

NORTHERN

INSIGHT

FEBRUARY 2016



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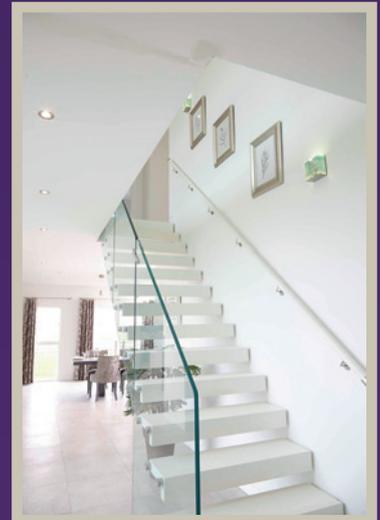
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issue 8

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foreword

Welcome to the February edition of Northern Insight Magazine.

I hope that the early weeks of 2016 have been satisfying for you all and that you are sticking to those New Year resolutions. This month's issue contains a number of new features which I hope will further add to your enjoyment of the publication. These added to the usual mix of profiles, social pics and reviews make for a bumper edition and a great start to the year. Our cover star is MTREC Recruitment and Training, a true North East success story.

Thank you for all your continued support!

Enjoy.

Michael Grahamslaw, Publisher



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Bradley Hall expands to extend range of services

North East commercial and residential property specialist, Bradley Hall, is expanding its range of services by moving into financial services.

BH Financial Services Ltd has been established to provide a comprehensive range of independent finance advice. This service is approved and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA).

Services will range from advice on commercial mortgages, commercial loans, to business finance, and motor finance for business and private use along both vehicle sourcing and disposal.

Heading the new business is James Hill, a

Financial Specialist with more than 20 years' industry experience.

James said: "Finance advice is a minefield for most people. Experience has shown there is a huge demand from business people and the wider public for an independent, professional broker who can provide a competitive and reliable service.

"We have access to an unrivalled panel of funders providing very competitive rates and a full range of products."

Neil Hart, Managing Director of Bradley Hall and BH Group companies, said: "Financial services have become an obvious extension for us. We

have worked with James for more than 10 years and have been recommending him to various people.

"Many of our clients want a one-stop-shop service. With so many people asking for finance advice, whether for vehicles, property or plant and equipment, it makes complete sense to bring a trusted supplier into the business and offer a full package to Bradley Hall clients."

BH Financial Services will be based within Bradley Hall's Grey street office in Newcastle however, finance advice will be offered through the firm's growing network of estate agent offices in Gosforth, Durham City, Alnwick and soon Morpeth.

Six months in and getting to the Core of North East legal issues

A North East law firm is celebrating six months of success for its newest legal offering, which has helped more than 25 local SME's achieve their business goals.

Developed by Gordon Brown Law Firm LLP, 'Core' offers bespoke legal services tailored specifically for the North East SME audience, without the hefty costs and legal jargon.

Ranging from coffee shops and hairdressers to educational providers and childcare services, Core's client base continues to grow with the team's ability to provide straight forward advice.

Headed up by commercial property solicitor Gwen Jones, alongside fellow solicitor Paul Crawley and paralegal Joy Heron, Core has taken its client total to 30 after experiencing an increase in demand.

The team anticipates further growth in 2016 for its Core offering, with plans to work closely with their small business partners throughout the North East, offering workshops and seminars in addition to their day to day legal services.

Gwen said: "We are delighted with the success of this particular service line to date which has greatly exceeded our expectations."



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Darlington business shines bright like a diamond

The newest tenant to Business Central exports to ten countries within the EU from its new base in Darlington.

'Euro Superabrasives' distributes a complete range of synthetic diamond grit and powder products to suit a wide variety of applications and industries.

Director Ray Mason explains: "From our office in Business Central we offer a variety of synthetic diamond synthesis and processing technologies to manufacture materials in different sizes, shapes and strengths to suit all needs."

In any one day, the company can ship £25,000 worth of goods and export to Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Poland, Denmark, Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg as well as within the UK and Ireland.



North East property developer secures multi-million pound corporate refinance

A multi-million pound corporate refinance of Newcastle-based 'Lugano Group' has been completed to enable the group to support further acquisitions across the region.

'The Lugano Group' instructed Newcastle law firm 'Mincoffs Solicitors' to oversee the transaction, which was one of the largest in the city's real estate market for several years.

'The Lugano Group' is one of the largest investment and development businesses in the North East, with a land and property bank in excess of £120 million and properties from Northumberland down to Staffordshire. Among its assets are the Kensington House Aparthotel and the 2,500 acres Dissington Estate.



Gan on, Treat the Bairn

An experienced children's wear retailer has launched their own Geordie baby clothing brand, 'Geordie Genes', which is designed to dress the region's 'bairns' and raise a smile.

John Keddy, who has spent the past 9 years selling children's fashion through his Tynemouth based business 'Children of the Revolution', has established 'Geordie Genes'.

The brand, which pays homage to the region, will feature well known Geordie phrases such as 'Shy Bairns Get Nowt' and 'Little Worky Ticket'. It will also include baby vests and bibs for the 'bairns' of the North East and beyond.

Designed and manufactured here in the North East, the range aims to appeal primarily to the gift market and makes for a novel baby shower or baby gift.

Muckle LLP helps sports stars set up new charity

Newcastle-based commercial law firm, Muckle LLP, has assisted local sports stars to kick-start a new registered charity.

The charity raises money for men's cancer and is the brainchild of the team behind 'Oddballs Apparel Ltd', a new clothing company set up by Steve Harper, Richard Metcalfe and Paul Varley.

Following the success of Oddballs, The Professional Footballers' Association (PFA) funded the set-up costs, with legal advice provided by Muckle LLP.

High praise for Durham school

One of the North East's oldest and most prestigious schools has been praised for rising academic standards and 'excellent' pastoral care.

A report by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) about Durham School, Quarryheads Lane, Durham, noted that GCSE and A Level results were above the national average for maintained schools and highlighted that 'standards are rising further.'

In 2015, three Durham School A-Level students achieved Oxbridge places, 63.1 per cent achieved A*-B grades and 29 went on to study at Russell Group universities.

Naylors launch new retail department

Commercial property agents, Naylors, have launched a new retail agency department. The firm say this will be a natural extension of its existing agency offering and falls in line with the business' wider growth strategy.

Angus White, Managing Director at Naylors said: "We have appointed a number of new staff to assist in driving forward growth and we feel confident now is the right time to launch a retail department."

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Securing IT



SearchBI's Mark Harbottle says cyber attacks are one of the biggest issues facing companies

Recent high profile cyber attacks have highlighted one of the biggest threats facing companies irrespective of size. So it's important that organisations invest in securing the right people with the requisite skills before it's too late, says Mark Harbottle, Director at Newcastle niche IT recruiters SearchBI.

Clever, resourceful and well organised, cyber criminals are constantly developing ever more innovative and sophisticated ways to attack companies, leaving traditional cyber-security solutions scrambling to keep pace let alone stay ahead.

The financial impact of cyber crime cannot be overstated. It's estimated that in the last 12 months, the security of 90% of large companies was compromised, costing between one and three million pounds per breach, while reports indicate that 75% of SMEs suffered some form of attack.

And the scale of the 'breaches' being committed is huge in its scope and ambition, ranging from the harvesting of salary information, garnering bank details and accessing finances through the recording of mobile and land line phone conversations and hacking email accounts to the monitoring of CCTV among other illicit activities.

To combat the threat, many companies are moving to implement ever more sophisticated cloud-based 'security-as-a-service' offerings as part of strategies to protect all facets of their IT infrastructure. And now, with so many IT services being outsourced, this is likely to see an explosion

in cloud-based security and in turn an increasing demand for people with the expertise to help 'despairing' employers tackle the threats.

Mark Harbottle says: "It's vital that senior managers and HR departments act now, investing in cyber security experts before it's too late and their organisation becomes another victim. This will also help to secure the specialist technology skills and acumen that industry and commerce craves and the wider economy urgently needs to tackle the problem and secure growth."

Currently one of the most in demand jobs is the chief information security officer (CISO). But with demand outstripping supply how do employers secure the right person for this complex role? Today's CISO must have an enterprise-level understanding of the risks of every form of cyber attack and other enterprise threats, and have the skills to communicate them not only to IT-focused colleagues but also to the board of directors as well.

Of course, cyber savvy does matter for any top security job, but it must not eclipse other crucial capabilities, notably communication, collaboration, influencing ability, and the candidate's fit with the organisation's culture -

companies screening CISO candidates should be aware of the candidate's technology credentials and even insist on them, but they mustn't view the role solely through this lens, or weight the technical requirements too heavily.

Don't hold out for the 'perfect' security leader. We have seen instances where companies have waited (often in vain) in an attempt to land the ideal security leader only to find that in the interim they have lost well-qualified candidates to more agile companies. For any role, 'perfect' is rarely manifested in one person, and cyber security is no different. So a more practical approach is to understand the different degrees of fit and to systematically gauge the candidates' strengths against future needs.

The CISO role is complex enough that it's often worth considering splitting the role among two or three individuals, each the master of a key component of the job, or to come as close as possible to the ideal with one candidate and then complement his or her shortfalls with a highly qualified second-in-command. These composite, flexible approaches will be far better than waiting for a candidate who doesn't exist.

It's strictly finance as tango aficionado and funding expert joins growing firm



The 360 team. L to R Steve Barber, Julie Ralph, Steven Colwell, Dan Lewis

An expanding North East business finance company has appointed a specialist to work with its increasing flow of new clients.

Julie Ralph has joined 360 Funding as Head of New Business after a 12-year career with Bibby Financial Services. She will be working with businesses seeking all aspects of commercial funding including invoice, trade, property and asset finance.

Working her way up from a receptionist to spending nine years as business development manager at Bibby, Julie is a specialist in the invoice finance market. In addition to bringing this expertise to 360 Funding, the role will allow her to further develop her own career as the Company's client base continues to grow exponentially.

The mum-of-two from Blackfell in Washington, a keen golfer and dancer who studied the tango in Argentine capital Buenos Aires, said: "I'm thrilled to be joining 360 Funding at such an exciting time in the company's growth.

"The new role is much broader than my previous position and I'm looking forward to working with the commercial market, using my network of contacts with lenders, SME's and advisors across the region. 360 Funding will give me the opportunity with its extensive product range to help grow North East firms to achieve their potential."

Julie's appointment comes as 360 Funding enters a period of rapid growth. Steve Barber and Steven Colwell, who have almost 40 years combined experience in finding financial solutions for businesses, established the company.

Mr Barber said: "We're delighted that such a high-calibre, high profile professional has joined our rapidly expanding business. Julie has a tremendous knowledge of the commercial market and numerous contacts across the North East business community. She will be a real asset to 360 Funding and our customers as we continue to grow."

The firm operates from offices in Cramlington, Northumberland, Bishop Auckland, County Durham, and is now seeking a third office in Newcastle.

It specialises in providing considered funding solutions to SME businesses throughout the UK.

Bishop Auckland-based Mr Colwell, whose background is in commercial finance, insolvency and business consultancy, said: "We're a solutions company for businesses. We understand our customers' requirements by engaging in their businesses and finding a solution that they understand by working with them every step of the way. We think outside of the box and bring a very driven approach to commercial funding.

"The addition of Julie to our management team has now set us apart from most brokers. We have specialists for each funding product

that have genuine industry experience, and the ability to implement practical solutions with an extensive knowledge and product base.

"We are fully authorised by the FCA and are members of the National Association of Commercial Finance Brokers – giving our clients the reassurance of working with a recognised and trusted commercial finance partner."

The company are incredibly proud to be North East based, but in fact, have a significant presence throughout the UK, and have recently been instructed in two large property transactions on behalf of London-based clients. This coverage will be further expanded with their website offering "businessfunders.co.uk" which will be managed by Durham University graduate Dan Lewis who joined the team in September last year.

Mr Barber, who is the principle of the business said "We are proud to be seen as the partner of choice for clients and advisors alike. We have a number of exciting projects lined up for 2016. Many of these businesses had unsuccessfully explored 'traditional' funding options such as their own bank but ended up benefiting from more viable 'alternative' funding solutions through 360 Funding's extensive panel of lenders."

For more information on how we can find your ideal funding solution please contact Julie Ralph on 01388 450762
j.ralph@360funding.co.uk www.businessfunders.co.uk

Change or Die!

Unlock Business Success through Sales Transformation



Welcome to the most disruptive time we've seen in technology for decades. As technology and competition continues to accelerate at break-neck speed, only the agile and those who can quickly adapt will survive, says Alison Freer, Associate Partner at sales performance company durhamlane.

The fast-changing business world has forever altered the way we drive revenues. Closing deals is just the beginning of building a high-performance business. It requires impactful leadership, effective partnerships, constant change and innovation, as well as sustainable transformation.

Most corporations understand the need for change. 93% of respondents surveyed for the Forbes Insights/KPMG report "Business Transformation and the Corporate Agenda" say that they have just completed, are planning or are in the midst of a business transformation. They get the vision right, but the execution is the hard part. Stephen G. Hasty, a KPMG partner, estimates that more than half of companies undertaking transformation fail to achieve the desired business result.

Whether you go the journey yourself, or you get support to fill gaps, to speed up time-to-market for new initiatives, it's a long way to go, Alison Freer says. It requires new processes and organisational structures, but most importantly it needs a reorientation of an entire organisation's culture. A typical transformation comes with 3 stages: changing mind-sets, changing skill-sets and changing tool-sets. The inconvenient truth about change though is that it never really stops. Just as you think you're through one transformation, another will be needed. It is

the adaptive and creative businesses, large and small, who are the ones at the top of the success trajectory. They instinctively know that standing still is never an option in the Digital Age. As economies recover from one recession, they know that another could be just around the corner. The smartest leaders know they need to invest during times of economic optimism and organic growth. Now is the optimum time to implement change, invest in training and development and employ new tools.

Sales is probably the most obvious driver to business success and yet very resistant to change. Over decades the approach to selling was the same and it worked. But in a market where consumers have more choice, access more information and trust is hard won, the expectations and demand of a salesperson's role is significantly higher.

Customers have dramatically changed learning and buying behaviours. At the same time sales data, tools and analytics are becoming more sophisticated. We are in a new dawn of far more rigorous and data-driven approaches to foundation sales processes, more cross-functional collaboration, and therefore new skill-sets for salespeople and leaders. Make sure the people who are in front of your customers are fully enabled and equipped to perform. But don't forget, Alison Freer advises, the key to optimising performance lies in working smarter, not harder.

That's where the whole organisation needs to be behind generating and delivering on sales, not just the sales team.

durhamlane is partner to clients who have successfully started their business transformation journeys. As experts who truly understand selling, we've supported them to change into genuinely customer-centric organisations. This development needs to be aligned to the customers' need and their omni-channel information behaviour – in fact, it needs to anticipate them.

Even though constant change is vital, there is one thing that won't change in business, Alison Freer argues. It is the importance of leading with high value relationships. It means that companies need to find out how to leverage technology, networks and social platforms to speed up success and create greater value for their employers, shareholders and customers.

durhamlane is a sales performance specialist, enabling businesses to become more commercial by unleashing the highest potential of their leaders and teams, and by managing outsourced sales campaigns on their behalf to create new business opportunities. With the coaching and training programme "Leading at a higher level", durhamlane delivers bespoke tools and techniques for leaders and their teams to become more productive and more successful regardless of their stage of development.

For more information on durhamlane's performance solutions visit www.durhamlane.co.uk or call for a free consultation on 0191 481 3800. You can also follow durhamlane on LinkedIn and on twitter @durhamlane.

Entrepreneur creates next generation of outstanding PE teachers.

An entrepreneur who visited the North East Business and Innovation Centre (BIC) for help starting his business has taken an Open Space membership as his company grows.

David Johnson is on a mission to ensure physical education in schools is delivered to a high standard and after establishing his business PEAK - Physical Education and Active Kids, just last year he is already working with five schools across the region.

With nearly 20 years experience in the field, David has also delivered National programmes on behalf of organisations such as Sport England and the Youth Support Trust and took the steps to self-employment following redundancy, he explained:

"I became increasingly aware that the level of physical education in primary schools varied and I wanted to address this as well as helping schools raise the profile and quality of physical education.

"I am very passionate about physical education, the sole intention of starting PEAK was to drive up the standards of physical education in schools in the North East.

"Across the North East, primary schools are



L- R Lucy Farrell, David Johnson, director of PEAK and Ruth Bottle.

relying upon either secondary PE teachers or single-sport coaches to deliver PE. PEAK aim to address this by putting deliverers into schools who are trained and qualified in primary age physical education."

PEAK also delivers an apprenticeship programme, David continued:

"We identify young people who aspire to deliver physical education, we don't just focus on one sport."

David chose the Open Space membership at the BIC, which is ideal for businesses on the go

and who don't require a permanent office space, David added:

"I was impressed with the facilities and the support, like Pulse Creative Marketing. They have produced a variety of marketing materials for me which I was very impressed with."

Donna Surtees, the Senior Space Adviser said:

"It is fantastic to welcome David to the BIC community. With access to meeting rooms, quiet spaces and high speed Wi-Fi I am confident that the facility will provide an environment for successful growth."



The Alan Shearer Foundation Charity Ball

Arguably the regions most prestigious social event was recently held at the Hilton Newcastle Gateshead Hotel.

The Alan Shearer Foundation Charity Ball raised over £200,000 to help fund pioneering facilities for disabled people at the Alan Shearer Centre.

Star guest was 4 time Brit Winner Ed Sheeran who gave an exclusive performance of many of his popular hits.







MTREC goes from strength to strength

MTrec Recruitment is a true North East success story. The business was founded in 2006 and has grown rapidly over the past nine and half years to be the leading recruitment brand within the North East Industrial temporary worker and permanent technical placements sector.

The business supports a large number of multi-national and SME manufacturing, engineering and distribution companies throughout the region from a network of 6 strategically located offices. It is this spread of locations, resources and expertise that has enabled the business to become a market leader and to service an increasing number of new clients who need a highly cost effective recruitment and training solution.

MTrec also has some of the most long serving and loyal staff members in the industry, which has been one of the most critical factors to the growth and success of the business. The business achieved Investors in People Silver Standard in 2013 and believes the good business practice and internal standards have retained core employees who have retained excellent customer relationships, provided outstanding customer service and ensured continuity of supply. All of the MTrec divisions within the business are aligned to complement each other and provide each customer with a range of recruitment services literally from the shop floor to the board room; MTrec believes this internal synergy provides a far higher level of expertise and service that is very hard to find with other agencies.

The company has had another great year in 2015 and some of their key highlights include;

- The launch of a high profile marketing campaign to increase brand/market awareness. This included a complete company re-branding, a new corporate web site, press advertising and significant out of home advertising at Newcastle Airport and St James Park. The marketing campaign is focused on MTrec "Engineering a Greater North East", supporting the local manufacturing, engineering and warehouse/distribution companies with the right people into critical job roles, training the staff to ensure they perform their new positions to the optimum level and providing on-site recruitment and HR support, which will make the region even stronger and more prosperous. The campaign has been well received from candidates and clients.
- The company diversified its portfolio into the Care Sector, which included recruiting a brand new team, a complete new brand was developed and launched and the successful delivery of care recruitment and training commenced.
- MTrec became one of the preferred suppliers to the North East councils through a master vendor relationship with early successes established with temporary worker placements.
- The business placed record numbers of temporary and workers and permanent placements within its industrial customer base, which also included a new on-site office established in Co Durham.
- MTrec hired 15 new members of staff to strengthen its business in all divisions; the growth of headcount is to ensure their expanding customer base is serviced to the right quality levels.
- The business is successful in the re-tendering process with a number of large high volume recruitment contracts.
- MTrec's headcount, due to a focused recruitment campaign, increases in 2015 to its highest number in the company's history of 50 staff members.

The future for the business looks extremely positive with further growth planned across all departments including diversification into new sectors and further geographical expansion in 2016. MTrec is also continuously investing in the training and development of the staff with new team members starting their Certificate in Recruitment Practice through the REC this year, as well as other training initiatives planned. The Directors Rob Armstrong and David Musgrave are delighted with the progress MTrec has made in 2015 and they are confident 2016 will be another successful year for the company.

White carries the light for Rowlands



John White

John White is Rowlands Accountants' Associate Director and Business Development Manager. With seven branches across the North East, the firm is one of the region's biggest independent accountancy practices and is continually growing. John takes a look at his role and the challenges involved in expanding the business.

The role of a business development professional focuses on spotting new opportunities for the business, then assessing how we can take advantage of them and incorporate them into the work we do at Rowlands.

These opportunities often appear in a variety of guises, from new markets and strategic partnerships to different routes to existing markets. They might also encompass new products or services we can offer to our clients. At the heart of the role is finding fresh ways to meet the needs of our existing clientele, attract new customers and bring in more revenue for the business.

With offices spread across the North East from the Tweed to the Tees, there is a wide geographical area to cover. It's a full-time job keeping tabs on what is happening in the individual local markets and staying abreast of new developments in the various sectors we cover.

Business development is closely allied to marketing and sales but is now a business discipline in its own right. When I started out nearly two decades ago, I was one of the first to take this strategic role in this sector. Since then, it has become an essential function for us at Rowlands, in our clients' businesses and for our

competitors.

So what does a business development professional do? My responsibilities cover a number of key areas.

Knowledge is everything

Market awareness has to be at the top of the list. It's crucial to develop a good knowledge of what is happening in our sector and to know what our competitors are doing. Accountancy is a constantly evolving discipline so you have to be at the forefront of change.

Secondly, a full understanding of our own strategy is necessary. As well as knowing where we are and where we want to be, we need to get to grips with how we measure up to our own expectations and against our competitors. Being aware of how people perceive the practice is extremely important.

Thirdly, we have to develop a strong understanding of our current market and any changes on the horizon that could impact our services and affect our client base. Being creative, open minded and flexible is important when horizon scanning and introducing new ways of working to the firm.

Finally, once new opportunities have been identified they then have to be brought to fruition.

This means that I spend a lot of time negotiating with colleagues about how we can leverage each one to the max to gain the most benefit. It's important to remember that this is always with the objective of increasing our bottom line.

Much of my time is spent considering issues such as the type of new business activities we should pursue, how best to market those activities, and the best way to position ourselves in a competitive marketplace.

Working in collaboration reaps dividends

Over all, the business development role involves varying degrees of sales and strategy. It is a highly cross-functional position, which requires close collaboration with various different internal and external management teams to ensure that deals are consummated.

It brings together a number of different skill sets. Strong research abilities are key to understanding the competitive landscape in which we operate. Deciding which opportunities to pursue requires quantitative and analytical skills. Plus, good people and communication skills are necessary when negotiating with other companies.

It's a challenging role, but one which is very fulfilling both on a personal level and for the needs of Rowlands as we grow our business.

If you'd like to know more about Rowlands, please visit www.rowlandsaccountants.co.uk or you can contact John White on 07906 083028 / at john.white@rowlandsaccountants.co.uk.



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In the Partners Chair

Nick Plumb

KPMG Newcastle

What were your career ambitions growing up?

I think my sole career ambition was to be able to afford a Ford Capri! I assumed for a while that I would work in the family business in Doncaster but my parents were clear that I should go to University first; by the time I left Uni I had met my future wife, Lynne, and we settled down south for a while.

Can you briefly outline your career path for the readers?

I trained with a small firm in Wiltshire, really old fashioned accounts prep stuff, before moving to KPMG Swindon and then on to Manchester in the mid-nineties. In Manchester I worked on a lot of transactions/IPOs alongside my core audit role. I still have that dual role today. In 2007 I was asked by Mick Thompson to join our Newcastle office; we had a good look round and it seemed a really great place to live and work; happily that's proven true.

Can you describe a typical day in the life of Nick Plumb?

I know it's a cliché but there is no typical day; my role is to lead client work, ensure our people are happy and learning, win new work and, with Mick and David Elliott, make sure the Newcastle office continues to thrive and contribute to the region. Most days involve some combination of the above. Yesterday, for example the morning was spent with clients; the afternoon with our team working on tech start-ups; I then went on to a BiTC meeting where I am the regional chair before dinner with one of our clients.

How have changing markets affected the business?

We are all now used to change being the norm, bringing challenges and opportunities for all businesses, including our own. The audit profession itself has changed significantly in recent years with new rules prompting a spate of tenders among Plcs. Winning Grainger last year cemented our leadership in the local Plc marketplace, but we also have great clients in the public sector, as well as a thriving community of family owned



and other independent businesses. This is an area where clients want rounded, commercial advice rather than just technical expertise and we have worked hard to develop this.

What is your greatest business achievement to date?

I don't think I could single one out. It is always great to win new work, to be involved in interesting transactions and to help clients achieve their objectives but its impossible to achieve any of the above on your own. My lasting memory will be the great teams I have been part of.

How about your toughest challenge?

