NORTHERN

INSIGHT

FEBRUARY 2018

AWARD WINNING COSMETIC DENTAL CLINIC EXPANDS TO DURHAM CITY CENTRE

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issue 32

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FOREWORD

Welcome to the February edition of Northern Insight

I hope that 2018 has started well for all of our loyal readers, advertisers and contributors. We are delighted to bring you another big issue, packed with new features, columnists and social photographs.

Our cover stars are the award winning Cosmetic Dental Clinic who have expanded into Durham City.

Look out for our exclusive interview with North East cameraman, digital cinematographer and all round good guy Simon August, the founder of 2XS Films Ltd.

For Business Lunch we sample the finest in French cuisine at Hexham's Bouchon Bistrot, a venue we will return to time and again.

Look out also for our expanded Health section which may encourage you to maintain those New Year resolutions.

In summary an exciting edition and one we are proud of.

Thank you for your continued support.
Till next month.

Michael Grahamslaw, Publisher

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CAVU CORPORATE FINANCE AND WARD HADAWAY ADVISE KYKLOUD LIMITED

Cavu Corporate Finance and Ward Hadaway law firm have provided advice on the sale of Kykloud Limited to US-based software company Accruent.

Based in North Shields, Kykloud is a global provider of asset management and mobile building inspection software. Founded by Ed Bartlett and Nick Graham in 2011, the software enables easy-to-use physical resource condition assessments on mobile devices.

The Kykloud app automatically uploads data to a cloud-based asset information portal where users can get a clear overview and accurate data to enable better forecasting and budget planning. Kykloud is used by customers worldwide, including the BBC, Trident and Cushman & Wakefield.

Accruent was founded in 1995 and helps businesses plan and manage real estate, facilities and asset management.

Commenting on the deal, Ed said: "The Kykloud team and I are excited to integrate our solution into the Accruent portfolio. The service provided by the Cavu team was exceptional. They took the time to understand our business, listened to what Nick and I wanted from the deal, and pursued what was in the best interest of Kykloud and its shareholders.

"Our thanks also goes to the team at Ward Hadaway for their expertise and efforts on the negotiations. They provided a professional response from the outset and worked exceptionally hard to ensure that the sale went through smoothly."

Shawn Bone, Managing Director of Cavu Corporate Finance, added: "The strength of the Kykloud software solution and the attractiveness of the market was core to a successful deal. We are delighted that we have been able to work with Ed and Nick and the other shareholders to deliver a great deal for all concerned."

ECOMMERCE EXPERTS SET FOR GROWTH

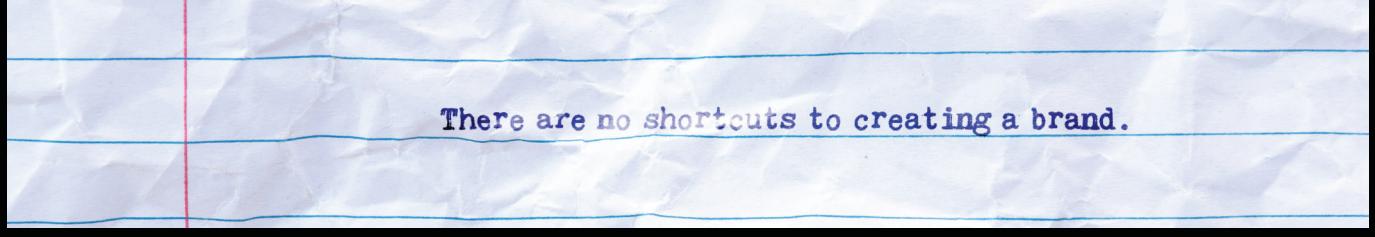
North East based international ecommerce company RyanFosterDesign (RFD) has relocated into bigger premises and taken on two more developers after helping to propel one of its biggest clients, Gymshark, into the Sunday Times Fast Track 100 list for the second year running, and increasing its sales from £12 million to £41 million in the last 12 months.

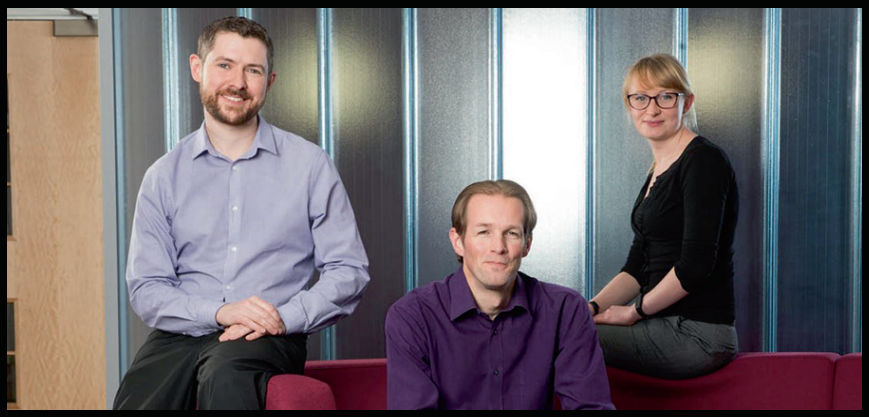
UK-based active-wear brand Gymshark has also signed up to RFD's client success programme to assist with its ongoing plans for further developments and improvements.

RFD has doubled the size of its offices in making the move to North Shields Fish Quay. The company aims to create more jobs, increase revenue by over 25% in 2018 and build on its success of achieving the half million pound turnover mark in 2017.

The 18-strong team at RFD now powers some of the world's most popular fashion and lifestyle brands. The company helps them generate high volume sales by adopting a strategic approach and creating customised campaigns.

The firm's success comes on the back of partnering with Shopify Plus, one of the world's biggest ecommerce platforms. RFD is one of only a handful of UK specialist Shopify Plus partner agencies, which is capable of designing, building and optimising websites for the cloud-based platform.





TRIO OF CHEMISTS BOLSTER ARCINOVA'S BURGEONING API DEPARTMENT

Three new chemists have joined contract research and development organisation Arcinova's Active Pharmaceutical Ingredient (API) team as demand for its services grows.

Arcinova, which is headquartered in Alnwick, provides both integrated end to end solutions and standalone services to pharmaceutical and biotech companies. The company has recruited synthetic chemists Stephen McQuaker, Celia Brammah and Martin Wilmshurst as part of the ongoing expansion of its API services.

Martin has a BA from Queens College, Oxford, and undertook postdoctoral research at the Université de Versailles Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines in France. Celia joins Arcinova from Johnson Matthey where she worked as a graduate scientist whilst Stephen previously worked as a senior process development chemist at Hartlepool-based Frutarom.

Arcinova works across drug substance synthesis, drug product manufacture, bioanalytical and metabolism services, and synthesis of toxic/highly potent APIs. It also provides consultancy services and works in partnership with companies throughout the drug development process.

CITY SKYSCRAPER ENABLED BY FOUNDER OF NEWCASTLE'S CHINATOWN

The man credited for being the founder of Newcastle's Chinatown has now enabled the creation of a second landmark.

Peter Cheng, who opened the first Chinese business on Newcastle's famous Stowell Street in 1978, sold one of his properties on Rutherford Street to allow the site to become the city's tallest building, an eagerly-anticipated 26-floor Dubai-style apartment block.

The £40m skyscraper, named Hadrian Tower, was recently granted planning permission, and work has recently begun to make plans for the 162 apartments a reality.

The Cheng family declined a number of previous offers to sell the property however, they finally agreed to sell the site to enable the creation of the skyscraper, which has been hailed as a 'beacon of economic investment' for the city.

The Cheng family were represented in the sale by Alan Harkness at Newcastle law firm Sintons, who has been their trusted advisor for over 30 years.

TIER ONE CAPITAL CONTINUES ITS EXPANSION

Newcastle-based wealth management firm Tier One Capital Ltd has continued its expansion plans with the launch of prestigious new offices in Mayfair, London, and Lausanne, Switzerland.

The new offices will provide a base in both the UK and Swiss financial markets and will complement its established North East-based operations and workforce.

The Mayfair office, ideally located within London's private equity sector, will allow Tier One Capital to secure new investment opportunities and further capital flows for its highly successful Private Funding Circles, which deliver an 8% plus annual yield for clients.

The Swiss office, which is Tier One Capital's first international location, is situated close to Switzerland's economic heart of Geneva and will act as an investment management hub under the stewardship of Chief Investment Officer Tristan de Gabiole.

Jess Swindells, Managing Director of Tier One Capital, said: "These are very exciting times for Tier One Capital. The new well placed locations will provide us with opportunities to expand and diversify our portfolio and client base."

FLEDGING NEWCASTLE COMPANY WELCOMES NEW INVESTMENT PACKAGE

Urban Candle, a premium luxury candle and fragrance company, has been given the green light to expand following a substantial investment from the firm based next door to its premises in Newcastle upon Tyne.

Urban Candle owner Matthew Patterson warmly welcomed an injection of fresh capital from neighbour Matt Daniel of M.K. Catering, giving the company the financial boost it needed.

The workshops of Urban Candle and M.K. Catering have sat side by side for two years at John Buddle Work Village in Newcastle's West End and in that time the two company owners have developed a close working relationship. Aware of Urban Candle's vision to grow, Matt was happy to lend a financial helping hand and provide the much-needed expansion capital.

As well as developing a UK-wide strategy for Urban Candle, Matthew is also seeking out international openings for the brand and exploring opportunities to evolve and improve the product range.

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DURHAM'S DIGITAL DENTISTS

The Renowned Cosmetic Dental Clinic arrives in the Cathedral City.

Ten years ago, when Dr Darren Cannell and Dr Andy Stafford set up their Cosmetic Dental Clinic dental practice in the centre of Newcastle, they were already making plans for the future. Not only were they determined to build one of the most technologically advanced dental practices in the UK, they also wanted to use their clinic in Old Eldon Square as a blueprint for expansion.

