

From bright ideas to web wonders

The web is becoming an increasingly important marketplace for franchisees. Six out of ten franchisors go online to recruit franchisees, according to the British Franchise Association.

And a growing number of operators, such as Riverford Organic Vegetables, Domino's Pizza, Oscar Pet Foods and Snap-on Tools, all have web-based ordering services.

Last year, Clive Hannis took voluntary redundancy after 20 years as a process operator with chemical giant Dupont. Now he is the franchisee in Gloucester for thebestof.co.uk, an online business directory.

'I looked at quite a lot of franchises, but they all seemed expensive to run,' says Clive, 43, who invested £40,000 in the business in May.

Thebestof.co.uk has 300 franchisees who each run websites advertising and reviewing local businesses. Advert costs range from £10 to about £50 a month, depending on their size and complexity.

But Clive, who runs the business with

By Nic Paton

his wife Carol, 41, says: 'Don't assume it's going to be easy just because it's online.'

'You still have to get out there and promote the business to build up trust with people.'

Cathryn Hayes, head of franchising for HSBC, says that a web-based business will often have much lower overheads, but this makes it even more vital to make sure it is based on an idea that will succeed.

'There still has to be a business beneath it,' she warns.

Websites such as alexa.com that rank sites and look at how many people use them can be useful. They also check how well a site is rated on search engines such as Google.

Nigel Botterill, thebestof's managing director, says: 'There are a lot of cowboys out there and people jumping on bandwagons, so make sure you look at the history of the franchisor, the business model and the support structures.'



Building trust: Clive and Carol Hannis, who run an online franchise