I actually think the Newcastle market is the most challenging I have worked in. It is a close knit community which can be quite daunting for an in-comer and Mick was an enormous help when I first moved up here. The competition is also quite tough: as well as the other big firms there are

some smaller firms with very good reputations.

What are you currently working on?

We are right in the middle of audit 'busy season' where there are lots of unforgiving deadlines and our people are working very hard. As ever there are one or two projects that may or may not come off. I am hoping that a planned IPO will be successful - it's been great to see IPOs return to the North East in recent years but, as we all know, the capital markets are very volatile at the moment so listing is not easy.

Do you have a favourite hotspot for a business meeting?

Tempted to say the Racecourse because I love horse racing but there's probably a bit too much fun to be had for a serious business meeting. Newcastle has lots of great places for lunch and the Broad Chare is one of my current favourites.

pointments....Appointments....Appointments....Appointme



A 24 carat recruitment

Reid & Sons, part of the Goldsmiths estate, are continuing to recruit the very best in customer service with the appointment of a new Deputy Manager. With over seven years of retail customer service experience, Danielle Gray, 28 from Gateshead, now works as part of a team of eight.



New appointment drives national growth at Gateshead's Office Co

Ambitious Gateshead serviced and managed accommodation specialists The Office Co. is targeting further growth with the appointment of Rebekah Milne as its new Sales and Marketing Director. Rebekah brings considerable expertise and sector understanding to the role and will be responsible for business development work, targeting regional and national organisations for the company's property services and workspace.

Bradley Hall appointments

Bradley Hall have recently promoted chartered surveyor, Tim Aisbitt, to Associate Director. Tim specialises in agency, commercial development and investment work. Rosie Stuart joins the Gosforth operation as property executive with 10 years of experience within the industry. Carl O'Brien, will take up the role of Senior Surveyor and will specialise in rent and lease renewals.



Success at law firm leads to new appointments

A leading Durham law firm has announced three new appointments following a successful year. Swinburne Maddison LLP, based at Aykley Heads, is pleased to announce the arrival of a solicitor, Rachel Fletcher, to add to its growing commercial property team as well as two trainee solicitors, Lauren Rutherford and Kelly Richardson.



Johnson Tucker strengthens senior team

A North East chartered surveying firm has added two new faces to its ranks as it continues to grow its client base. Johnson Tucker has recently welcomed Malcolm Angus as Associate Partner to its commercial valuations team and new Senior Surveyor, Elena Contogiorgi-Smith, to its growing management department. The addition of Elena and Malcolm brings the team up to 13 people.





Stuart McKinnon

Ziggy played guitar

Being a massive fan of music and live music in particular, I was saddened by the death of David Bowie back in January. He had a particular impact on my future musical tastes and held a special place for me as he was the first person I saw live in concert at the City Hall in June 1973.

I had hair and everything!

Strangely, his death at age 69 has had a remarkable effect on some of my clients. I always remind them of the old Benjamin Franklin line that nothing is certain except death and taxes so they may want to talk about inheritance tax.

Many shy away from the subject as it means facing their own mortality. However in recent weeks I have had a number of clients contact me to say I think I need to talk to you about inheritance tax. One even said if it can happen to David Bowie it can happen to me!

The Government has led us to believe that you can have assets of up to £1m and not pay inheritance tax. But the £1m only applies with a particular set of circumstances, and for many the limit could be much lower. With the freezing of the nil rate band and some modest inflation we could see inheritance tax at its punitive rate of 40% begin to nibble away at more and more estates.

There is a school of thought that says well, I

will be dead so it won't be my problem, which is fair enough. Equally though if you have built up your assets from income that has already been taxed through prudent saving and investment then why simply let the Government have another slice through apathy?

Like the many changes to David Bowie's stage personas, inheritance tax planning changes depending on age and circumstance. While you are younger with a growing family you may simply want to make sure they are looked after when you are gone. This may involve looking at how you wish death in service benefits to be paid or simply ensuring that you have a simple will to ensure those who you wish to benefit do, and not the taxman at their expense. If you have a growing business you may want to ensure that your untimely death doesn't result in inheritance tax starving the business of cash and resulting in trading difficulties for the remaining owners, your staff and, of course, your family. This would mean ensuring there is nothing which

may inadvertently preclude you from claiming business property relief.

Then you have the later stages of life, maybe following a business sale or retirement, with lump sums from your pension pot adding to your assets. Should you, for instance, give money away to the next generation in the hope you survive seven years and as such the value falls out of your estate? And what about grandchildren? Should you be doing something to, say, help with their education and, if so, what? Are trusts the answer?

Now let's not get too obsessed with death. Your approach is always that at some time during each of the stages of your life you should have a think about inheritance tax, even if it is to decide that you don't have a problem. If you do, then make a plan and put it in place. Then maybe every seven years revisit it to make sure it still works for you.

Don't just ignore inheritance tax. As my client said, if it can happen to the Thin White Duke, it can and will happen to you!

For more information on inheritance tax or other taxation issues, please contact Stuart McKinnon on 0191 255 7000 or email stuart.mckinnon@rsmuk.com or your usual RSM contact.

Crunch time approaching...

Hands up anyone who fancies a referendum? More canvassing, more debates, more TV arguments. Yes, you just enjoyed a very long election campaign last May (I think it actually started around January, or it felt like it at least) but another is on its way and there is every chance it's going to come sooner than anyone thought.

My good colleagues at the UBS Chief Investment office are increasingly convinced that the EU referendum could be held this summer, perhaps as early as June. For it to take place then, Cameron would have to secure an agreement at the February European Council meeting. This is an ambitious target, but given the comments he made during his speech to the House of Commons regarding the December European Council meeting, it is not impossible. You should know by the time you read this.

So, my flippancy aside, I don't want to hear any moaning or groaning about another "campaign", another period of wall to wall politicians arguing the "ins" and "outs" of Europe. For we wanted it, we asked for it, UKIP would point to a groundswell of support...I would say for the debate at least.



Vinay Bedi

And for us, the North East, the region with a positive trade surplus, the economy in the North East that relies upon exports (to EU countries in particular) this is it... the moment of truth. Forget for now regional devolution, forget the Northern Powerhouse and the North East Mayor

debate. We need for Cameron to deliver a clear agreement (and the tone of communication from a number of European leaders at the December European Council meeting was also reasonably conciliatory) and then, once and for all, decide whether we are in or out. This is as important as it gets for us.

UBS thinks the public will turn more in favour of remaining in the EU in coming months, especially once Cameron completes his negotiations and the campaign begins in earnest. But, this is not a given, recent polls suggest it may be closer than originally thought. Cameron's decision to allow cabinet ministers to campaign on either side of the debate increases the risk of a more acrimonious split, we think. Moreover, high-profile government ministers campaigning to "leave" may give that camp an additional boost. In the meantime, will the Labour Party be able to sort out its internal conflicts in time to focus on the debate when the campaign begins? And, finally, the moderate slowdown in the economy at the end of last year may flow through into 2016, could that start to affect voters?

This is going to be interesting, exciting even. And for us, it really does matter.

Vinay Bedi, Executive Director, UBS Wealth Management.

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The views expressed in this article are the personal views of Vinay Bedi and not the views or opinions of UBS AG.

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Cash flow finance



Peter Cromarty

The latter half of 2015 proved particularly tough for North East businesses, with the closure of the SSI Redcar steelworks having a huge impact on to the local economy. Such events bring cash flow into a sharp focus. Businesses need access to a stable form of funding in good times and bad and it is vital that firms chose a funder who will provide a level of support and take a commercial view.

Despite the number of funding routes available in the UK, often little is known about alternative options. This lack of knowledge often leads many business owners to compromise their interests by opting for funding which hampers their growth strategy.

If a firm's cash flow is suffering while waiting for customers to pay invoices or a business is being forced to offer extended credit terms to larger clients, it may be appropriate to approach an invoice finance provider.

Invoice finance provides a flexible source of finance by allowing businesses to unlock the funds tied up in one of their biggest assets, namely, unpaid invoices –

leading to an immediate injection of cash.

On receipt of an invoice from a client, an invoice finance company will pay up to 90% of its value within 24 hours. It may carry out the credit control (optional) on each invoice, sending out statements and chasing the debt until it is paid. Finally, the balance, less a service charge, is handed over to the business once payment is received.

The cash flow released from invoice finance can be used to settle supplier's bills more quickly, enabling businesses to benefit from early payment discounts. In addition, the monies can be used to pay staff wages and meet creditor payments such as PAYE and taxes. With the money advanced to the business based directly on actual sales, the amount of cash available increases as the business grows.

For those businesses wanting to make a change in order to improve their cash flow and be able to invest in their business moving forward, alternative finance, and in particular invoice finance, is a really viable option.

You can't call the market



Three Counties Team

It is always interesting to look back on the previous year and to try and gauge which financial pundits got it right. This time last year, in another publication, I wrote about how, at the beginning of 2014 it was doom and gloom for the Fixed Interest investments (Gilts and Corporate Bonds) but in fact the best performing sector for the year was Index Linked Gilts, beating the US stock market. The Gilt sector came third.

The reasoning for the pessimism was the expectation that the Bank of England would raise interest rates. Apparently this was a “no brainer” but it simply did not happen and indeed still hasn't!

It has to be said that the Fixed Interest sectors did not have such a good year in 2015 but it certainly was not a disaster. Indeed the UK Corporate Bond sector returned a positive 9.8%! I do not think anyone can grumble with that.

In addition the UK stock market was a bit of a mixed bag through 2015 and the recent volatility in China (as at the time of writing) has caused worldwide volatility. The table below highlights the variations.

What does this information actually tell us?

Firstly, you cannot call the markets otherwise you would have missed out on more than acceptable returns from Gilts and Corporate Bonds for two years now.

Secondly, we can see that diversification is very important. Do not put all your eggs in one basket. That was a lesson well learned back in 2008 when many individuals purely invested in bank shares. However the table below clearly indicates that share prices do not move as one. Sectors of the market show considerable divergence.

Which sectors will perform best over 2016?

I would refer you to the first point above. You cannot call the market!

Should we be frightened of investing in shares now?

No; not if you are investing for the medium to long term. As Warren Buffet (the most successful investor in the world) likes to say, you have to be greedy when others are fearful. After a price fall you are actually buying the same assets at a lower price, like in a New Year sale.

So is this the time to be greedy?

Probably but remember the need to diversify.

Here at Three Counties we run well diversified portfolios covering both UK and International equity funds combined with a range of Fixed Interest/Alternative funds. The funds are selected on the basis of consistent performance against their peers. We take no account of famous names or which manager bought the last lunch. Persistent performance is the only criterion.

We do not try to make market calls. We know that it simply does not work in the long run. We believe that investment classes will return to their long term average real returns and blend asset classes to achieve the investment targets that our clients have.

It is an approach which is sensible, achievable and proven.

Index	2 0 1 5 Change	Comment
FTSE 100	-4.9%	Miners and global commodity (oil etc.) bias causes an overall loss for the main index
FTSE 250	+8.4%	Greater UK-focus leads to outperformance of FTSE 100
FTSE Small Cap	+6.2%	As above
FTSE 350 Higher Yield	-10.1%	Value-investing usually outperforms but not for the last couple of years
FTSE 350 Lower Yield	+5.3%	More UK, non-commodity focus helps results
FTSE All-Share	-2.5%	Outperformed FTSE 100 due to mid/small caps
FTSE Household Goods & Construction	+29.1%	Top sector: housebuilders had an excellent year assisted by Help to Buy and increasing house prices
FTSE Industrials Metals & Mining	-53.0%	Bottom sector: where most of the damage has been done to overall returns

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In Conversation With...

Peter Rutherford

Commercial Director, Three Counties Group

What were your career ambitions growing up?

To copy my Uncle Stan and be a Lawyer. He was senior partner with Brumell and Sample in Morpeth and also the Town Clerk at the same time. Sadly he passed away in his sleep at the age of 49 but was highly respected and is still remembered 50 years later.

Can you briefly outline your career path to the readers?

Despite doing a law degree I decided that wasn't a vocation that I wanted to pursue. However I enjoyed certain aspects which fitted in with insurance and financial services and got a job with Norwich Union as a trainee inspector. That was back in 1979.

After 9 months of training they gave me my own patch in Chelmsford and after two years I left and started the first Mortgage Shop in the country with a friend.

I then sold up and decided to return home and was proud to open my own business, Peter Rutherford and Co in April 1992. This grew to be Rutherford Financial Management before a merger with Wilkinson Hatton in 2002 to become Rutherford Wilkinson PLC. We sold the firm to a national consolidator in late 2008 but I wasn't happy not having the control I was used to so I took a break in 2012. I returned to financial services after a few months and latterly set up Universal Tax and Wealth with David Hughes who I had known since the Norwich Union days.

In November 2015 we merged into Three Counties, a well established and well respected IFA.

Can you describe a typical day in the life of Peter Rutherford?

I don't like "typical" as I get bored. I am not someone that believes you have to do 16 hours a day as I believe in the law of diminishing returns.

David and I review business and marketing strategy and train the consultants. I have responsibility for the articles that are written and maintaining contact with our professional connections. I also have a few clients that I look after personally.

Is there a mantra you aspire to when doing business?

If you put the client first then all else follows.

What is your greatest business achievement to date?

Starting from scratch back on April Fools Day in 1992 and building a strong business with an excellent reputation. We are doing that again now.

Who are your biggest influences?

My father always used to say that the customer is always right, speaking as a shopkeeper. Being client focussed is the same thing but they come to us for advice.

I have picked up things from a number of people I have worked with and known over the years. John Redpath, a good friend, always says "people's perception is their reality." I also say that "you don't know what you don't know." Both these

sayings are true and worth bearing in mind in any walk of life.

What are you currently working on?

Raising the profile of Three Counties as we are not as well known as we should be despite a good reputation. It has all the expertise of some of the better known firms and an outstanding investment process which is the best I have seen in over 30 years in the business. Other adviser firms have "bought" our portfolios for their clients. We are combining this with a state of the art back office system that monitors and actions all portfolio changes for clients.

In addition we have access to products and solutions that are all but unique to us in this region. This means we have more chance of achieving the clients objectives than probably any other financial planner locally.

We are also seeking businesses to partner with, or buy and for quality advisers.

Do you have a favourite hotspot for a business meeting?

Not really although it depends who is paying ! I am happy to meet with our connections for a coffee, a bite or a glass of wine anywhere that suits them.

Outside of the office what do you do to relax?

Playing golf, watching sport, cooking, reading, watching a film and enjoying a glass of red or a beer at Morpeth RFC.

UNW's dental business unit celebrates record year



The Dental Business Unit at UNW chartered accountants and business advisers is celebrating a record 12 months, helping to sell almost £20m worth of dental practices nationwide.

Newcastle-based UNW LLP, which has been established as one of the UK's leading accountancy practices for dentists for many years, reports selling five separate practices across the UK in transactions worth more than £17m.

The firm says the outlook for its dental team in 2016 is looking equally buoyant, with a series of deals, including finance raisings, acquisitions and disposals on behalf of dentists, in the pipeline.

The news comes after UNW – which has grown every year for the last 10 years – cemented its position of delivering long term, sustainable growth having recently reported a firm-wide 10% rise in turnover. In the six months to September 2015, UNW delivered an annualised revenue rate of more than £8m.

Dental specialist partner Alan Suggett said

"I'm delighted, not only with record total amount of the deals, but also with the geographical spread from Newcastle and South Shields, down to Lincoln, Bradford and Nottingham.

"We are also helping more dentists than ever before to buy their own practices, which is exciting for us because they are our clients of the future.

"Dentists like us not only because of the very specialist knowledge we have built up about the various technical issues which make dental businesses unusual, but also because they can easily tap into our in-house experts from our Corporate Finance and Tax teams should they need them. Our offering is truly full service and therefore different to most other dental accountants, or local firms with little or no dental expertise."

As well as advising dentists, Mr Suggett is also advising other accountants, and during 2015 has been on a national tour presenting to around 300 other accountants in 10 locations, including London, Cardiff, Bristol and Birmingham, about the unique needs of dental clients.

Suggett, a guest speaker at The Dentistry Show 2016 at Birmingham's NEC in April, said: "We want to be regarded as the best dental accountants in the UK and the tour has been about educating other accountants in how to work for dentists and demonstrating our capability.

"We have established UNW's dental reputation with healthcare bankers, lawyers and practice sales agents, as well as the BDA, NHS Pensions and the CQC, the logical next step was with the accountancy profession."

The UNW Dental Business Unit, led by Alan Suggett is a leading national dental advisory team. We act for approximately 300 dentists across the UK. For more information contact enquiries@unw.co.uk

Are your feet on the ground or in the cloud



Cyd Smith

According to recent figures the number of smartphone users worldwide will surpass 2 billion in 2016. My whole life is in my smartphone – contact details, emails, friends (real or virtual), my diary, updates from various websites, twitter feeds, shopping, banking, a somewhat eclectic music collection – just everything. Heaven help the day it stops working!

But what about your business accounting records? Do you have everything on a spreadsheet on your PC or are you more of a 'everything is filed safely in the van or in a carrier bag' sort of person? Or have you embraced modern technology and ventured into 'the cloud?'

There are numerous cloud accounting systems giving you 24/7 instant access to all your accounting data, as long as you have an internet connection of course. From an app on your phone or a website login on your tablet you can raise an invoice and email it to your customer before you leave them and even accept payment by card with an online payment system or a plug in card reader. When you fill up with petrol you can scan the receipt and it magically appears in your accounting records and you can connect to your various bank accounts and automatically download the transactions.

But does it work? Well, yes, by and large it does. There are systems varying from simple 'in and out' to multi user systems including stock controls and the ability to send live updates to your sales reps on the road. You have to keep

up with the entries of course but it becomes a habit to just enter something or scan it into the system. Then your up to date information is at your fingertips. Your accountant or bookkeeper can also have real time access to your information so they can monitor everything and keep an eye on your KPIs.

And is it safe? Everything has bank level security so it's as safe as it gets. It's not without the occasional problem, if the site is 'down' for instance but outages are relatively rare. And it's not for everyone, if you don't have a decent internet connection or you're not happy with technology it probably isn't for you.

In the November spending review the government announced that by 2020 HMRC will require most businesses, self-employed people and landlords to keep track of their tax affairs digitally and update HMRC at least quarterly via their digital tax account. This is to be achieved with the availability of free apps and software that link securely to HMRC systems.

So the cloud is the way forward – just don't lose your phone.

Accounting for his actions...



Cameron Blake

Mention the word “accountant” and there’s a certain image that springs to mind.

It’s likely to be a middle aged man in a suit with little sense of humour, who’s idea of having fun is some recreational bean counting and who ensures you’re on the clock every time you have an inquiry.

In that respect Cameron Sibbald completely breaks the mould. It’s not just the fact that he’s only 30 and comes with impeccable credentials but it’s also his manner which makes him easily approachable and which fills his growing client base with confidence.

Cameron, originally from Wales, has now set up shop in Newcastle via London where he worked for many years.

Having worked for renowned companies such as Deloitte and KPMG, he also spent time at leading tax and audit firm Crowe Clark Whitehill before heading to the North East to take up a position at RSM (then Baker Tilly.)

Cameron was lined up for a bright future with these top firms, particularly after gaining the ICAEW chartered accountancy qualification, the ACA, which is one of the most advanced learning and professional development programmes in the world.

At RSM he was put forward for the Future Leaders programme which would have meant he

was on the fast track towards becoming a partner – but Cameron had other ideas in mind.

In April 2015 he decided to take the plunge and set up on his own - and so Cameron Blake Chartered Accountants was born.

“I always knew that I wanted to set up on my own eventually,” he said.

“And I felt this was the perfect time. I always had in mind the kind of service that I wanted to offer, which was that people would deal with me directly and my aim would be to save people more in tax than they would pay me in fees.”

Tax efficiency is definitely Cameron’s forte and he is bringing his particular expertise to everyone from limited companies to sole traders and individuals with their personal tax affairs.

His aim is also to demystify the areas that make most business owners shudder in horror - namely dealing with organisations such as HMRC.

At the same time, Cameron has recognised that for many – particularly smaller – businesses the costing of accountancy might be considered prohibitive and he has taken the innovative step of devising a range of packages suitable for every need.

“It’s about offering a service to companies and individuals which they feel confident in and where they know they are going to deal with the same person all the time,” he said.

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North East company directors seek RMT advice as dividend payment rule changes approach



Rachel Warriner

The imminent introduction of new rules on how directors can draw an income from their businesses has led to a surge in the number of North East company owners looking for advice about how best to manage them.

Gosforth-based RMT Accountants & Business Advisors has seen growing numbers of clients and other regional business people looking for its help on dealing with the rule changes on dividend payments, which come in on 6 April 2016.

Dividends are drawn from a company's 'distributable reserves,' which are made up of current operating profits and other money in the bank, and are a more tax efficient way for most company owners to draw an income from their firms than taking a simple salary, which attracts a higher rate of income tax.

But with the changes to the dividends system including the abolition of the ten per cent tax credit that is currently applied to the net dividend paid, these directors could be facing a substantial increase in their tax bills if they carry on as usual.

And Rachel Warriner, Corporate Tax Manager at RMT Accountants, believes many company directors will now be considering taking larger

dividends than usual this year while the lower tax rate is still available.

As things stand, company shareholders who are basic rate tax payers when taking all their income into account pay no additional tax on the dividends they take. Higher rate taxpayers pay additional tax of 25% of the net dividend taken, while additional rate taxpayers pay 30.56%.

Under the new rules, which will be in place for at least the present Government's lifetime, the ten per cent dividend tax credit will go, which removes the need for dividends to be 'grossed up' in personal tax computations.

Basic rate tax payers will face a 7.5 per cent tax rate on the dividends they take, with higher rate taxpayers paying 32.5% and additional rate taxpayers pay 38.1%.

A new £5,000 dividend allowance will also be introduced, regardless of income level, meaning that the first £5,000 of dividend income will have a zero rate of tax. The personal allowance can also be used against dividend income.

Rachel Warriner says: "These changes have been in the pipeline for some months, but as is often the case, the closer that a deadline gets, the

more focused the minds of people become on the potential impact on them.

"These new rules will amount a major tax increase for the owners of North East SMEs, especially those who are currently drawing a tax efficient mix of dividends and salary up to the level of the basic tax band, and with many having fought very hard just to keep their businesses afloat through the recession, they may well feel punitive in the extreme.

"There may be a case for directors taking higher than usual dividends during this financial year, which would be payable at the current lower rate, and balancing this by taking lower amounts next year, but they should only consider this approach if appropriate distributable reserves are available and it isn't going to cause cash flow issues which could have longer term repercussions.

"There's no definitive answer on whether company directors would be better to stick with taking dividends next year or return to a salary-based income, and each person's individual circumstances should be properly reviewed before any decision is taken on what to do."

Why we need to help more entrepreneurs become employers

Employment is always a hot topic in the media, whether it's because there aren't enough jobs available, the jobs aren't good enough, or we don't have sufficient skilled people to fill the vacancies.

Like all business leaders, entrepreneurs have to decide upon their own organisation's employment strategy, with some seeking to recruit people as soon as their venture allows and others waiting, with reservations about taking people on.

While the benefits and challenges of becoming an employer need to be weighed up carefully, the positive effects on a business, an employer's quality of life, and wider society can be huge.

SMEs represent 25% of the UK's GDP, but account for somewhere around 60% of employment. With all net new jobs being created by businesses in their first five years, this SME growth focus - in terms of both numbers and size - becomes increasingly apparent.

Boosting the SME market by 30% in the North East would bring us in line with the rest of the country, in terms of jobs per head of population. It would also boost UK GDP overall.

Moving from being a one person company to hiring the first employee is perhaps one of the biggest changes a business owner can make; a much larger shift than moving from two to five people, or even from 50 to 100.

Certain factors may make it clear when the

time is right to make the leap and take on your first person; like having to turn down work, the need to readjust work life balance, or spending too much time on tasks that could be easily delegated.

The social good that comes from employing people cannot be underestimated, especially in the North East. While unemployment in the rest of the UK is falling, recently it has been increasing here. Our wage growth is the weakest in the country too. By creating and keeping jobs in the region, local communities can rebuild, and businesses can tap into a uniquely skilled and industrious workforce.

For any aspirational business owner, recruiting the right people and taking care to retain them will provide the security of a core team, around which they can plan for growth and to scale up. The benefits of any sustainable jobs to employees and society as a whole are self-evident; stable incomes and good prospects of career progression let people put down roots, and contribute to their communities.

A recent Government report indicated that in 2015, the North East saw a 2% increase in the number of businesses with between 1 and 49 employees. In line with the national average

this bodes well, but when we look further into the findings, they show a significant reduction in the number of businesses that are not employing anyone (-14%).

It seems where budding entrepreneurs have started their own enterprise, many have then reverted back to the security of direct employment, without moving to the next level as an SME. The challenge now is to support these ambitious business owners to get them to the point where they can start to employ people.

