

The Silver Lining

When Kiran Masrani and his wife Reshma took over the shop and post office in Bidborough, near Tunbridge Wells in Kent, two years ago, it was run down and old fashioned, so they had to set about the hard task of rebuilding the business.

Before...

Kiran extended the post office opening hours and gradually began to make improvements to the product range in the shop, including the introduction of his own range of fresh and frozen curries, which have been selling very well. Indeed, he now also supplies the village pub, the Hare and Hound, where Curry Night quickly established itself as the busiest evening of the week.

Kiran's efforts were recognised when he was included in the top 100 Independent Retailers by the Independent Achievers Academy in autumn 2007. However, at about the same time Bidborough Post Office was included on the Kent post office closure list. Despite opposition from the local community and the Parish Council, it was closed in January 2008. Although he was disappointed, the closure created a

golden opportunity for Kiran to review his business and to consider how the space freed-up by the removal of the post office could best be used. After reviewing the options, he concluded that his shop needed a complete refit.

This was carried out in May 2008 by Design-A-Store, part of the national Team Design Shopfitting group of companies - one of the Rural Shops Alliance's Retail Services partners. As well as new fixtures and fittings, the refit included a new non-slip floor, new electrics and lighting, new refrigeration, redecoration and a CCTV system. The shop already stocked chilled and frozen foods, newspapers and magazines, cold drinks, confectionery, biscuits and cakes, tobacco products, greetings cards, bread baked on the premises, general groceries, and a range of household products as well as an off licence. The extra space enabled extending such ranges such as fresh vegetables, dairy products and alcohol, and the introduction of a fresh meat slicer. The bake-off oven was moved to a more convenient position. Kiran now has agreement for a PayPoint terminal to be installed. Still on his want list is to be a National Lottery outlet.

The response from local customers to the much improved shop has been extremely favourable. Already after only a few months, turnover is up by some 25%, taking it past the

£1,000 per day mark, with profit margins also up.

Kiran's vision and confidence have also had wider results. The post office closure caused the local community to reassess the value of its local services. As a direct result, the local District Council in Tunbridge Wells agreed to provide some funding for the three local facilities in Bidborough - the shop, the pub and the garage - to help

them market their services to the community through leaflets, distributed by the Parish Council. As a result, although the village has lost its post office, it is gaining a new appreciation of the local services that do remain.

● **The Team Design Shopfitting companies cover the whole country. They can be contacted through the reply coupon on the Retail Services page. (page23).**



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