

CASE STUDY



Arena Flowers

An Online Bouquet

ArenaFlowers.com is the UK's leading independent online florist. It specialises in providing high quality, ethically sourced flowers (FFP) from around the world at excellent prices.

Every bouquet or arrangement is freshly prepared to order and often despatched within hours of order receipt from the refrigerated warehouse facility at Park Royal, West London. The sender even receives a text message to let them know the flowers have been delivered.

From internet to indoors inside hours.

Thanks to their impressive interactive website at www.arenaflowers.com, an order made before 3pm will be delivered in London on the same day. Orders made before 5pm for addresses across the rest of the UK will be delivered the next day. Little wonder that the company were London winners of the HSBC Startup Stars award in 2007.



Sam Barton – Hosting is incredibly important to online retailers

Beer Mat concept

ArenaFlowers.com was set up 2½ years ago by a bunch of guys - **Will Wynne, Steve France, Ronald van den Burg, Zach Powell and Sam Barton**. It was one of those zany ideas conceived on a proverbial beer mat during an essential ale house visit. They already had some background knowledge of retail flowers through Steve and Ronald, though the main skill base lay in their background as web developers and marketers for the world's largest etailer - eBay.

Months of testing bear fruit

Sam Barton is **ArenaFlowers.com's** head of design and development, "We were all very excited about the prospect of a high traffic website that could be built rapidly, replicated easily and grown on demand, which is why we chose to develop our site idea using Ruby on Rails. In February 2006, we built a 65k page test website in just one week. This was accomplished during our free time, as we were all still fully employed elsewhere. We used this initial period to actively test site functionality and popularity. Very few sites were employing long tail search terms for flowers and associated elements, so we wanted to gauge a real audience reaction.





Ronald, Steve and Will –
HSBC Startup Stars winners

Needless to say, during the two months of testing, it surpassed our expectations, and the combination of traffic results and our achieved Google ranking enabled us to obtain £100,000 angel funding for the set up of a full transactional site and distribution business.”

The right server is the key to success

Sam said: “It wasn’t until we encountered the fluctuating highs and lows of online floristry that we realised how incredibly important the right server is. Our business was founded on a less than perfect web box. The reason for this was simply funding. We had to cut corners somewhere, and this was a selected snip. It proved to be a far greater issue than we had imagined, as the hosting provider’s data centre had a number of outages, which caused us some problems, along with serious downtime around Mothering Sunday - a highlight in the florist’s calendar. This was a potential nightmare for an online business, with thousands of concurrent users logging on at the last minute to get mum’s bouquet and chocolates delivered in time. It was this, along with the fact that the ‘support’ team seemed to be based at home, that finally forced us to look seriously at finding a new hosting partner.

Fanatical[®] support

Sam added: “We had encountered **Rackspace[®] Hosting** before when we used the company for an intensive but short term marketing project at eBay.co.uk. Their reputation was one of incredible support and superb attention to detail. Things had not changed when we approached Rackspace for a hosting solution for the www.Arenaflores.com site.”

Smooth operation

Sam said: “The Rackspace account team understood our requirements and recommended a failsafe system comprising two servers, and unlimited backup giving us the required scalability, redundancy and total system security we were seeking. The result has been stability and calm, even during key periods of activity. We no longer panic about Valentine’s Day, Mothering Sunday, Easter or Christmas – all massive spikes in traffic, but now handled with impunity. Rackspace looks after every aspect of hosting and backup, leaving us free to concentrate on new site development, which has been truly amazing. We now have sister sites in Holland www.arenabloemen.nl and in Germany www.arenablumen.de which are replicating the success in the UK.”





Successful model

In addition we have developed very successful commercial retail sites for other companies using the same model, and are currently involved in setting up white label operations and an API to allow access to databases. Today, the result is a blooming £4.5 million p.a. turnover business that is growing very rapidly.

Hosting is a key element

Sam summarised, “For us the relationship with Rackspace has been an important part of the success. Hosting is a key element to online retailing and it is vital to have the guarantees of uptime, bandwidth flexibility, and total security at all times. I would wholly recommend Rackspace to anyone who, is serious about running an online retailing business”

People matter

Sam’s final comment was: “We have grown rapidly, but we never forget the human side of the business. People are the key to all business success. People like **Ronald Van den burg** – the man behind sourcing all our flowers. He goes directly to growers to negotiate deals. And of course the people in the warehouse that skilfully put together the beautiful arrangements for which we are well known, and those in distribution who make sure they arrive in the best possible condition. Finally the people at Rackspace, who solve any hosting issues before we hear about them, and make sure that our sites are alive and well 24/7/365, ready to take the last minute order for every special occasion.

For celebratory flowers and gifts for friends and loved ones visit www.arenaflowers.com.

For online retail hosting please visit www.rackspace.co.uk or call for **FREE** hosting advice Tel: **0800 988 0100**.

