied round to support him once again and helped him get back on his feet and back to business. 'The greatest things in all of this have been my friends. Their help and support, and just being able to bounce ideas off of them made a real difference.'

Dean says he's overcome a number of challenges to get where he is today. 'There is a very potent fear factor', he says. 'You worry that a few months down the line; there could be no money coming in and with a mortgage to pay; it's all down to you.' He said this gave him the motivation to put 'blood, sweat and tears into DV8 and to try and see the bigger picture. You have to work out early on how your business is going to generate income and what your target audience is going to be.' He says he made a huge effort to go out and meet people and make contact with other businesses. Dean says the best thing you can do in business is maintain enthusiasm. 'You always have to speak with enthusiasm. I'm a firm believer that whatever you put out comes back to you.'