ICAS Business Mentoring is funded by the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland and delivered by Scottish Chambers of Commerce. This pilot programme matches the leaders of early stage growth businesses in Scotland from any industry or sector with experienced and talented business mentors. The business mentors provided are all registered ICAS members and give their time and input on a voluntary basis at no cost to mentored businesses.

Gordon Saunders (above left) is the latest leader of a growing business to take advantage of ICAS Business Mentoring. The business model of Saunders Films and Photography recently diversified to focus on producing photography and films for commercial and private clients, after previously concentrating on Graphic Design for a number of years. So when Gordon was paired with his mentor Mark Tenby (above right) in November 2014, it was the perfect time for his business to maximise the benefit to be gained from the unique insight provided by a mentor.

Mark’s background is in accountancy and business advice, where he has carried out roles as partner and director of chartered accountancy firms, advising clients from various sectors during his 20+ year professional career.

Gordon was interviewed by Scottish Chambers of Commerce and was asked to outline in detail how his mentoring experience worked, including what specific business issues he and Mark focused upon, and crucially what impact the experience has had on his business:
Why did you decide to be mentored Gordon?

“I’d been skating along for decades and recently changed strategy from focusing on graphic design to producing photography and films, but didn’t really know where to go to make the business successful.”

How did the mentoring relationship between yourself and Mark work?

“Mark and I initially met up just before Christmas and we talked about what I needed. He’s a gentle guy, a nice guy, but he’s been very straightforward & honest with me. The meetings with Mark have been a huge motivation. He’s giving me his time voluntarily and I would be embarrassed the next time we met had I not been working hard on what we’d discussed.”

What business issues did you work on?

“Coming from an accountancy background, numbers are important to Mark! So we discussed my pricing structure, the terms and conditions of my service and also the importance of looking at what my competitors do. Mark was also big on me having a robust Business Plan.”

Has Mark’s mentoring changed the way your business operates?

“I’d been spending a lot of time networking to get new customers in and Mark encouraged me to think harder about what I was really getting out of different events. Working on your own can also be quite isolating and having a mentor makes you face reality. I’d been greatly under-pricing some of my work and I’m astonished at how little I was charging, that’s changed.”

Has mentoring benefited your business financially Gordon?

“Yes it is making a difference, it is making me more secure. I’m now more comfortable with my pricing, my terms and conditions and I’m more confident about the business’ future. When you network and go out to get business this confidence radiates and it leads to more business.”

Are there more business issues you would like to work on?

“Going forward we might talk more about the presentation of my products and services, web site design for example. I’d also like to work with more large scale clients and secure larger contracts.”

Would you recommend ICAS Business Mentoring to other businesses Gordon?

“I would recommend mentoring to anyone. It doesn’t cost you anything to be mentored, but the financial benefits of not making mistakes and the piece of mind you get from working with an old hand is very valuable.”