2018 has seen the first part of their plans fall into shape at 7 Old Elvet in the heart of Durham City. Here they have copied the original business model enabling them to have multidisciplinary dental centres in both NE1 and DH1.

Any clients who attend the Newcastle clinic will immediately feel at home in Durham. Not only will Andy and Darren be familiar faces at the clinic, but the décor, facilities, equipment and huge range of dental procedures are identical.

Two further restorative and aesthetic dentists have been appointed to work out of both sites. They are Dr Sonnie Yousefzadeh-Bindra who has relocated to the North East from London, and Dr David Bretton who has left Yorkshire to join The Cosmetic Dental Clinic Team. David has also recently been named as 'Young Dentist of the Year' at both the prestigious 'Dentistry Awards' and 'Private Dentistry Awards'.

"Following over 10 years success in Newcastle City Centre it was time to expand the brand. Durham was the obvious choice given a substantial number of our current clients travel from the likes of Co. Durham, Teeside, North Yorkshire and beyond..... it also ties in well with the exciting development and heavy investment into Durham City itself" said Darren. "It allows us to expand our digital dentistry to more people who live within the Durham locality. We're already working alongside the Durham University student population and are currently sponsoring the university rugby teams."

Darren and Andy are proud of the reputation which the Cosmetic Dental Clinic has earned.

"We wanted to move dentistry forward," said Andy. "We wanted to offer something different and we want to be the best. We can now offer the very latest technology to patients....we've been doing it in Newcastle and now we're doing it in Durham."

Being at the cutting edge of the digital revolution enables the Cosmetic Dental Clinic to offer its patients more unique, efficient, precise and comfortable dental solutions.

For example, the Cosmetic Dental Clinic is one of only a handful of practices in the UK where CEREC treatments are available. Using on-site computerised equipment, it allows Andy, Darren and their team to provide single-visit dentistry crowns and veneers as well as repairing broken teeth and removing unsightly metal fillings which can be replaced with tooth coloured ceramics under very precise control.

Everything is done in one appointment which gives busy people the opportunity to preserve and enhance their teeth with accuracy and efficiency in as short a time as possible.

The Cosmetic Dental Clinic is also has its own CBCT bone scanner which, in conjunction with the CEREC software, enables the clinicians to precisely plan and place dental implants with optimised predictability and patient safety.

Are you happy with the shape and alignment of your teeth? If the answer is no, then the Cosmetic Dental Clinic has another piece of wizardry which will transform the way you look when you smile. For many people, the result is life-changing.

The Cosmetic Dental Clinic are the biggest Providers of Invisalign® clear brace systems in the North East. This is highlighted by their 'Diamond Provider Status' awarded to only a small number of Invisalign Doctors throughout the UK.

Being the regions 'Digital Dentists' they can carry out such treatments using a full digital workflow which does away with traditional impression moulds which many people find to be extremely uncomfortable. A 3D image is created of how your smile will appear. You will be given an estimate of how long it will take to complete the course of treatment. Over the coming weeks, you will be provided with a series of aligners (which are almost invisible) that slowly but surely move your teeth to the desired, predetermined positions.

The best idea is to go onto www.thecosmeticdentalclinic.com and see what Darren, Andy and their team of experts can do for you. If you want to check out the staggering results of their new technology, head for the 'treatments' section. The series of before/after photographs are truly amazing.

Alternatively, give them a call on Durham 0191 375 0191 or Newcastle 0191 260 3688 to arrange an appointment and discover how your world can change.

HINDLEY MAKES KEY APPOINTMENT

Cramlington-based electronic assembly services specialist Hindley Circuits has announced the appointment of business development manager Alistair Barnes, 43, who has over 20 years' experience in the electronics sector.

Richard Whitehead, Chief Executive Officer at Hindley Circuits, said: "We have a £2.6 million order book going into our new financial year. To move forward, we need to continue to bring in talented people so Alistair is a key appointment. He has vast experience in the electronics components sector and a very strong technical background."

Alistair said: "I am delighted to join Hindley Circuits at this pivotal moment. My role is to identify clients on the cusp of new product development in specialist niche markets, and to develop close relationships that enables them to come to market as quickly as possible."

TIER ONE CAPITAL GROWS EXECUTIVE TEAM

Tier One Capital is strengthening its executive team with the announcement of two senior appointments. Jess Swindells joins as Managing Director whilst Brendan O'Grady joins as Director of Corporate Finance.

Joining from North East corporate law firm Muckle LLP, Jess will be responsible for contributing to the overall management and growth strategy at Newcastle-based Tier One Capital. Jess brings with her vast experience in all aspects of banking and finance, having acted for many major national and international banks, alternative finance providers and charities on their finance needs.

Brendan joins the business from Gentoo Group, where he was the Head of Finance for Gentoo Homes and the Tax and Treasury Manager for the wider Gentoo Group. Brendan is a chartered accountant, qualifying in London with the Institute of Chartered Accountants of England and Wales.

JOURNALISM GRADUATE JOINS O FROM BDAILY

Newcastle-based O Communications has expanded its team with the first of several new recruits planned for 2018.

Sammy Sadler, 25, has joined the award-winning agency as marketing manager, previously working as sales and marketing manager at regional news website Bdaily.

Using her journalism degree, Sammy is responsible for creative content marketing, social media, video and running the agency's own events programme.

Sammy said: "I've always been passionate about marketing and communications and I'm thrilled to start the new year with a position at O. I was drawn to the agency due to its reputation in the North East for being a dynamic, talented creative team with an impressive range of high-profile clients."

W NORTH ADDS THREE TO GROWING NEWCASTLE TEAM

Newcastle-based PR agency W North has hired Taimar Askew, Fran Clark and Rachel Jones to join the rapidly expanding group.

Based in Ouseburn's Toffee Factory, W North is the Northern arm of London's W Communications, one of the world's top ten fastest-growing communications consultancies which specialises in media, digital and social work for global and regional brands. The three join as account executives to create an eight-strong W North team.

Taimar, 21, recently gained a first-class honours degree in public relations from the University of Sunderland whilst 22-year-old Fran recently completed a successful communications internship with The Sick Children's Trust in the North East. Meanwhile Rachel, 23, joins after recently completing her undergraduate studies at Northumbria University.

ARE YOU EXCEEDING THE NEEDS OF YOUR CUSTOMER?

It is all too easy for your customers to switch to your competitors who are only a click away.

Differentiating your service or product offering is important. Being able to articulate what you do in a simple, compelling way is vital but meeting your customer's needs every day at every touchpoint is the real challenge. Is your business truly customer centric?

'Customers will never love a company until the employees love it first' – Simon Sinek

Your people are integral to your customer experience. How much do you value your team? Is your service culture evident right across your business? What does your culture look like from an employee perspective?

Spend some time reviewing your employee journey and ensure they are empowered to meet the needs of the customer and truly champion your brand.

Why you?

What is the true value of your brand? Have you taken time to articulate why you do what you do? If it isn't clear to you how are you going to convince a potential customer to buy. Think of brands that you admire and ask yourself why. Not only do they have a compelling story but they have taken the time to ensure the story is understood across the business and evident at every customer interaction.

'If people like you, they will listen to you but if they trust you, they will do business with you' – Zig Ziglar.

Trust comes from authenticity, consistency and the firm belief in your customer's mind that they are the reason you get out of bed in the morning.

KISS (keep it simple stupid)

Remember that in this digital age the good old goldfish has a greater memory than us humans. Keep your message simple, appeal to as many senses as possible and remember that your customer's comments are far more believable than yours. Lastly make it memorable. It is now video, rather than pictures, that tell a thousand words.

Wearing your customer's shoes

When was the last time you tried them on?

Conduct both quantitative and qualitative customer research and engage with those closest to the customer experience. You'll be surprised by what you find out. Customers love to be asked but you might want to engage folk who specialise in customer insight to ensure you ask the right questions.

Understand MY needs

Generic marketing was acceptable in years gone by but with the wonders of modern technology and social media platforms you can now market to the individual. It is now expected for your company to communicate what I want, when I want it, understanding my preferred method of receiving it.

Innovate with your vision in mind

Watch out for disruptors in your sector. They are fleet of foot, customer obsessed and probably armed with some techno wizards. However, if you are going to innovate make sure it is something that your customer cares about. Innovation for innovation's sake is a waste of resource, time and money.

What's working

How well do you know what your customer thinks about your service? What does your customer feedback look like? Create a customer satisfaction model that makes it easy for your customer to talk to you, irrespective of their chosen method of communication.

Analyse the results, prioritise and focus on some solutions before your competitor does. Oh and keep your customer up to date with progress. Listening is one thing but action is what will set you apart.

Get an external view

It is difficult to view your business from the outside. Use your network. Talk to your customers, even use your friends but most importantly find a marketing partner who can be your guide, develop your strategy and help you create an integrated marketing plan that will delight your customers and deliver measureable results. And remember...

'Customer service is not a department, it's everyone's job'

Andrew Silver is the owner of 360 Growth Partners who identify, coordinate and make the adjustments businesses need to accelerate growth. For more information go to www.360growthpartners.co.uk or e-mail start@360growthpartners.co.uk

Looking through the right end!

On the grid - motoGP Spain

Aerial filming in Canada for RK Heliski

Mt.Bear summit

LIFE IN THE FAST LANE

Northern Insight's Steve Russell meets
Simon August, Managing Director, 2XS Films

Fast cars, motorbikes, extreme sports and the occasional close encounter with helicopter rotor blades. No, not a list of James Bond's hobbies, just an average day at the office for award-winning North East cameraman, digital cinematographer and Managing Director of 2XS Films Ltd, Simon August.

