



Remote Shetlands village signals a boost to local business with elevated profile

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Walls' thriving mussel business responds to demand with Vodafone Open Sure Signal

In demand but out of touch

The west Shetland village of Walls is one of the most remote communities in the UK. With a population of around 300, it sits at the head of the beautiful Vaila Sound, and for centuries has provided a safe haven for sailors seeking respite from wild north Atlantic storms and high seas.

Despite its isolation – or possibly because of it – Walls is a draw for visitors in the summer months, which are attracted by the stunning scenery, lovely beaches and coastal walks, wildlife and fishing.

It is also home to one of Scotland's many thriving sea fishery businesses. The Tait family has been operating Shetland Mussels since 1987 and have an international reputation for producing some of the tastiest mussels in the world. Each year they grow and harvest almost 1,000 tonnes of mussels, and their thriving business provides employment for local people and is an important part of Scotland's £5million mussel fishing industry. Its consistent high quality means that Shetland Mussels' products are in demand at top restaurants and the major supermarket groups.

Unfortunately the lack of a mobile phone signal was making it increasingly difficult for CEO Michael Tait to maintain a level of contact that his customers and colleagues in the industry demanded.

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I was delighted that Walls was selected by Vodafone. Rural communities such as ours can suffer from being mobile 'not-spots'. I do understand that it's not always economically viable to invest in major infrastructure in remote areas – but at the same time our needs are the same as the rest of the country.

Michael Tait, CEO, Shetland Mussels

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Constantly on the move

The business, run by former crofter Lollie Tait and his two sons Michael and Richard is thriving, providing up to 20 jobs for Shetlanders and with projected annual growth of 40%. But, like other small businesspeople and residents in the area, the lack of a reliable mobile phone signal has been the cause of growing frustration in recent years.

Despite huge investment in mobile technology and infrastructure in the UK in recent years, Walls was in a so-called 'not-spot', the two per cent of places in the UK that were geographically impossible for any mobile phone signal to reach.

“As our business has grown it was becoming increasingly important for me to be contactable at all times by our people and by customers. I'm also the current Chairman of the Scottish Shellfish Marketing Group based in Glasgow, so I need to be in touch with colleagues and members,” explains Michael Tait.

“The nature of our business means that I am constantly on the move around our processing factory and away from our landline.”

Creating a signal

The answer for Shetland Mussels and the residents and businesses in Walls as a whole has come in the form of an extension in the use of Vodafone's highly successful Sure Signal product, which creates 3G signal in thousands of homes and offices in the UK suffering from particular, localised connectivity problems.

Vodafone has been trialling Open Sure Signal – a scaled up version of Sure Signal – in small, rural village communities, all 'not-spots', by installing a series of small 3G base stations in carefully selected locations, allowing any Vodafone UK customer in range, indoors or outdoors, to connect to the Vodafone network.

Together, Ian Walterson from the Walls Community Council and Michael Tait mustered the support of local people, MP Alistair Carmichael and MSP Tavish Scott to put forward a powerful case for Walls to be included in the Vodafone trials of Open Sure Signal.

“ This has brought the whole community together and we have already seen the benefits from both a business and personal perspective of having a strong Vodafone 3G voice and data signal. ”

Michael Tait, CEO, Shetland Mussels



Their efforts were successful and in 2013 a series of base units, about the size of a cereal box, were positioned in a number of locations across the village, including the Village Hall and Shetland Mussels. The base units connect to existing broadband services to deliver a 3G mobile signal, providing widespread and consistent coverage.

The selection of Walls for the Vodafone trial attracted widespread interest and media coverage in Scotland, as other remote communities seek similar solutions.

Coverage in a simple way

“I was delighted that Walls was selected by Vodafone. Rural communities such as ours can suffer from being mobile ‘not-spots’. I do understand that it’s not always economically viable to invest in major infrastructure in remote areas – but at the same time our needs are the same as the rest of the country,” comments Michael Tait.

“In fact, given our location and the fact that our community is quite dispersed, we would argue that our need is even greater!

“So it’s great that this solution is becoming available and can provide the coverage that we need in such a simple way. I am now confident that my customers or colleagues will be able to get hold of me even if I am away from my desk or down by the shore. Having simple things like being able to text and communicate via social media makes such a huge difference to us!

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“Having always suffered in Walls from a lack of a mobile signal, when we heard about Vodafone’s trials, we were very keen to be involved. We are very pleased that the village is no longer excluded from what is part of everyday life to most people,” concludes Ian Walterston.

Significant benefits

- Residents, small businesses and visitors alike have access to the Vodafone 3G network, providing a boost for the local economy and community
- Local businesspeople are much more accessible to colleagues, customers and suppliers, making business more efficient and responsive
- Due to the Open Sure Signal trial, Walls has been in the news, attracting attention and with it additional visitors, spend in local shops and elevated profile for businesses like Shetland Mussels, raising the prospect of additional employment opportunities and security.

About Walls

Walls is located in remote west Shetland and boasts some of the most wild and beautiful scenery in the UK. It is a destination for pleasure sailors touring the coastline and sea lochs of the west of Scotland and Shetland and is an important player in the thriving Scottish sea fisheries industry.

shetland-mussels.com



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