Here in the North East, we continue to see entrepreneurs striving to help their peers and start-ups, as part of a wider regional environment that backs enterprise, through a mix of public, private and academic-led programmes.

That support is out there, to help these early-stage entrepreneurs to thrive, rather than fall by the wayside, but it is clear that more needs to be done to raise awareness of the help available. Assistance including the new Innovation Unit and online Business Growth Hub from the North East LEP and the funds available through Tees Valley Unlimited, the Tees Valley LEP, are vital to reversing this trend, which has accelerated to the potential detriment of future job creation.



The Entrepreneurs' Forum supports North East business owners, helping them to develop, create new opportunities and grow their business. For more information, call 0191 500 7780 or visit www.entrepreneursforum.net

An entrepreneur interview with:

Peter Slee spark eCommerce Group.

Peter Slee doesn't have what most may consider to be the background of an entrepreneur.

From humble working-class beginnings, his father's transition from teacher to insurance broker was perhaps a sign of things to come for the family. As the second eldest of six highly successful siblings, Peter began his career in 1977 as a junior clerk in a bank.

Now 54, he is at the helm of Gateshead based Spark eCommerce Group, an outsourced service provider for some of the best known names in retail, and eCommerce operator in its own right.

The company, which is centred on two sites covering 170,000 square feet on Follingsby Park, employs just over 200 people, and has strong plans for growth, having battled through early setbacks that may have crippled many other businesses.

Peter, you started out in banking. It's not the usual beginning for an entrepreneur.

At 16 I knew I wanted to get out and earn money. I joined TSB and did my banking qualifications whilst working, rather through the classical route. I stayed with the bank for 17 years.

During my time there the organisation was constantly changing, mainly from a traditional savings and deposits business to a marketing focussed organisation, selling products for commission.

By 1990 aged 29 I was appointed as manager of the Gosforth High Street branch. The following year I was asked to go and work with a US partner bank in New York, to understand the maturing US model and in turn develop the UK telephone banking arm. This would ultimately become the national platform for Lloyds TSB.

When did you realise, working for a bank, that it wasn't satisfying your entrepreneurial spirit?

At the time I saw my role as entrepreneurial, however in hindsight it's clear I never had the pressures that a real commercial environment brings. At that time nobody seemed to leave the bank, but I recognised that I'd built a range of transferrable skills and held a firm mantra of taking on the big decision. So in 1994 I took the opportunity to build a similar direct operation with Comcast (latterly NTL in the North East, in the infancy of the UK cable telecoms industry).

How did you develop your career at NTL?

We set the whole business model, from operations to the network; a £25 million capital build, and the entire sales, marketing and pricing strategy was set by our small team. We drove that business end to end. Due to the success achieved in the Teesside operation that franchise became the flagship operation for the newly national NTL business.

That sounds great, why leave?

I was 40, with a big role as national telesales director and operations director for the North, Scotland and Northern Ireland. I had 5,000 people reporting into me, but I didn't enjoy it. My role had become more of a figurehead, reporting into central HQ and implementing strategy rather than creating the plan. So after six years in the business I took the big decision to move on, and look for new opportunities.

You moved into Spark Response in 2003. How has the business grown and developed in that time?

Prior to 2003 the business had seen numerous changes in senior management and ownership. At that time the business hadn't made a penny of profit, it felt hugely dysfunctional, had a disengaged workforce, and didn't have a handle on its cost base. In 2002 just before I joined, a small consortium of London based investors with worldwide business interests, headed by my now Chairman Barry Stiefel, got involved and stabilised ownership of the business.

At the time we had a major contract with a national DIY retailer. It was the early days of eCommerce. We built their online platform and had over 200 people dedicated to that contract. By 2006 we'd made great strides, we had the 'right people on the bus', achieving far greater client and staff retention, and were breaking even on a £10 million turnover. Then one day we had a quarterly review and their director walked in and said "thanks very much Peter, great job, there's your six months' notice". That was a real bombshell to face.

Around that time I'd stepped into the MD role and our main investor returned to London and became our chairman. In the year following the loss of our key client, our revenue halved and as you'd probably expect, the company delivered a significant loss. So we had some difficult decisions to make, and cuts were made through the loss of 47 jobs.

How did you bring the business back from that?

Thankfully our investors and their long term view came into play. We were in a good location, had good people, good clients and understood our cost base. We decided to rebuild and take the business forward.

Within two years the business was in profit, with revenue back over ten million. This coincided with internal restructuring, and consolidation of space. Our ethos was transparency with the staff, strong communications, and facing up to tough decisions.

And that was the story of 2008 through to last year, steady but spectacular progress. Growth in turnover back to £11 million and steady profitability, £1 million EBITDA, and half a million pre-tax profit.

What do you do to keep your staff? What's your staff turnover like and how do you keep those numbers down?

Staff engagement, retention and turnover have always been key areas for us. On the eCommerce side of our business for example, our average tenure is over eight years. We measure each department weekly in terms of tenure, and how we retain our people is really down to our culture, which we've won awards for.

Engagement is the big thing for us, our clients really like our approach and it's a dynamic which definitely differentiates Spark in a hugely competitive sector.

While I'm very proud of this business and what we've done over the years, you've got to have restlessness, a frustration, and a dissatisfaction to keep accepting that we can always do better.

What sort of changes are you going through at present?

We've overseen a change in strategy. Whereas historically we've worked with huge retailers who had their own infrastructure, we now work with fast growing, privately owned eCommerce brands who want to focus on their core expertise of marketing and product development.

In doing so we've de-risked the business. Last year another major retailer took their contract back in house, but the growth we've seen through our client base means that by this time next year the business will grow beyond the size it was at its peak, with a much healthier mix of clients.

We've also diversified through the purchase of the assets of Ethical Superstore in 2011 and the formation of Spark eCommerce Group.

So tell me about Ethical Superstore?

Ethical Superstore is an online retailer of ethically sourced, fair trade and environmentally friendly products. It was the biggest player in that sector online, but it was a business that was losing one million pounds per year.

We thought we could do something with the business. It had a strong brand position but weak customer retention. We had the infrastructure to support the business, and we really liked the people involved.

Five years on and we've now got a strong team driving three brands in the ethical market; Ethical Superstore, Natural Collection, and Spirit of Nature. The product range is evolving and the brands are strengthening, but more importantly, the business is profitable and has serious growth plans over the coming years.

What's your motivation now, at this stage?

We've done a lot of good things in the business, things that I'm proud of. My ambition is to grow this business to its ultimate point, whether that's by purely maintaining our North East base or by adding additional locations further south. I'm restless, but firmly committed to the business and to improving what we do. I'm 54 and if I had remained in banking I could well be retired, something I can't imagine right now. I honestly feel so much younger than my years.

Peter Slee is a member of the Entrepreneurs' Forum, a unique group of like-minded people who come together through peer-to-peer mentoring and a series of inspirational events to share best practice, create valuable connections and grow their business. For more information, visit www.entrepreneursforum.net





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Wrapped up!

Being into Metrocentre's very own stylist means that **Michaela Dale** stays on top of the season's favourite styles, so who better to tell our readers about the best outerwear for work this spring.

"Winter may be starting to look like a distant memory, but that doesn't mean your spring wardrobe doesn't need a great new coat. The new season's collections are arriving in all of our high street and department stores and we can't wait to see them hit the shop floor. There's a huge variety of outerwear at the minute, which means finding a coat for work is easier than ever before.

When it comes to choosing your new coat make sure you take the time to try lots of different styles on over your workwear and bear in mind your commute. For those of you who walk to work, long coats with tie belts will not only keep you warm, but also flatter your figure and work well with trousers or a dress. Funnel necks are great for staying cosy if temperatures plummet and big collars are right on trend this spring.

If you are in and out of a car make sure your coat isn't too long and is free and easy to move and drive in. A cocoon shape is ideal for this as its loose enough to wear over workwear and the rounded shoulders are roomy and comfortable.

Often workwear is quite uniformed or classically tailored in safe colours, but your coat is the perfect opportunity to be a little unique. Opting for bright colours, checks, tweeds or textured material can make you stand out from the crowd and you can even personalise some of the more classic numbers with a luxury scarf or statement brooch. Trench coats are a great investment, whatever the season. Why not go for the classic Burberry look with a tan mac, you will always look effortlessly chic and will stay dry if there's a downpour.

Take some time to really explore your options and try on all the new styles and remember intu Metrocentre is open until 9pm on weekdays, so you could even pop over one evening after work."



House of Fraser Gray & Willow
Khaki waterfall trench coat
£129



BHS
Green Peacoat
£40



H&M
Jacket
£99.99

Do one third of your staff want to leave?



Bryony Gibson

Bryony Gibson, Managing Director of Bryony Gibson Consulting, looks at why so many workers plan to leave their current job in 2016 and how employers can prevent it.

According to job search website Monster, the first Wednesday of every year is the most popular day for people in the UK to start looking for a new job. Monster believes this is because during December "your career is not at the forefront of your mind because you're racing around with holiday plans and functions".

I think that probably holds true for many people. The end of the year is traditionally a time to take stock of the last twelve months and resolve to make positive changes in your life; which often include your work.

I've seen a number of surveys in the last few weeks that reinforce this, each suggesting where people feel they are not being challenged, are bored with their work, or want to increase their salary, they will begin to look for a new role in January.

According to website CareerBuilder, 30% of us expect to have a new job by the end of the year. Investment and savings specialist Standard Life claims that 54% of British workers - rising to 73% of 25 to 34 year olds - are currently searching.

The Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) discovered that out of almost 2,000 people they interviewed, one third plan to leave their

current job in 2016. Perhaps most revealing, they studied the reasons behind the decision to leave and, for the second year running, a lack of progression (26%) is the number one cause; followed by a lack of appreciation (17%); a desire to change career (17%); better salary (15%); and to simply be happier (12%).

If this research holds true, it's quite a foreboding thought for many North East businesses that are gearing up for growth and what they hope will be a positive year.

The best people in any business have ambition and as the UK comes out of recession, job security remains one of the most important factors in job satisfaction. If you can offer stability alongside a career path with training and support, by highlighting the opportunities available and ensuring staff can see how achievement and hard work will be recognised, you will begin to address a number of the most common concerns.

People's motivations have changed. Today's employees want to feel like they are making a difference. They need a sense of purpose and a clearly defined direction so they can understand what it is they are working towards; whether that's building a business, helping other people, achieving a specific goal or reaching the next stage of their career.

The quality of a working environment has a major impact on our enjoyment level, so try to make yours fun. Be flexible, as in the modern workplace it's much less about the business defining an individual and more about individuals defining the business.

People have lives outside of work, so by helping them to achieve a healthy balance you can keep them motivated and happy. It's also beneficial to address any workplace anxieties and fears that staff may have. Often people dislike public speaking, making cold calls, networking or staying away overnight with work, but you will never fix a problem if you don't know what it is.

Good communication is key. Take a look at your team's individual roles and have a chat with them about what they enjoy, and what they don't. Often small things can have a big impact on how somebody is feeling. If you can identify their fears and help them to overcome them, then you can alleviate a lot of their problems.

Of course, you may well be doing all of these things already, which means you'll be the company all of the people want to move to, but if you're not, now would be the perfect time to start and become proactive, making some changes that might just get your staff back on side.

Contact Bryony for help finding the right tax & accountancy role or recruits on (0191) 375 9983. Alternatively, visit www.bryonygibson.com, connect on LinkedIn or follow @bryonygibson.

**BRYONY
GIBSON
CONSULTING**

Recruiting specialists, helping you grow.

Niche independent Newcastle Property & Construction Agency C&P Recruitment open in the city



Brand new in the city is niche independent property and construction agency C&P Recruitment.

With a long established reputation and a board of directors who have over 100 years combined experience at two of the largest recruitment agencies in the world, it's no surprise that the award winning agency are forecasting record sales of 7.5 million for the current financial year. Add to this that one of their board directors is UK entrepreneur and angel investor recruitment guru Paul Atkinson, there are some fantastic ingredients for the North East property and construction recruitment market.

Regional Manager David Hutton, who has spearheaded the North East opening and latest branch of C & P Recruitment said "given my previous experience of the North East market it was imperative that we hit the ground running when we launched the Newcastle office. We took our existing business model of placing a robust management structure in the organisation and this has undoubtedly proved to be the right strategy. Our team of consultants have quickly become a force in the market and are working hard to further develop relationships. With a menu of recruitment services for clients to choose from and an extensive database and network of contacts, we are ideally placed to source the



best staff for each and every client. Turnover to date has far exceeded our expectations and more importantly our clients are happy".

The independent recruitment group incorporated in 2004 offering bespoke permanent and temporary staffing solutions across all sectors of the built environment from architects to site staff including trades & labour to facilities management. C & P Recruitment have established offices in Edinburgh and Inverness as well as their latest branch opening in Newcastle upon Tyne.

Mike Wynn, Managing Director of C&P Recruitment said "we have traded successfully through one of the worst recession periods in the industry 2008 - 2015. It was a very challenging environment, however we are delighted to announce that C&P Recruitment has performed exceptionally well with turnover in 2016 on course for a record 49% increase".

Fellow Director Donald Wynn added "when trading conditions became difficult in 2008 we took the decision to consolidate our position and whilst it was tempting to venture off into new

markets we took the decision to stick to what we know best. This has proved to be the correct decision as it allowed us to open the Newcastle branch which has gone from strength to strength.

I don't know of many other recruitment agencies working in the construction sector that were actively expanding and opening new offices during this period".

The UK construction and property sector has encountered a sharp upturn giving the recruitment sector the most dramatic upturn for over six years. Recruitment guru and UK entrepreneur Paul Atkinson who sits on the C & P Recruitment board of directors said "I'm really impressed with Mike, Donald and Inverness Regional Director Tina Mason. They bring an incredible amount of experience to the table and really listen to what their clients need and offer solutions that fit".

Paul Atkinson continued "C&P Recruitment have kept a tight rein on their business and their staff and this is why I believe they have managed to trade through the property and construction recession. Put simply they have developed a reputation for being ethical, trustworthy and experienced, constantly assessing the market place, examining trends in the both the Scottish and English property and construction market and operate accordingly. This has paid dividends, securing a high level of trust across the industry".

We are what we think we are



Ammar Mirza

pic: Peter Walton 2014

Living in the North East means so many different things, but all too often mostly negative.

Let me share some stark statistics about the North East. 19% of people under 21 are unemployed, that is nigh on one in five. According to a 2014 Santander Enterprise Index which benchmarks the regional ecosystem for entrepreneurs in the UK the North East comes last. The North East has the highest levels of social deprivation than any other region.

And the statistical list goes on about how poor, disadvantaged, and unfortunate we are in this region.

Yet there remains so much enthusiasm, commitment and passion to make our diverse region a better place. There are a huge number of organisations, individuals, establishments that are all beavering away to help make a difference. Businesses including Sage, P&G, Nissan, business support organisations like IOD, FSB and of course Asian Business Connexions, many small and medium enterprises continue to grow and flourish, there are huge developments across the region, infrastructure investments, and I am quite confident the A1 western bypass will get completed in my life time.

My point is that with all of the positive economic activities, interventions, and promotions why is it that as a region we continue to be at the bottom of the league tables. Could it be that we think we aren't good enough so we assume that position? But, more importantly

how do we change?

Well for me we need to leverage the power of Three. "Three is the magic number" and this isn't just highlighted by a 1990's pop song by De La Soul, but in fact promoted throughout time. I would like to briefly examine the symbolism, significance, and meaning of the number three.

The number three is used to mediate between two opposing or contradictory values. The third value mediates, reconciles, and connects the two. Three is the number of truth.

Time is divided into three portions: The past, the present and the future. The position in time that is most expressive of the non-physical is the present, because it is so fleeting and instantaneous. The function of that time, the present, is its service as connector. The number three expresses connection.

The number three connects the dichotomy of two and shows a common purpose. Two lines may go in different directions; the third line unites them into a single triangle. Two bricks laying side by side share no common goal; the third brick placed on top of them, unifies them in a common effort.

Three as a symbol is a triad or trinity. It is a symbol of the unity between body, mind and spirit. The symbol is of universal significance - it is found throughout history and all over the world. It can be interpreted in many different senses: spirit/mind/body in a circle of creation; past/present/future enclosed in the ring of eternity; art/science/religion bound in a circle of culture.

But if three is indeed the magic number then can this also be said for the third letter of the alphabet? The letter C. What if I proposed that three simple words starting with C, if introduced, could have a profound impact on our regions outputs and outcomes? The way we feel, the way we think?

Those three words are Communication, Collaboration, and Celebration.

Of course, each word is powerful in its own right and the actions associated independently are positive. But if we communicate effectively, collaborate cohesively and celebrate collectively, and join them all up they become incredible.

This is a great region and let us all better work together to demonstrate how good we are. Let's stop with the negativity and start communicating, collaborating and celebrating. We have some tremendous resources, the Local Enterprise Partnership and through it the launch of the innovative Growth Hub, the Progression Forum, City Deals, City of Culture bids, Business Improvement Districts, Science Central, our Museums, Colleges and Universities, and even premiership football (for now) to name but a few.

I am involved in many of these organisations, and more, dedicating time to making our region a better place because I think we live in the best region in the whole wide world. And through us all communicating, collaborating and celebrating, I know we will prove it.



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between 9-11am www.spicefm.co.uk 



A business lunch with **Gusto** by Michael Grahamslaw

In a previous magazine incarnation, I frequented **Gusto Italian Restaurant and Bar** on a regular basis as it was my place of choice for a good business lunch. With its prime sight on the Quayside adjacent to the Malmaison Hotel, it has a cosy, yet contemporary feel and this, coupled with an extensive menu, was where I decided to take two prospective business clients for a spot of lunch. It offers a very cost effective business lunch menu of varied pasta and pizza at just £11.95 a head including a glass of wine/beer/lager or soft drink from 12noon to 5pm daily as well as a much more varied a la carte version which is available until 11pm.

The vast choice necessitated the partaking of several glasses of wine before we all finally decided on the meals of our choice from both menus and indeed, in one instance, a mix of both. That's a "no-no" in many of today's fashionable restaurants but Gusto was only too happy to oblige our request. After a short wait during which several more glasses of wine were dispatched, our starters arrived. Our choices included hand rolled meatballs in spicy tomato sauce; a beetroot, green bean and goat's cheese salad with pickled walnut vinaigrette and lemon dressing and garlic dough petals. These dishes really hit the spot and set us up for our mains. Pan fried chicken breast with butternut squash, a flattened rump steak

with peppercorn sauce (for you know who) and a large fillet steak with all the trimmings rounded off a meal that brightened up an otherwise cold Tyneside day. Thankfully (for me and my waistline) desserts were swerved in favour of coffee. We all agreed that it had been a very agreeable lunch and a successful first meeting so it was a case of job well done all round. It brought back very fond memories for me and I pondered on why I hadn't been back there sooner. As a result, on my return to the office, I subsequently looked up their website and was astounded to read about all the extraneous activities Gusto also has to offer. Perhaps a cocktail class floats your boat or what about a very unusual and interactive kids party? Or would a very cost-effective and prestigious day at the races turn you on? If so read on.

As we are all painfully aware, today's parents are continually striving to out-do each other with more and more exotic, glamorous and even bizarre kids parties, some of which cost hundreds of pounds. Gusto could just provide a cost-effective solution. It already offers a child-sized portions menu but they also organise kids parties with a chance to make their own pizza whilst wearing a chef's hat. Now that's a kids party with a difference (available daily until 6pm) without breaking the bank.

Other noteworthy activities from Gusto

include a Ladies Day package at Newcastle Racecourse on Saturday, July 23, 2016. The very reasonably priced affair includes a glass of fizz and breakfast at Gusto to kick-start the day, a return coach to and from Gosforth Racecourse with a badge for entry to the both the grandstand and paddock areas plus a three course meal at Gusto on return from the racecourse. Now that sounds like a plan to me.

Likewise, a cocktail masterclass is on offer where experts teach you to make your own favourites at home as well as getting to grips with the tried and tested "classics". Participants can also discover the insider secrets of the Trade that might just help them to invent the next major cocktail craze.

I also gleaned that Gusto offers a private party facility from reserving the entire restaurant for 150 people, to 80 people on the upper floor only with a view to die for and 70 covers on the ground floor. For a more intimate event, a "Con Amici" (Italian for a meal with friends) is available for up to 22 people. Whatever the format from bespoke menu creation to canapés and drinks, Gusto seems to have all bases covered. Surprised? Me too and I'm sure I can accommodate at least one of them into my business entertaining schedule!

Everyone knows where to find Gusto but for the out-of-towners, **Gusto (Italian for good taste)** is situated on Newcastle's Quayside and is open daily from 12 noon. T:0191 260 2291. It is within walking distance of the City centre but multi-storey car parking (SatNav co-ordinates: NE1 3DX) is available over the road to the rear of the restaurant.

BUSTINE





Judith Doyle, Principal and Chief Executive, Gateshead College

Further education sector key to Northern Powerhouse success

The Government's promise to create 600,000 good quality jobs in the North of England as part of the Northern Powerhouse agenda in addition to its ambitious target of creating three million apprenticeship places in the UK by 2020, means it has never been more important for employers to take a strategic view of skills development and to have a plan in place to meet their needs now and in the future.

Gateshead College's training provision has been industry-focused right from the outset. When the college was established in the 1950s, we pioneered one of the very first apprenticeship schemes for Sigmund Pumps. Today, we are working alongside UK and internationally renowned companies such as Nissan and Vantec, providing training in new and emerging technologies, enabling them to create an innovative and highly skilled workforce.

We work with businesses in a unique way, ensuring that they have a significant input into course content to create bespoke solutions for both up-skilling existing employees and recruiting and training new staff. Our partnership with Vantec, the largest global third party logistics provider, has created a broad range of courses from level 1 to level 7, providing staff from entry level right through to senior management with a clear progression route.

We're very proud to be Nissan's trusted training partner and we've worked with the Sunderland plant for more than a decade to develop a unique training programme that hits every area of the business. Nissan's prestigious apprenticeship programme takes employees through the levels to a degree equivalent

qualification and is continually adapted to focus on practical workshop time to develop advanced engineering skills such as the design and production of electric vehicles.

Research by UKCES (UK commission for Employment and Skills) estimates that by 2020 well over half of new jobs created in the north will require a qualification of Level 3 (equivalent to A Levels) or above, increasing the demand for higher level training. The support of the further education sector to meet this demand is fundamental.

We're committed to increasing the skills levels across the North East workforce, undertaking a Higher Earning Higher Learning project with the AoC (Association of Colleges) and other colleagues in the sector to identify higher level skills needs. A college-led partnership will develop solutions for flexible HNC, HND or Foundation Degree qualifications; Higher Apprenticeship programmes, CPD programmes or blending college provision with employer delivery, private provider delivery and professional body certifications and qualifications.

Having all of these opportunities in place is one thing but to really make it work in practice, achieving greater awareness of the career routes

available is essential. I strongly believe that greater cohesion is needed between schools, colleges and employers to ensure broad and impartial careers advice is offered. By working together, we can ensure that young people receive sound, robust advice about the different paths available to help achieve personal career goals and change perceptions that apprenticeships aren't as attractive as A level and degree routes into higher paying jobs.

The North East has a long-standing reputation for innovation and engineering excellence. Our adaptable workforce has transitioned from heavy industries to become pioneers in advanced manufacturing techniques and digital technologies. We need to harness this success, continuing to provide opportunities to learn and gain work-based skills that meet the current and future needs of industry.

While it's easy for me to say that skills and training should be prioritised by businesses to help us shine as a Northern Powerhouse, I know that many companies have never embarked on any training programmes or taken on apprentices. They might feel overwhelmed or not know how to go about it and that's where our team of experts can step in and support you every step of the way.

Investing in the North East economy

Jeremy Middleton is a North East Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) Board Member and serves as Chair of the North East LEP's Investment Panel. Here, Jeremy talks about the North East Investment Fund and how it has the potential to give a real boost to the region's economy.

What is the North East Investment Fund?

Quite simply, the North East Investment Fund is a capital loan fund which is available to support projects in the North East that encourage local economic growth and create new jobs in the region. The fund is worth £55m in total and is made up of £30m from the Regional Growth Fund and £25m from the Growing Places Fund.

Loans can vary in duration from 2 to 20 years and it's an evergreen fund, so once funded projects are completed and their loans are repaid, the money is re-invested into the fund and made available to support new schemes. We made this strategic decision to reject the culture of grants and dependency, instead choosing to award loans which can be recycled.

Can you tell us what the fund has achieved so far?

The North East Investment Fund has already supported some fantastic ventures and is well on the way to exceeding its goal of creating at least 2,300 new jobs across Tyne and Wear, Northumberland and County Durham.

One of the first developments to be allocated money was the Stephenson Quarter development in Newcastle, swiftly followed by a number of projects in Washington, central Sunderland, Chester-le-Street and on the banks of the Tyne

in North Tyneside that are all now going ahead thanks to investment from the fund.