Having racked up twenty years of filming experience on some incredible projects for many of the world's leading brands, including England Rugby, Formula 1 and Red Bull, Simon and his company are now at the vanguard of high-tech image-making.

However, like many entrepreneurs, his early career path wasn't always so smooth. Simon, 44, explains: "Growing up I wanted to be an RAF pilot but I failed the Maths and Physics tests, so being from a farming background, I decided to go to Agricultural College". This lasted about 6 months until a near-fatal car crash at 19 triggered an epiphany.

"After the crash I told my parents I didn't want to be a farmer and to be fair they were really supportive. I'd always been into Windsurfing so I decided I'd train to become an instructor while I figured out what I wanted to do."

That decision took him to Cornwall, teaching water sports for several years until once more he found himself restless. An attempt to become a helicopter pilot followed – leaving him close to penniless - before an opportunity to break into the film-industry arrived by chance. In 1997 Shekhar Kapur's biopic Elizabeth, was filming in Northumberland and thanks to his knowledge of the area, Simon was hired as a location runner, a role he enjoyed and which planted a seed of ambition.

Returning to Cornwall, he briefly resumed his teaching career before enrolling on a film and photography course at Falmouth College of Arts. Following graduation, he paid his dues within the film industry before establishing himself as a freelance camera man, and he considers himself lucky to have covered some amazing events, such as the Isle of Man TT and Moto GP. Establishing 2XS Films in 2003, he continued his freelance work but also began to take on increasingly impressive projects with 2XS, culminating in what he considers to be his proudest achievement:

"Doing the first ascent and descent of Mount Bear in Alaska with professional athletes was physically, the hardest thing I've ever done."

Filmed in 2009, Taming the Bear, charts Berghaus athlete Julia Pickering's audacious attempt to split-board down Mount Bear, and it was a project which demonstrates just how much Simon suffers for his art!

"When you're in a tent, it's so cold you can't get your snow boots on (temperatures can reach minus 50 at the summit) and you're the only people in 3 million square miles of wilderness it can be pretty mind blowing!"

Due to some treacherous weather conditions, this was also where he had a rather too-close-for-comfort encounter with the rotor blades of a helicopter, but luckily he survived to tell the tale and 2XS has since gone on to become a truly world-class operation. Mount Bear was also where he met Warwick Pickering, a professional ski mountaineer, who now acts as a safety specialist for 2XS and has become an integral part of the company. The other principal player is Joe Carter, an accomplished producer and cameraman who heads up the Australian wing of the company. Simon himself considered relocating down-under but found the call of home too strong. Now a Newcastle resident once more, he told us: "I love the North and the people up here. I'm not a city person generally, but I love Newcastle. For me, it's the perfect city. I've lived all over the globe and had some crazy experiences, but this will always be my home."

Australia's loss is the North East's gain and having settled back in the region, Simon is eager to use his passion and experience to help showcase local businesses. Offering an incredible range of image production, including a helicopter, state-of-the-art drones, super slow motion cameras and 360 degree filming, 2XS are able to bring a unique and dynamic perspective to their clients, regardless of the brief. Simon explained:

"We try to take what we do in the wilderness and apply it to everyday situations to help our clients stand out. Just by making a two-minute film we recently helped a local business increase their profits by 33 percent".

Though somewhat ill-at-ease in selling himself, Simon is a remarkable man at the peak of his game and undoubtedly represents an exciting addition to the North East business scene.

For more info, visit www.2xsfilms.com

BRADLEY HALL ANNUAL FUNDRAISER

Leading North East chartered surveyors and estate agents Bradley Hall held its second annual fundraiser in aid of Heel and Toe Children's Charity.

Over 200 of the firm's guests enjoyed an afternoon of dining, drinks and entertainment from comedian Carl Hutchinson, close up magic from Paul Lytton and music from North Star Band at the Crowne Plaza Newcastle - Stephenson Quarter.

Generous attendees donated over £9,000 to the charity. The total was raised through raffles and a silent auction for the event's main prize which was donated by Ramside Hall Hotel.

Mortgages

SMART TECHNOLOGY GIVES ACCOUNTANCY FIRM THE CUTTING EDGE

Newcastle-based Robson Laidler Accountants is one of the very first accountancy practices in the North East to launch its own App to help its clients manage finances at their fingertips.

The free mobile App is the latest technological development for the forward thinking firm, which is preparing its clients for the digital tax revolution via a range of cloud accounting software packages and business advisory services.

The App, which can be downloaded free onto iPhone, iPad or Android devices, gives users invaluable tools and features such as a GPS system to track business mileage, tax calculators and tables, logbooks, receipt and income management, instant access to the latest financial news and important dates and filing deadlines.

Robson Laidler managing director Graham Purvis said: "Our drive is to help businesses and individuals across the region to become more successful, more profitable and ultimately more enjoyable to run.

"This App was designed to provide a go-to-place where clients and other business owners can access all our services. It's packed full of some really useful tax tables, calculators and important financial dates, all of which people can access for free.

"The new App has been tailor made for Robson Laidler and is perfect for busy business people on the move. It integrates with our popular Xero cloud accountancy software and has a receipt management system, which allows users to take photos of their receipts and upload them to the Receipt Bank function or export to Robson Laidler directly.

"We are among the first accountancy firms in the region to provide customers with such a useful, free financial app. We are always looking to innovate and find new ways of helping our clients run their financial affairs smartly. We think this is a great way of attracting new clients, particularly tech-savvy companies."

Nick Wilson Head of Cloud Accounting at Robson Laidler said: "The App will have a positive impact on our clients as it streamlines how we work, for example we could meet a client off-site and by logging on to the App, we will be able to see the latest data on Xero accountancy software, send out invoices or set up direct debits. It is an extremely helpful business tool."

The Robson Laidler App can be downloaded free of charge using the links below:

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COMMERCE HOUSE ALL SET TO MAKE 2018 GOALS HAPPEN FOR NEW TENANTS

January has been spent by many companies and businesses planning out the rest of 2018. This is ideal as it means there are goals and aspirations with another eleven months to achieve them in but what positive actions can be put in place to help achieve those targets?

Believe it or not, a new office can be instrumental in this, so in this article Christine Huntington of Commerce House shares with Northern Insight readers the benefits, to inspire us all to take a good a look at where we are sat right now!

Christine said: "A new office has a number of benefits and not just on a practical level of having more space to expand the team now or in the future.

"It has a number of positive emotional and physical effects too, boosting moral and drive. Here I have broken down the feedback from some of our most recent tenants on the impact their office moves have had on them, their team and their bottom line."

"The team feels invested in, loving their new daily surroundings, so they seem to work harder and achieve more."

"It gave current and prospective clients a really positive message about us and where we are taking the business."

"Since having the new city centre post code we have found it so much easier to win new business and have doubled our portfolio. It has boosted our reputation to a whole new market."

"It give us a new lease of life – we had been in our old office for so long that the daily routine had become a bit of a grind. They say a change is as good as a rest, and in our case moving office brought our passion back. Also sharing a building with new faces in the reception and corridors has been a boost in itself!"

Christine continued: "These are just a few examples of the benefits that people have found by investing in a new office space. Certainly our tenants are thriving and the atmosphere in the building is one of excited expectation for 2018. I think that kind of mentality is infectious and is always something to consider. Take a look at where you are sat now – does it excite you, do you feel motivated, are you surrounded by other successful businesses and what image are you giving to the outside world with your address?"

Commerce House is a stunning Grade II listed building in the heart of Middlesbrough. Directly opposite the train station, with plenty of parking available. It boasts fully furnished and serviced offices, which are now ready to move into. Add that in with hot desks, a business lounge and spectacular meeting areas including the Chairman's Room and there is nowhere else quite like it. And as prices start from £200 pcm it's proving popular, so interested parties need to act quickly!

