

**The CatStrand – Going For Growth
Project Reference No: DG80**

Final Project Report

Background to the Project

1. How was the idea for the project developed:

GCAT was established in 2001 with the aim of developing the old derelict primary school in New Galloway and converting it to a resource for the local community. Following a £1.2m fundraising campaign the CatStrand opened in September 2007. In the years running up to the opening, GCAT undertook extensive research and consultation processes as well as a major feasibility study and a wide range of pilot studies. A marketing and audience development strategy was also produced. The results of this research have informed the current facilities and resources which now operate from the venue.

The CatStrand produces a varied programme of arts, cultural and social events and activities, regular exhibitions, lectures and training courses. The centre offers free internet access and high quality conference and training facilities. A range of commercial activities has been under development to increase income streams and contribute to the running costs of the venue. These include a gift shop, café and bar as well as venue hire, which includes conferences, meetings, training courses and private functions. GCAT employs a Programme Manager and a Business Development Manager to develop these activities.

In addition to the venue, GCAT manages the GTI (Glenkens Transport Initiative) and the Glenkens Gazette, a bi-monthly community newsletter. A two year pilot study called Living Independently, funded by the Department of Work and Pensions, was also carried out. This led to the development of a range of on-going support services for the elderly, which are now supported by the Big Lottery Fund. GCAT has also been developing activities and services for young people and employs a Community Project Worker to carry out this work. The organisation's activities are supported by a large team of volunteers (over 100 in total) who are involved at many levels, including driving the community bus, compiling copy for the Glenkens Gazette, assisting with general weekend cover, stewarding at events, serving in the bar and sitting on committees.

The organisation did not have sufficient funding and resources in place to employ a marketing assistant or to develop marketing partnerships, initiatives and activities to fully promote the venue and its services to maximise both income streams and usage of the venue.

A limited amount of basic marketing activities are undertaken by various members of staff. The Programme Manager, in addition to programming the venue, budgeting, fundraising, overseeing the Big Lottery Fund project and reporting, produces the 4 monthly events brochure, writes press releases and sends out regular email bulletins. Some volunteers help distribute posters around the community. The Community Project Worker produces copy and posters and distributes them. Time and resources were limited and there are many marketing and promotional activities which are simply not achieved due to strain on staff and time. We have been unable to develop online initiatives and digital audience development activities (particularly in relation to reaching young people), research potential customers for hires and conferences, and develop destination management initiative's and tourism strands and partners.

Therefore there was a definite need within the organisation for a more strategic approach to marketing with a dedicated member of staff in place to carry this out.

2. Who was involved in the project:

Initially the funding application was prepared by Karen Donald, Programme Manager in conjunction with Rachel Thompson, General Manager.

Monitoring of the project was also carried out by Karen and Rachel along with Fiona Ramsay, Finance Manager.

Peter Renwick was recruited as a part time Marketing Officer and commenced work in September 2009. Peter resigned from this post in September 2010. A replacement for this post was recruited and Ronnie Bradford commenced employment in November 2010.

Other key individuals who contributed to this project were:

Gillian Hilsley – Reception/Retail Co-ordinator

Wendy Leach – Volunteer Co-ordinator

Jodie Noble – Programme Manager (who replaced the previous programme manager, Karen Donald in October 2010)

Sean Paul O’Hare – General Manager (who replaced Rachel Thomson as General Manager in June 2011)

3. What were the aims and objectives of the project:

This project aimed to build on past research, consultations and feasibility studies to develop new marketing and business initiatives and expand on current activities which take place at The CatStrand. Thus enabling the organisation to strengthen its customer base and market position, increase earned income, attract new revenue and grow in a sustainable way, helping the organisation to gradually move away from being so dependent on public and private sector funding to being a self-sustainable social enterprise.

The key aim was to enhance venue resources and to increase partnership working, combined with an increased marketing activity.

The objectives were to contribute to the following:

- Development of new audiences, especially young people
- Increase in volunteer activity
- Increase in participation
- Increase in visitor numbers, including tourists
- Growth of commercial activity
- Increased sales of merchandise
- Increased conferences and hires
- Increase in involvement of local business

This overall aim was to enhance income streams, which, it is hoped, continue to increase year on year, contributing to the project and also the long-term sustainability of the venue. As such it will mean that, as time goes by, the organisation will be less dependent on grant-aid funding and will increasingly support our salary costs and activities with self-generated income, ensuring the continuation of the project for many years to come.