Durham University's ambitious plans to develop a Centre for Innovation and Enterprise have also been supported by the Investment Fund and this is another great example of a development which itself will create more opportunities for growth. We've also supported the Blyth Workspace development in Northumberland and the West Chirton business park, amongst others.

The flexibility of the fund means it's been able to support a wide range of projects in both the public and private sector.

Who can apply?

Applications to the North East Investment Fund are evaluated against a number of key criteria. Firstly, strategic economic fit – will the project help to strengthen the local economy or will it benefit transport, connectivity or infrastructure? We also consider deliverability: will projects be completed on time and are the goals achievable? Applicants are asked to outline how and when they will repay the loan and we also look at how bids will help to create or safeguard jobs, private sector investment or brownfield land development here in the North East.

Ultimately, the fund is there to help support the North East LEP's goal of creating new and

better jobs for the region and achieving the economic potential of the region.

How is the funding allocated?

The fund is managed by the North East LEP, which was behind the successful bids for the third round of the Regional Growth Fund.

The North East LEP's Investment Panel is a group which includes members of the North East LEP Board and people from the business community, and the group meets regularly to review new applications to the fund.

What's next for the North East Investment Fund?

We're inviting more organisations to apply, via the North East LEP, for loans from the North East Investment Fund. The money is available to help kick start projects that lack the initial finance to get off the ground but that have great potential to benefit the North East economy and that are able to realistically repay the initial investment, making it available to support yet more schemes in the future.

I strongly encourage people to take a look at the opportunities which are available through the North East Investment Fund and to consider how it can be used to make real improvements to the North East economy.

North East Hearts with Goals shows that 'saving lives is black & white'

Sister-in-laws Christine Stephenson, 42, and Kelly Best, 45, understand how it feels to lose somebody they know and love due to heart failure; what makes this incredible duo stand forward is that, from that devastation they created their own charity which shows that from a small acorn, a great oak can grow – North East Hearts with Goals is that great oak.



Christine Stephenson left and Kelly Best right at their annual Winter Ball, December 2015

When was the charity founded and why?

The charity was founded in 2013 following Kelly's son's diagnosis of a heart condition. Kelly lost her husband, Christine's brother in 2003 aged just 32. Discovering that the condition ARVC carries a high risk of cardiac arrest, placing lifesaving defibrillators, is therefore your only chance of life.

Where are you based?

The charity is run from home in Cramlington and focuses primarily on placements in the North East. We are volunteers and are not for profit; it is also run in the minimal spare time they have available.

What type of events do you fundraise with?

We encourage people to get fundraising and place their own defibrillators. If you can raise £800 you can state where the defibrillator is placed. This is a great opportunity for people to make an impact on their own doorstep. We have great north runners and swimmers, even coast-

to-coast cyclists. Charity auctions and raffles but our biggest event is the Winter Ball. December 2015 was a 007 extravaganza complete with 007 themed decor by award winning 'Balloon Bedlam' and also featured casino tables and celebrity memorabilia.

How much have you raised to date & how many defibrillators have been placed?

Since starting the charity 150 defibrillators are in place in and around the North East at around approximately £1000 per unit which is an amazing achievement. We have also placed 48 defibrillators in North Tyneside Schools under the Heart Start Head Start initiative which saw children wearing red to raise funds. The charity topped up money raised with £20k to ensure each school hit the target. The North East Ambulance Service trained every school as well as many other placements. We now work with the ambulance service and Chris Bull from First Aid North East to meet training needs.

What does the future hold for Hearts with Goals?

2016 sees a charity partnership with Winnovation Training who have many charity events to run through 2016 and we're excited to see what that brings. P&G are a great support to the charity helping with items for our Christmas

ball and also have funded defibrillators to local needy places such as coach lane campus, Percy Hedley School etc. We have major support from Pinpoint Recruitment who offer all teams in their Junior league £100 towards a defibrillator.

We also look to continue placing defibrillators and to increase awareness of what they are and also the importance of CPR. We would also like to see the FA include defibrillator training as standard on all first aid courses nationally, easing pressure on local services to train and also raising awareness at grassroots level. We have a great relationship with Northumberland FA which will continue. We implemented a form for teams to use to ensure parents and children understand the signs and symptoms of an impending cardiac arrest which is avail from their website to download. They also run a beach soccer comp at Tynemouth every summer which is a brilliant weekend for ability, men's and women's teams.

And finally, the success of the charity?

We never dreamed the charity would be so successful. Our original aim was to place 5 into our local schools. Safe to say we've exceeded the target! Quite surreal for us to see celebrities wearing our Saving Lives is Black & White wristbands in support.

Mission statement

It is our mission to see a defibrillator placed wherever you would see a fire extinguisher



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DARREN BAKER



Businesses invited to 'Celebrate their journeys'



Businesses across Tyne and Wear and Northumberland are being encouraged to celebrate their journeys to work as part of the latest travel challenge by Go Smarter – Tyne and Wear and Northumberland's sustainable transport programme.

Taking place from Monday 22 February to Sunday 20 March, Celebrating your Journey is a sustainable and active transport challenge aimed at reducing the number of cars on the region's roads by encouraging more people to travel to and from work by bike, foot, public transport or car sharing.

Staff are invited to register a team at www.gosmarter.co.uk/challenge and log their commute to work. Points are awarded for every journey and teams are able to see who's in the running for first place via the online leaderboard.

At the end of the month-long challenge, a winning team will be announced with an individual leaderboard celebrating those staff

members that have gone the extra mile.

People taking part in Celebrating your Journey can share their experience online using #lovegosmarter and celebrate the impact Go Smarter has had on their commute over the past four years. Participants can also upload photos to social media using the #lovegosmarter hashtag to be in with a chance to win a prize and feature in an upcoming Go Smarter exhibition. More details can be found at www.gosmarter.co.uk

Businesses that have taken part in previous Go Smarter sustainable transport challenges include, South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust, software development company Scott Logic and ORE Catapult.

Helen Coatsworth, Marketing Manager at ORE Catapult said: "I'm really pleased ORE Catapult took part in the Go Smarter challenge last year. It's a lot of fun and generates some friendly rivalry, while encouraging people to consider using alternative cleaner modes of transport, which bring a lot of positive benefits too.

"As a result of the challenge, quite a few of my colleagues are now biking to work and car sharing on a regular basis, which is great and shows the long-term impact such schemes can have."

The sustainable transport programme in Tyne and Wear and Northumberland, Go Smarter works with schools and businesses to promote sustainable and active travel.

The Go Smarter 'Celebrating your Journey' challenge takes place from Monday 22 February to Sunday 20 March. To register, visit www.gosmarter.co.uk/challenge

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Customer service centre celebrates 20 years in Sunderland



EDF Energy celebrated 20 years in Sunderland by handing out long service awards to 20 employees

One of the North East's largest employers is set to mark its 20th anniversary by honouring its longest serving staff.

Twenty staff members at EDF Energy in Sunderland, who first joined when the customer service centre opened in 1995, will be recognised with long service awards during the company's anniversary celebrations.

The Doxford centre opened as London Electricity 20 years ago, with only 50 staff, before becoming EDF Energy in 2003. It has since grown into an employer of 1500, exceeding the original plans to employ 450 people.

The centre now plays a key role in managing 5.3 million residential EDF Energy accounts a year.

Kevin Gatens, head of customer service for North East, said: "We are delighted to have reached this milestone. As one of the first operations of its kind to come to Sunderland, EDF Energy is pleased to have led the way in helping to create a customer services employment culture that is now so important to local people and the local economy.

"I have had the great experience of working at the centre for almost 20 years, starting as a customer servicer adviser in 1996. We have become so much more than just an employer. The team here play an important role in the local community, supporting local organisations and charities through voluntary projects and fundraising.

"We are fortunate to have a large team of enthusiastic and dedicated staff who have played a pivotal role in the success of the offices."

One of the features of the Sunderland operation is the high staff retention rates and low staff turnover for the sector. This is represented not only by the number of 20th anniversary long service awards, but also by the number of individuals who have been able to develop successful careers within the company. Over 200 current employees who joined the company as customer service advisers have since gained higher positions.

The Doxford offices now host a number of roles including customer service, finance, training, HR and advisers on low carbon solutions. The Sunderland team also includes some management with national roles.

Not only has the centre contributed to career development and the local economy, it has also provided approximately 3,000 hours a year of voluntary work to local charities and organisations through the companywide Helping Hands scheme, which allows employees at Doxford to take up to two days extra paid leave every year to volunteer in the local community.



Jane Roberts, Doug Turner, Sharon Tilley, Pennie Alford, Colin Faulkner, Lee Sullivan, Kevin Munday

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Snooping Employers - Beware!

Access to the internet and freedom of expression are fundamental human rights. However, in the employment context, the application of these principles can be blurred in the ever developing world of technology.

The flurry of sensationalised press headlines regarding the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) decision that Article 8 (Right to Privacy which includes respect for private and family life, home and correspondence) had not been breached when a Romanian court found an employer had fairly dismissed an employee for sending private emails during working time will likely have made employees paranoid and employers confident about the future impact of IT and online communications at work.

Now that the hype has subsided, here is a realistic summary of what the decision really means.

Background

The applicant in this case (Mr Barbulescu) worked for a Romanian business in a sales role and had been asked by his employer to set up a Yahoo Messenger account for business purposes only.

The employer operated a policy which clearly stated that employees were not permitted to use the employer's equipment for personal use.

All relatively straightforward so far!

However, when the employer accessed the Yahoo Messenger account he discovered that Mr Barbulescu had been using the account to exchange personal emails with his fiancé and brother. The employer did not extend this monitoring to accessing other data or information on Mr Barbulescu's computer. When confronted, Mr Barbulescu did not give any compelling explanation and instead denied misusing the systems, alleging the employer's actions were a breach of his privacy.

Based on a 45 page transcript that said

otherwise, the employer terminated Mr Barbulescu's employment relying on its policy in doing so.

Mr Barbulescu brought a claim of unfair dismissal through the Romanian courts which failed. This resulted in Mr Barbulescu asking the ECHR to determine whether this finding was a breach of his Article 8 rights.

The decision

The ECHR found that Article 8 was applicable but there was no breach of Article 8 in Mr Barbulescu's circumstances because the majority agreed that it is reasonable for an employer to take proportionate steps to ensure its employees are doing work during working hours. Monitoring in this case was limited and the balance between Article 8 and the employer's interests had been considered.

What does this mean for employers?

This case was decided on its specific facts, as outlined above.

This decision does not change UK law nor does it give an employer an automatic right to snoop excessively or unreasonably on an employee's use of work systems or to demand access to employees' personal devices.

The employer's reasons for monitoring must be considered and objective. Therefore, we would advise against employers using this decision as an opportunity to completely remove an employee's right to use such equipment for personal reasons or to excessively monitor use. To do so is likely to be counterproductive and lead to a culture of distrust giving rise to potential constructive unfair dismissal claims from employees on the basis the employer has breached trust and confidence.

Should an employer see a requirement for restricting and monitoring employees use of its systems, a clear and reasonable IT and communications policy outlining what employees can and can't do? What will be monitored and to what extent monitoring will be undertaken is a good starting point. Employees should be made aware of any such policy.

Operating a workable policy that strikes a balance is more likely to be lawful and something an employer can rely on, whilst also facilitating a productive working relationship.

What does this mean for an employee?

There is still the reasonable expectation of privacy.

However, whilst an employer cannot freely monitor all employees' communications, employees should nevertheless take steps to avoid using company equipment to send personal messages to minimise such actions being used against them by their employer.

Instead, employees should endeavour to send personal messages on personal devices, either during breaks or outside of work.

Should an employee regularly send personal emails or access the internet for non-work related material, they may give an employer a reasonable basis on which to sanction or dismiss.

Top tip

There are risks to both employer and employee in taking advantage of the ECHR's decision.

Employers and employees should therefore work together to facilitate an effective working relationship in a world increasingly dominated by technology.

If you require any further advice or assistance on how this decision impacts your business, please contact me on 0191 282 2882 or at paul.mcgowan@collingwoodlegal.com.



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Adoption - is it time to widen the search?

What are the issues for couples wanting to adopt children – and what happens if children are adopted outside the UK? Family lawyer Louise Cannell-Mirza of Ward Hadaway examines the subject.

For many couples and single people, adoption is the only way to have a child. As a society, people are starting to have children much later in life than earlier generations which is impacting upon the ability to have children naturally. There are also many couples and single persons who wish to extend the family they already have.

Despite high numbers of those interested in adoption, there remains a national shortage of adopters; demonstrated by the increasing number of banners and billboards advertising for potential adopters in our local areas. We often see celebrities in the press who have adopted children from abroad, but the reality is that there are thousands of children here in England who are waiting to be adopted, waiting to find a 'forever family'.

National statistics confirm that of 31 March last year, nearly 7,000 children in England alone were waiting to be adopted, waiting in foster care as they are unable to return to their parents or wider family members. The inability to return to their biological family may be as a result of a Court decision or parental decision.

Foster care can be a very uncertain time for children as there is no guarantee that a child

can remain in one foster placement throughout their childhood. Many children will see frequent changes of placement; for sibling groups, changes can be made separating them from their brothers and sisters. Remaining in long term foster care also means that the child retains ongoing involvement with a variety of professionals with regular meetings to consider their care and placement. It must be said, however, that for some children, remaining in foster care long term is in their best interests and provides them with the optimum life chances. Foster carers are well trained to meet the bespoke needs of children within their care.

If a Local Authority has the necessary Court orders to allow them to place a child in their care for adoption, the Authority and Adoption Agencies will try and 'match' such children within their area, with approved adoptive parents/persons within the locality. Sometimes the matching process is difficult because of the age, sex and any disabilities of the child. Such difficulties can be heightened if the children are part of a sibling group and are being placed for adoption together. Similarly the family environment of the proposed adoptive parents may not be suitable for every child who is in need of a 'forever family'. The matching process takes time and very

careful consideration to ensure that a proposed placement is right for the child and family. However, time works against the process and the reality is that the older the child, the more difficult it is to find an adoptive placement.

When a Local Authority is unable to identify a suitable approved adoptive placement within the area, the search for a family for that child will widen to include other Local Authority areas and Adoption Agencies up and down the country. Despite the breadth of the UK and the number of agencies involved in trying to place children, it is not always possible.

Against that reality, is it time to extend the searches and allow such children the opportunity to find 'forever families' abroad?

It is accepted that some countries - Ireland for example - are in an entirely different predicament to England with the numbers of approved adopters outweighing the number of children in need of a family. Whilst the idea of placing children outside the jurisdiction may be controversial to some, is it time for this to be used as a further opportunity for some children in finding a forever family of their own? Should we now be exhausting all options for the thousands of children waiting to be claimed as part of a family?

For more information on the issues raised by this article please contact louise.cannell-mirza@wardhadaway.com or call 0191 204 4407.

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Positive outlook for John N Dunn Group



l-r: Andrew Love, AIB (GB); Stephen Bilclough, John N Dunn Group; Richard Bertram, John N Dunn Group; Christopher Welch, Sintons; Christopher Dixon, AIB (GB)

Building services John N Dunn Group is forecasting a positive future for the business, as it continues to recover from the effects of the recession and accompanying crisis in the construction industry.

The Tyneside-based business was forced to make cutbacks during the economic downturn – during which the construction sector was particularly badly hit – which included closing its Teesside office and making a number of redundancies.

Now, John N Dunn Group – which has traded in the North East for over 100 years – is confident its painful cuts have resulted in a strong, streamlined business which is well-equipped for the future.

As well as having a “healthy” forward order book, the company has returned to profit, with a turnover of £30m, and employs around 320 people. Significant investment is being made in the company’s future, and the business currently has 39 apprentices it is committed to developing.

John N Dunn Group started life in the 19th century and has grown to become a leading building services company with offices in the North East, Scotland and Yorkshire. It delivers plumbing, heating, electrical, mechanical and renewable energy services to the construction industry and counts major housebuilders, local

authorities and a host of blue chip companies among its long-standing clients.

Stephen Bilclough, Chairman of John N Dunn Group, said: “The last few years have been challenging – I’d say I have learned more in the past five years than I did in the previous 25. But now, after a lot of hard work from our team, we are in really good shape. The future is looking positive for us.

“Our North East and Yorkshire offices are currently at full workload capacity, with our Scotland office not far behind, and we have a healthy order book for the year ahead. We have a five-year plan to develop and continually improve the business and are confident we are doing so from strong foundations.

“As a family-owned business, we have a strong commitment to our people and are dedicated to developing them, as well as adding to the skills base of our industry. We currently have 39 apprentices, whose training we are investing in, and have a long and proud heritage of offering opportunities to young people over many years. That is something that will continue to be a priority for the business.”

Newcastle law firm Sintons has been legal advisor to John N Dunn Group for over 50 years, and day-to-day banking for the business is handled by the Newcastle team of Allied Irish Bank (GB).

Christopher Welch, Partner in the Company and Commercial team at Sintons, said: “Over more than 100 years of trading, John N Dunn Group has amassed a well-deserved reputation for its quality of service and commitment to its people, which is one of the main reasons the business has truly stood the test of time. Sintons is proud of the long-standing relationship we have with John N Dunn Group, and look forward to continuing to support Stephen and the team in the next phase of development.”

Andrew Love, Senior Manager at AIB (GB) in Newcastle, said: “John N Dunn Group is a very well-known business with a strong heritage in the North East, and is a business we are very proud to have built a relationship with. We are confident John N Dunn Group is in very safe hands, with unfaltering commitment from Stephen and his fellow directors, and is well equipped for the future.”

Meet...

Alistair

He's in his element with a golf green underfoot and iron or driver within reach. We're not sure his handicap quite makes him Tiger Woods, but he loves a round or two with friends ... Fore!

Alistair is our Associate Solicitor in the Dispute Resolution team, He specialises in Employment Law.

Speak to Alistair to see how he can help you call 0191 389 5121 or email alistair.smith@gblf.co.uk



l-r: Alan Dawson, Sintons; Fiona Ewing, Tiny Lives; Catherine McNulty and Charles Penn, Sintons; Louise Carroll, Tiny Lives; Iona Sweeney, Sintons.

Sintons raise £11,500 for Tiny Lives

Law firm Sintons have raised £11,500 for their 2015 charity of the year, Tiny Lives.

Staff at the Newcastle firm held a series of fundraising events throughout the year – including a daring abseil down the side of its headquarters, The Cube, on Barrack Road – to raise vital funds for Tiny Lives, which helps to support and care for premature and sick newborn babies and their families in the Special Care Baby Unit in Newcastle’s RVI hospital.

The money will help to finance the role of Tiny Lives’ full time social worker Fiona Ewing, who works closely with families whose babies are in special care, to help provide vital emotional, practical and financial support at such a difficult time. The charity also provides a hardship fund for parents to access if they need it.

Over the past few years, Sintons has raised tens of thousands of pounds for a number of North East charities, including Macmillan Cancer Support – helping to launch the pioneering ‘Chemotherapy in the Community’ project in Benton, Newcastle – The Sir Bobby Robson Foundation, Downs Syndrome North East and the Charlie Bear Cancer Appeal.

Throughout 2015, Sintons’ staff have visited the RVI Special Care Baby Unit to see first-hand what they were fundraising for.

Alan Dawson, Chairman of Sintons, who took part in the abseil in April, said: “Tiny Lives is an incredible charity and coming to the Special Care Baby Unit has allowed us to see how babies and their families are supported in so many ways. The support offered by Fiona to families who are thrust into a very worrying and unknown situation is invaluable, and we are delighted to be able to support Tiny Lives with their truly brilliant work.”

Carol Meredith, Head of Tiny Lives, said: “Our thanks to everyone at Sintons who rose to some great fundraising challenges for Tiny Lives. Their (sometimes brave) efforts will make a real difference to some of the most vulnerable families in the region by supporting the social worker post and hardship fund that help parents when their baby is on the RVI Special Care Baby Unit.”

Insolvency claims management



Andrew Cawkwell

Litigation can result within insolvency cases and an insolvency practitioner has the right to examine whether or not a director has breached their duties.

For example, if a director enters into new contracts and trades with little ability to pay creditors, they could be accused of wrongful trading and held personally liable for the repayment of certain company debts.

Once the company has entered insolvency, the insolvency practitioner (IP) has a number of options to pursue debts, including litigation. They could ask creditors to fund litigation, although this is not a popular option for creditors.

At present, IPs have been frequently using solicitors and barristers on Conditional Fee Agreements (CFAs). However, recent legislative changes are taking away the ability for IPs to successfully use CFAs, therefore making it harder for practitioners to pursue claims because they lack the funds to do so.

By April 2016, the insolvency exemption that allows CFAs to apply will cease. However, directors should still be aware that IPs now have the ability to sell claims to third parties to pursue, so the insolvency litigation market could see players in

the claims management industry pursuing these new revenue streams.

Legislation came into force in October 2015 to allow them to buy certain types of actions, such as wrongful trading. This could result in a more buoyant insolvency litigation market where funders buy a cause of action and pursue actions against directors.

This means claims are likely to be pursued more rigorously by focused claims companies that aren't distracted by other aspects of an insolvency that IPs deal with, once they have bought the claims to pursue.

At Muckle LLP, we guide directors to avoid personal liabilities and protect them from the effects of potential litigation by demonstrating amongst other things that they've actively received and taken legal advice. The earlier we get involved, the more options remain available to protect directors from personal liability.

Andrew Cawkwell

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The fast & the furious



Jan Dale, Director, urban base

As the property market appears to continue to gain a faster pace, we are seeing more buyers than we are seeing properties. As such, working out which are the good buys from the bad buys can be increasing difficult for any buyer.

Staying committed to buying solely in your preferred location can result in hasty decisions so as to not miss out. Looking a little further afield can offer greater options and indeed more property for your money. Areas which have previously been considered as "out-of town" are now seeing an increase in demand, and regeneration areas such as the Ouseburn are seeing such properties grow in demand with pricing swiftly moving upwards. The difficulty in this type of market can be the bank's surveyors not sharing the buyers' confidence in them borrowing more than the property that recently sold down the road – and sometimes that is the end of the road for a property sale too.

The mortgage market is proving increasingly complex with buyers needing all the help they can get when it comes to securing a mortgage and meeting the lenders criteria including lenders' affordability requirements which vary significantly from one lender to another.

Following the many changes including MMR

(mortgage market review), recent stamp duty changes and the pending MMD (mortgage market directive) there are new rules and affordability guidelines to secure a mortgage. Michael Twedde of Instinct Financial Solutions guides buyers to ensure they can move forward to successfully meet the mortgage application criteria to offer the best home loan for their financial needs and circumstances.

Michael comments that "Helping my clients manage both their present and future credit is an absolute must. There is certainly an increase in the need for a number of new acquired clients to have their credit report at hand prior to a mortgage application. Helping expand our clients understanding on the effect of a slightly late credit card, mobile phone or even a TV package service payment and how it can adversely affect their mortgage options is essential to ensure that they are able to attract the most cost effective mortgage products on the market both now and in the future."

Looking ahead we still believe there remains a slight hesitation from First Time Buyers making

that crucial decision on when to buy a first home. With the average value of a home in Britain today costing £197,044 we still hear feedback on many occasions that clients don't think they have enough deposit and the client fearing the need for so much as a 20% deposit where in fact the positive news is that there is a growing appetite for lending and a growing number of 5% deposit mortgages, with and without help to buy, which includes a recently released impressive mortgage deal offering incentives of free valuation and free legal fees on a home purchases. "While we are very unlikely to see the 100% mortgage ever again the mortgage market is seeing an increasing number of low deposit opportunities and schemes to assist both first time buyers and home movers alike."

So as we move in to spring, and we approach a seasonally Fast & Furious property market, we will welcome the long awaited lighter nights, and longer days. This in turn moves our clients out to their patios and gardens and whether to extend, sell or even consider a second home.... but more on that next month.

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Eslaforde

Castleton Grove, Jesmond



Eslaforde is believed to have been built in the 1930's and occupies a prominent site within this very well sought after central area of Jesmond. This excellent family home has been improved to a high standard with superb entertainment and reception areas, a lovely family kitchen/breakfasting room, four bedrooms, two bathrooms and a substantial roof void which shows potential for further accommodation, subject to planning consents. The house has beautifully landscaped gardens, a private courtyard and parking area, a double garage and electrically operated gates.

Price Guide

£1.39 million

Contact rare! From Sanderson Young

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SELLING THE REGION'S FINEST HOMES



Newlands Grange Shotley Bridge

Newlands Grange is a handsome, Georgian country house that sits amidst well stocked landscaped gardens with far-reaching views over open countryside. The four bedroom property has been renovated in recent years yet retains a host of period features including bespoke timber sash windows, marble fireplaces, panelled doors, high ceilings, decorative cornicing and working shutters. EPC: F

Price Guide: £895,000



Middle Leazes Leazes Lane, Hexham

Middle Leazes, set back from Leazes Lane, enjoys an elevated position with delightful grounds that extend to circa half an acre. The five bedroom house, which has an additional one bedroom guest annexe, is understood to date back to the early 1600s and has been extensively remodelled and extended to provide an impressive detached country home with a great deal of character. EPC: E

Price Guide: £895,000

rare!
From Sanderson Young

Are you ready for the boom?