Contacts and more details can be found on www.commerce-house.co.uk

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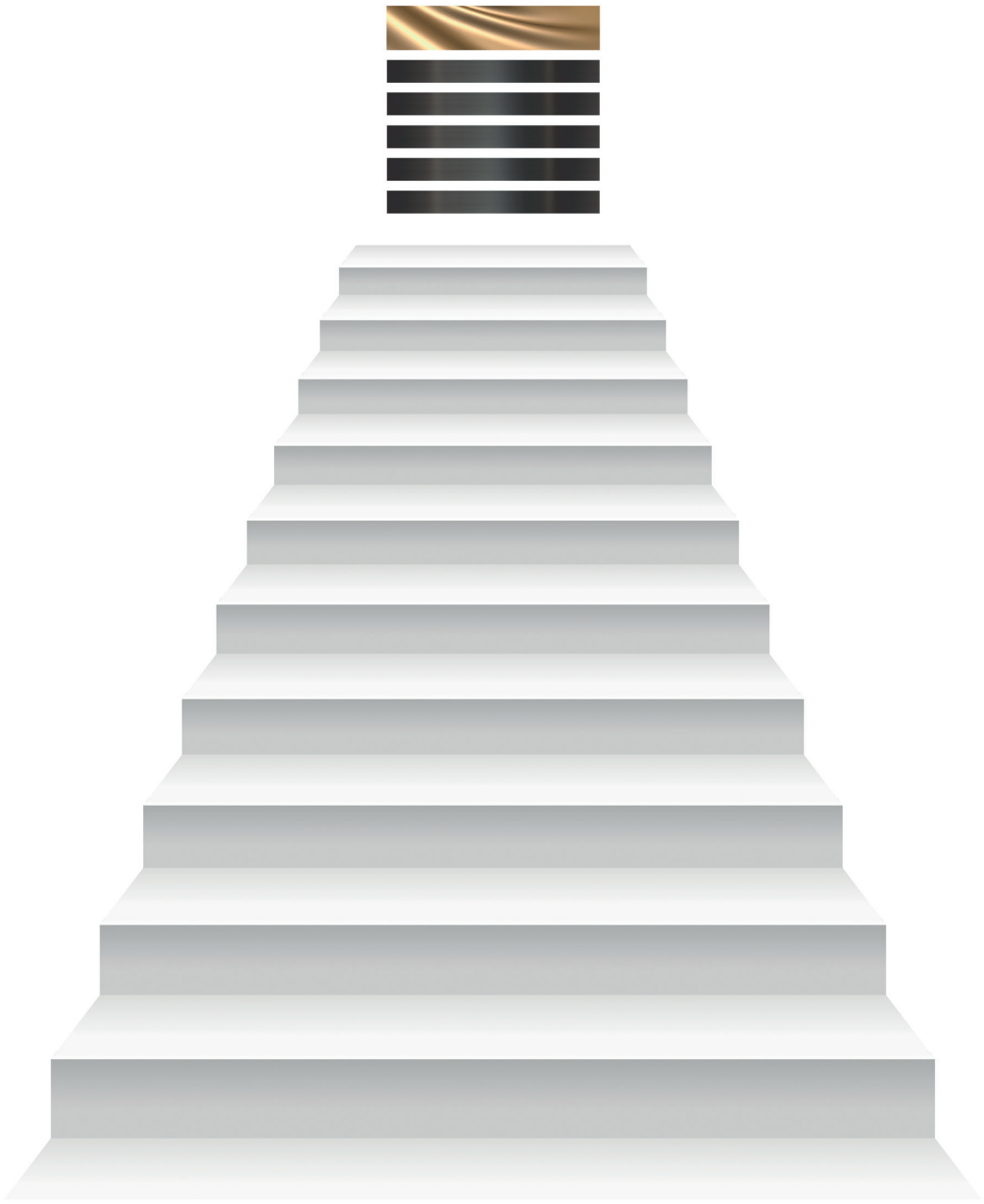

COMFORTABLY ON TOP OF THINGS

FINANCIAL EXPERT GETS BEHIND CHARITY MAKING IT HAPPEN FOR GIRLS

Dr Emma Black, a financial expert named in the Top 18 to watch in 2018, has started the year with a pledge to make sure schoolgirls in the North East get the support they need to enter the career of their choice.

The 30-year-old managing director of Cascade Cash Management, a financial company that last year looked after a portfolio in excess of £600 million, has taken on the role as mentor within The Girls' Network.

The Girls' Network is a national charity that aims to inspire and empower girls from the least advantaged communities by connecting them with a mentor and a network of professional female role models. The charity has just launched in the North East and is looking to support up to 100 15 year olds in its first year, with over 1,500 girls being mentored per year across London, Manchester, Birmingham, Portsmouth & Liverpool.

Emma met network manager of the North East for The Girls' Network, Alison Allan, at a Forward Ladies event and the relationship grew from there. Emma said: "I was impressed by Alison and what she said about The Girls' Network. I am passionate about women coming into the financial industry from all backgrounds, so it seemed a natural step for me to get involved. Having undergone the recruitment process, I was delighted to host the training course at our offices for xx other women joining too. I am looking forward to working with all of them and meeting our mentees."

Cascade Cash Management (Cascade) is an independent and transparent service created to generate enhanced cash returns and increase protection on deposits through professional cash management. This year the company has taken a huge step to create and launch a unique online digital portal on their website, which has catapulted the company into a new level of success.

The digital portal is the only one of its kind in the UK allowing independent and unbiased cash solutions using the company's proprietary algorithm that means clients don't have to choose only one bank. With the online portal and Cascade's client support team all banks can be accessed quickly and easily, on a daily basis.

Alison Allan said: "To get support from women like Emma is so important to our first year in the region. We need to support and help girls to find their way to the career they aspire to, and having a mentor is a proven way to ensure this happens. We are on the lookout for more schools and mentors to be involved, and of course as a charity donations assist us in our project massively!"

More information can be found at www.cascade.co.uk and at www.thegirlsnetwork.org.uk

NEW YEAR - NEW MORTGAGE?

Paul Hardingham, Director of Innovate Mortgages and Loans

Many people entered 2018 with renewed enthusiasm and resolutions to lose weight, drink less, exercise more etc. All of these aims should be applauded, but financial health and wellbeing should also be at the top of the New Year agenda.

Newspaper headlines often focus on areas such as utility bills and costs of shopping, areas which can produce a gradual saving each month over time. Many of these ideas are also targeted by the price comparison sites as they offer small savings in a quick and easy time.

A mortgage review though can produce significant savings both month on month by lowering repayments and long term by securing a lower rate and possibly reducing the mortgage term. To many, it may seem a daunting prospect, however, by using a mortgage broker, much of this pain and time can be removed. After an initial no obligation conversation in the region of 45 minutes, a good quality broker will know whether they are able to assist and also broadly how much you might be able to save or perhaps raise capital to clear credit commitments, fund a Buy to Let, help children etc.

In addition, they will deal with all of the paperwork and the lender so that you don't have to be too concerned, and your time investment is kept to a minimum.

Interest rates are currently close to all-time lows with many experts now suggesting that interest rates may continue to rise after the interest rate rise in November. So as we enter a potentially volatile period for the UK financially why not take this early opportunity of a no obligation mortgage review to establish your options and make this once of your New Year's resolutions?

Paul Hardingham and Tony Ibson are Mortgage and Protection Advisers at Innovate Mortgages and Loans. Both have over 20 years of experience advising individuals and businesses across the North East of England. They can be contacted for bespoke advice at paul@innovateml.co.uk or tony@innovateml.co.uk or call 0191 223 3514.

Think carefully before securing other debts against your home. Your home or property is at risk of repossession if you do not keep up repayments on a mortgage or other loan secured on it. Innovate Mortgages and Loans is a trading style of Innovation Financial Management Ltd.

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To find out what money can do for you please contact **Neil McLoram** on 0191 279 7300 or email neil.mcloram@brewin.co.uk

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CHAT HEROES TALKING THEIR WAY INTO M62 CORRIDOR

A successful North East-based managed web chat service is aiming to talk up its way into the M62 corridor as it plots the next stages of its growth story in Leeds and Manchester.

Chat Heroes aims to help companies convert website traffic into useful business leads by providing a proactive chat system managed by a team of expert individuals based at its Wallsend office, with detailed information on potential new customers being compiled and sent instantly to the clients for which they're working.

Since being set up in 2015, Chat Heroes has won clients right across the UK, as well as in the US, South Africa and Spain, but as part of building more closer to its North East, it is now looking to expand its presence in the major conurbations along the M62 corridor.

Three new jobs have recently been created in response to growing demand, and the firm is expecting to add more people to its nine-strong web chat team in the coming months.

Chat Heroes' clients, most of which come to the business through direct recommendation, cover a wide range of industries, but it is seeing particularly growth in the property and professional services sectors.

Gosforth-based RMT Accountants and Business Advisors is both advising the Chat Heroes management team on all aspects of the firm's development, and using its services themselves to help manage enquiries from existing and potential new customers.

Matthew Flinders, head of marketing and business development at RMT, says: "We get a lot of visitors to our website who are looking for information about the practice, and using Chat Heroes services to proactively give them what they're looking for is helping to turn more of these general queries into specific opportunities.

"The Chat Heroes team is succeeding by delivering a tailored service that can make a big difference to the ways in which companies can grow, and we're very happy to be both supporting and benefiting from their work."

Paul Lawton, founder and commercial director at Chat Heroes, adds: "Customers are becoming ever more demanding of businesses with which they're considering working, and experience tells those that can meet their demands for information and support have a far greater chance of converting their interest into a commercial relationship.

"We take away any barriers that might prevent people finding the information they're looking for when they want it, and our UK-based teams respond in real time to

"Having established a strong presence across our native North East, it makes sense to use it as a base from which to establish more of a presence along the M62 corridor, and we're expecting to see further growth resulting quickly as the Chat Heroes brand becomes more established there.

"Having the RMT team available as an expert sounding board for our senior team is helping us take the right decisions for the company's future, and you couldn't get much more of an expression of confidence that we're doing things well than having them sign up to our services themselves."

www.r-m-t.co.uk. For more information on chat heroes please visit www.chatheroes.com

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DEALING WITH UNSOLICITED ACQUISITION APPROACHES

Shawn Bone

Most business owners will at some point receive an unsolicited approach from a potential acquirer. But how should you respond to such an approach and should you open up the discussions to other parties as well?

It is important to be prepared for such an event, even if the prospect of selling your business may be something you have never considered.

If you feel that the buyer is serious, there is often little harm in having an exploratory meeting. In a first meeting, the onus should be on the buyer to explain their strategy, what attracted them to your business, how they expect your business to fit within their group and their approach to valuation. It is important that the onus is on the buyer to justify a strategic logic and how that would translate into a strategic valuation that is after all what most shareholders are looking for.

The buyer will undoubtedly also want to hear more about your business, but it is important not to disclose too much information at this early stage. The "less is more" maxim is key in initial conversation as it allows you a far greater strategic and tactical flexibility at a later stage of the discussion.

Quite often the initial approach may also trigger wider consideration of the future of the business in general and a potential sale process specifically – should you give consideration to other potential acquirers – do they provide leverage or is there a premium to remaining exclusive with your initial suitor?

The textbook answer is that you should always run a competitive sale process to ensure the market determines the optimum value. However, there are merits of talking to only one purchaser in certain situations – it is important to establish whether they are a strategic buyer prepared to pay extra for a non-competitive process, and in certain situations shareholders may feel that an "off-market deal" will also minimise the risk of commercial leakage.