The aim was to employ a part-time (2 days per week) marketing officer. The post holder main tasks to be involved in destination management activities, development of e-commerce and e-marketing activities, building of new marketing partnerships and collaborations, and audience development initiatives (with a focus on youth and tourism).

4. How was the funding package assembled:

The organisation had already secured some funding to be used toward this purpose, namely

Hollywood Trust	£7020.00
Callendar Trust	£2800.00

And in drawing up a projected project budget was able to ascertain the availability to use some in kind hours for volunteer activity, and in kind advertising and looked to gain the remaining proportion from Leader.

The total anticipated project cost was £31,640.

5. How much money did Leader provide:

Leader provided £15,820
50% of the total project costs.

The Project Experience

1. When did the project take place:

The project was carried out from 1/9/09 to 30/9/2011.

7, 8 & 9. What actually happened, how was the project delivered and what marketing was undertaken:

The first step was to commence a recruitment process to appoint a part time marketing office. Peter Renwick was appointed and commenced employment in September 2009, working 2 days per week at The CatStrand.

One of the first activities undertaken was to commission a detailed Audience Analysis to investigate:

1. Who are our audience?
2. Where do they come from?
3. How often do they attend?
4. The value of regular customers

This analysis showed us that:

1. Our present audience consists of a mix of local residents, regional visitors and visitors from outside the region.
2. We need to build and maintain our regular audience.
3. We need to increase awareness to visitors from within and outside the region

This then allowed a plan to be implemented to aim to build audience both locally and further afield.

A new strategy of regular adverts in local newspapers commenced where events and regular activities were promoted in the Galloway News on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. Adverts were also placed in publications which had a wider readership, including D & G Life, Raring 2 Go and Visit Scotland Guides and other Visit Scotland issued publications. Some in kind reciprocal advertising was also arranged with other organisations including, Ferry News, Spring Fling, Macher's Guide.

Monthly events posters were designed to provide a monthly snapshot of what was happening in the CatStrand, these were distributed within Dumfries and Galloway to a varied collection of outlets, including shops, tea rooms, community centres, visitor attractions and information centres.

Regular flyers were also produced to publish particular events and distributed locally and outwith. These were targeted to specific events in the weeks leading up to the event to maximise audience numbers.

Targeted marketing delivery was also carried out matching audience type to events, for example; flyers and posters for Children's Puppet shows were distributed to Schools, nurseries and play centres and child-minder's.

Distribution of these marketing materials was carried out by a distribution company and also by key staff and volunteers along with mail shots.

These publicity materials were printed out of house and also designed and printed in house.

A radio campaign on West Sound radio was implemented regularly promoting forthcoming events. Online marketing was implemented with the commencement of a regular newsletter to mailing list consisting of past audience members.

Social networking was also introduced as a method of reaching new people, using Facebook and also by the setup of a new ning site called Glenkens Online. This had the desired effect of attracting a greater youth audience and numbers using these online sites increased consistently over the project term.

The website presence of the venue hire side of the CatStrand was developed with a new venue hire web site being set up alongside Google ad words. Website domains were also acquired to broaden the web presence of the venue hire facilities available in the CatStrand. This was followed by a major mail out promoting venue hire to businesses.

A focus was also placed on developing existing and new partnerships including; RSPB, Galloway Forest Park, Glorious Galloway, D&G Arts Festival, Spring Fling, Kirkcudbright Arts Trail, Robert Burns Centre and many local businesses and initiatives.

The range of local crafts and produce stocked in the CatStrand was also increased providing a valuable outlet for local artists to sell their work and increasing the items available to purchase in our shop. We also held annual Christmas shopping evenings showcasing the work of local artists and craft makers and providing unique shopping experience in the Glenkens. We also developed and expanded upon the range of items available to purchase in our gift shop.

A targeted initiative was undertaken to develop the involvement of local business and provide regular marketing materials, programmes, flyers and posters to accommodation providers to promote the facilities of the CatStrand.

