

KMBF Case Study 2

Have you got a blockbuster of a business idea?

Date 15 January 2024

Topics [Business](#) [Community](#)



Simon Ward from the Palace Cinema in Broadstairs

The Kent and Medway Business Fund provides 0% interest loans to qualifying companies with ambitions to grow. The Palace Cinema in Broadstairs is a KMBF success story.

We catch up with Simon Ward mid-mission.

It's the birthday of his wife (cinema co-owner Corinna Downing) the following day and next on the to-do list is cake mix so he and their daughters can create a masterpiece. But he has already secured a premier gift in the shape of a special screening of her favourite movie: Orlando, an adaptation of the Virginia Woolf novel.

“It’s the one that shot Tilda Swinton to fame. It’s a great film. It’s a surprise.”

It’s not the first time the Palace Cinema in Broadstairs has played host to, well, script-worthy moments since Simon and Corinna took over in 2016.

The first hiring of the cosy venue after that was a wedding where the grooms shared a movie of their lives. And an unsuspecting fiancée-to-be thought it strange her and her other half were the only patrons until the curtain went up and he popped the question via celluloid.



The Palace Cinema in Harbour Street, Broadstairs

A chance conversation at a children’s birthday party about the imminent sale of the Grade II listed space sent Simon straight down Harbour Street to see the outgoing octogenarians, who were delighted fellow film enthusiasts wanted to take the [projector] wheel.

The pair went armed to the vendors with their impressive CVs which detail senior roles at the British Film Institute, Institute of Contemporary Arts, BAFTA, the Barbican and the Independent Cinema Office amongst others; a combined 40-year career that not only brought the unashamed film nerds together but set the

foundations for what has now protected a jewel in Broadstairs' crown for another generation.

Together with savings, the pair, who already called the town home, applied for a KMBF Small Business Boost loan, which gave them what they needed to buy the building with some working capital. They were not businesspeople per se, but they knew their business.



Simon Ward in the projector room at the Palace Cinema. The average size of a film is 50 gigabytes

Simon, once a film student in Canterbury, said: “We have the knowledge to carefully choose the right film, understand the process, the technology, the licensing, cinema health and safety considerations.

“This is our baby, we live and breathe this stuff and we have some fantastic staff who love the thing we too.

“It is not meant to compete with Vue or Cineworld, it’s a decision to provide something different - phenomenal world-class culture for less than a pint of beer.”

It took five years to pay back the loan and the business is now debt-free. But that was not without some negotiation and a revised payment schedule during the difficult pandemic years when the doors were locked shut and then reopened with a third of the capacity because of a need to still socially-distance amongst the velvet chairs.

“Our contacts meant during the pandemic we could offer a free online film club through MUBI, a Netflix for arthouse movies. Every week we had a different film and then we would talk about it. We had 150 people and we had everything from ‘I didn’t understand it’ to ‘that was rubbish’ to ‘it changed my life’. Amen to that. They were trying something different. We were managing to build an audience and created loyalty.”

The couple’s commitment, passion and hard work has resulted in turnover doubling and they are now into their busy grey days and dark nights season with a varied programme, school visits, screenings for older people, fundraisers and events including talks from celebrated directors who want to just come because the Palace Cinema has a name.

“We’re keen it’s a place for everyone. We’re really proud of that.”

The Palace Cinema was nominated in the Best Cinema category at the Big Screen Awards in November, pipped to the trophy by the Highland Cinema in Fort William.

The Palace Cinema by numbers:

- 2 - passionate cinema fanatics
- 50,000 - pounds of the small business boost
- 111 - seats in the auditorium (23 on the balcony, 88 in the stalls)
- 1 - world-class concert pianist who visits every month to accompany a silent film screening (which always sells out)
- 194 - the length of the film Titanic in minutes (Simon once answered that unprompted in a general knowledge quiz)
- 4,000 - watts in the projection light
- 36 – where the Palace Cinema came in Time Out’s top cinemas in the UK and Ireland (out of 1,087 cinemas)
- 500 - the average gigabytes per cinema film

- 15 – terabytes storage of the digital projector that can store up to 30 films
- 4 - owners of the cinema since the Sixties
- 200 - number of independent cinemas in the UK
- 6 – billion. What the cinema industry is worth to the UK economy
- Since 2016, the Palace Cinema has shown 1000+ different films from 60+ countries around the world.

Further information

For more information about the interest-free loans available and the eligibility criteria, visit: <https://www.kmbf.co.uk/>

Find out about the Palace Cinema here: <https://thepalacecinema.co.uk/>