The nature of your business and your sector will also be a key consideration. There may be other potential buyers where there is a particularly strong synergy case, or your sector may be going through a period of heavy consolidation activity, in which case you would likely benefit from inviting other consolidators to the table.

If you have received an approach and you are unsure how to best progress it, Cavu Corporate Finance have many years experience dealing with unsolicited approaches and optimising value for shareholders.

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(L-R standing) Michael Dickens, Emma Neal and Alex Marsh of Maven Capital Partners
(L-R sitting) Michael Vassallo and Ben Jones of Maven Capital Partners

MAVEN CAPITAL PARTNERS: A YEAR IN REVIEW

2017 was a transformational year for Maven in the North East – the expansion of the business in the region has created exciting opportunities for businesses looking for funding to fuel their growth plans.

With £550 million of funds under management or available for investment for a range of client funds, Maven enjoyed a record year for new deals and realisations across private equity and regional funds. The Maven venture capital trusts (VCTs) invested in nine high-growth businesses, closed a successful fundraise for Maven VCT 6 and there is currently a £30 million open offer for Maven VCT 3 & 4. Funding from Maven's Investor Partners network also supported the growth of a range of established private companies across the UK.

Last year, we tendered for and were successful in securing the £57 million equity mandate for Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund (NPIF) in the North West of England, in a process administered by the British Business Bank. Maven also bid for and won the mandate to manage two debt funds of £50 million and £40 million across the West Midlands and East and South-East Midlands respectively, as part of the Midlands Engine Investment Fund (MEIF), supported by the European Regional Development Fund.

Locally, we tendered for and won the mandate to manage the £20 million Finance Durham Fund, now managed by Maven on behalf of Business Durham, the economic development company for Durham County Council. Opening new offices in Durham and Newcastle last year added to Maven's strong presence across the North of England. Now operating from a network of 11 regional offices across the UK, Maven recruited over 20 new employees last year to join the existing team of dedicated private equity and commercial property professionals.

Maven's property business also had a strong 2017, working extensively with Hong Kong based IPIM on several projects to fund hotel and PBSA (Purpose Built Student Accommodation) projects across the UK.

Maven's property portfolio has expanded significantly and the team now manages 19 property investments including hotels, student accommodation and office refurbishments with a combined Gross Development Value in excess of £250 million. Maven's eighth hotel development, Manchester's first Hampton by Hilton, a £17.5 million new build development of a 221 guest-room hotel was announced late last year and expands a hotel portfolio which includes hotel Indigo, Ibis Styles and Travelodge hotels.

Locally, Maven completed a £15 million transaction for the purchase and refurbishment of the Grade II listed Shire Hall in Durham. Originally built in 1890s as the headquarters for Durham County Council, Shire Hall is being renovated into a Hotel Indigo, the up-market, boutique brand of InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG), with a 150-cover Marco Pierre White Steakhouse.

Maven supporting North East businesses

In the North East, Maven has the capacity to invest in a wide range of companies in private equity transactions of up to £15 million, and on behalf of a range of funds. One of the most active and best resourced VCT managers in the industry, Maven manages six VCTs, which offers retail investors access to a diversified portfolio of high-growth UK private businesses.

Locally, Maven invested £1.1 million of VCT funding in Durham-based Fintech firm, Growth Capital Ventures (GCV), a developer and operator of specialist online investment and alternative finance platforms. Funding enabled GCV to launch a new P2P lending platform, develop its existing online platforms and grow its team to service its expanding investor base.

Maven also invests on behalf of its established co-investment network, Maven Investor Partners, including around 300 High Net Worth individuals, family offices and institutional investors. Maven recently invested £1 million via Investor Partners in Newcastle-based app designer and technology consultancy, hedgehog lab, to support the next phase of growth. Funding allowed the company to invest further in its sales and marketing function, boost its delivery capabilities and broaden its presence overseas.

For businesses across County Durham, an exciting funding opportunity is available through the £20 million Finance Durham Fund. Maven has already supported one of the North East's largest small-batch craft distilleries, Durham Gin, to open a visitor centre in Durham city centre and launch the production of Durham Whiskey, whilst Seaham-based Moralbox, an innovative technology start-up, received the Fund's first incubator investment to fuel its growth plans.

The opportunity for local companies

The North East is home to some of the UK's fastest growing, innovative private companies with impressive growth potential. Our local team is actively seeking exciting businesses, based in the region, looking for funding to help achieve their growth plans.

Please contact Maven's North East team to discuss your business and its plans, or visit www.mavencp.com to find out more

MAVEN

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Maven offers flexible debt and equity funding options to support dynamic SMEs across the UK, investing up to £15 million in a single transaction.

Maven funding can support a business at any stage of its growth cycle and cover a wide range of corporate activity including MBOs and buy-and-build strategies, as well as the provision of acquisition finance, development capital and replacement capital.

If your business is in need of finance to help unlock its growth potential, we may be able to help. For more information please contact:

Salvus House, Aykley Heads, Durham, DH1 5TS. T: 0191 731 8595

Earl Grey House, 75/85 Grey Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 6EF. T: 0191 731 8590

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2017 - THE FTSE 100 IS ONLY PART OF THE STORY

The FTSE 100 ended 2017 over 7% up from where it started as last year's rather late Christmas rally gave a terminal boost to what would have been a lacklustre performance.

Peter Rutherford

This a reasonable return especially considering the clouds of political uncertainty that have loomed over the markets. By that I mean the General Election result and BREXIT.

Whilst the TV and newspapers tend to focus on the "Footsie," it is only part of our share market. What we have seen is consistent with research carried out in the USA, that smaller companies outperform larger companies over time. Why? Because the investor is being rewarded for carrying additional risk. In simple terms, a small company is more likely to go pop than a very large one. Diversifying over a large number of companies clearly reduces the risk of catastrophic loss.

The performance of the UK equity market was well below the global average. In sterling terms, the MSCI World Index was up 20.1%. That was not simply the buoyant USA market (just over half the World Index by weight and up 19.4%, as measured by the S&P 500): the MSCI World ex USA was up 21.0%.

In the emerging markets, returns of around 20% was also the order of the day. The MSCI Emerging Markets Index was up 22.72% in sterling terms.

What can we glean from all this?

Firstly, it is important to have diversification into the different markets of the world and not to be too UK centric. Secondly, overweight your mid and smaller company exposure as this will boost your returns over the medium to longer term.

Finally, how do you think our strategies are, and always have been, positioned?

Index	2017 Change	Comment
FTSE 100	+7.6%	Oil & Gas and utilities hold Index back
FTSE 250	+14.7%	UK focussed companies outperform Footsie
FTSE Small Cap	+14.9%	Small caps outperform mid cap and big-cap
FTSE 350 Higher Yield	+4.9%	Value-investing went out of favour
FTSE 350 Lower Yield	+13.6%	Investors were anxious to find growth
FTSE All-Share	+9.0%	Outperformed Footsie due to mid/small caps
FTSE Basic Materials	+25.0%	Top sector: Continued commodity price recovery
FTSE Utilities	-14.8%	Bottom sector: Political woes from all sides

Please remember that the value of investments and the income from them can go down. You may not get back the original amount invested. Past performance is not a reliable indicator of future performance.

Peter Rutherford is a Director at Rutherford Hughes Ltd. He can be contacted on 0191 229 9600 peter.rutherford@rutherfordhughes.com

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Joanne Warren

A STRONG 2018 FOR THE NORTH EAST NEEDS FUNDING

As we head quickly into 2018, this is a time when many businesses start to plan for their success in the year.

The North East Chamber of Commerce is looking to build a future this year that attracts investments and creates new employment opportunities. They look to a future where a stronger North East is achieved by –

- **Better funding for the region**
- **Spending on key infrastructure projects**
- **Further devolution of political powers to the area**

And this aligns in many ways with the 'Northern Powerhouse' idea of the government to develop the areas away from London and the South East economically.

New building projects and devolution of powers are something that can have a positive impact on the companies of the North East over the long term. It delivers a more connected region, able to do business with the world. With Brexit negotiations now heading into the second phase, businesses of the North East (and the rest of the UK) need to be in the best position possible to make the most of the opportunities out there.

Cash is at the core of this

And for all of these projects, access to money is the key factor. For the big infrastructure plans, there will need to be a big pot of cash available from the government to make these happen and have the positive impact on the area that is planned.

And this reflects the way that all businesses in the region operate. Having plans for the future means needing cash in the present. Companies across the North East have made improvements to their processes, developed new products or commissioned a new piece of software over the last few years. The idea with these projects is that it makes things better for the future. Any business investing their hard-earned cash in a project is doing it to be more efficient or drive sales.

In the very same way that major projects enacted by the government are designed to improve the North East, smaller projects in individual companies are designed to improve outcomes. And this comes at a price. But the government is aware of the value of these projects, and is offering incentives to business to take these risks. But not enough businesses are claiming these incentives.

R&D tax is here to stay

R&D tax credits are the name of this government incentive that rewards businesses in the North East, and the rest of the UK, to develop their business. The phrase 'research and development' might conjure up images of scientists in deep underground laboratories experimenting with different chemicals, but R&D is something that many businesses carry out as a matter of course. This might be –

- **A food manufacturer that comes up with a new flavour or product**
- **A company that improves a process or procedure**
- **A business that develops a new software platform**

And there are many more examples of how projects can turn into R&D claims with HMRC for tens of thousands of pounds, sometimes more.

R&D tax credits is seen by the government as an integral part of their drive to make the UK economy more productive. They have been in place for years already, but the funding has been increased in the light of Brexit and the opportunity this delivers. For the businesses of the UK, this is a fantastic opportunity in itself to gather that funding from a past project, or to make R&D a part of their business going forward.

