

Encounter Walking Holidays continues its successful journey with Evergreen

Last time Encounter Walking Holidays [featured in an Evergreen case study](#), the piece concluded with Damon Wilcox, the company's owner signing off as follows: "We want to be at least as good as the competition, and cheaper. And because of our [superior database system](#), our administration costs are lower and our procedures are more effective. We believe this has directly contributed to our success as a business".

That was several years ago. Since then, Evergreen have done lots more work for the increasingly successful Cornwall-based business that offers self-guided holidays in South West England and Wales. The work has included a major upgrade to a responsive website, application of a major design change and impressive database work that means Encounter Walking Holidays' staff can create sophisticated interactive maps much faster than in the past.

Summarising working with Evergreen, IT-co-ordinator Rich Brown says: "Let them get on with what they do brilliantly while you get on with running your business. Be confident that you'll get what you want. We did and so will you!"

In particular, the long-established self-guided walking holiday specialists faced Google's threat to penalise websites that weren't mobile friendly. The Encounter website was a traditional static site that had served the business well since the late 2000s, but change was urgently needed.

The project went to Rich Brown, who had just joined Encounter as IT-coordinator.

This was the first big project to land on my desk when I joined the business in 2015," explains the multi-talented IT contractor-outdoorsman-youth-worker. "An excellent, long-established working relationship was in place and I quickly realised why Damon was so impressed with Evergreen. When I started working with them, I quickly realised that everything I'd heard was true, from their approachability and clear communication to the human touch they bring to delivering databases and bespoke software. And just how easy they are to work with."

An updated design too

Rich Brown combines seasoned coding skills with design flair and previous professional web design experience. These were soon deployed as he and Damon decided to use the upgrade to give the website an updated, contemporary look. If there was ever a glitch with the project, this is where it briefly appeared.

Rich Brown again: "The existing design had served us well, but we felt it could be improved. We briefed Evergreen and they developed a new design with signature professionalism. While it was a perfectly good design, and Evergreen were clearly a little surprised by our thoughts, we felt that there was further scope to improve it and fully reflect our creative vision."

At that point, Rich revisited the concept and created the spacious, airy integration of design, colours and photography that they wanted.

Their considerable strength is in databases and online applications

"I can understand how this may have touched a bit of professional sensitivity. To Evergreen's credit, they understood and accepted our input with good grace. While they're capable designers, I suspect they'd agree that their greatest – considerable – strengths are with **databases and online solutions**.

"What really impressed me, particularly after this minor hiccup, was how Evergreen, and specifically their project manager Chris Rollin, respected my coding skills. And how they encouraged my input so we could apply two complementary professional minds to the project. We hit it off quickly and never fell out during our collaboration."

The “Wow!” moment

Rich highlights work that Chris Rollin did on a database-driven interactive mapping app for the website. "We'd developed some code for creating interactive maps, but it was time-consuming. So we gave it to Evergreen to develop a database solution. When we saw the result, it was the project's "Wow!" moment. Five years ago, developing maps like this for the site would have taken days. Now we do it in 20 minutes! We were very impressed, but not surprised. It was Evergreen at their best."

"The human touch"

When he describes Evergreen's work with the perspective of another IT professional, Rich Brown describes them as probably the best database developers and designers he's ever met. "Best of all, they have a human touch that's often lacking with highly-technical people such as coders."

The new site runs beautifully

Two years after Rich joined the Encounter team, the new site runs beautifully. As, arguably, the UK's best-looking, best-performing walking holidays website, it gives prospective customers a wealth of information, while making it inviting and easy to plan and book holidays on any device.

Clear benefits

Thinking about quantifiable benefits, Rich reports significantly increased dwell times (up 50% from two years ago) for site visitors. Daily site visitors have also increased noticeably along with the number of bookings made through the site.

"The interactive maps are another very useful, highly visible, addition. They help walkers see the extent of the walks and the routes' locations in South West England and Wales. And they help prospective clients to imagine themselves enjoying their walk, which helps sell the holidays.

Additionally, an improved FAQs page enables visitors to quickly answer their questions on the website, where they'd previously have contacted us."

"We're thrilled with Evergreen's achievement"

Responses to the new website have been universally positive. The design that Rich and Damon gently, but firmly, insisted on is consistently praised for its inviting spaciousness.

And how it effectively portrays the areas through which the walks pass. The team like being able to set up interactive maps very quickly indeed. And, of course, customers love using them.

Rich Brown again: "We're thrilled with Evergreen's achievement and their [approachable working style](#). We still have some minor website tweaks to do, using the robust, easy-to-use content management system. And more development is planned for the site. This includes further database development to help our administration and give customers an even better experience."

We'd definitely recommend them

Would he recommend Evergreen? "Absolutely, without a doubt. I know Damon has done so over the 10 years or so that they've worked with us and I would too."

So how does Rich sum up the Evergreen experience and what's his advice to anyone considering them?

"You'll get what you want"

"Don't hesitate. They're good listeners, so tell them what you want. Then let them get on with what they do brilliantly while you get on with running your business. Be confident that you'll get what you want. We did and so will you!"

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Rich Brown, IT-coordinator
Encounter Walking Ltd



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