Hello everyone, and welcome from the whole Wright Residential team and myself Kerrie Dixon.

In days gone by the focus was always on buying a house and getting a foot on the property ladder as quick as you could.

Times change though, and like everything, property matters have seen a seismic shift. Once looked down upon, the letting and renting of properties has become huge business in the last few years. So much so that lettingagenttoday.co.uk reported that the build to let sector alone could be worth up to £50 billion by 2020. That figure is enormous and looks even bigger when you consider it does not include rented properties that are already built.

The sudden surge in the rent and letting market is no surprise though and can be put down, in part to the rise of the young professionals and their ability to move while remaining in cities.

But what does this mean for you? Well if you have a property to let, it could mean that you are about to come into a big windfall.

The letting market is very much a case of supply and demand. The more people looking to rent, the higher the rent tends to be. But from a tenant's point of view, this may look like they are getting the short end of the bargain. Yes, while you may be paying slightly more than maybe initially expected, the sheer size of the letting market today means there a number of legislations and



Kerrie Dixon

laws in place to ensure you aren't conned, robbed or hoodwinked.

Well, whether landlord or tenant, here at Wright Residential we have you covered. For landlords, we will make sure you get a responsible tenant who will pay on time and will treat your property with the utmost respect.

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Until next time, Kerrie

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Luxury homes selling fast in Durham

6 of the available 13 luxury homes at Dere Street Homes' Hill Top Farm development on Pittington Lane near Ramside Hall in Durham have now been sold, less than three months after the showhome opened.



Sales and Marketing Manager, Marie McQuaid, commented, "The interest since we opened the showhome in October has been phenomenal with most visitors returning several times and booking private appointments to talk to our Sales staff in order to understand the options available."

"We were open right up to the festive period to satisfy the demand and actually had one further sale over this period - a testament to the standard of these bespoke homes. We're very proud to have created such a high quality development."

The five bedroom detached Farmhouse showhome has particularly impressed visitors with the interior design making the most of the light filled spaces with contemporary furniture and fittings perfectly matching the modern feel of the home, exemplified by the central 'floating' staircase that has attracted such attention from visitors. The superb open plan ground floor living space is complemented by the cosy family sitting room with one the home's two stoves whilst the double heights of the great room and the garden room fill the home with natural light.

Energy saving has also been a priority at the development with heat recovery systems

extracting the heat from bathroom and kitchen vented air in order to heat fresh air entering the homes. Under-floor heating on ground and first floors combined with open fireplaces and triple glazed windows create the best of both worlds - low energy utilisation alongside abundant light in the homes.

Located adjacent to Ramside Hall Hotel just outside Durham City, Hill Top Farm off Pittington Lane consists of 13 farmstead style, detached and semi-detached luxury homes which come complete with one year's complimentary membership to both the Golf Club and Ramside Hall Hotel's new Spa and Leisure Club.



Prices for homes currently on sale start from £425,000 with full details available from Jan Gill, the on-site Development Sales Manager 07983 080952 or www.derestreehomes.co.uk

Local housebuilder showcases beautiful new homes at Durham development

Tuesday, 12 January 2016: House hunters looking to buy in Durham are urged to visit David Wilson Homes' luxurious Burton Woods development in Spennymoor, where a range of three and four bedroom homes are available to purchase.

The development, set in Whitworth Park, is one of the most successful David Wilson Homes developments in the North East and is surrounded by beautiful countryside, situated just nine miles from the historic city of Durham. Homes at the development are popular with both professionals and families alike.

Buyers visiting Burton Woods can view the Cheadle housetype, a flexible three-bedroom detached home featuring a beautiful open-plan kitchen and dining area with a glazed bay leading to the rear garden, family lounge, utility room and WC. The first floor comprises of two double bedrooms, with an en suite shower room and dressing area to the master bedroom, a single bedroom and family bathroom.

Also available is the Woodbridge housetype, which is a stunning three storey, four-bedroom home with an open plan lounge/dining room with French double doors opening onto the rear



garden and a stylish kitchen providing attractive fitted contemporary units. The first floor boasts two double bedrooms, one single bedroom and a family bathroom. The master bedroom with en suite and dressing area is neatly located on the top floor.

Chris Neal, Sales Manager at Burton Woods, commented:

"Burton Woods is a beautiful development and the properties we have available here are perfect for those looking to get on or move up

the property ladder. We're delighted that the development has been such a success so far and I'd advise hopeful homebuyers to come sooner rather than later to avoid disappointment."

Situated close to a local wildlife haven, Burton Woods is in close proximity to historic local attractions and is in a commuter-friendly location. Both homes at the development are available to purchase using the Help to Buy scheme or David Wilson Homes' Part Exchange scheme, and the Cheadle and Woodbridge are available for £174,995 and £171,500 respectively.

To find out more about David Wilson Homes in the North East, please visit: www.dwh.co.uk

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Claire Parry

Working away from home can often be a lonely and soulless experience. Luckily, week 2 week apartments have found an alternative.

If working away is part of your job, it's got to be done, but it doesn't mean that you enjoy it. A solution to this age-old problem is renting an apartment, but where do you start to even look for them and how can you guarantee that the place will be as comfortable as the home you've left behind?

Family run business, Week 2 Week Apartments in Newcastle offer a selection of properties in Jesmond, Gateshead, Gosforth, the quaysides in Newcastle and Gateshead, St. Peter's Basin, Tynemouth and Newcastle city centre – all of which are of a very high standard and are the perfect place to stay for corporate clients.

Visitors can stay in the same apartment every time they visit the city, if that's what they want, meaning that you really do feel like you're at home.

Fully fitted kitchens with modern cooking facilities ensure that you don't have to encounter dining alone and you can even lounge around in your onesie if the mood takes you!

The booking system is quick, reliable and user-

friendly and when you arrive, even if it's in the middle of the night, there will be a welcome pack for you which includes tea, coffee and fresh milk. If you're after something a little more exotic, then they even offer a Culture Shop, where they will source anything you want to eat, whether it's an Indian curry pack or a Hungarian goulash, they'll scour the city to get what you want!

Claire Parry, 36 from Wideopen is the Company Director and therefore insists on every aspect of her business being run exactly to her high standards.

Claire told us: "We really do move heaven and earth to ensure that our corporate clients stay with us every time they are visiting the city, whether it's for business or pleasure.

"All of our apartments are cleaned every week, bedding is changed regularly and we're always at the end of a phone, 24 hours a day for any emergencies."

The feedback that the company receives is always very positive with their clients rating them an impressive 4.8 out of 5 in surveys carried out.

Clients also have access to a further 55,000

apartments in 132 countries through their alliance with TAS, the body that brings providers together to offer a one-stop-shop to their corporate customers.

The company, which was set up by Claire's mum, Janet Jackson in 2000 has seen the business grow rapidly since Claire re-joined the family business three years ago. Claire's determination to make Week 2 Week Apartments the top of their industry is obvious, which is why she insists that only the best employees work for her.

Claire concluded: "I do have high standards; however this is something that ensures our clients come back to us time and time again. We are only a small team of six, but that doesn't mean we are unable to deliver what the blue chip companies we work for, want. Quite the opposite, they tell us that our hands-on friendly, reliable approach is what makes them come back to us, which is definitely what we want to hear. After all, it never pays to take for granted your client base, which is why we welcome feedback after every visit, that way we can always remain the top of our game."

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Christian Cerisola

Icelandair: It's not bad PR, it's bad business

'A victory for social media,' many will say. And they'd be right.

Remember this recent North East story? It had a happy ending. Former athlete Drew Graham's specialised wheelchair was handed back to him in an unusable state. He'd been on his way back to the UK just before Christmas, flying with Icelandair.

Paralysed Drew broke a vertebrae in a freak diving accident while on holiday in 2014. He arrived back in the UK in December and his wheelchair was handed to him, if not in a thousand tiny pieces, then a good 30 or 40.

But Icelandair refused to accept responsibility for the specially-equipped chair, which cost Drew and his family £20,000. They were sticking rigidly to the rules and were offering the maximum £1,000 baggage damage cover. His dad, Gary spent some days in private dialogue with the airline. No movement. They weren't going to cover the costs to replace the chair like for like.

Exasperated with their lack of acknowledgement and, as a last throw of the dice, Drew and his father took their plight to social media. You can imagine what happened next. It was viral sensation. People from all over the world flooded Icelandair's social media channels criticizing their heartless response.

The groundswell of bad publicity, negative comments and bombardment of Icelandair's social media channels hit the chief executive right where it hurt. Type 'Drew Graham Icelandair' into Google. The story made headlines around the world.

Just a few days after Gary took Drew's plight

public, initially via Facebook, he not only had the promise of a new chair from Icelandair, but they promised to upgrade Drew's wheelchair to something far more sophisticated and advanced.

A win-win, surely. Drew and his family are thrilled with the result and, very gracefully, publicly thanked the company on their social media channels to the same extent he'd criticised them in the first place.

But what about Icelandair? How do we feel about them? Well, congratulations for eventually reaching the right result, but I suggest they have far deeper problems if they think they too can box off the experience and move on.

Drew's dad fought with the company for acknowledgement of the damage they'd caused and the massive effect it had on Drew's quality of life. There was no movement from them UNTIL they realised they were in the eye of a violent PR storm. It's only THEN that they take appropriate action. Too late.

Had their culture been right in the first instance, had that first customer services representative, their manager and their manager above that – as this must have gone through quite a chain to reach the chief exec – had any sense of empowerment in their roles to say 'wait, this is wrong. We must replace this guy's chair immediately,' then the whole story simply would not have got to the stage it did.

Have a look at Icelandair's closing comment on this. A spokesman said: "We are glad that this issue has been happily resolved. Again we at



Pic: Gary Graham Facebook

Icelandair apologise for failing to realise Drew's unique situation earlier."

Everyone knew Drew's unique position from the off. They simply chose not to act, they chose to stick to the rules.

There's something wrong with the imbedded culture of that company that no PR crisis management manual could ever really repair fully. I hope Icelandair are studying this one closely and arriving at a result that suggests their entire culture needs urgent attention, because this wasn't bad PR, it was rank bad business.



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“I was very impressed not only by the work but also by the obvious amount of research and thought the Silver Bullet team had put into the whole project. They asked the right questions and came up with great ideas within a tight deadline.”

David Knox, Managing Director, AssetWatch Ltd

Do you have a marketing question you have always wanted to ask? Ask:SB

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John Dias, Managing Director of Silver Bullet

Ask Silver Bullet

As a Newcastle business, we'd like to target students as potential customers but we're not sure how to reach them?

With over 50,000 full time students at Newcastle (23,000) and Northumbria (30,000) Universities, including around 9,000 international students, the student market represents a huge opportunity and, given the city's total population of around 315,000, a significant proportion of the local market.

For the property developers this group of people has come as a huge boom with student accommodation blocks now forming a massive proportion of the construction sector within the City whilst leisure operators, taxi companies and other specialist consumer goods suppliers have cause to be more than grateful for Newcastle's reputation as a great city for students.

So, dependent on what services or goods you wish to market to this transient population, are there any general guidelines to student marketing?

The first point is actually not to generalise (although this short article will, due to space constraints!) – the student population is not a homogeneous group but rather a group of different people with different tastes and

aspirations – the old stereotype of white, middle class 18-21 year olds who drink a lot, live on baked beans, do no work until deadlines loom and spend all summer out of their minds in Ibiza simply isn't true. You need to understand their behaviour, spending patterns (which vary greatly depending on the time of year and state of their finances) and ethos – these are bright young people, full of ideals (a recent survey revealed 97% of students interviewed said ethics were important to their purchase decisions, resulting in students being 51% more likely than other adults to purchase products with ethical credentials).

So ditch the spin, they will see straight through anything that isn't 100% truthful and be creative rather than trot out the same old hackneyed campaigns – it's been proven that the quality of your creative work is the single biggest driver of advertising profitability (Top 10 Drivers of Profitable Advertising, Data2Decisions for Admap, 01/09/2014). Campaigns need to be creative, clever or entertaining if you want to engage with this audience with unsolicited or valueless messaging easily filtered out by this tech-savvy audience. Also, don't try to be 'cool'

if it's not an inherent part of your organisation – you'll just end up looking like 'Dad at a disco'...

Reaching these groups isn't all about social media either, although this is great for promotional offers, with more traditional channels such as TV and outdoor advertising also being an important part of the marketing mix. The majority of students actually list email as their preferred channel to link to brands but most are also opposed to direct marketing messages – again, campaigns have to be clever.

Whilst price is just as important to students as it is to other groups, this isn't at the expense of quality – students like the finer things in life but will compromise over the year as money gets increasingly tight often switching from brands to own brands for consumer goods. They are also more likely to make purchases online with most progressively using smart phones over laptops as their weapon of choice.

So, be truthful, be creative and remember that this huge sector represents not only your present market, but also potentially your future market if you can retain them as increasingly higher earning customers over the years to come.

Do you need to some assistance with your marketing? Do you need to review your strategy or do you have another marketing question we can help with? Talk to us. Email your questions anonymously to us today hello@silverbulletmarketing.co.uk or Tweet us (not so anonymously) @SilverBulletPR and use the hash tag #AskSB

Recruitment & Promotion at Hedley McEwan

Following a record 5th year in business which saw many new client wins and a move into new offices at St Peter's Wharf, creative business, Hedley McEwan have further strengthened their team and are on the lookout for more new talent.



Joe Haynes joins Hedley McEwan after 10 years at Different, where he was an Account Director. Prior to that, Joe was with Robson Brown, working across various disciplines and is widely experienced in a number of sectors.

Meanwhile, **Ruth Mattera** has been promoted to the role of Creative Services Director. Ruth has worked at Hedley McEwan since the company formed in 2011 and has worked alongside Tom Hedley and Duncan McEwan for over 15 years. Her new role sees her helping to lead the company into the next phase of its development and to help manage the anticipated growth over the next few years.

Speaking of these appointments, Joint Managing Director Tom Hedley commented, "We couldn't be more proud to have people of this calibre working for us and hopefully, their being part of our very talented team says a lot about the ambition of the company."



He added, "As part of that ambition, we are also on the lookout for the next stars of our business, with opportunities for Creative Designers and Account Handlers. We want to offer talented people a real opportunity to work alongside, and learn from, what I truly believe to be the best pool of creative talent in the region."



Sorry, we couldn't resist the nautical reference. You see we've just moved into our new waterfront office at the extremely tranquil St.Peter's Marina in Newcastle. The sentiment however, is genuine. We're in the business of helping brands make the most of themselves by applying creativity to marketing objectives. Give us a ring, of the telephone type, if you think we could help you.



PR and marketing resolutions that will aid business growth



Sarah Hall

A New Year always brings new resolutions. Here are ten PR and marketing ones to get 2016 off to a successful start.

1) Ensure your website is up to date

What's the first thing you do when you want to know about a product or company? You go straight to the website. How do you feel when it's poorly designed and the copy's out of date? Enough said.

2) Get to grips with SEO

SEO stands for Search Engine Optimisation – where you appear in search results when someone googles your product or service – and is key for anyone with an online presence. Don't neglect it. If you can't do it yourself, get a specialist to help. It needn't cost the earth and the right people will help you upskill in this area too.

3) Develop your blog and post regularly

If you want your website to appear higher in search results, regular blog posts are key and give you fresh content to share on social media platforms. The companies achieving the greatest cut through are generally those who have realised they don't need to rely on traditional media because they can be publishers and broadcasters too. They also use their blog to answer questions that their customers are searching for – always keep your audience in mind so content is relevant.

4) Check your security settings

Ok so I'm appalling at this but there is nothing

worse than losing precious earning / selling time because of a security threat or virus wreaking havoc when these are easily preventable if you invest a little time and money.

5) Refine your stakeholder databases

Along with your website, your customer database is arguably your most powerful sales tool. Sadly it's also one of the ones most frequently neglected. Set time aside quarterly to update and de-dupe and consider new ways of leveraging it.

6) Audit all your marketing literature

One of the first things we do when working with a new client is audit their marketing materials to see whether it's all needed, works efficiently and needs updating. Could you benefit from doing this? You might find budget can be reallocated elsewhere and/or it's time to refresh your corporate tone and look.

7) Set measurable goals and evaluate activity properly

There is absolutely no point doing any PR and marketing activity if you're not measuring it because you can't tell what's working and what's not. Even if you're not able to measure behaviour change and brand awareness, there are some quick and dirty metrics that can keep you on the straight and narrow.

8) Build in time for networking

The route to success here is to choose the events you attend carefully, regularly set up one to one meetings and nurture the relationships you make. Don't forget there are lots of ways to network online too for example through #northeasthour and others based on location/sector.

9) Join an industry body

One of the most rewarding work-related things I've done is join the CIPR and PRCA to play my part in taking the industry forward. In return I've met some of PR's leading lights, extended my network, and have access to all the latest skills guides, which aids my CPD. It's certainly challenged and developed me for the better as a consultant – think about how you could benefit from joining an industry body too and make signing up a priority.

10) Commit to give back

Life is short and at times we all need a helping hand along the way. I'm grateful to those who give their time when I need support or advice and always try to help when people approach me. As a Trustee for the Chronicle Sunshine Fund I use my skills and networks to help it raise awareness as well as much needed funds. This type of give back is only right and proper. What could you and your business be doing to help make our society better?

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Four digital marketing resolutions you can stick to



Brett Jacobson, Managing Director, Mediaworks

With 2015 quickly fading into memory, we're all looking forward to the opportunities 2016 will bring. If you've already vowed to make your brand a priority this year, Mediaworks' Managing Director, Brett Jacobson, shares his four digital marketing resolutions to help build your business online.

1. Commit to social media

Already a dominant digital force, social media is a great way to connect with your existing and potential audience. In 2016, it's estimated that the total number of social media users will grow to 2.13 billion.

If your Twitter account is dormant and your Facebook page has been forgotten, it's time to change. Keeping your feeds regularly updated with fresh, interesting content and interacting on a personal level will help engage your core audience, maintaining your brand at the forefront of their mind.

There's more to social than 140 characters though — it offers fantastic potential in terms of paid search advertisements too. Facebook and Twitter already dominate the field, while LinkedIn, Pinterest and Instagram are rapidly developing their offerings. Devise a strategy and set aside a budget for ads to ensure you can effectively promote your products and services across the most suitable channels.

2. Don't ignore mobile

Last year, Google confirmed that more Google searches take place on mobile devices than desktop PCs in ten countries. Despite this, many brands are still neglecting mobile.

As the saying goes, if you don't look after your customers someone else will. Fail to meet a user's mobile needs and they'll find someone who can. Make mobile your priority this year and ensure your site is friendly to all portable devices. Not only will it improve the overall user experience, it could secure you a larger share of the lucrative mobile market.

3. Go personal

In the past, digital marketers were slaves to the search engine. Focusing their energy on manipulating rankings for their own benefit, they forgot the user. Things are very different in 2016 - the user is your primary focus.

Whether you're improving the functionality

of your site or crafting informative content, everything you do is for the user. Create a digital strategy that combines Google's requirements with your users' needs. Go above and beyond to set yourself apart and make sure that your brand has a personal voice.

4. Experiment with new tools and strategies

In the ever-changing digital landscape, stagnancy can be the final nail in your brand's coffin. Digital marketing moves quickly - fail to keep up and you'll almost certainly be left behind.

You have the opportunity to change this in 2016. While the same-old strategies and tools can be something of a comfort blanket for your brand, you should have the courage to wonder 'what if?' Don't shy away from new tools and ways of working - embrace them. Who knows what kind of doors it could open for you this year.

Need advice on conquering the digital domain? Contact Mediaworks today on 0191 404 0100.



Ayesha Arundel

Knowing me knowing you - The importance of personality

Hello from the team at JAM marketing and a big welcome to this month's column.

One of the things that are often taken for granted in marketing, the media, and even life as a whole, is people. The first thing I learnt when training was that everyone has a story to tell. Think about it. How many people do you talk to day to day that turn out to be fascinating?

From the man who once interviewed Sir Bobby Robson, to the woman who applied to be part of the Mars One mission, I can think of a few off the top of my head!

Talking then, is a huge resource, and being approachable is something that should not, and cannot be undervalued. In marketing this is even more vital.

How could you expect to get the best for a client without being talkative and personal with them? With that in mind, you can see how things

would fall apart in the relationship between marketing company and client if the talking stops.

Of course that is not to say you should bombard them with phone calls and emails double checking every little thing! Regular contact is a good idea but badgering could have the same effect as having no contact at all so there's a happy medium to be found.

So how do you find this balance between nuisance and absence?

First of all, plan ahead. Make a list of all your clients, and pencil them in for regular chats to ensure everything is going well. This could be done once a month, fortnightly or even weekly, depending on the needs you gather from your clients. Scheduling calls or face-to-face meetings will also allow the client to feedback any improvements to you and the services you offer.

Of course if there's an issue that needs solving ring as soon as possible, that goes without saying!

As you are making contact regularly, it would be a good idea to know what you want from each meeting. Make a list of questions you want to ask and information you want to find out and don't worry if the list is long. Chances are clients will be happier to address more issues now than be bombarded with phone calls all week.

Finally, don't forget to smile! It might sound silly, but a smiling face really does make the difference. Research has shown that smiling makes you appear more approachable and in a business where you are meeting any number of people a day – many of them potential new clients – a smile could be your most cost effective strategy.

Until next time! – Ayesha

Remember whatever your marketing and PR needs you can get in touch with us at JAM Marketing on 0845 900 2127 or e-mail us on info@jam-marketing.co.uk.



Age UK Gateshead Winter Fashion Show

On the 26th November Age UK Gateshead held their first winter fashion show at the Marriott Metro centre. The fundraising event was a celebration of North East talent, showcasing a variety of local collections from recent fashion graduates collections to local boutiques on the runway and featuring in their market hall.

The evening was a success showcasing a selection of winter themed collections taken from day to night, entertainment from a Jesmond duo Pete Reily & Miles Taylor and a raffle including £100 As You Like It vouchers and an afternoon tea at Catpawcino.

A number of special guests brought the event to life including the evenings host Tom Campbell from Heart Radio who had the audience tweeting suggestions of band names for the evenings performance duo (including Miles and Pete and the Philosophers Stone), brought the audience together in a chorus of happy birthday to you as well as attempting to match make two of the events raffle winners.

Other special guests taking part to celebrate the good course were Gateshead Fc team who stepped out of the football field and on to the catwalk modelling a selection of male ranges from; Matalan, Hotspur 1364 and Humbug. The female models accompanied the gentlemen modelling collections from Matalan, BRM studio, The Trend Fashion, Fash1 and a range of second hand items for Age UK Gateshead's charity shop.

Gateshead footballer and model, Sam Russell said: "The show has been a brilliant laugh, but done in a professional manner for a fantastic cause. We all look amazing, which is a bonus."

The money raised from this event will be used to support our Winter Warmth Campaign for many older people the winter months can be a large struggle which many must tackle alone.

The cold weather can cause serious health problems for older people; each winter, 1 older person dies needlessly every 7 minutes from the cold - that's 200 deaths a day that could be prevented.

Throughout the winter months Age UK Gateshead's Information and Advice service are here to help our older community through the winter warm and well, providing them with advice, support, advocacy services and benefit checks to ensure they get everything they need this winter.

Age UK Gateshead Campaign and Fundraising Co-coordinator said; "Age UK Gateshead's first winter fashion show was a wonderful evening, I'm so appreciative to everyone who helped make the event such a success. I can't thank Tom Campbell enough for hosting he brought the event to life ensuring everyone left the Marriott in high spirits. It was a great evening celebrating North East talent whilst raising money to help continue the work we do at Age UK Gateshead. Watch this space for future events! "



nesma - digital tools



Aimee Muirhead

"We forget that digital tools are actually supposed to make our lives easier. And used correctly, they can." So wrote Alexandra Samuel in Harvard Business Review in June 2015.

At nesma we believe that digital tools are there to help you in key areas:

- *to listen*
- *to learn*
- *THEN to lead the thinking*
- *launch campaigns*
- *lobby for support*
- *link people and products*

The tools are different and you use them in different ways depending on whether you are in PR, marketing and sales. The boundaries between the interrelated disciplines are blurring but in essence:

- *PR is about reputation, what you do, what you say, what others say about you.*
- *Marketing is identifying, anticipating and satisfying customer needs.*
- *Sales is converting an enquiry or lead into a sale, the exchange of a product or service for cash.*

The range of courses at nesma puts digital into context. We work with and are accredited by CIM/CAM, CIPR and the DMI.

One student who studied both CAM and DMI courses is Aimee Muirhead, now Digital Account Manager at Narrative Integrated Communications, whose clients include Berghaus, Mattel and University of Cumbria.