Submitting an R&D tax claim

R&D tax claims can be made to HMRC by submitting the correct forms and supporting evidence. This takes the shape of relevant accounting information and an explanation of the project. HMRC are interested in –

- **How the project was an advance**
- **That it overcame uncertainty**
- **That the solution wasn't readily available**

These come together to explain why the project is eligible for a claim. There are billions of pounds in R&D tax claims made every year, and a substantial proportion of these are made by small and midsized businesses. If you have projects that you have not claimed for, then you can look back at the last two tax years as well to submit.

R&D tax is here to stay, so make the most of this opportunity to get your hands on the cash needed for your business, and develop what you do in the future. Like the capital projects called for by the North East Chamber of Commerce, this is government money that can be put to very good use.

STUART COTTEE

A native of the North East, Stuart Cottee is Deloitte's new practice senior partner for Yorkshire and the North East. Here he talks about his life and career.

How do you feel about your new role at Deloitte, and what are your plans for the business?

I'm very proud to be practice senior partner. It's the first time someone from the North East has been in that role at Deloitte. It's also the first time that a tax partner has been made practice senior partner for this region, so it's a double honour.

There are around 700 people employed across our Newcastle and Leeds offices, and it's a privilege for me to be leading such a talented group of people.

We already have a fantastic business with market leading offerings, but I'm confident that we can accelerate the growth of our practice in the next 5 years and I have a clear strategy to achieve this. This will provide even greater opportunity for our people to develop and pursue their careers in our region.

How would you describe your leadership style?

I'm very down to earth. I believe in being honest and straight with people.

I like spending time with the team and will always do my best for them. It's just the way I am. There are a lot of very bright people here, and my goal is to provide them with challenging work and good mentoring so they can develop quickly and be as good as they can be.

Is that team ethic something you've always had?

Yes, ever since I was a boy.

I was a competitive swimmer as a youngster, which taught me the importance of teamwork. The camaraderie you build up through training and competing with the same people on a daily basis helps you understand how important it is to work together to achieve your goals.

What was your childhood like? Were you an over-achiever?

I grew up in Hetton, a mining town. My dad was the first male in our family that wasn't a miner and he and my mam were keen that we kept out of trouble and that we did our best at school. I owe them a lot.

What I definitely did have, even as a kid, was a drive to get on and do well for myself. I had a sense of entrepreneurship, even if that was just a paper round to earn money or selling sweets at school that I'd acquired from a local wholesaler.

Sports – particularly swimming – gave me a competitive streak. It also kept me off the streets by giving me a purpose and instilling discipline.

How did you end up in the world of finance?

I studied accounting finance at Warwick University. That led to a job at what was then Arthur Andersen UK, which was later taken over by Deloitte.

Arthur Andersen employed a very diverse group of people from very different backgrounds. What they had in common was drive and a hunger to succeed. I liked that.

Outside of work, what do you enjoy?

My working days can be very long, so when I'm not working I like to spend time with my family.

We have six daughters aged 7 to 18, and we enjoy doing adventurous things together as a family. We've been to places like Machu Pichu and the Galapagos Islands, and we've trekked through the jungles of Costa Rica.

I like sport, particularly cycling and golf, but I'd like to do more thrill-seeking things, such as cycling in the Atlas Mountains or in Colombia. I like a challenge.

So what's the next personal challenge?

I'll be heading to Namibia later this year with colleagues from Deloitte, which will include walking across the world's oldest desert. It's part of our One Million Futures strategy, which aims to support a million people to get to where they want to be.

scottee@deloitte.co.uk www.deloitte.co.uk/northeast

DON'T LET TAX GET TOO TAXING…

Last month we welcomed in 2018 with a quick 'knees up' before getting back straight back to the grind shortly after. January is generally a month of long hours and extra shots of coffee at KP Simpson as the personal tax deadline is the 31st. For all of our clients we have been preparing, checking and double checking every scrap of paper to make sure the correct tax is paid on time.

Now, as we enter February, our main focus is how we can protect our clients with small businesses from the changes to taxing in 2018. Two years since the introduction of the dividend tax allowance, it will be cut. The tax break will see a massive reduction from £5,000 to £2,000, meaning that an estimated 2.3 million people will end up paying more tax. The average loss has been calculated at £315, but for many it will be a lot more. After earning over the £2,000 threshold, you will be taxed 7.5% if you are a basic rate tax payer.

Following on from this April, welcomes, though for many not a warm welcome, the second phase of the changes to tax relief on mortgage interest payment. Higher rate tax payers only receive 75% mortgage interest relief at 40% and 25% at 20%. By 2020/21 landlords will only receive 20% tax relief on mortgage interest, even if they are a higher rate tax payer.

There are ways to avoid being completely hit by the upcoming changes, such as using ISA's or SIPP's. We can help individuals, small and medium businesses with their accounts and have dedicated team members to ensure that you're always well informed and up to date with financial changes.

So, if you are affected by or would like more information about any of the above then get in touch with our team over the phone on 0191 420 0550, for some free, impartial advice, or drop us an email to info@kpsimpson.co.uk

BITCOIN - A WINNING GAMBLE

Richard Urron, tax partner at RSM in Newcastle, considers whether HMRC could be the biggest winner from Bitcoin investments.

Richard Urron

It has been nearly a decade since Satoshi Nakamoto's white paper was issued and Bitcoin entered the world. Bitcoin has been dismissed in the past as something used by the criminal underworld, however its popularity is now seemingly surging with ordinary investors.

This is not entirely surprising given some of the eyewatering increases in value over the last year. For example, those who made an investment of £1,000 on 1 January 2017, would be looking at a gain of £12,870 a year later, peaking at £14,354 on 17 December 2017.

Almost foreshadowing the volatility and drop in value from mid-December was the warning from Andrew Bailey, CEO of the Financial Conduct Authority. In an interview with the BBC Andrew stated that 'buying Bitcoin carried a similar level of risk to gambling' and that 'if you want to invest in Bitcoin, be prepared to lose all your money'.

Despite that warning and a lack of regulation, the interest in cryptocurrencies does not appear to be slowing. Indeed, the fact Bitcoin is unregulated has perhaps contributed to the growing interest, as it has led to the emergence of trading platforms making it easier than ever for individuals to become cryptocurrency traders.

How will Bitcoin gains be taxed in the UK?

With this increase in cryptocurrency activity, HMRC will be looking forward to its slice of the cake if big gains are made on Bitcoin or other cryptocurrency trades.

How any such gains are taxed will depend on how the Bitcoins were acquired in the first place. For most of the new generation of investors, the Bitcoins will have simply been purchased via online exchanges.

For these investors, it is likely that the normal Capital Gains Tax (CGT) rules will apply. In simple terms, CGT is the tax payable on the profit of an investment, meaning it is the gain on the investment that is taxed and not simply the amount received.

As an individual, you can have gains up to the 'annual exemption' limit (currently £11,300) in a tax year before any CGT will be due. This assumes, however, that you do not make any other capital gains in the same year. For gains over the annual exemption, CGT will apply at a rate of either 10 per cent or 20 per cent depending on whether you are a basic or higher rate taxpayer. Corporate Bitcoin investors will instead be subject to corporation tax.

What about miners and frequent traders?

Those more familiar with cryptocurrencies will be aware that as well as purchasing Bitcoin, they can be earned by certain users, called miners, who verify transactions and add them to Bitcoin's public ledger (the 'blockchain').

Miners are likely to have their profits subject to income tax, as could those who buy and sell frequently as Bitcoin traders. This is due to it being more akin to profits arising from a trade rather than an investment return. The normal trading rules will apply in these circumstances and advice should be sought due to the more complex rules that can apply when calculating the tax due.

What about losses?

Whilst it might be expected that HMRC will want gains and profits relating to Bitcoin and cryptocurrency trading to be taxed and declared on tax returns, the position on losses is less clear.

Some investors employ stop-loss strategies, basically a means of triggering a sale of their cryptocurrency at a set price, to limit their losses. Others steer away from this, arguing that the lack of regulation leaves stop-losses open to market manipulation by those who control large amounts of the cryptocurrency, accepting the risk of large losses as highlighted by the recent plunge in Bitcoin values.

Regardless of what approach an investor takes, HMRC has outlined in its guidance that the taxation of cryptocurrency trades should be reviewed individually on a case-by-case basis. HMRC also refers to the fact that 'highly speculative' transactions might not be taxable at all as they are similar to gambling winnings or losses (which are not taxable or relieved).

Whilst this would be good news for a 'winning' gamble, there is a risk that if a big loss is made on a cryptocurrency transaction, HMRC would argue that the transaction was so speculative that no tax loss is allowed. So if, as Andrew Bailey says, your Bitcoin investment is more like a gamble and it goes wrong, don't expect too much sympathy from HMRC.

RSM

For more information on the taxation of Bitcoin gains, please contact Richard Urron on 0191 255 7091 or email richard.urron@rsmuk.com

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NORTHERN INSIGHT

NEW ENTREPRENEURS' FORUM CHAIRMAN ANNOUNCED

Nigel Mills hands over to new chairman, James Robson

Well-known North East business owner, mentor and investor James Robson MBE has been named as the new chairman of the Entrepreneurs' Forum.

A highly-active entrepreneur who has launched and invested in a number of growing businesses, James succeeds Nigel Mills who held the chairman's role for the last six years.

"I am very honoured to be appointed chairman of the Entrepreneurs' Forum," said James, "the access the Forum gives business owners to a strong and diverse network is vital to the success of so many North East firms."

James is a huge advocate of the benefits of sharing expertise and experience among fellow entrepreneurs, which is something he has been committed to throughout his business career.

He established Exwold Technology in Billingham in 1992, which is a contract chemical processing company operating in the agrichemical and speciality markets. The company currently operates from four sites in Tees Valley employing in the region of 120 people, with a turnover in excess of £10m.

