



## *Gareth Lewis, editor Central Brittany Journal*

Jeff Here I am in Dualt with Gareth Lewis who is the editor and owner of the Central Brittany Journal. Hello Gareth. Start by telling me what Central Brittany Journal is, please.

Gareth It's a journal that we started almost 11 years ago with the aim of welcoming residents to central Brittany whose first language was English or people from other parts of Europe whose second language was English.

Jeff Why was there a need?

Gareth Well, I'd been living here for about 10 years and I noticed around 2000 or 2004 a lot of people were arriving, buying houses, spending a lot of money in the area and I noticed over the previous 10 years people had come and then they'd gone, often complaining about not being able to find a way of making a living or finding tradesmen who were honest - that was always a huge issue - people that did a good job for a fair price. And I just thought there was a need for another sort of media that could join up customers with service providers and also help to build um, a community so people could make friends and talk to each other and socialise and not feel so out of place. 'Cos I think Central Brittany is a great place to live and its a shame to see people come here, get disappointed and then leave again without ever finding a, a niche that they can settle into.

Jeff So, you've been going for 11 years.

Gareth Yes

Jeff And how has the Journal evolved over the years?

Gareth It grew very rapidly over the first four or five years. Then it stabilized and then over the last four years or so it's been noticeable that there's been less money around for the advertising has been more limited but on the editorial side over the last half dozen years I've had a lot more people contributing. They write articles, send me letters, information about what's on, photographs. So I think it has become more of the community magazine I'd hoped for at the beginning. Now, I think, it's a reflection of what's going on. It's what interests the readers. A third of it is advertising which I still think is

what it's all about - that is connecting people to services that they want, um, and the rest of it is just a snapshot of what people are doing and thinking; like what interests them; new businesses; places to visit; events; letters; photos of the garden.

Jeff           And how do you know it's hitting the spot.

Gareth       It's a commercial business, so it has to make a profit.

Jeff           But how do you know you're serving the needs of the people? How do you get feed-back?

Gareth       It's all, it's all feed-back. If it wasn't working as an advertising medium, advertisers wouldn't pay for adverts and if people weren't finding the content interesting they wouldn't want to contribute to it.

Jeff           Do you do any vetting of advertisers?

Gareth       That's a difficult issue - vetting of advertisers. It's... I take somebody on trust, normally. If they ring up and say 'I want to place an advert', you just have to assume that they are who they say they are and what they're going to do and in 95% or maybe even 99% of cases that's the case. And then, occasionally, there's people that don't provide the service they say they're going to and you learn about that from readers but it's unusual if you haven't already had an inkling about it.

Jeff           So, if that were the case, would that be something that you would publish in the Journal, in terms of someone misrepresenting themselves or not providing the right service?

Gareth       I don't publish.... I don't 'name and shame' but I drop adverts. Having advertising businesses for 11 years, my experience has been that the majority of people who provide a bad service isn't when they start a business, it's when the business gets into difficulty. And it's not malicious, often, it's just people that have become overwhelmed with taking on things they can't complete. And the worst thing that people do is take money for work that they then don't do. They shouldn't take the money because they already know they're in financial difficulty but I don't think it really helps to publicly shame them for it because they've usually gone out of business by the time it's done.

Jeff           As you say, a high percentage of people are honest and, and do continue to, to advertise in the Journal and do continue to gain business from it.

Gareth       I think the advertising in the Journal has stabilized enormously over the last 10 years. A high proportion of businesses have been advertising in the long term so they've all built up a local reputation, with a proven track record.

Jeff            So, the advertising stabilizes..... um...

Gareth        It's a very - but I'm obviously thinking a lot about print media but we ran a web site for a few years, when we were up-dating it, putting stuff on on an almost daily basis but now our web site's much more just an addition to the magazine and I've gone back to concentrating on the printed magazine and I'm just coming to the conclusion that people like paper and they enjoy a printed magazine, particularly the age bracket that the Journal serves. I'd like to see younger people engaging more.

Jeff            So, your readership is, generally, older adults, would you say?

Gareth        I think it is, I'm afraid. I'd like to have a younger audience but I think it is older adults. Yes.

Jeff            So, you've got a number of regular contributors? What sort of range of articles are they providing?

Gareth        We have a lot of articles on nature and gardening. We have pieces... people who write history so somebody might research a subject and then send me an article. We have a regular contributor on chess puzzle; we have three crossword contributors; a technical contributor; we have a recipes contributor (Hetty's been doing that for many years now); garden tips; nature, I think, is the most thing.

Jeff            And what about local events; are they generally advertised?

Gareth        I think the events section is one of the most interesting things in the Journal because it is completely reader-driven and I think people send information about events because they're organising them and they're organising things that they think people will be interested in and I think it's a contrast to the French language 'What's On' sections which tend to be very over-loaded with events organised by Arts Associations and Tourist Boards and Government bodies which, to my mind, aren't terribly interesting.

Jeff            And, apart from your regular contributors, how can other people contribute to the magazine?

Gareth        Just send stuff in.

Jeff            And where do they send it?

Gareth        Information Zone, generally under the Editorial, usually on Page 5. Send it by post or by email.

Jeff            And you send it by post or email to: Central Brittany Journal, BP4 22160 Callac. Or by email to: [letters@theobj.com](mailto:letters@theobj.com)