Aimee Muirhead sums how PR, marketing and digital can all work together:

Why did you choose the courses?

I studied some PR and journalism at university, but after graduation I wanted a course which could provide more extensive knowledge and theory which could be done whilst working full time.

The CAM Marcomms Diploma provided me with sound marketing and consumer behaviour theory and gave me an insight into what I could make of my career in future. I really enjoyed the course content and it was a great opportunity to network with other students working in marketing in the North East.

A year later, the DMI Professional Diploma was exactly what I wanted to help progress my career and to develop my skillset. I wanted to specialise in digital marketing, and I was looking for a tactical course to support the theory (and work experience) I already had.

How did the courses help you at St Oswald's?

At St Oswald's, my broad marketing communications knowledge enabled me to progress quickly and to support my colleagues across PR, internal communication, sales promotion and direct marketing to enhance the profile of the charity locally and nationally, and crucially to support fundraising.

Being able to analyse markets and previous marketing activity, and then produce clear, informed strategies was key to success, and the CAM Diploma undoubtedly helped me to become confident at doing so.

On the other hand, my DMI Diploma enabled me to gain a promotion and author the charity's inaugural digital strategy – something which I was very proud of.

I subsequently supported a new website project, led a variety of digital projects including the launch of St Oswald's ecommerce department, and the growth of online fundraising.

How do the courses help you today at Narrative?

I'm responsible for paid and organic digital marketing for clients and my role requires me to combine strategy and theory of marketing and consumer behaviour with up to date knowledge and applications of digital and social media.

It's also essential that my plans integrate with the clients' marketing and thus having a background in PR and marcomms is extremely beneficial.

Understanding the other disciplines, and having some experience in most of them allows me to think holistically and how digital can support the client effectively.

How important do you think it is to have an understanding of PR and marketing before doing digital?

For me, digital marketing brings together PR, media buying, design and market research together in one place – and crucially, it doesn't stand alone. The basics (and complexities) of marketing communications is applicable to digital marketing just like any other type of marketing but it's how you combine these with the advantages and opportunities of digital media which makes campaigns, and brands, stand out.

Lessons learnt in business



Wayne Halton

Wayne Halton is a Director and joint owner of MHW PR, a leading North East business to business PR and marketing agency. Last year he and fellow Director Ian Watson celebrated 15 years in business. Here Wayne discusses some of the lessons he has learnt from a personal perspective and also from working with many regional businesses.

Focus

It's important to be clear about your direction of travel, what you offer and what you're about as a business. This seems pretty obvious, but I've met many businesses who seem fairly vague and floppy on the matter. We've learnt to stick to things we do best, while being flexible enough to adapt to a changing media and digital landscape.

Business values

The strongest businesses and best performing clients I've met or worked for have a very clear set of principles they work to. These could be called 'brand values' but are often intrinsic and instinctive to the owner manager. They're often an unwritten code; people treating other people – suppliers and customers - as they would hope to be treated. We aim to be open and honest with all people we deal with. I try to be that 'critical friend' to clients, a balancing act that's got me into hot water more than once.

Hard work

Running your own business isn't all fun and glamour. It's regularly hard work. Forget any idea of working 9-5 or having a five day working week. The work/life balance can be a challenge. But as the employer you enjoy more control in

your destiny than as an employee and are able to quickly make decisions that can make a difference. The fun comes from meeting a challenge head on, developing a creative solution and winning.

Expect failure and the unexpected

There will be some failure on the journey. In business, you need to be resilient and a little thick skinned. Also, you must try to learn from mistakes, move on and not repeat. Accept that best made plans don't always go to plan; you need to keep a cool head in a crisis and be agile enough to change direction, particularly if it's on behalf of a client.

Quality of work

Businesses only succeed long-term if they have great products or deliver consistently good service. Ian and I have been lucky to have worked with some great owner managers and world class companies while at MHW. It's a thrill working with business owners who give a damn about their products and level of service; it's infectious. Sometimes the passion and drive for genuine quality gets lost in the big corporates that behave more like machines. We develop strong relationships and understanding with our clients, always striving to do the best for them.

People

Good, honest, hard-working people build and maintain strong businesses. We've currently got a good team at MHW – a mix of personalities with different skills, developed from different experiences. We have former national and regional journalists, marketers and young PR graduates. Recruiting and managing people is definitely one of the harder things I've had to do. I've had some fabulous failures, but these have been compensated by some great appointments of people who have grown, and left to prosper and develop their own careers; some remain good friends.

Profit and loss

Businesses that have focus, a set of values, good products and service along with a motivated team of people will invariably succeed and create profit. We've never taken our eye off the bottom line, always remembering the truism that 'turnover is vanity'. In a fee-earning business it's all about understanding yields and margins. And if you put your clients first, look after them, then they tend to stick with you and recommend you to others. For a small, specialist consultancy like MHW, we need to maintain a pipeline of new leads but don't have to behave like a cold-calling business development machine.

For more information about MHW and what experienced PR practitioners can do for your business visit www.mhwpr.co.uk or call Wayne Halton on 0191 233 1300.

North East technology firm expands head office team



Specialist Tyneside technology business, Synergi IT, has expanded its head office as part of a national development programme.

SharePoint consultant Dave Tansley joins the team with fifteen years of IT experience including SharePoint and the wider Microsoft product range, specialising in intranets and internet facing websites.

The company, led by directors Peter Joynson and Justin Short, recently relocated from offices at Gateshead Quays to larger premises at The Watermark, Gateshead, which reflects the steady growth of the business.

Dave, a hands on developer and systems architect, joins the 18 strong team of IT specialists following a range of significant contract wins, which have put Synergi well on target to achieve sales of around £2m within three years.

Dave, who is 41 and from Gosforth, Newcastle, said: "I am looking forward to developing my career with a successful and growing company which shares the same outlook as I do on technology and its importance to businesses in the North East. The Microsoft cloud and Office365 offer fantastic advantages to companies; providing reliability, security and meeting a range of business needs."

In his most recent role, Dave was a Technical

Strategy Director based in London, working on a productised intranet-in-a-box solution for SharePoint Online for a Microsoft gold partner.

Synergi IT is enjoying particular success marketing and implementing a range of Microsoft's cloud based technologies including Office 365, SharePoint, along with Nintex and associated products.

Justin Short said: "We are looking forward to Dave becoming a key member of our head office team at such an exciting time for Synergi. His experience, skills and knowledge of IT will all be welcome additions to the overall expertise of the team."

BI leads niche IT sector growth in 2016

The rise of business intelligence (BI), big data, cloud security and IoT (Internet of Things) and real-time data science will be the dominant issues for the niche information technology sector in 2016, predicts Newcastle specialist IT recruiters, SearchBI.

Directors, Richard Deas and Mark Harbottle, at SearchBI, which supplies to specialist national

markets, see 'huge' demand for self-service business IT in the next 12 months, along with a heightened focus on understanding the customer journey.

These together with the 'dramatic' increase in cloud-based/analytics solutions' spend and demand for highly skilled people will drive even more growth in some of the most dynamic IT sectors.

Richard Deas said: "Next year, we will see BI and analytics reach new heights. As advanced data technologies emerge, businesses will process and store more information than ever before. As a result, they will be looking for a next-generation BI and analytics platform that helps them tap into the power of their data, whether in the cloud or on-premises."

New telephone deal gives fish and chip supplier Advantex

A Gateshead technology firm is 'frying' high after winning a contract to supply a new internet-based telephone system to the UK's oldest independent supplier to the fish and chip market.

Advantex Network Solutions Ltd, which specialises in telecoms and IT infrastructure

services, has won the work to supply and install the IP (internet protocol) phone technology and a new wireless network at Henry Colbeck's Team Valley and Coatbridge sites.

The investment will create improvements in productivity and customer service levels while delivering cost savings and performance benefits

for Henry Colbeck Ltd, which supplies thousands of fish and chip takeaways and restaurants with palm oil, dripping, batter, fish, frozen food and packaging.

Henry Colbeck will also be taking advantage of the government's Business Connection Vouchers scheme to fund some of the cost.

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SERVICES.**

How would you cope with disaster?



Garry Sheriff, Managing Director of ITPS

Garry Sheriff, Managing Director of IT experts ITPS, takes a look at how businesses can prepare for the unexpected.

Recent pictures of businesses and homes around the region devastated by flood water are a sober reminder of the power of external factors such as the weather.

As a business owner, getting a phone call to tell you that your premises are flooded would be devastating. Knowing that your backup disks or tapes were half-way down the river would be catastrophic.

While we can't control environmental factors we can put business continuity plans in place to deal with their potential effects. Assessing the threats to people, systems and premises and putting measures in place to deal with them puts you in a strong position if disaster should strike.

A good business continuity plan is built on the foundations of a well thought out backup, test and recovery cycle.

Backup: Protecting the growing amounts of Big Data and critical systems is a challenge for every organisation but the right backup strategy requires more effort than simply running a backup every so often. Although often seen as a background function, backup is actually one of the cornerstones of a healthy business.

Each plan is individual and to create yours you need to consider how much downtime your business can live with, whether you want to backup systems, applications and data every time

or whether you can live with doing daily data backup combined with monthly systems and applications. Also consider whether you need on or offsite backup.

Testing: We come across numerous organisations who despite having a test schedule in their backup plan, don't comply with it and are horrified to find their backup doesn't work, right at the point when they need it. You don't want to find out your tapes have corroded or your hardware has failed on the day you urgently need to restore your data.

Recovery: You need to think about your recovery point and time objectives. Recovery point means the time lapse between backups and therefore the data that could be lost, while recovery objective means the maximum time you can live without access to systems and data. Banks and emergency services may opt for zero point and time objectives, but your business might be able to live with a little downtime and a later recovery point.

People: Once you have established that your systems and data are protected, you need to consider where to physically house your business, and workspace recovery centres are the obvious choice. These secure, fully equipped spaces are kept ready for staff to move into at a moment's notice, and give you access to all the systems and data you need to run your business in the event

of an interruption.

When we created the North East's largest ISO9001-certified Tier 3 data centre our clients asked us to build extra space and facilities into our workspace recovery services suite that could be used as and when they needed it, and not just for emergencies.

As a result we included 20,000sq ft of project, build and repair areas all equipped with high speed secure connectivity and support facilities, VoIP telephony, workstations with PCs, printers, copiers and faxes, plus meeting and recreational rooms.

As well as being 24/7 ready for emergency use, the workspace recovery centre is proving useful for clients with a need for extra, fully kitted out space to call on when there is pressure on existing resources and teams. For instance one of our manufacturing clients used it after invoking their disaster recovery plan when their premises were flooded, another client in the utilities sector housed a specific project team there for several months, and a third regularly uses the meeting spaces for off-site strategy meetings.

Business continuity can't prevent disasters but it can help you plan how to deal with them. To refer you back to the start of this piece, if a flood warning was issued for the area around your premises tonight, are you happy that you have the right plans in place to cope?

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Michael Gramshlaw meets

James Rickerby

Owner of Rickerby Executive Car Services

What were your career ambitions growing up?

From an early age I wanted to be my own boss and every job I had along the way was with that aim in mind but even though I've now achieved that I still want to do more.

Briefly outline your career path for the readers?

If nothing else varied with a number of random jobs along the way.

I loved Art when I left school and spent a period of time painting David Winter Cottages similar to Lilliput Lane. I then ended up doing factory work with Chic Cane and Pine which was very intense but good fun also.

After subsequent spells in retail and managing petrol stations I moved into the taxi industry where I decided I wanted to launch a full car service business.

Describe a typical day?

There isn't one and I love the sheer variety of the work. We have clients based all over the world and the business is multi national which means I am often on call 24 hours a day.

Recently we worked with the Saudi Royal Family. All in a days work!

Is there a mantra you aspire to when doing business?

When I collect clients if given the opportunity I always like to ask their secrets to success. I suppose the most common one I hear and my favourite is "do the right things consistently and do them often."

What is your proudest business achievement?

Recently celebrating 10 years in business, enduring the recession and thriving in a bespoke industry.

What is your business plan going forward?

Looking after our clients as best as we can. I know that's pretty simplistic but its true...also more investment with into our range of vehicles.

Who are your heroes in and out of business?

A personal friend called Neil Martin who I worked for. Simply a great guy with a fabulous work ethic. If I can be half the man he is I will be very happy.

What advice would you give to your 18 year old self?

Grab every opportunity and always look to grow. Le jour viendra (the day will come)

How do you relax?

Sometimes with great difficulty as I am often thinking of the next project. However I love drawing,reading,socialising and most importantly catching up with family and friends.



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Benfield and Lookers team up to support Prince's Trust & Samsung Celebrate Success Awards



Lookers, the new name for Benfield Motor Group, have teamed up to show further support and commitment to the Prince's Trust charity by sponsoring this year's Rising Star category at the 'Princes Trust Samsung Celebrate Success' awards held at the Sage Gateshead.

Inspirational young people from the North East were honoured at a prestigious royal awards ceremony, which recognised the achievements of disadvantaged young people who have succeeded against the odds, improved their chances in life and had a positive impact on their local community.

Gavin Ruddick, Lookers Aftersales Director, said, "Benfield and Lookers are proud to have supported this year's 'Celebrate Success Awards' and welcomed the opportunity to highlight the fantastic achievements of young people here in the North East.

"As a long time supporter of The Prince's Trust, we are particularly proud to have sponsored the 'Rising Star Award' which recognises those young people who, despite having faced substantial personal obstacles, are in sustainable employment as a result of a Prince's Trust programme.

"We are passionate about working with local communities; providing

them with the support and opportunities that are vital to help them succeed.

"Celebrate Success represents a significant date in the North East's awards calendar and illustrates the huge collective effort being made by organisations across the North East to help create a promising future for our young people- something that we feel proud and privileged to be a part of," he added.

The ceremony recognised young people who have overcome issues such as abuse, drug addiction, homelessness and depression.

Youth charity The Prince's Trust gives disadvantaged young people the skills and confidence to find a job. Three in four young people helped by The Prince's Trust move into work, training or education.

The overall winner of the Rising Star award was Thomas Nobrega who despite having faced substantial personal obstacles is in sustainable employment as a result of a Prince's Trust programme.

Iconic all-new Mustang takes centre stage at Jennings Ford



Colin Massey, sales manager at Jennings Ford in Middlesbrough, with the all-new right-hand-drive 5.0-litre V8 GT Ford Mustang.

The powerful and dynamic all-new Mustang is now available at Jennings Ford, part of the multi-award winning Jennings Motor Group.

The group's Cargo Fleet Lane dealership in Middlesbrough took delivery of the top of the range right-hand-drive 5.0-litre V8 GT Ford Mustang Convertible model just before Christmas and since arriving in the showroom, the latest model in the award-winning Ford line-up, has been attracting attention and generating test drives.

First launched in 1964, this is the first time a right-hand-drive model has been available in UK dealerships.

Customers looking to purchase the model can choose between two engines, including a 5-litre V8-equipped, or the entry level 2.3-litre EcoBoost petrol engine.

There is also the choice between a six-speed manual or six-speed automatic transmissions and the option of either 'Convertible' or 'Fastback' bodystyles.

Colin Massey, sales manager at Jennings Ford in Middlesbrough, said; "We're delighted to be able to offer our customers the right-hand-side option of the all-new Ford Mustang model, which has been turning heads since the moment it arrived in the showroom."

Perfectly proportioned from every angle, the all-new Ford Mustang 'Convertible' is guaranteed to leave a lasting impression. An entirely new folding mechanism enables the roof to fold away in seconds, deep into the body to maintain the

car's streamline appearance and aerodynamics.

Customers opting for the ultra-modern 'Fastback' version with its long bonnet flowing downwards to reduce drag, can enjoy distinctive headlamp and rear light designs, along with other signature features, in addition to the latest technologies.

Standard specification on the UK model includes 19" alloy wheels, a performance brake package, xenon headlights, LED tail-lights and a rear diffuser. The interior gets dual-zone climate control and Ford's latest SYNC2 infotainment system with nine speakers and an 8" coloured touchscreen. This high-resolution display gives intuitive control of several key functions including phone, audio, climate control and optional navigation via voice or touch.

Behind the wheel of the all-new Mustang and at the flick of a simple switch, motorists can change between four different modes, including Normal, Sport Plus, Track and Snow/Wet, with each setting adjusting throttle response, gearshift points (on automatic transmission models) steering effort and stability control calibration.

Electric Power-Assisted Steering (EPAS) automatically adjusts to provide easier lighter steering when you're parked in a tight spot, and firmer steering for more control on motorways. Unlike conventional power-assisted steering that operates continuously and consumes energy and

fuel, Ford's EPAS only operates when required, helping to improve fuel economy.

Other features include Hill Start Assist, which stops you rolling backwards or forwards when making a hill start, in addition to AdvanceTrac Electronic Stability Control (ESC) designed to give greater control of the vehicle and Electronic Line-Lock, which is an entirely new feature and technology that's unique to the new Mustang.

Customers visiting Jennings Ford's dealership in Middlesbrough can take advantage of the entire new Ford car line-up with everything including the Ka, Fiesta, Fiesta ST, Focus, Focus ST, Mondeo, all-new Vignale, C-MAX, Grand C-MAX, B-MAX, S-MAX, Galaxy and EcoSport on display and available to test drive.

The dealership also provides a Motability service to customers who are eligible to lease a vehicle through the programme. Dedicated Motability specialists and deputies are on hand to give professional advice and guidance and discuss the variety of models available.

In addition to the new car range, customers can also take advantage of a number of aftersales facilities with a service, MOT, accident repair centre and parts department on site.

Jennings Ford also operates dealerships at Yarm Road in Stockton and Eslington Park in Gateshead, in addition to two Ford Transit Centres also based in Stockton and Gateshead.

For more information about the range of products and services available at Jennings Ford in Middlesbrough, contact 01642 240055, or visit www.jenningsmotorgroup.co.uk



Virgin Train's Media & PR Manager Richard Salkeld celebrates his 30th Birthday in style at The Baltic Kitchen.

A host of North East celebrities turned out for former ITV Tyne Tees Richard Salkeld's 30th Birthday Party at the Baltic Kitchen with #richard30 trending on twitter throughout the night! Richard who is now Media & PR Manager at Virgin Trains, posed for photo's with a giant train ticket invite including ITV Tyne Tees news anchor Pam Royle & weatherman Ross Hutchinson, Miss Newcastle Melissa Crawford, Mr Gay Universe and one half of Metro Radio's breakfast show, Steve Furnell.



Out & About –

Bishop Auckland

Stationmaster Alex Nelson has been suggesting places to go by train each month for ten years. For February, he takes a look around Bishop Auckland.

Great things are afoot in Bishop Auckland!

Last year I had an hour with Jonathan Ruffer, the visionary wealth manager and barrister who first bought the 13 paintings of Jacob and his Twelve Sons in Auckland Castle from the Church Commissioners and then bought the Castle to keep them in.

The Castle and tearooms have been closed for winter maintenance during January and reopen on Monday, 1st February. Throughout the year, they are open every day except Tuesdays, and the admission is £6 for adults and free for under 16s.

Auckland Castle offers guided tours at 1130 and 1430 every day (no extra charge), obviously excluding Tuesdays, and you can see the splendid rooms and vistas as well as the paintings by Francisco de Zurbarán (1598-1664). The former banqueting hall was converted into a chapel by Bishop Cosin in 1665. There are other events throughout the year, details on the website, including the popular Bishop Auckland Food Festival which this year is on 23/24 April 2016. A walk in the park costs nothing, although you might get your shoes rather muddy so take boots. The Deer Shelter is in the care of English Heritage but there is no charge to walk round it.

Ten trains a day run to Bishop Auckland, which is a branch from the main line at Darlington. So to get there, head for Darlington first. A visit to Bishop Auckland can easily be combined with a free visit to Locomotion, the branch of the National Railway Museum. On arrival at Bishop Auckland, walk up Newgate Street which is the straight shopping street heading north to the Market Place and turn right for Auckland Castle where the Bishop of Durham still has an office, although he lives elsewhere in the town. It takes about 15 minutes to walk to the Castle, which is the focal point of a one-man effort to regenerate a whole town. Even the mediocre old Postchaise and Queen's Head hotels are being remodelled to create one single midmarket boutique hotel. Already there are 30,000 visitors a year now, compared to 800 when the Bishops were in residence. "I don't want it to be interesting", says Jonathan, "I want it to be astonishing." This summer there's something really astonishing: an epic production on the land to the north of the Castle called KYNREN, the epic story of England, covering 2,000 years on a 7.5 acre stage including a large lake, with 1,000 performers and crew.

The scale is truly breathtaking – I saw progress on the site even during my hour with Mr. Ruffer.

KYNREN will be performed on 14 occasions over the summer of 2016, starting from Saturday 2 July until Saturday 17th September. It's on various Fridays, Saturdays and one Sunday (28 Aug) and tickets are available now. This is a live action night show that starts as late as 2130 hours and finishes 90 minutes later. If you think "2012 Olympics Opening Ceremony" you'll be on the right lines!

www.kynren.co.uk
www.aucklandcastle.org

Keep the Date Sun 13th March

I am organising a mass visit by train to Teesside Airport station to ensure it is not the least used station on the National Rail network in 2015/16. The only train of the week leaves Darlington station at 1105, and you can spend just over an hour at the airport before joining the only train back at 1235. For one of the weirdest excursions of the year, suitable for children, led by an experienced team – full details in March edition.



Alex Nelson, Chester-le-Track trades at Chester-le-Street station (0191 387 1387) and Eaglescliffe (01642 200140).

To contact Alex, phone/text 07860 953981 any reasonable time. www.nationalrail.com. For National Rail Enquiries call 24hr 08457 484950



Images from Guys & Dolls

New Theatre Royal season goes off with a Chitty Chitty Bang Bang!

Fresh from winning the 'Most Welcoming Theatre in the UK' award in October, Newcastle Theatre Royal has announced a sizzling new season for Spring/Summer 2016, full of delights for all tastes and ages.

The season features musical film classic, Chitty Chitty Bang Bang (1-12 June), which will have audiences of all ages flying high with its mixture of madness, intrigue and exuberance.

A brand new musical, TOM. A Story of Tom Jones, The Musical, is set to make its North East debut 3-7 May. Welsh West End star Kit Orton appears in the title role.

In July, the producers of the sell-out smash hit Puttin' on the Ritz return with the dazzling song and dance extravaganza, That's Entertainment (5-9 July), celebrating the biggest hits of the '30s, '40s and '50s.

Back again in August due to popular demand is the international multi-award winning musical, Chicago (1-13 August). Based on real life events back in the roaring 1920s, this world-famous show features one of the sexiest, sassiest scores ever written.

The Commitments (6-11 Feb 2017) will also feature. Like the novel and the film, this tale of a talented group of working class Dubliners is full of heart and features over 20 soul classics.

A wonderfully uplifting family drama for May is the Olivier award-winning Goodnight Mister Tom (17-21 May). Set during the dangerous build up to the Second World War, the story follows young William Beech who is evacuated to the idyllic English countryside.

From one country idyll to another, Heartbeat visits in late May (23 - 28 May). This new stage production features all the TV show's favourite characters, video footage, an original script and even members of the original TV cast.

Alfred Hitchcock's classic spy thriller, The 39 Steps (27 June - 2 July) is set to return also. It features only four actors playing a staggering 130 characters in 100 minutes.

Lee Hall's hit play Our Ladies of Perpetual Succour (12-16 July) makes its Theatre Royal debut in the summer. The play tells a tale of love, lust, pregnancy and death.

Comedy fans will delight as Julian Clary is

bringing The Joy of Mincing on Sunday 15 May.

Scottish Ballet will bring its World Premiere of Swan Lake from 11-14 May. This will be the company's first tour of the ballet in over 20 years.

Another favourite, this time with our younger audiences, is Peppa Pig who is back in Newcastle in July with her brand new live stage show, Peppa Pig's Surprise (27-28 July). This will be a charming and colourful show with new songs and life size puppets.

The multi-award winning 'master of psychological illusion', Derren Brown, is back in the summer with his most provocative show yet, Derren Brown: Miracle (20-25 June).

This month, lovers of mystery and intrigue will revel in Stephen Daldry's multi award-winning West End production of J.B. Priestley's classic thriller, An Inspector Calls (9-13 February).

And finally, there are plenty of great shows to suit all tastes with family-favourite musicals Guys & Dolls (22 Mar - 2 Apr), The Mikado (15 - 18 June) and Disney and Cameron Mackintosh's multi award-winning musical Mary Poppins (8 Sept - 29 Oct).



Katherine Jenkins OBE set to take to the Sunderland stage by storm



Classical crossover sensation, Katherine Jenkins, is set to dazzle a crowd of thousands as she takes to the stage with The London Concert Orchestra on 6 May 2016 in Sunderland's Herrington Country Park.