Now a non-executive director of Exwold, James has built a respected reputation for helping other businesses since he has been able to focus more of his time on sharing the lessons he has learnt during his own entrepreneurial journey.

Presented with the Entrepreneurs' Forum's Mentor of the Year Award in 2016, his consultancy company Alexander Jewitt & Co. provides mentoring and hands-on resources to North East SMEs. James also works closely with the Department of International Trade (DIT) and, as an investor and chairman of Mircopore Technologies, has raised considerable capital to fuel international growth, bringing the Loughborough University spin-out from the Midlands to its new home on Teesside.

Awarded an MBE in 2011 for services to North East business, James is also a prominent member of the region's chemical sector community and is a member of the North East Process Industry Cluster (NEPIC) leadership board.

James is also honoured to succeed Nigel Mills as chairman, who is one of the region's most prominent business people and a strong advocate for the importance of entrepreneurship.

Nigel, who will remain on the board and is a founder member of the Forum, was recently awarded a CBE in the Queen's New Year's Honours for his services to entrepreneurship in the North East and Cumbria.

James says, "I would like to thank Nigel on behalf of our members for his dedicated and loyal service during his chairmanship and I look forward to building on his achievements in driving the scale-up agenda and as a champion of North East business."

Nigel has been part of the region's business community since he founded his first retail enterprise in 1986 with eight stores across Tyneside. He grew the Mills brand into a chain of 85 convenience stores and supermarkets, becoming a multi-award-winning group that employed more than 2,000 people and turned over in excess of £100 million.

Nigel is also the co-founder and chairman of The Lakes Distillery, a Cumbrian-based producer of whisky, gin and vodka and the largest distillery in England.

Of his time as chairman, Nigel says, "The Forum has established itself as a core part of the North East business community and I am proud to have played a role in its continuing growth and the development of events and programmes that encourage and nurture entrepreneurship in the region.

"I am delighted to pass the chairmanship of the Entrepreneurs' Forum to James who brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to the role."

Gillian Marshall, chief executive of the Entrepreneurs' Forum concluded, "Nigel has been a wonderful chairman and the driving force behind much of the development of the Forum in recent years, which has created a solid platform that I am sure James will help our team and our membership build upon for future shared success."

The Entrepreneurs' Forum support more than 300 aspirational North East business owners in all sectors, helping to expand their networks, improve leadership skills, share experience, create new opportunities and grow their business. For more information call 0191 500 7780 or visit www.entrepreneursforum.net

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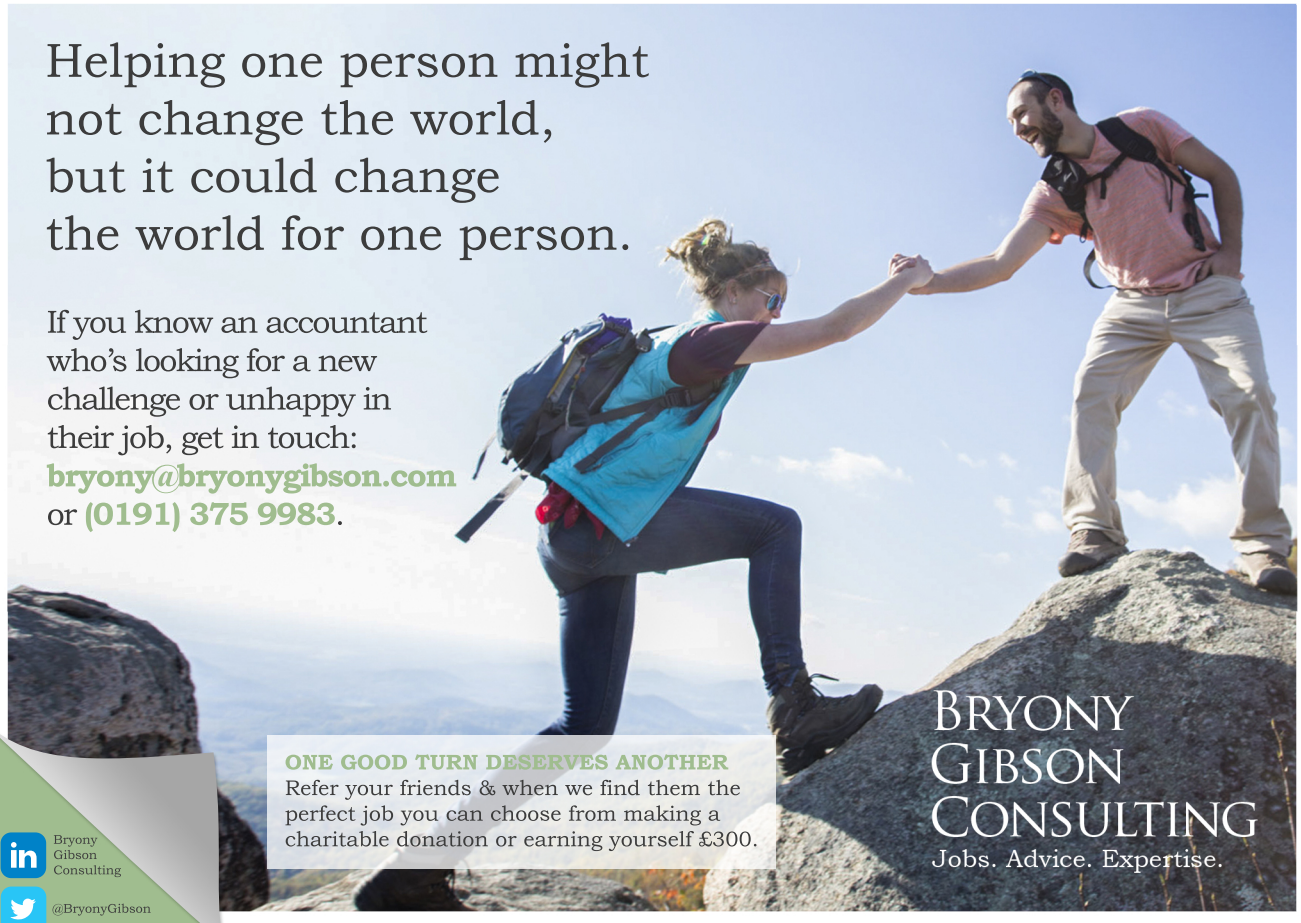

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James Robson is chairman of the Entrepreneurs' Forum, a unique group of like-minded people who come together through peer-to-peer mentoring and a series of inspirational events to share best practice, create valuable connections and grow their business.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

Growing the region's entrepreneurial community, with:

JAMES ROBSON MBE

James Robson is very much looking to the future as he starts his tenure as chairman of the Entrepreneurs' Forum.

The Teesside-based business owner, investor and mentor is very proud of the companies he has set up and those he has helped to grow in the region and believes that more can be done to encourage others to do the same:

"Establishing and scaling-up a business is a wonderful achievement for any entrepreneur and it is the role of the Forum to support those who have the potential and those who are already on the journey towards delivering fast-growth in their companies.

"Scale-ups are vital to the success of the North East and wider UK economies and the Entrepreneurs' Forum is working exceptionally hard to help businesses achieve their growth ambitions.

"In particular the Scale-Up Leader's Academy we have established, which was launched last year, has proven to be a successful initiative and something we will definitely be developing moving forward."

The Academy, which included 12 North East business-owners in its inaugural programme, has been designed to help entrepreneurs who are running high-growth companies and want to scale-up at a faster rate. Delivering practical advice in an easy to understand way, it explores what it means to scale-up, helping business leaders to build actionable plans through workshops, coaching, mentoring and inspirational events.

Mentoring has proven to be a key part of James' business career, which he has been able to develop a passion for following the success of his company, Exwold Technology.

Having established the company in Billingham in 1992 James has grown it to a business operating from four sites in the Tees Valley, employing more than 120 people with a turnover exceeding £10m.

He remains a non-executive director of the company, providing James with the opportunity to focus on mentoring.

A former Entrepreneurs' Forum Mentor of the Year (2016), James has worked closely with several growing SMEs and has become an accredited business coach providing services through his consultancy company, Alexander Jewitt & Co:

"The value of mentoring cannot be underestimated. No entrepreneur is an island and there are resources out there for business owners to call on."

Among the companies James has supported is Micropore Technologies, a university spinout company which provides specialist particles and emulsion manufacturing services.

"When I first got involved, Micropore Technologies was based in the Midlands because it was a born out of Loughborough University.

"I knew that if the company was to succeed, it needed to relocate to an area with a cluster of chemical and pharma companies, with adequate lab space, and a business environment where it could raise capital. This prompted a move to the Tees Valley, specifically The Wilton Centre, where the company has flourished."

Mentoring, according to James, should be encouraged and businesses should turn to networks like the Entrepreneurs' Forum for support:

"The biggest strength of the Entrepreneurs' Forum is its members, and their experiences are an invaluable resource for business owners.

"The events the Forum holds, from its small and intimate focus dinner through to its major conferences, all provide a key opportunity for members to find out about other companies, which often sparks ideas and strategies.

"Hearing about other entrepreneurs' successes, failures and the real issues they've faced is not only interesting, but can help influence the decisions people make in their businesses. The Forum's Round Table discussion events are particularly good for this."

James suggests that 2018 presents a great opportunity for businesses in the North East following the announcement that the new North East Fund, also known as JERMIE 2, should go live this year. It will offer a range of equity investments and loans to drive local growth and job creation in the North East LEP area:

"We are lucky in this region to have access to a range of funding options, including the new £120m JEREMIE 2 fund, which will be online soon and be very exciting.

"The south of the region, in the Tees Valley, also has the Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund, and as I sit on the board of NEL, I can see the opportunity accessing the right funding can bring to North East businesses to help them scale-up through investment-driven growth and acquisition."

