

The Brownbook: Free Online Local Business Directory Helps Consumers Identify The Good and The Bad Traders

The Brownbook (www.brownbook.net) launches its UK service today - a free and open wiki-type 'local business directory' website that lets consumers add and find local businesses, rate them and add reviews.

The Brownbook breaks the monopoly of big directory companies and gives the power back to the people. It is the UK's first 'peer-produced' online directory service.

Based on the 'anyone-can-instantly-edit' principles pioneered by the online encyclopedia Wikipedia (www.wikipedia.org), *The Brownbook* aims to do for the local directory market what Wikipedia has done for the encyclopedia market; namely, to provide a service that is more complete and more accurate than the existing local directory services; that allows people to have their say; that anyone can use for free, and that lets even the smallest business promote itself at zero cost.

According to recent research commissioned by comScore and The Kelsey Group into US-based local review sites, ninety-seven percent of consumers said they made a purchase based on an online review as they believed this to be more accurate.

"We built The Brownbook because we wanted an impartial service, one based on peoples experiences and preferences so others can share their confidence when making purchasing decisions," comments one of the Brownbook founders. "Some businesses really care about the service they give, but often we seem to experience bad service from businesses that just don't care. Aside from telling a few friends about it we can't really make ourselves heard and bad businesses continue to get away with it. Conversely, businesses that give good service don't really get the recognition and commendation they deserve".

"With over 2.2 million local businesses already listed, The Brownbook is putting more power back into the hands of consumers, giving us a platform to be heard all over the web. We firmly believe that the days of the rogue trader are numbered."

Due to the open nature of *The Brownbook*, anyone without registering can add reviews for any business - positive or negative – and if the business you want to review isn't there it takes you a matter of seconds to add it, further increasing the power of the service for future users. Frequent visitors can optionally register with *The Brownbook* if they want to develop a sense of 'reputation' behind their reviews and edits. They will also receive their own 'user page' which lets them tell other members about themselves in addition to tracking any reviews or edits they've made at anytime.

But it's not all doom and gloom for businesses

Smart businesses can use *The Brownbook* to promote their business and its reputation. By encouraging satisfied customers to give positive testimonials any business can build up its local credibility.

Business owners can claim and promote their business listings for a small annual subscription that costs less than a box of pens. *The Brownbook* system alerts them any time a review or any other updates are made, and they can add photos and videos of their business as well as rich business details like opening times, special promotions, and any other information useful for customers. And all these can be changed or updated by the business owner at any time at no extra cost by simply going online to www.brownbook.net.

The Brownbook will also be launching in the US in the second quarter of 2008, and plans to be in four countries by the end of the year.

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About the Founders

The Brownbook was founded by two senior ex-directory industry executives who saw the potential of creating a 'user-created' local directory.

*"We knew that the big directory companies had monopolised the local directory business for decades, charging businesses high prices to advertise and giving no way for consumers to judge the credibility of businesses. We wanted to give the businesses and the consumers more power, and when we saw Wikipedia, we realised it was the perfect concept. We set about building *The Brownbook* by embracing wiki principles of 'anyone-can-edit', and simultaneously removing any need to understand technology or any special computer language or syntax. The result is a local directory service where anyone can add businesses, edit, or add reviews; and one that puts total control into the hands of the businesses and consumers."*

There's more on the ethos and beliefs behind *The Brownbook* on our blog: <http://blog.brownbook.net>.

Available for comment

The founders of *The Brownbook* are always available for comment on news and features related to: business directories, local search, local social search, wiki, peer-production, user generated content, social networking, rogue traders, customer service and local reviews.

About *The Brownbook*

The Brownbook is the UK's first user-created local business directory where anyone can edit and anyone can review. The business is owned and run by the founders and it is independent of any of the existing directory providers.



More information on *The Brownbook* is here: <http://forum.brownbook.net>