Since debuting in 1998, Katherine has become one of the most popular classical-crossover artists of all time, selling over four million copies of her ten studio albums. One of the world's most famous classical singers, her records have sold millions of copies across the globe whilst prime time television roles on Dancing with the Stars and Popstar to Operastar have aided her journey

to superstardom.

The Sunderland concert marks the most Northern of several UK performances confirmed for Jenkins in 2016, including a celebration of Her Majesty the Queen's 90th birthday at the Royal Albert Hall.

The Katherine Jenkins performance marks the first of four open air concerts that will be delivered as part of 'The Northern Sessions' concert series in Sunderland this summer. An exciting mix of box office headliners and quality tribute performances ensure that The Northern Sessions will offer something for all musical tastes.

Record of The Month - David Bowie 'BLACKSTAR'

What else could possibly feature?

On January 10th an incalculable vacuum was left in the landscape of popular music as the world mourned the passing of a towering cultural presence. David Bowie did however leave us with his 25th and final studio album Blackstar described by his longstanding record producer Tony Visconti as a 'parting gift.' Despite the obvious meditation upon his own mortality and the urgent feel of the album, Blackstar depicts Bowie as a true innovator til the very end. Jazz, art rock and hip-hop elements are all equally prevalent and contribute to an unmistakably edgy and contemporary sound with real standouts being Lazarus and 'Tis A Pity She Was A Whore. The starman returns to the sky on a triumphant note.



What's on this February?

Gabrielle Aplin

February 3

02 Academy Newcastle T:(0844) 477 2000
www.ticketmaster.co.uk

Magic of The Beatles

February 6

Sunderland Empire T:(0191) 566 1040
www.atgtickets.com/venue/sunderland-empire

Paddy McGuinness

February 6

Newcastle City Hall T:(0191) 277 8030
www.newcastlecityhall.org

An Inspector Calls

February 9 - 13

Newcastle Theatre Royal T:(0844) 8112 121
www.theatroyal.co.uk

Eight

February 9-13

The People's Theatre T:(0191) 265 5020
www.Peoplestheatre.co.uk

Get Carter

February 12 - March 5

Northern Stage T:(0191) 230 5151
www.northernstage.co.uk

The Drifters

February 14

Sunderland Empire T:(0191) 566 1040
www.atgtickets.com/venue/sunderland-empire

Stomp

February 15-20

Newcastle Theatre Royal T:(0844) 8112 121
www.theatroyal.co.uk

Dynamo

February 18-21

Metroradio Arena T:(0844) 493 6666
www.metroradioarena.co.uk

The Perfect Murder

February 22-27

Newcastle Theatre Royal T:(0844) 8112 121
www.theatroyal.co.uk

Leona Lewis

February 25

Sage Gateshead T:(0191) 443 4661
www.sagegateshead.com

Eclipse

February 25-27

The People's Theatre T:(0191) 265 5020
www.peoplestheatre.co.uk

Sunday for Sammy

February 28

Newcastle City Hall T:(0191) 277 8030
www.newcastlecityhall.org

Back together again!

THE PERFECT MURDER

Who do you play in *The Perfect Murder*?

Jessie: I play Joan Smiley who has been married to Victor (Shane Richie) for 20 years and it's a love-hate relationship. Well, all the love has gone.

Shane: At moments throughout the play you see there were times when Victor, who I play, and Joan were madly in love but sadly they never had children.

Jessie: That's a lot to do with it, I think, because they mention it a lot during the play. I'm not sure if it's her fault or his fault because she mentions she'd like to have a family with her lover. But basically the flame's gone out and they both want excitement.

Without giving too much away, what prompts the murder that's referred to in the title?

Shane: It's to do with chemistry, cookery and downright violence. There are several ways both Victor and Joan talk about it and play around with it. Ultimately how it happens is really interesting.

Jessie: It's a real twist.

What do you have in common with your characters? And what are the big differences?

Jessie: I don't put any of myself into it. I'd like to think that I have nothing at all in common with her, although you do sometimes find those things during the rehearsal period.

Shane: I have nothing in common with Victor. He's like a blank canvas.

Jessie: Joan is a blank canvas but there are so many sides to her – there's a funny side, a dark side, and that's all down to Peter James's writing. He's so clever.

Shane: I'm always finding new things in Victor. Sometimes it's when someone else says something about the character – not what Victor says but what Joan says about him or what her lover says about him. It will be interesting to see how the audience feels about Victor and Joan and who they are rooting for.

This is the first time you've performed on stage together... That must be really exciting?

Jessie: It really is. That's part of the reason I wanted to do it – not just because of the great script but also getting to work with Shane on stage, which we've never done in 14 years of working together.

Are you friends as well as co-stars?

Shane: We're great mates. Best mates.

Jessie: We're on the phone to each other every day.

How do you feel your chemistry from *EastEnders* will translate in a theatrical setting?

Shane: It will be a different dynamic with a different set of rules. When we do the TV show together there's a safety blanket and there's always someone there to hold your hand. The characters we play on screen we both know inside out, but Victor and Joan are very alien to us. We'll probably find out stuff about each other as actors from doing this, which will be really interesting because we've never done live theatre together before.

Jessie: It's a completely new experience for us together. I've worked in the theatre a few times and I love the whole journey of it – from meeting everybody, like new cast members and the production team and the director, to making this product and putting it on stage. Going into it with Shane is another experience for me. As for the chemistry, it's a great help.

Shane: We've got like a mental shorthand where we know each other's strengths and weaknesses so we kind of prop each other up when we need to and step away from each other when we need to. As Jessie says, she's done a lot of theatre and so have I and the first week is getting to know everybody, whereas we've already got that bond and we've known each other for the best part of 14 years. It's about the characters, not worrying about getting to know each other as people.

What do you most enjoy about stage work?

Jessie: The buzz of performing in front of an audience. That's why you become an actor in the first place. When you play the same role for years you don't get stale as such but sometimes you can lose your zing a little bit. When you're on stage you can do something new every night. You're doing your craft, the thing you learned to do, and it's even better when you're doing it with your best mate. It's just great.

Shane: I miss the butterflies when I'm not doing theatre. A lot of people in the business don't like that but I love that thing of not being sure if you're going to pull it off or not. There's a danger if you're in a long-running show where, although it doesn't stop being enjoyable, you're not being tested. With

film or television if you get it wrong you stop and do it again, but with theatre there's a lot of people out there to see you get it wrong.

What are the particular challenges for you in *The Perfect Murder*?

Shane: The challenge is that the characters are so far removed from who we play on television.

Jessie: Because we're doing this together and we're playing a married couple there is that worry that people will compare it to what they're used to seeing us do together. But the characters are so different. Just because it's 'Shane Richie and Jessie Wallace' doesn't mean it's going to be 'Kat and Alfie'. He's done a lot of other stuff and so have I.

Shane, you're a big fan of Peter James' books, aren't you?

Shane: I am, yes. I'd read several of his books before I knew about *The Perfect Murder*. I had the honour of meeting him and we had dinner together, not thinking for one moment I'd be doing one of his pieces on stage.

Jessie: Shane introduced me to his books and he's an amazing writer.

***The Perfect Murder* has a comedic element, doesn't it?**

Jessie: It does, yes. It can be really dark then it's funny, but playing it straight is what makes it funnier.

Shane: I always say 'Never burlesque burlesque'. The straighter we play this the funnier it can be. When I say 'funny' I mean 'uncomfortable funny'. It's like laughing at a funeral. I've been at funerals where I've gotten that nervous laughter and the play has a little bit of that in it. It's dark and macabre.

Do you think that audiences will differ around the country?

Shane: It'll be interesting to see audiences right round the country with *The Perfect Murder* because we go from Edinburgh to Newcastle, down to Cheltenham, down to Coventry, Northampton, Brighton and Bromley among other places. It will be interesting to see where they may find it funny or not funny, but I think they'll certainly be scared.

Jessie: I'm looking forward to doing this in Dublin. I love Ireland.



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In Conversation With...

John Irving

Business Development Director, Newcastle International Airport

What were your career ambitions growing up?

Certainly not to be an accountant!

I suppose to be in sport first and then to work as a trader within the financial markets. I got a great education at Dame Allans before taking a business degree at Loughborough University.

What is your career path to date?

After leaving University I joined Procter and Gamble at the age of 21 where I had a great time within a variety of roles. This included a spell in London and it was while here I got the call to join Newcastle United via a friend who worked at Freshfields with Chris Mort, the newly appointed Chairman of the club. In June 2015, I took up my current position as Business Development Director at Newcastle International Airport.

Describe a typical day within your new role?

With new things happening all the time there isn't one. I can plan 10 things in the morning and end up doing 10 different things but the variety is great.

Is there a mantra you aspire to when doing business?

Empowerment at all levels. I like to be open and believe people are the most important assets to any business.

What is your proudest business achievement?

Being a lead part of a team turning a £32 million loss in my first year at the football club to a £35 million profit in my final year was pretty special.

And your biggest challenge?

The year the club got relegated took everyone out of their comfort zone but it made us more focussed and was a difficult experience so early in my career. I learned a lot from some great people.

What do you hope to bring to the Airport going forward?

Within my role as Business Development Director I look after the commercial side of the business and hope my skills and experience can really help. The Airport is a massive player regionally and has tremendous growth potential. I want to be at the forefront of that.

Who are your heroes in and out of business?

No one specific but there are some great people in the North East who make a huge difference to the region. I don't want to single anyone out but I am certainly very proud to be working here.

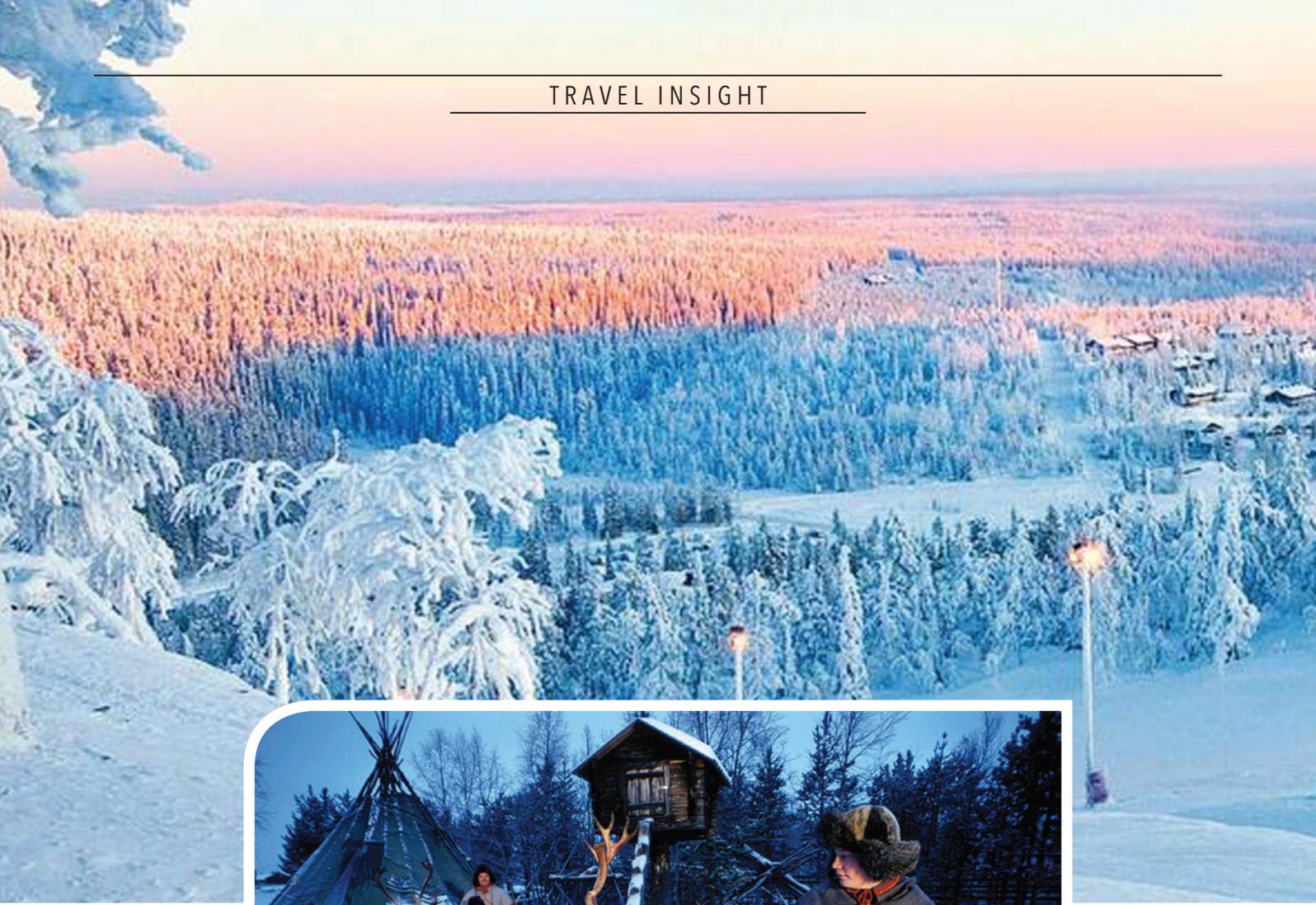
What advice would you give to your 18 year old self?

Learn as much as you can from the people you think are good and don't think you can do everything yourself.

How do you relax?

Spending time with my wife Jerri and friends. It is very important to switch off. I love golf and would like to find more time to play.

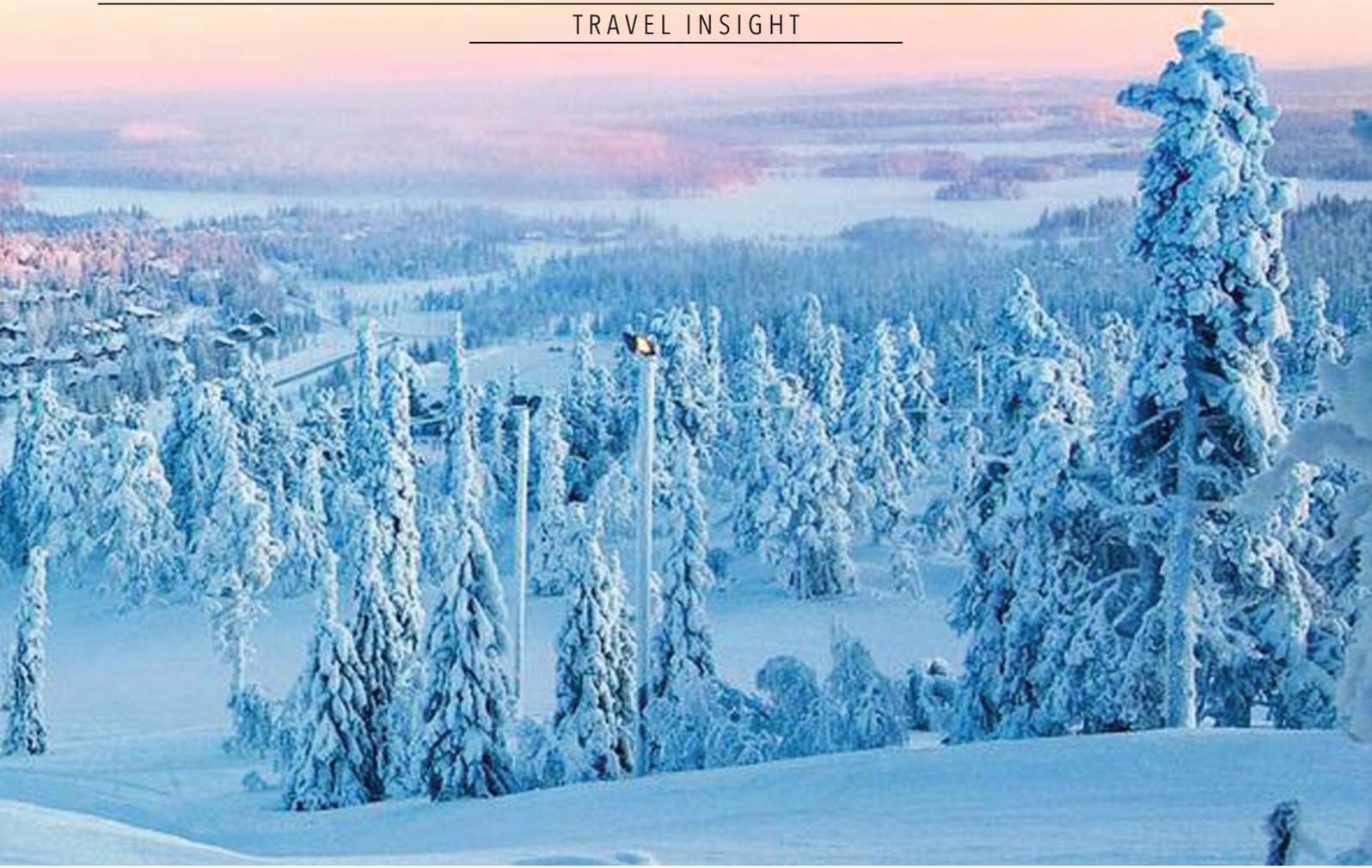
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Disappointed with Santa this year?

- Travel Writer, Ken Spearen suggests the ultimate Christmas trip for 2016.

If you were unhappy with the quality of your visit to see Santa this year, apparently you are far from alone. According to social media and media commentators, parents are unhappy with the rising costs of this exercise which seem to double in price every year. More importantly, they also felt the credibility of "Santa" himself was dubious to say the least and were unhappy at the overall experience for their offspring. Children, except for the very young, are much wiser these days and you just can't pull Santa's cotton wool beard over their eyes anymore as they are far from daft!



Parents and grandparents all over the UK will already be planning to take their excited children/grandchildren to see Santa again next Christmas as it's a tradition - but where to go to fulfil such huge expectations? Why not consider taking the kids to see Santa at his home rather than keeping up the pretence that Santa lives in a department store or a hastily erected grotto in some shopping centre/garden centre? Out of the question? Perhaps not...

Just for research purposes, let's examine the project for feasibility.

Firstly, the eternal question is where Santa actually lives? In the UK, it's widely believed that his spiritual home is at the North Pole whilst the Norwegians believe he's in Drøbak and the Danish say he's actually in Greenland. The Finns however are adamant the real Santa lives in Lapland and this is where most people from the UK head to.

Most organised trips to visit Santa's holiday village begin with a flight out from Newcastle to Rovaniemi Airport in Finland. Surprisingly, this airport is serviced by many airlines all year round including British Airways, Finnair and Air

France etc. and many holiday companies offer all-encompassing Santa packages of 3 days and more. Most offer "early bird" discounted prices if booked before the spring but do your research on the internet for a package that suits you, your family and of course, your budget. Just think how excited the kids will be having something like that to look forward to all year.

The Santa Claus Holiday Village is just 6.5 miles off the Arctic Circle and only a short distance from the airport. It offers private cabins and free airport transfers - a definite bonus in a remote place like this. All of its fully equipped heated cabins have private bathrooms with saunas, a kitchenette and a terrace. Santa's home is just a 2-minute walk away. This is a magical and memorable place for young and older children alike - and dare I say it, for adults too as Santa's little helpers can arrange reindeer, husky and snow mobile safaris whilst boats, bikes and even fishing equipment can be hired. Guests can also enjoy the skiing and hiking on nearby trails. Local and international food is served at Christmas House Restaurant and Coffee Shop but packaged food is also available for self-catering. Check it all out on www.santaclausholidayvillage.fi/. In late autumn/winter, air temperatures range from -5c (real feel

-10c) so dress accordingly. Macho, stripped to the waist, Toon supporters are advised not travel!

CREDIBLE UK ALTERNATIVE: If your budget will not stretch to a Lapland trip, I suggest you check out Lapland UK based in Whitmoor Forest in Ascot, Berks as an alternative. Open annually between November and Christmas Eve, it's the nearest to the real thing I've ever seen and is akin to a film set, even using an artificial snow machine for authenticity. This amazing up-market venue does not come cheap but they too offer early bird packages for a family of four. An exit poll revealed that 97% of youngsters actually thought they met the real Santa Claus. How can you put a price on that? OK, so it's a trip down south but it's not as far or as costly as going to Lapland. You could do what I did and make everyone happy by dropping your wife off for a Christmas shopping trip in London while you take the kids/grandchildren on to see Santa in Surrey. It turned out to be a win, win all round! Check out its super website on www.laplanduk.co.uk and see how it should be done in this country. At the time of going to press, the venue has just been voted the "Best Family Day out, 2015" by the Little London Awards committee.



Lobster Ball announces 2016 line up

One of the most anticipated charity balls on the North East calendar will be returning this spring, with a 90s diva heading up the entertainment.

The annual Lobster Charity Ball will be taking place at Hardwick Hall Hotel, Sedgfield, on Friday April 22, which will include a performance by Heather Small, the voice of M People.

The singer, whose hits include One Night In Heaven, Moving On Up and Search For the Hero, will be taking to the stage at the glitzy event in aid of the autism charity 'Daisy Chain'.

Also featured on the line-up is party band Shakedown and North East 20 piece big band Musicians Unlimited, with the evening hosted by comedian Brendan Healy.

The black tie event will give guests the chance to sample a four course gourmet lobster surf and turf meal prepared by the award-winning chefs from The Rib Room Steakhouse and Grill.

This year's event includes a cocktails and canapés reception, along with a Taittinger Champagne bar and complimentary wine, lager and beer for guests all evening.

"We are delighted to have been able to book a singer of the calibre of Heather Small for this year's ball," said John Adamson, owner of Hardwick Hall Hotel.

"The Lobster Charity Ball has a reputation of putting on brilliant performers and this year will be no exception. It's such a fantastic evening where everyone likes to dress up, come along and have a great time, while supporting an amazing charity. We are also grateful to our sponsors including LA Taxis, Heineken and Bidvest along with jobhunter.co.uk who are coming on board as our main sponsor for the first time."

The evening will also feature a fashion show with clothes from award-winning menswear store Woven, which was recently voted the Durham retailer of the decade.

Blackfriars sees surge in autumn weddings

A medieval venue in Newcastle is celebrating a rise in mid-week and autumn wedding bookings as it prepares for its latest wedding showcase this month.

Blackfriars Restaurant and Banquet Hall, based at Friars Street in the heart of the city centre, is seeing an increased amount of couples opting to tie the knot on a weekday and autumn is proving to be the most popular time of year for marrying at the venue.

To celebrate the continued growth of wedding bookings, Blackfriars is hosting its third annual Wedding Fayre on Sunday February 21 from 12-3pm.

Admission is free and visitors will be treated to complimentary refreshments while they view the medieval Banquet Hall, meet top local florists, cake designers, photographers and make-up artists and check availability for their big day.

The venue has the added benefit of a picturesque Cloister Garden which couples can use for photos and drinks receptions and guests also have the option of dining at Blackfriars Restaurant, which received the Taste of England accolade at the North East Tourism Awards and was voted Best North East Restaurant in the Licensed Trade Awards.

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Cricket fans in a spin over Super Sunday

Following the announcement this summer that Emirates Durham International Cricket Ground is set to host the second Spring Investec Test between England and Sri Lanka, Durham County Cricket Club has today unveiled that the third test day will be dubbed 'Super Sunday' and will offer spectators a family-friendly day of International Cricket with a distinct local accent.

David Harker, Chief Executive at Durham County Cricket Club, said: "Super Sunday is going to be just that – a brilliant day, excellent food, drink and of course, some top-class cricket! The test match will be a great advert for cricket in the region but Sunday in particular will be an occasion with real carnival atmosphere, whether you're a regular at the ground or not."

It's estimated that the second Spring Investec Test between England and Sri Lanka will have an overall economic impact of £1.5m, highlighting the value of hosting international sporting events.

David added: "The five-day Investec Test Match will bring the thrill of international sport back to the region and will also be an exciting preview to a series of international matches set to take place in the coming years, including the ICC Cricket World Cup 2019. We hope Super Sunday will allow us to add to the already exciting cricketing experience with fantastic local fare and entertainment."



Works of cartoonist David Haldane on display at new Northumberland pub

David Haldane, renowned cartoonist for The Times newspaper, has made a major contribution of original cartoons to the artwork on display at St Mary's Inn near Morpeth.

David, born in Blyth, studied graphic design at Newcastle Polytechnic. His career as a freelancer cartoonist began in 1980 when he started producing work for the Punch magazine. Over the years, David has worked for many national newspapers and his work has also appeared in the 2006 Private Eye touring exhibition.

David now draws daily for The Times, producing the page one cartoon section and topical cartoons for the main news section of the paper.

David said: "I've worked on many newspapers and magazines over the years but I can honestly say that producing cartoons for St. Mary's Inn and Jesmond Dene House has been one of the most enjoyable experiences of my career."



NE1 Ltd is working with 3 of the city's top restaurants and Newcastle College to avert an impending skills crisis in the restaurant industry in the North East. Attracting and training new recruits and recruiting highly skilled staff is a growing problem, especially with 26 new restaurants opening this year in Newcastle city centre alone.

