

Case Study

**SCOTLAND
FOOD & DRINK
PARTNERSHIP**

Christie the Baker: learning digital skills helped us through crisis

“I believe that through training you allow your staff to develop as people and also become closer to the business. You spend a bit of time on them, and they give you their time and effort back.”

Andrew Chisholm
Managing Director



Christies is a traditional Scottish baker, selling traditional products. During the Covid-19 lockdown, all of us – from our managing director to our bakery and shop staff – learnt new ways to do our jobs.

We're an award-winning Scottish bakery firm, employing over 40 people. Through our shops in Airdrie and Coatbridge and our wholesale business, we have supplied North Lanarkshire with breads, rolls, pies and sweet bakes for over 75 years.

Across the whole business, the Covid-19 pandemic was a wake-up call. We're still selling traditional products and quality, but we have changed the way we run the business. We'll be slicker as a result.

How we moved online to beat Covid

The first effect of Covid was that we had to close the two shops – there was no one in the high streets. We also closed the bakery for three days, but then, seeing the demand, decided on a different approach: to set up a home delivery service.

That may sound straightforward, but it was a steep learning curve – especially since our directors had no digital or IT experience. We did have a website, but it was a basic 'shop window' site, telling people our

opening times and locations. So, we had to learn quickly how to sell online:

- With help from an IT consultant, we set up a basic online shop; we later switched to the Shopify platform to cater for growing demand.
- In order to manage social distancing, we transformed the bakery, moving our machinery and changing our processes.
- We bought packing machines to package the products for delivery.
- For the deliveries, we approached two local businesses with excellent knowhow of the local area – a florist and a taxi company
- We became much more active on social media, to promote the service and keep up a conversation with our customers.

Within a few days of launching home delivery, we were selling close to what the shops would have sold in 'normal' times. Later, as people returned to the high streets, we reopened both shops.

The wider lessons we learnt

The whole Covid experience, and our own response to it, taught us many things about resilience – and reinforced some things we already knew:

- **the need to be open to change**
- **the need to wake up to digital** – we'd talked about it in the past, but not really done anything
- **the value of having good people – and developing them.**

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By developing your people, you develop your business

Our management style at Christies is to allow people to take on as much as responsibility as they want, and provide the training and support to do it. Our managing director Andrew Chisholm became an apprentice baker when he was 16, and we believe Modern Apprenticeships are the way forward—providing people with practical skills, understanding of what happens across the bakery, and confidence to progress.

Sometimes in a business, staff may not think they need training – especially if they've done a job for a while. But they grow in their role, and gain different perspectives and an openness to do things differently. We saw the benefits of that during Covid, and will do in future too.

Support for our people development initiatives

There's very good support out there for food and drink businesses.

With our apprenticeships, we receive excellent external support from the Scotland Food & Drink Partnership.

On recruitment, we get most candidates through the Routes to Work scheme with North Lanarkshire Council. It's an employability service for the unemployed and economically disadvantaged, helping employers with sourcing, sifting and training candidates. It also provides wage subsidies.

www.christiecakes.co.uk