We also continued to work with Visit Scotland with the aim to achieve official Visitor Information Centre status, this would help build capacity and maximise income streams as the number of visitors to The CatStrand seeking information increase.

Promotion of the CatStrand and its facilities continued in the Visit Scotland Guides and publications which are distributed worldwide.

A new downloadable events guide was developed allowing access to the full programme of events and details of services provided to be obtained online.

The promotion via social networking methods continued to be expanded upon including the use of twitter and listings in a variety of online listing guides.

E mail newsletters and promotions continue and the mailing list continued to increase with 545 people at the end of the project receiving regular information.

10. Who benefited from the project?

The aim was to improve rural capacity and 148 Leader target groups were expected to benefit from the project. At the end of the project we had evidence to show that 170 people from the target groups had participated in the project. This participation included, attending events, workshops, learning activities, using facilities, viewing exhibitions, attending groups and help sessions, volunteering and selling items in our shop.

We also found that we had difficulty in recording some of the attendees who fell into particular target groups, in particular people on low incomes and those under employed, although we were aware that such people were attending benefit sessions and other support groups they were very reluctant to provide evidence and we in the end felt that this question was too sensitive to ask on a participation questionnaire.

During the project we also increased our volunteer base increased and we now have a bank over 100 individuals who regularly volunteer in varying capacities. We estimate that over 4000 volunteer hours are utilised in year within the CatStrand.

11. How did the final budget turn out?

During the project we at regular intervals assessed the budget and made some amendments between budget categories, this allows us to maximise the activities that were the most successful.

At the end of the project we were slightly under budget.

The main areas of underspend were firstly in the salary costs of the marketing officer, this was due to the fact that the first marketing officer Peter Renwick resigned from his post during the project and there was a small gap between Peter stopping work and us being able to recruit a replacement for the role, Ronnie Bradford. Secondly we had an underspend in the website development budget, this was due to the fact that we experienced significant delays in implementing our strategies for e

commerce and also the realisation that the costs involved with fully implementing the anticipated developments were larger than anticipated resulting in a scale down and change of strategy in this area.

12. What lessons have been learned?

After analysing the different methods of marketing carried out with regard to their effect and cost it was decided to scale down and discontinue the regular advertising in local press after an initial awareness had been built up. This was because we felt that the cost of doing so was high compared with other methods and once new audiences became aware of the CatStrand we could reach them by other methods as effectively, by mail shot, posters and flyers.

We also found it more difficult than anticipated to increase our venue hire business in particular to business's for training and conferences resulting from the economic downturn and the feedback from potential user's was that they were cutting their spending in this area and tending scale back or not to look to carry out these types of events.

13. Will be project by mainstreamed or transferred:

At the end of the project we had not obtained successor funding to continue to employ a part time marketing officer therefore the decision was main not to continue the fixed term contract of the marketing officer, Ronnie Bradford. However we wish to continue with the great results achieved through this programme and will strive to obtain a new funding package to allow us to continue this work.

14. Detail the sustainability of the project:

The Catstrand continues to grow and increase its commercial activities to develop marketing partnerships, initiatives and activities to fully promote the venue and its services to maximise both income streams and usage of the venue. We will continue to enhance income streams to contribute to the project and also the long-term sustainability of the venue. Our aim continues to become less dependent on grant-aid funding and to increase our support to our core salary costs, overheads and activities with self-generated income, ensuring the continuation of the project for many years to come.

15. How the project has addressed the Leader issue selected in the application:

The issue selected was to *develop a diverse and dynamic business base*.

The key aim was to enhance venue resources and to increase partnership working, combined with an increased marketing activity which in turn would help develop a diverse and dynamic business base.

The objectives were to contribute to the following:

- Development of new audiences, especially young people
- Increase in volunteer activity
- Increase in participation
- Increase in visitor numbers, including tourists
- Growth of commercial activity
- Increased sales of merchandise

- Increased conferences and hires
- Increase in involvement of local business

At the end of the project audience participation averages were almost 80%, commercial activity income had increased by 33% and volunteer activity had increased by 20%, Work by over 90 local artists and craft makers is held in the gift shop for sale.

We have also increased partnerships and relationships with local businesses and have seen an increase in visitor numbers consistently over the period of the project resulting in a more dynamic and diverse business base to continue to expand upon in the future.