To stimulate interest in a career as a professional chef, NE1 has teamed up with Fat Buddha, Babucho, 21 Group and Newcastle College's Lifestyle Academy to create a chef's fast-track training course.

The Traineeship programme will initially cater for fourteen 16 – 24 years olds to partake in an eight-week on-the-job training course that, after successful completion, will provide an NVQ Level 1 qualification in Hospitality. The course is being run by Newcastle College but will be mostly work based.

After 8 weeks, the training will culminate with a showcase three-course dinner prepared by the newly trained chefs.

Alnwick welcomes its first Turkish restaurant

A former Alnwick Indian restaurant is getting a new lease of life, after being transformed into the town's first Turkish eatery.

Mezze, will be opening its doors on January 20, at the former site of Veranda, Clayport Street and will offer diners a selection of classic BBQ grills and other popular Turkish dishes.

"Mezze offers something completely different to the other restaurants in Alnwick," said Dilanula Abdullah, who is the restaurant owner and has previously run The Med, Westgate Road,

Newcastle.

"We hope people will come a long and help us to celebrate the opening."

Guests at the restaurant will be able to choose from a wide range of cold starters, such as peppers, potatoes and aubergine fried in olive oil and served with tomato and garlic sauce, celery, peppers, tomato and walnuts dressed in olive oil.

There will also be a number of hot starters served at the restaurants including, deep fried filo pastry

filled with feta cheese and fill and diced lamb's liver lightly coated in flour and paprika, fried and served with onions.

The menu also offers diners a whole host of main courses, including traditional Turkish BBQ dishes such as, Shish Kebab, lamb cutlets marinated with herbs and chargrilled, mixed grill and chargrilled chicken wings.

Prices start from £2.95 for a starter and from £7.95 for a main course.

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Northern Insight meets

Angela Mazingham

Director of Operations, Cottages in Northumberland

What is your history with Cottages in Northumberland?

I lived and worked abroad for a while, and when I returned to the UK and joined Cottages in Northumberland in March 2011 I remember thinking at the time 'what a unique business - selling holidays staying in cottages in the North East!' – I guess it was through returning to live and work in the North East and working at Cottages in Northumberland, that I really discovered the phenomenal beauty of this wonderful county with its wide open spaces, amazing beaches and stunning landscapes. The feedback we receive from guests staying in our cottages both at the coast and further inland is always hugely complimentary and they love to tell us about how much they have enjoyed their time here. Many of them ask us to 'please stop telling everyone how lovely Northumberland is so they can keep it for themselves!' Ha ha. Naturally, we are delighted with their response and this positive feedback reflects the huge increase in the number of people booking their cottage style holidays in Northumberland in the last 5 years.

What do you most enjoy about your role?

I genuinely enjoy talking to all of our customers both the owners of our lovely portfolio of properties who live in the region and beyond, as well as all the wonderful holiday makers who often call the office to ask us questions about their forthcoming holiday and tell me about their fantastic experiences while staying in Northumberland. Every day is very different but we laugh most days! I often say we should write a book with all the funny stories we hear.

Describe a typical day in the life?

My day can be extremely varied and includes meeting new and interesting people from all walks of life who are prospective clients. I tend to meet them at their holiday homes to get to know them a little better and view their properties with them. My aim is to explain everything I can, from how to set up their holiday property to ensure it appeals to a broad range of people; to how we work on their behalf in terms of marketing in order to attract plenty of enquiries and bookings and of course, earn them significant income from the start. I think it works best when I explain how the whole process works and try to put them at their ease. We are a very personable and flexible company and I think most of our clients appreciate an open and honest approach.

I also often find myself chatting to someone who is thinking about investing in a property in the Northumberland area in the near future or, someone who has in fact, just bought a property here with a view to renting it out as a holiday cottage. I am always happy to offer them advice and suggestions to help make sense of it all.

What stands out in your career so far?

When I started here, we were marketing about 60 properties on our website and today we have well over 160 and are adding to this figure all the time through word of mouth and recommendation. Last year saw a 24% increase in our sales on the previous year and while we were very happy with that, we are always looking for new ways to increase our owners' income. Interestingly, our website includes 18 properties located in the Newcastle upon Tyne area which we call our City Breaks collection. People often need somewhere to stay while they are in the city visiting family and friends or

while they are here for work projects or on secondment from overseas and having these properties available through us offers a real home from home option versus say staying in a hotel or B&B.

I am very proud to see the rapid growth in the popularity of the North East and Northumberland region as a destination for holidays and business stays. It is testament to the hard work of everyone involved in promoting the North East outside the region and yes, the lovely Robson Green is included in that!

On a personal level, I've learned to develop so many new skills during my time here to date, including the whole world of social media which, don't laugh, but I hadn't been so involved with it before!

Who are you heroes in and out of business?

I really admire the entrepreneurial spirit of the Duchess of Northumberland. She's an inspirational business woman and an excellent ambassador for the region as a whole. Her re-development of The Alnwick Garden, making it accessible (and interesting) for all ages, has played a major role in attracting new visitors both from the UK and from overseas to the area. I would say the majority of our guests make it a point to visit the castle and gardens during their holiday and they all comment on how everyone in the family enjoys the experience. She had a vision and exceeded all expectations. No one ever anticipated just how much of a contribution she makes to helping local businesses in the Northumberland community.

Is there anything exciting you're currently working on?

We are looking to increase our exposure to more international markets and I have been working with the UKTI to look at how we can develop a strategy for maximising our exposure abroad in targeted countries, such as Germany, Spain and The Netherlands. My languages background is finally going to come in handy!

What advice would you give to your 18 year old self?

Well, where do you start? I would say – don't worry, it will get better! You look back and think – if only I'd had some of the confidence I gained with experience. I'm hoping I'm not alone on that one! Everything feels like such a big deal when you are younger, from what I remember. It's a shame when you are young that you spend so much time worrying about what other people think while, when you are older, you are more self-assured and can have the courage of your own convictions.

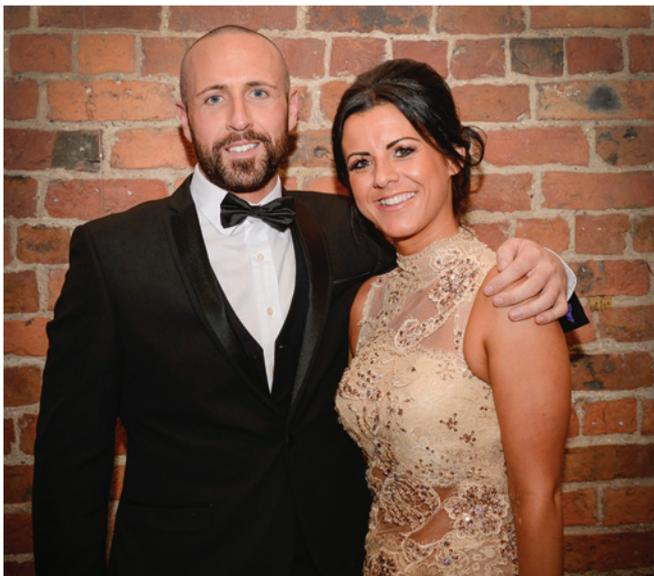
Looking to 2016 what does the future hold?

We have an extremely busy and ambitious year ahead in the business. It is my job to ensure we continue to grow, while still offering the fantastically personal and flexible customer service we have become well known and respected for. 2016 means taking on the challenge of exceeding our business goals and continuing to embrace new skills. We have just moved into larger offices in Jesmond and I will be adding at least one new member of staff to join our wonderful team to help meet the increase in demand for our services. Like other successful businesses, Cottages in Northumberland is continually evolving to stay ahead of the ever challenging online marketplace. I am proud of what we have achieved so far and 2016 promises to be another exciting year for us all!



The Simon Bates Foundation Ball was recently held at the Biscuit Rooms.

£25000 was raised on the evening, which went towards a larger target of £44000 to go to Build It International and their school building project in Katuba, Zambia.





In the Pink

With Valentine's Day fast approaching top of the list of gifts to bestow upon our loved ones will be red roses, although not far behind will be another rose or should I say rosé – pink wine. Always popular as a Valentine's gift the pink wine sector of the market has increased significantly in the last 5 years and for many this is the starting point for discovering wine. So how is rosé made?

Rosé wine can be made in a range of colours and styles, from a very pale pink to pale orange and on to a vivid near-purple, depending on the grape varieties, and wine making techniques used. The wines can range in style from bone dry to sweet. The idea behind a good rosé is to combine the fresh qualities of a white wine with the body, flavour and richness more often associated with red wine.

Intrinsic to understanding the production of rosé is the fact that the internal structure of both red and white grapes is the same. The central pulp, where the juice comes from, is identical for both red and white varieties. Squeeze either and the resultant juice is clear. The pigmentation is found only in the skin of red grapes.

There are 3 ways of making rosé

Blending - simply adding a small amount

of red wine to a white wine to impart colour, is today relatively uncommon. This method is discouraged in most quality wine-growing regions except, paradoxically, for the production of pink Champagne where 8% - 10% red wine is added to the white wine.

The Contact Method is used when rosé wine is the primary product. Red-skinned grapes are crushed and the skins are allowed to remain in contact with the juice for a short period, typically a few hours to a day or two. The grapes are then pressed, and the skins are discarded rather than left in contact throughout fermentation (as with red wine making). The skins contain much of the strongly flavoured tannin and other compounds, thereby leaving the taste more similar to a white wine. The longer that the skins are left in contact with the juice, the more intense the colour of the final wine.

Rosé wine can also be produced almost as a by-product of red wine fermentation using a technique known as Saignée, or bleeding the vats. When a winemaker desires to impart more tannin and colour to a red wine, some of the pink juice from the must (unfermented grape juice) can be removed at an early stage. The red wine remaining in the vats is intensified as a result of the bleeding, because the volume of juice in the must is reduced whilst the volume of skin remains the same, and the must involved in the maceration is concentrated. The pink juice that is removed can be fermented separately to produce a rosé. Again the intensity of the colour is adjusted by the time of the initial maceration to the removal of the pink juice.

Whatever the occasion give rosé a go!

Further information about the aforementioned wines can be found at www.richardgrangerwines.co.uk or instore at Richard Granger Fine Wine Merchants, West Jesmond Station, Lyndhurst Avenue, Newcastle Upon Tyne, NE2 3HH





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Posh Traditional Sunday Lunch by Michael Grahamslaw

Following on my reconnoitre of Horton Grange Country House Hotel with Jack which was featured in the last issue of *Northern Insight*, I have been banging on to anyone who would listen about how impressed I was with its facilities, food and surroundings. This obviously hadn't gone unnoticed at home either as Lisa and Holly virtually demanded that I took them for a "proper" Sunday lunch at the venue, a request which I was delighted to accede to. Upon arrival we were shown to a comfortable lounge where Lisa and I enjoyed a glass of Pinot Noir whilst we perused the menu. The price of £24.95 for three courses was decent value for money. Agreed, you could opt for a pub carvery of dubious quality for less - but this was the real thing and worth every penny.

After our aperitif, we both had salmon gravadlax to start with (try and find that on a pub carvery menu) whilst Holly really enjoyed her delicious cream of cauliflower soup. To follow, we all plumped for the traditional roast topside of beef which was truly magnificent. It was accompanied by huge tureens of fresh vegetables including kale, which is very much in vogue at the moment. Well, if it's good enough for Paul

McCartney, one of its great exponents, it's good enough for me but will consuming it really turn me into a legendary singer/songwriter like him? Probably not, so I'll just console myself that this so-called "Queen of greens" provides a huge nutritional punch.

Regrettably we could not finish all our lunch as the portions were so generous. Now it's not often you hear me say that! Despite this and the post-Christmas calorie counting regime and well-intended New Year's resolutions, we gave into temptation far too easily and both fell at the first hurdle by tucking into a dark orange brownie with sorbet. Initially, we told ourselves that we would only eat half of it so we would remain within the "acceptable" limits of our sensible eating regimes but two empty plates later, the truth was out there for all to see. We have to face the fact that we are unashamedly dedicated foodies who love their food. By contrast, Holly, who has no such weight issues, despatched her cheesecake with consummate ease and great relish. The young don't really appreciate how lucky they are when it comes to over indulgence in the culinary stakes as they seem to be immune to its effects. You have to believe me when I tell you that there's a thin, well-honed and ripped hunk lurking just beneath

my skin but it just hasn't found its way out yet.

Feeling totally sated and irresistibly drowsy after such a great meal, we returned to the lounge for coffee and petit fours where I would have gratefully had a power nap had Lisa had let me. A chance would have been a fine thing and I've got the bruises from the elbows to my ribs to prove it.

"Mo" the hotel's charming deputy GM, was again a wonderful host and really looked after us all. This had been a memorable Sunday lunch and I'm already being lobbied by the Grahamslaw clan to make it a hat trick of visits next month by taking them for a sumptuous afternoon tea. They'll get no argument from me as Horton Grange is rapidly becoming one of my favourite haunts and I can thoroughly recommend it to *Northern Insight* readers.



Horton Grange Country House Hotel can be found at Berwick Hill, Ponteland, Newcastle (SatNav: NE13 6BU).
Why not look it up for yourself on www.hortongrange.co.uk.

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Q&A Nola Collinson, Sales Manager

Newcastle's newest luxury hotel, Crowne Plaza Newcastle – Stephenson Quarter, recently strengthened their team by appointing Sales Manager, Nola Collinson.

Business is thriving at Crowne Plaza Newcastle – Stephenson Quarter, with the hotel securing over £1m of revenue within months of opening on 31 August 2015. As the newest team member, we spoke to Nola about her plans and aspirations to continue this success in her role as Sales Manager.



Q: What is your background? How long have you been in the leisure industry?

I started working in the hospitality industry over 14 years ago and in that time, I've worked in all aspects of sales in the hotel industry, both in the North East and further afield in the UK. The places I've been employed have varied hugely, from city centre corporate led properties to castles.

I've worked at Close House as Sales Manager for both the hotel corporate clients and corporate golf members; and for independent venues such as my most recent role as Director of Sales at Lumley Castle Hotel in Durham.

Q: What are your career highlights?

I'm very proud of my achievements at Copthorne Hotel, Newcastle. It was rewarding to lead a talented sales team building relationships with

over 100 clients that produced £1m of new business in my final year.

Q: What attracted you to work for Crowne Plaza Newcastle – Stephenson Quarter?

Newcastle is a fantastic city. I was based in South East England for a couple of years and coming home just felt great. The people here are so friendly and welcoming and the hospitality industry is buzzing. And of course the Crowne Plaza Newcastle - Stephenson Quarter hotel itself. It's an amazing building. From the accommodation and conference facilities through to Hawthorns brasserie, Mineral House spa and The GIN Bar, it's a brilliant offer for business and leisure visitors and I'm excited to get started and invite clients in to experience what we have to offer.

Q: What will you be doing in your Sales Manager role?

I'll be having one-to-one meetings with corporate clients and ensuring that they're receiving a high quality service as well as building working relationships with the local and regional business community, hosting events to showcase the hotel's facilities and really getting our name out there as the place to do business.

Q: What are your aspirations for your role?

My aspirations are to make sure that Crowne Plaza Newcastle – Stephenson Quarter is known as the number one venue in the North East for business, continuing to grow and strengthen the hotel's portfolio of corporate clients across the region.

SAJI's

Since opening its doors in August 2015, Saji's has gained a loyal fan base.

Both in its food and decor, the Restaurant offers a sophisticated yet relaxed approach to dining.

We feel that a memorable dining experience is not only about the food and wine, it is about the whole experience, great staff and a family friendly atmosphere – every little detail matters to us.

Saji's has a carefully chosen menu, including some sensational Chicken, Lamb and fish dishes, the food is both delicious and beautifully presented.

The restaurant also boasts a well stocked bar - a comfortable place to settle in for a pre-dinner drink.

With its stylish interior Saji's is a perfect place to Dine and Celebrate your Special Occasions or just pick up a Takeaway on your way home.

We have Separate function rooms available for Private Parties, Weddings and Corporate Events

Please check our Trip Advisor reviews; we feel they speak for themselves.



Sajis Restaurant Sunderland Road Gateshead NE10 OAR Tel: 0191 4384828
Email: contact@sajis-restaurant.co.uk www.sajis-restaurant.co.uk

From Washington DC to Washington NE...



A new restaurant with influences from the States has recently opened its doors to the public in the North East.

Carter and Fitch Pizzeria, Smokehouse and Bar opened in January following a £500K investment from its owners, the Ailantus Group and delivers an authentic US eating experience to the region with pizzas, steaks and burgers being just a few of the options on their menu – which has been two years in the making.

Named after the friends who ran a smokehouse in America with Mafia links during the prohibition, Carter and Fitch's owners assure diners of a truly authentic realistic taste of the USA.

The authenticity is down to the experiences of long-term head chef from the George Washington Hotel, Chris Hume, who travelled around America to soak in the food culture of Arizona, California and New York and gained insight into how their dishes are prepared.

And Chef Hume, 59 from Washington, Tyne and Wear, who has been at the George Washington Hotel for an impressive 42 years said Carter and Fitch aren't stopping there with their faithfulness to the source. He said:

"As well as taking in first-hand the methods used in America, we have bought a specially made

smokehouse oven all the way from Oklahoma.

"It means that we can offer steaks as they are in Texas, burgers as they are in New York and pizzas just as they are in Manhattan. We really think we are offering something that's completely different from the usual restaurants that we see out there."

The restaurant is situated next to the George Washington Hotel, and has room to seat up to 90 diners at a time, with more room available on the exterior terrace and is available to outside diners too.

Neel Chawla, Director of the Ailantus Group says the food is not the only thing that is a pull for diners. He told us:

"Obviously as a restaurant, our food is our bread and butter and with Chef Hume at the helm we are confident it will go from strength to strength, especially if the initial feedback from our customers is anything to go by. But the restaurant's vibe is something we have looked at as well.

"The décor and surroundings at Carter and Fitch adds a relaxed but up-market environment, which brings something new and exciting to

Washington. Customers have told us that they feel just as comfortable having a drink after work as sitting and enjoying a bite to eat."

The new venture for the entrepreneurial Ailantus Groups' owners has also created 20 new jobs to the area, which is a great start for the regions' economy at the start of the year. The Ailantus Groups' rise in popularity has seen their empire make an impressive £15M a year turnover and employ over 450 staff since it was started in 1995 by Mike Chawla and is a privately owned family business.

Desserts are also available and are equally as themed as main courses, all made in-house but again, with a twist. Diners can tuck into New York style cheesecakes, treacle tart and Amaretto chocolate tart while starters have been replaced by Chichetti – small dishes which can be served with Prosecco – the traditional way of eating in Venice and Little Italy; another nod to the culture which Chef Hume experienced.

Chawla concluded: "This is another example of the vast expansion and upgrade of the Ailantus Groups' venues and we will continue to invest in the future of all the staff and businesses we operate."

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Length of course

6601yds.

Course Type

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Signature Hole

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Tee has great views across the Forth to Edinburgh and Fife as well as to the 4 courses on Gullane Hill.

Toughest Hole

12th long par 4 445yds (the Buchts)
tough dog leg left then approach to a raised and sloping green guarded by a cavernous bunker.

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Contact

Derek Scott (Manager), info@craigiellawgolfclub.com, 01875 870800.

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Green fees weekday £59pp
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Details and prices available on request.



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At Be-Fit, we specialise in one to one training and rehabilitation. However, many of our clients have found real benefits with semi-private/small group sessions.

Semi-private sessions are a great way to work as a team, push each other on, or fuel your competitive side.

Four of our fantastic boys from 'Everything Different' agency, have given us testimonials to show what the sessions have done for them:

I've always kept fit but I've never really been a gym person. Working with Michael at Be-fit has changed all that.

We train together which gives it a sort of team competitive spirit and this suits my personality much more. We spur each other on and support each other.

Michael has quite a structured way of working but always manages to keep things fresh and interesting. One week we'll be in the gym bench pressing, the next we'll be outside flipping tractor tyres -it's made a huge difference to me personally, but it's also bonded us as a management team.

Mark Martin, Art Director

We train together as a board at Be-fit. This ensures we build our energy and stamina and fosters team building and togetherness outside our busy daytime schedule, running a successful marketing communications group.

Be-fit provides us with both bespoke and group fitness programmes, to build strength and stamina. And not just that...Vital dietary advice that helps really makes the difference by eating well and training well. I feel stronger, fitter and ready for anything. And it's a great laugh too!

Ben Quigley, Group CEO

They say marketing is a young persons game, but what 'they' really mean is that it's a business full of energy and that's at the heart of what I personally get from our training sessions at Be-fit. I've always believed that being physically fit makes you mentally fit and the Be-fit trainers share knowledge on the right foods and what wrong foods may be doing to you, what stress is doing and sleep and rest. Training is now an integral part of our professional lives. It's not just something we squeeze in when we can, which has helped us be at the top of this young persons game.

Yousaf Khalid, Group MD

Myself and my fellow business partners have been going to Be-fit, twice a week for the last 3 years. The sessions are a great way for us to share something, which sits outside of work and allows us to maintain a moderate level of fitness. Well-planned routines include exercises that alternate to cover upper and lower body workouts. Michael, our trainer, switches things round to keep our sessions fresh, while working different sets of muscles. (One thing you don't do at Be-fit is get bored!) Facilities at Be-fit are perfect for us, with a great range of equipment and well-informed training expertise. In the summer we do outdoor sessions too, a great way to improve our cardio. Be-fit has had a fantastic effect not only on a personal level, but sharing the sessions with my co-workers has brought us closer as a team.

Ian Millen, Group Director of Design

Pavel is a Geordie

"I wouldn't swap a World Cup, Champions League or Premier League winner's medal for that reception. The cocktail of euphoria, adrenaline and fear was coursing through every vein of my anatomy as I ran towards the Gallowgate End. Even now it still feels like a surreal, out of body experience." Pavel Srnicek describes his return to St. James Park as he came on as a late substitute for Shay Given, and is the start of his book, aptly named 'Pavel is a Geordie.'



Two dates will be forever etched into the hearts and souls of all those connected to not only followers of Newcastle United, but to the family and friends of Pavel Srnicek.

December 20th 2015 was the day news broke from the Czech Republic that, whilst jogging, Pav, as he was affectionately known, suffered cardiac arrest and was in hospital in a medically-induced coma; and nine days later, that was the day an ocean of hearts was shattered at the news that Pavel Srnicek had passed away.

Srnicek was born in Ostrava, Czechoslovakia in 1968 and by the time he was ten he was playing youth team football. Within thirteen years he was leaving Dukla Prague for a professional contract with Banik Ostrava, however, by the beginning of 1991 he was winging his way to England, aged just 22, and signing a contract with Jim Smith's Newcastle United.

For the majority of the 90's, Pav played a big part in the saving and rebuilding of Newcastle United after a rocky start. Winning over the famed Toon Army is no mean feat but he did, and became one of our own in the process. Near 200 appearances, and a First Division Championship winners medal later and he was also a part of United folklore, his shock passing ensured that his name will live forever.

Whilst with United, Pav played under Smith, Ossie Ardiles, Kevin Keegan and, albeit very briefly in a second spell in 2006-07, under Glenn Roeder; he also saw off challenges to the number one jersey from the likes of Tommy Wright and John Burridge, Shaka Hislop and Mike Hooper as Keegan continually tested the Czech-Geordie.

Pav also spent time with Sheffield Wednesday, Portsmouth and West Ham in England, as well as Italian clubs Brescia and Cosenza and the Portuguese side Beira-Mar before settling into a coaching role with Sparta Prague mined with regular visits to Tyneside.

In an interview with Newcastle Legends shortly before his untimely departure Pav said: "I'm happy to have been a part of it all.

"We gave the fans those memories which will last the rest of their lives and, although we never won anything, it was a pleasure to do that. They are what matters and I have great memories of the (Toon) fans; they took me

to their hearts which is a fantastic achievement for me, it's a great feeling."

Agent and close friend, Steve Wraith, summed it up to perfection with his eulogy at Pav's memorial service on January 13 at St. Andrews Church, Newcastle as the famous Toon Army said goodbye to one of their own. He said: "He may have arrived without a Geordie accent or an inkling of what a Geordie was, but somehow, he got it.

"He was a gentleman and a Geordie and his place will be forever written into the history of Newcastle United.

"We love you Pavel, we do, oh Pavel we love you."

His memorial service was attended by close to a thousand well-wishers as friends and family united as one for the big man. Brother Milan and several family members flew over from the Czech Republic; eulogies were read by Steve Wraith and Steve Harper; and in attendance were the likes of Sir John Hall, Malcolm Dix, Steve McLaren, Stephen Miller, Shay Given, Alan Shearer, Rob Lee, Steve Watson and many other colleagues from Pav's time in the game.



It was a day nobody present will ever forget.

His book, 'Pavel is a Geordie' is available and can be purchased online at www.pavelsrnicek.com

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