

Digital Upscaler

Case Study

CRUISE CIRCLE

Sector: Travel Agency

District: Bolsover, Derbyshire

Support Accessed: £26,250 Grant and Specialist Advice

How did the Digital Upscaler project help Cruise Circle to successfully set sail on an ambitious digital transformation journey?



When husband and wife team, Jason Daniels, and Danielle Nemeth, acquired independent specialist travel agent, Cruise Circle from its previous owners in 2009 they had a clear vision to evolve it into an online travel provider that was ahead of the curve in the cruise travel sector.

Having already completed the initial stage of a new website build, prior to engaging the Digital Upscaler project, Cruise Circle received invaluable one-to-one advice to help to elevate the platform. Crucially, this has seen them transform online capabilities and radically improve their customers' online experience by implementing new features and automation functionality that will now support the realisation of Cruise Circles wider growth ambitions.

Their plan from the outset was to harness the potential offered by digitisation to create an unrivalled customer experience, something that the Digital Upscaler project helped them achieve, as Managing Director, Jason Daniels explained:

"We wanted to transform the digital infrastructure we'd inherited and take our customers digital journey and experience to a whole new level. We needed expert guidance to achieve this and when seeking out funding and support it became immediately clear that the Digital Upscaler project ticked all the right boxes."

About Cruise Circle:

Cruise Circle is one of the UK's leading independent travel agents and cruise holiday specialists. The firm, which is a member of CLIA (Cruise Lines International Association) boasts many years of cruise industry experience and prides itself on providing customers with a second-to-none cruise booking experience.

The business was originally established in 2005 and is a fully independent member of the Midcounties Co-operative Travel Consortium. Cruise Circle was acquired from its previous owners by current owners, Jason Daniels and Danielle Nemeth in November 2009 and today employs 14 staff members in total. The business created two new roles as a direct result of the Digital Upscaler project road map, one joining the team in December 2021 and one joining in January 2022.





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To successfully scale up, grow and compete in such a competitive space, it was vital for Cruise Circle to have a hi-tech system underpinning its operations. Jason demonstrated ‘real vision’ in terms of digital transformation. We’re currently working on the next phase which will see the business integrate ‘real time’ connectivity.

Jason Roper,
Digital Technology Adviser



Jason Roper demonstrated significant system development experience which proved invaluable to us. He impressed on us the need to completely re-think and re-build our digital position and helped us understand that the digital architecture we needed to develop was, in principle, not entirely different to that deployed by other business in other sectors. This reassured us that, with the right technical support, our digital functionality goals were perfectly within reach. He really helped us get things moving.

Jason Daniels,
Managing Director



What challenges did Cruise Circle face?

When Jason and Danielle acquired Cruise Circle the business, it was supported by an out-of-date IT system. The legacy systems they inherited were simply not advanced enough to support their plans to take the business to new heights as Jason explained:

“When we bought the business, it was trading from a very old website with very little functionality. We had the website updated by a B2B tech provider back in 2013 but had always had our sights set on developing a much more sophisticated platform. We knew that the travel industry was continuing to evolve, and the way customers accessed and booked holidays and breaks, including cruises, had changed radically since the business was first established. For us to thrive we needed to meet customer expectations, which increasingly centred around elevating our online capabilities.”

As neither Jason or Danielle came from a tech background, they needed help to get their digitisation plans down on paper and to access impartial advice on grant funding availability.

How did the Digital Upscaler project help Cruise Circle meet these challenges?

Having heard about the Digital Upscaler project from D2N2 Growth Hub back in February 2020, Jason Daniels was first introduced to the project at a presentation given by Digital Upscaler adviser, Jason Roper.

Cruise Circle signed on to the project soon after and Jason Roper began providing one-to-one digital advice to the business. Drawing from his many years of technical experience, Jason Roper was able to offer extensive functionality insight and demonstrate in detail what was actually achievable. Having immersed himself in Cruise Circle's long-term commercial objectives, he helped the business to define an end-to-end digital strategy and map out a detailed scoping brief.

This enabled them to choose the right development partner, as Jason Daniels explained:

"Jason Roper worked with us to define our 'business rules' and helped us put these at the heart of our scoping brief. This enabled us to clearly communicate to our chosen agency how our digital framework needed to interact."

In addition, Digital Technology Adviser, Jason, played a key role in helping Cruise Circle to prepare a technology grant funding application. He ensured a solid business case was made, demonstrating the technology the business wanted to invest in would offer a long-term benefit and would, as far as practically possible be, 'future proof'. Speaking about the support provided, Jason Daniels told us:

"As someone who has real 'form-a-phobia', I found it incredibly helpful having Jason on hand to take us through the grant application process. Some of the paperwork was quite 'challenging' and he made it all so much easier, taking me through every stage until everything was taken care of. He also played a pivotal role in helping us formulate the digital agency tender which was a key component in making the project such a huge success."

What key milestones has Cruise Circle reached following through their involvement with the Digital Upscaler project?

The project has helped the business successfully deliver on its digitisation strategy, which is already presenting several commercial benefits, including:

- Standardisation of cruise data supplied by different providers. Formatting conflicts are now resolved, and the result is that new cruise products can be added at a much faster pace, boosting customer acquisition, and supporting sales growth.
- Greater control over the data collected which has significantly reduced data handling costs from 3rd parties.

Key Improvements and Impact:

- **Digital interconnectivity achieved:** A complete overhaul of the legacy systems originally in place has resulted in the integration of data collection and data processing modules and customer relationship management (CRM) alignment, collectively leading to enhanced cross-platform functionality and a streamlined digital infrastructure.
- **Productivity and customer experience greatly enhanced:** Integration of automation functionality across platforms has reduced time spent manually inputting simple bookings, accelerating booking procedures and delivering a more efficient service to customers.
- **Leading-edge ecommerce capabilities integrated:** Full service online cruise configuration and booking system (phase 1) will be live from 1st March 2022. Initially, five cruise lines will be available to book online.

What's next on Cruise Circles digital transformation voyage?

Cruise Circle's continued involvement in the Digital Upscaler project will now support further growth for the business as Jason Daniels explained:

"Phase 2 will see us continuing to expand the range of cruises on offer and phase 3 will mark the launch of an exciting initiative with the introduction of innovative cruise customisation functionality."

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