



The Michael Lowe Story by Russ Kane

"You're too young," the counter assistant sneered. "Try coming back in a suit, with a business plan." Today, award-winning 19-year-old businessman, Michael Lowe grins when he remembers the day he got laughed out of the bank for having the cheek to ask for a business account at just 16 years old.

He returned suited, booted and packing a plan which raised eyebrows and a new level of respect from the bank staff. This time they were only too pleased to hand over the all-important business account he needed to get on the way to achieving his dreams.

Hello Talent

Michael's extraordinary story begins on an ordinary day at his ordinary North London school. He was an ordinary 15-year-old schoolboy whose teacher asked if he would be interested in entering the Young Enterprise Project. Michael agreed because he "frankly, didn't have much else to do." The project left Michael inspired with a new belief in himself. He knew he had what it takes to run his own business and he didn't want to wait too long to start.

Michael felt drawn to marketing and promotions from the beginning, "I'm a natural salesperson," he told us. "I was always plugging things. I enjoy talking to all sorts of people and I think I'm good at it."

Genning Up

Good research is crucial to the success of all new businesses and Michael threw himself into it with his typical enthusiasm. "I questioned every managing director I could find about their business projects. I pestered my friends, my family and anyone they knew who could help me get started. I asked 'what would you want if you were to outsource your marketing?' and brainstormed their answers with my business advisors. My goal was to create a product that companies would actually want."

Michael spotted a hole that he hoped would allow him to squeeze into the crowded public relations (PR) market — and his company, Vizarie, was born. "Many of the companies I spoke to already had PR agencies, but they were often unhappy with them, especially when it came to hidden costs and sky-high fees. I developed an all-inclusive monthly fee system which offered a guaranteed minimum number of hour's work per month from us."

As explained on his website www.vizarie.com, clients can sign contracts for various levels of service. "This gives us financial protection and them freedom from mounting costs of day-rate charges," explains Michael. "It also benefits companies who find it too expensive to have employees. They can outsource to us at a guaranteed low rate."

Look at Me!

Michael's next priority was to get Vizarie noticed. "We needed to stand out as, obviously, the other marketing and promotion companies in my field had far more experience than I did. So I used crazy branding and crazy ideas. I had 12 animated characters as my logo to make us look different."

Michael is a confident guy, but there were some worrying times in the beginning. "The first year was very tough," he admits. "In fact, we made a loss. I was scared. I was promoting the company like mad, but it was a chicken-and-egg situation — to get work we had to prove that we were capable of doing the job, and to do that we had to get work. So I looked for anyone who needed marketing and promotion — from beauty salons to football clubs, from property companies to restaurants."

Big Boys Look Out

Eventually the hard work of Michael and his team paid off. The jobs came in and, two and a half years later, Vizarie is going from strength to strength.

"Right now I'm eyeing up the competition," says Michael. "Frankly, I want their contracts. I'm looking at bigger companies to approach because they have larger marketing needs. I feel I'm able to do this because Vizarie is not yet at capacity and we'll grow as our new clients flow in. I've drawn up a three-year plan which centres on building up our client base and not making the mistake of diversifying too much."

Biz Whiz

Michael's shelves must be groaning under the weight of all the awards he's won. They include the National Business Award 2003, Phoenix Development Fund Award 2004 (Young Entrepreneur of the Year), Young Enterprise Award 2004, Education Business Partnership Award 2004 and the Enfield Enterprise Agency Award 2005.

What advice does Michael have for other teenage entrepreneurs? "When I was struggling, my friends kept encouraging me to carry on. My best advice is: Don't give up — it may be tough the first few months, but if you keep focused you'll make it



Managing Director of Vizarie Limited

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London born and bred Michael Lowe was involved in a Young Enterprise's Project when he discovered his great interest in business. In 2003, sixteen-year-old Michael opened his own artiste management company Domain Music. Michael restructured his company in September 2004 and gave it a new name, Vizarie Ltd, a business marketing specialist company. Michael has since won numerous awards celebrating his business achievements.

