

## Phelps Online Department Store

After working for many years in the retail industry, Martha Phelps launched her own online-only store in the autumn of 1999. Originally heavily funded by venture capitalists, the business – that trades as PODS – suffered badly in the 'dot-bomb' of the early years of the century. However, Martha re-mortgaged her own house to buy out investors and is now sole owner of the company.

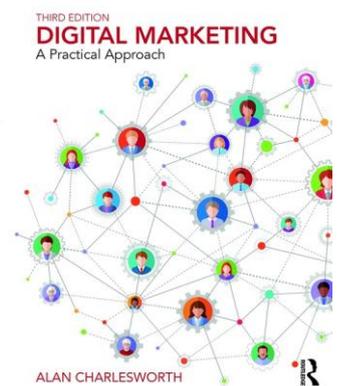
### A Practical Approach

In those early difficult years after the buy-back, Martha managed all aspects of the business herself. However, as sales – and profits – have built, she has brought in a management team to help run the store and oversee the staff of around 40 people.

All aspects of the business are carried out in-house, where staff with a variety of skills and from an assortment of backgrounds bond together as a close-knit team to run the website. The unity of the staff reflects the style of management of Martha.

The products sold are female clothes and accessories that are aimed at women who are over the age of 40 but who still wish to dress fashionably. Although not in the 'designer' price-bracket, PODS sells goods for premier prices. At this time, PODS ships only within Europe – with over 80% of turnover being in the UK.

After what started as an internal joke became common knowledge in a newspaper interview with Martha at the height of the dot-com era, the firm uses as its tagline 'we hope you made a good buy, goodbye' which appears at the bottom of each page and on all emails that emanate from the organization. In itself, this slogan is a fair representation of both Martha and the way she projects the brand of her business – her rather zany personality coming across in the tone of the content of the website. As much as the quality and range of goods offered for sale, it is this persona that has attracted a hardcore of loyal customers.



ALAN CHARLESWORTH

ROUTLEDGE