Floremakerry: What GCSEs and A Levels did you get/ need to get into this type of work?

Michael Lowe : At the moment I am completing A Levels in Business Studies, General Studies, English Language and Music Technology and I got 10 GCSEs. It really helps to have a good education as it gives you the knowledge you need to get into your own business.

Lois from London: Do you ever feel that you are stereotyped because of your age?

Michael Lowe : Yes, sometimes people doubt whether you can do something well. The proof is in the pudding really. If you deliver good results people trust you, then you break the stereotype. It's all about hard work and it's a case of proving yourself.

Barry: How many artists are you working with at the moment?

Michael Lowe : At the moment, I have actually stopped artiste management to focus on other services that are in high demand. We currently deliver marketing services to over eight businesses. This was part of my restructuring. We felt we could deliver more on the marketing side of the business.

Samantha from London: Did you find it difficult to start your own business at such a young age?

Michael Lowe : Yes, it was really, really hard because running a business is extremely difficult to do anyway and doing it at a young age is even tougher. Things like opening up a business bank account proved difficult but in the end, all I had to do was come with a professional attitude, look the part and I got treated seriously which helped things progress and become a success.

Nathaniel from London: What inspired you to become a businessman?

Michael Lowe : I'm not too sure really. I think it was something I always wanted to do. From a young age I was always pretending to run a business. I started a magazine when I was eight years old, which I then sold to my family and friends for fifty pence! The big thing that inspired me was doing a Young Enterprise's Project at school and it really sparked off the dream to run my own business.

Saira from London: Do you like doing business?

Michael Lowe : Yup, it's loads and loads of fun. You get to meet loads of people and you get a really big buzz when you get the success.

Jane: What was the Young Enterprise's Project?

Michael Lowe : Basically they allow you to set up a company over the course of one academic year and the company is a real company: you make a product, you sell it and you have a business plan. I decided to start a music company. Although it wasn't very profitable at that time, I learned so much that I wanted to do it for real.

Kristal from Scotland: Where I live there is nowhere you can get noticed or helped with your musical talent, what would you do if you lived in Shetland and are trying to get the most out of your talent, get noticed and make it big?

Michael Lowe : The first point would be to use the internet because it can open a lot of doors even if you cannot make it to the actual place. It may mean setting up a website and emailing a lot of people. Also, it might be a good idea to play at local venues in the area until you build up a fan base at home.

Michael from Bedfordshire: Can you tell us how we can get a record deal?

Michael Lowe : Basically, the best way is to build up some kind of buzz around your band. That may mean securing radio airbase, playing to large crowds or creating a lot of fliers to promote the band. Then you can present this to the record label so that you can prove that you can sell a record. They should then decide whether it is worth it to give you a record deal. Basically, it's about showing them you can sell records. You also need to speak to an A&R man at the record label because he's the best person to try and get you a record deal.

Paul from Stoke-on-Trent: How did you get the money to open your own business?

Michael Lowe : Initially it was just £100 of saved up pocket money and I basically sold my time doing promotions for bands, clubs and companies and from the money I got from that, my business grew and grew. Then a few months later, I finally got a £1000 grant from the New Deal for Communities (NDC) which helped me take my business to the next stage.

Dozey dreamer: Are you a musician or do you have a passion for music?

Michael Lowe : A bit of both really - I can play the piano and in my spare time, I produce my own music as well but it's more of a hobby.

Lady lesha: What kind of music do you like? Can you give me some information about how to become a musician?

Michael Lowe : I like all sorts really; R&B, hip hop and even some rock so I am quite eclectic. The best way to go about becoming a musician is to get some training for it. That may mean going for singing lessons and instrument lessons.

Christy from Leytonstone: Why are you so successful? Are your friends different about your sudden success? Are your friends supportive or just jealous?

Michael Lowe : I think it's down to hard work really... It's a lot of blood, sweat and tears. My friends are really supportive about it which is good and I try to get them involved if I can.

Chanell: What made you become what you are today?

Michael Lowe : It's kind of like the previous question. Just a lot of hard work really and I am a really determined person, I won't let anything pull me down.

Vegie_pie: Who do you admire in the world of music or business?

Michael Lowe : In the world of business, people like Terry Leahy: he's the chief executive of Tesco and Simon Woodroffe from YO! Sushi. I have a lot of respect for a lot of people in the music industry.

Paint_brush: Who do you turn to for advice for your business?

Michael Lowe : It's my business mentor who is my former teacher and also a guy that runs a computer hardware business who I go to for a lot of advice because he is very helpful and he's been so successful as well. Sometimes I get it from my local enterprise agencies as well.

Fajer from London: What is your hobby?

Michael Lowe : Music, cinema... I like travelling, swimming. I like going to shows, different stuff.

Leigh from SA: What advice would you give someone who wants to get into the same business?

Michael Lowe : It's all about building up a really good track record because when you show that to potential customers, they can see what you have done and they are more willing to pay money for the jobs they need to do. That's the key to my success - having a really good track record.

Lots of laughs: What would be your dream business deal?

Michael Lowe : Selling some technology to Bill Gates for billions!

Tasha from Liverpool: What do you actually do?

Michael Lowe : We look after a number of businesses' publicity, advertising and marketing. That may involve holding press conferences, running advertisements in newspapers, magazines and other media.

Webbie: What's your average day like? How do you study and work at the same time?

Michael Lowe : My average day will be go to school for one to two hours in the morning, then I might be arranging an interview with a newspaper, filming for a documentary, chasing up a few people who owe me money, and doing a lot of travelling and having marketing meetings! I do find it quite tough to juggle studying with business.

Punkboy: Who is your favourite person you have worked with and why?

Michael Lowe : I like working with people like Shola Ama on a charity event and I enjoy working with a number of different artistes and people in TV as well. I enjoy doing a lot of TV work, it is great fun!

Bag_lady: What qualities do you need to make it in business?

Michael Lowe : Drive, determination, confidence, organisation, a positive outlook and also a really good idea!

Davey: Which musician would you most like to work with and why?

Michael Lowe : That's a really hard one because there are so many! Probably someone like Gwen Stefani or Usher because I think they look like really fun people and could be a laugh!

Ickle-lisa: If you had to go into another type of business instead of music, what would it be?

Michael Lowe : Probably the one I'm in now, publicity because it is really good fun and you get to do some really amazing things. Also I would like to go into the food industry because I like eating as well! Maybe I would also do property because I get bored really easily and I like a challenge.

Mai daisy: As a musician, what is the most important quality you need?

Michael Lowe : Professionalism - that's the main thing you need. It may mean making sure that your product is packaged nicely so people want to buy them. It may mean creating a really eye-catching and appealing performance so that people will be willing to pay money to see you in concert or buy your CD in the shop.

Louise from Scotland: How can I get in touch with record companies to let them hear my singing?

Michael Lowe : There are a number of directories available; some are on the internet which gives you names of people such as A&R managers and record company executives. Also you can check out a business directory and just call them up to ask them for the right person to speak to. The other thing to do is to send them a demo CD so that they can listen to it in their free time. Also check newspapers like *The Stage* and other music publications that may have audition details in them.

Blast_Host: Any final bits of advice for wannabe musicians/entrepreneurs out there?

Michael Lowe : For the musicians, it would be to make sure that music is the career path for you, it's a really tough business and only a few people make it so make sure you have the passion and the determination to make it happen. In business, it is all about remembering to look after your customer and to make something they want to buy and that is the recipe for success in the business. If you don't have any customer, you don't have any money! Thanks you very much for all your questions. I really hope you are successful in what you choose to do and remember to enjoy whatever you are doing!