James is also big advocate of skills development and raising the awareness of the opportunities entrepreneurship can offer young people:

"It's really important we keep entrepreneurial talent in the region; and that starts with schools.

"There remains a disconnect between education and business, which we have to overcome. Many teachers have not worked in a commercial environment so need the support of entrepreneurs to provide first-hand experience to the students.

"It also presents the chance to explain to young people the opportunities available to them here in the North East.

"This is a great region to live, work, and bring up a family, but the draw of big cities in the UK and abroad, can tempt our talent away. But there are so many members of the Entrepreneurs' Forum who can extol the virtues of running a business here in the North East."

James is enthusiastic about becoming chairman of the Entrepreneurs' Forum and is confident the organisation will continue to have a key role in the development and promotion of the North East economy:

"The Forum has a robust and diverse network, which represents the strength of the region's economy.

"It is important that we continue to showcase the entrepreneurial endeavours of this region and the wide and varied economic and social benefits businesses bring to the North East.

"If we grow the network by increasing our membership, we will have the opportunity to help more businesses be part of this continuing success story."

HOW TO BUILD A SUCCESSFUL CAREER

Bryony Gibson, managing director of Bryony Gibson Consulting, believes that these three recommendations will help you to have a more successful and happy career.

Everyone I meet wants a successful career. They could be searching for a promotion and extra responsibility, trying to join a more prestigious company, or hoping to get a better job title with more money. Whatever the ambition, they are motivated to make their lives better.

Having a goal or dream is often what keeps them going in their professional development, particularly in the earlier years, but if the truth be told, having a successful career is only half of the battle.

As you get older it becomes harder to find the balance between work and home. Family commitments and project deadlines clash, throwing up unexpected conflict and making it difficult to keep both plates spinning at the same speed.

Unfortunately I can't prepare you for the curve balls life is going to throw at you, but I can help you to plan for a rewarding career; one that will make you happier in your personal life too:

1. Stay in control

Steve Jobs famously said: "Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life ... Have the courage to follow your own heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become."

No matter what happens in your career, make sure you are the one who is in control of it. This is your journey and it's as much your choice where you work as it is your employers, so don't let other people guide you in something that is so important to your personal happiness.

Have a plan. Go into a new role knowing what you can give and what you want to get out of working in that business.

Life's too short to be stuck in a job that's going nowhere or you don't enjoy, so set personal goals alongside your work ones and decide on actionable steps, with timescales, that will help you to understand how you are doing and when it is the right time to consider your position.

2. Find a job you enjoy

The average person in the UK works over 90,000 hours in their lifetime, spread over 47 years. That's a long time to be unhappy.

If you've never taken the time to genuinely understand what you enjoy about work and what you're passionate about, then do it now.

Think carefully and, when you know, dedicate energy to finding businesses that match your personal beliefs and can give you a sense of purpose.

I know it's obvious, but not everyone does this and it can very quickly lead to you not only doing what you enjoy, but also enjoying how you do it.

3. Don't fear change

In today's job market it's a myth that you'll leave education, get your first job and climb the career ladder until you retire.

Your road will be long and winding, working in a number of different sectors with different businesses and in a multitude of different jobs; but that's ok.

Just make sure that, whatever you choose to do, you don't settle for second best because you're scared of changing direction.

If you're too frightened to make a change, just ask yourself these two questions: 'What's the worst that can happen?', and when you work that out, 'Can you deal with it?' If the second answer is yes, then give it a try.

Your overall well-being hinges on having a happy working life, so make sure it's you who's in control of it. Be bold and have the courage to create your own unique career path.

Becoming a success in any business requires commitment and hard work, so when you find the right job, make sure you focus on making yourself critical to that business' success.

Try to also find a sustainable and healthy work-life balance, because building a great career and being happy in life is a long-term pursuit.

If you work in tax & accountancy and are looking for a new challenge, or need someone to help drive the business forward, get in touch: **bryony@bryonygibson.com | (0191) 375 9983.**

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JARROW-BASED UTS EXPANDS INTO WALES

Jarrow-based engineering specialist UTS Group has opened a 50,000 sq ft facility in Newport, Wales, to meet increasing demand from its clients in the utility, industrial and commercial markets.

The company, which was established in 2001 by managing director Shaun Sadler, has invested £750,000 in the plant.

UTS produces a vast range of couplings, flange adapters and repair clamps for customers. Its unique selling point is having the capability to provide almost any product for the piping industry, incorporate tailor-made solutions and fabricate its products to suit any size.

The company has two existing sites in Jarrow, a 100,000 sq ft manufacturing plant on the Bede Industrial Estate and a 30,000 sq ft service facility based at the Viking Industrial Estate.

The firm employs just over 100 in Jarrow and anticipates that the Wales facility will initially employ 20 staff. Its customers include many UK water and gas companies, along with a number of overseas clients.

In addition to its manufacturing capability, UTS guarantees a 24 hour, 365 days a year, emergency service anywhere in the UK.

MANUFACTURING AND TECH TENSIONS SPARK DEBATE

Tait Walker's annual round table recently brought together the North East's manufacturing and technology leaders to debate matters affecting the industry.

The event, chaired by Tait Walker's managing partner Andrew Moorby, took place at Ramside Hall in County Durham. Amongst those participating were representatives from Lloyds Banking, CPI and Durham University Business School.

The company's debated Industry 4.0, which is the name for the current trend of automation and data exchange in manufacturing technologies. This includes developments such as 3D printing, horizontal and vertical system integration and cloud solutions. According to the specialists participating in the discussion, North East businesses must adopt this new technology to remain competitive and succeed on a national and global scale.

A general concern amongst manufacturers was the lack of funding which they saw as a barrier to embracing Industry 4.0. Another prevalent area of debate was the skills shortage in the region, with the consensus that lower-skilled workers must be trained to keep up with technological advancements.

PATRICK PARSONS PRAISES NEL INVESTMENT IMPACT

A thriving North East consulting engineering business has praised the impact of its decade-long relationship with regional fund management firm NEL Fund Managers.

Newcastle-headquartered Patrick Parsons Consulting Engineering worked with NEL in 2011 to secure a £250,000 investment from the Finance for Business North East Growth Fund, which was used to grow work overseas, upgrade IT systems and recruit expert staff.

Since then, Patrick Parsons has increased its workforce from 26 to 225 people and has seen its annual turnover grow from £750,000 to over £18m. The company has also expanded its office network to cover nine locations in the UK and has established an overseas presence in both Dubai and Sydney.

Patrick Parsons provides full civil and structural engineering design services to a wide variety of clients and markets, working on structural surveys as well as multi-million pound new-build developments.

As part of the next stage of its development plans, Patrick Parsons recently took on an investment from leading UK mid-market private equity firm LDC, which it will use to drive its continuing growth and acquisition strategy.

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From left to right Phil Franks, Stephen Portlock and Samantha Davidson

OUR JOURNEY WITH...FRANKS PORTLOCK

Samantha Davidson, Managing Director of B2B marketing specialists Horizonworks, explains how they helped a leading independent asbestos management consultancy to revamp its image, reposition its service proposition and build its profile nationally.

Operating from a network of offices across the UK including Sunderland, Scotland, London and nuclear site Sellafield, Franks Portlock specialises in the identification, testing and monitoring of asbestos. A UKAS accredited organisation, the company combines their extensive industry experience and technical knowledge to ensure that clients comply with current health and safety and asbestos regulations.

Founded in 2007 by Phil Franks and Stephen Portlock, the company identified that it needed to raise its profile, increase engagement with existing clients and attract new clients in priority sectors to support its strategic growth plans. The company didn't have an internal marketing department and appointed us to act as its outsourced marketing team. We act as a marketing advisor in addition to planning, managing and implementing all their marketing activity.

We worked closely with Franks Portlock to create a marketing strategy and plan which would help develop Frank Portlock's proposition – enabling clients and prospects to understand its capabilities as a full-service asbestos management company. To help form the strategy, we firstly conducted a communications audit, competitor analysis and market insight to help define Franks Portlock's unique selling proposition (USP) and reshape messages to position the firm as a leading edge asbestos management company.

Secondly, we developed and implemented a new brand, visual style and messaging along with a new website to clearly articulate the services offered and sector expertise. Now, we deliver their full marketing plan on an ongoing basis – this enables Franks Portlock to access our team of marketing experts who specialise in a range of disciplines which include digital, PR and creative. Franks Portlock benefit from being able to access all these services under one roof and have access to their own marketing team.

Phil Franks, director at Franks Portlock said: "Horizonworks' really understands our business and their support has been invaluable in communicating our proposition effectively and scoping our future strategy. They have implemented a range of activities to strengthen our brand and develop stronger relationships with our clients.

"As a business we have enjoyed significant growth over the last few years - the work we undertake for existing clients has increased, we have made a number of new appointments and created a commercial manager role to help attract new clients and drive further growth", he adds.

Samantha Davidson, managing director at Horizonworks, said: "The team at Franks Portlock are a pleasure to work with and it's been fantastic to see how well their new brand has been received both internally and externally. 2018 is gearing up to be another exciting year for the company and we look forward to continuing our journey."

Horizonworks specialises in working with businesses from the manufacturing, engineering, automotive, technology and innovation-led sectors. We offer marketing, strategy, PR, creative and digital services - all under one roof - to ensure all elements of marketing work together seamlessly to generate the best results for our clients.

Horizonworks has a diverse portfolio of clients including US based AmeriWater, a premier provider of water treatment equipment, ENEX Group, a mechanical engineering services provider, Cellular Solutions, a business communications and systems provider, The Expanded Metal Company, an expanded metal mesh manufacturer and Arcinova, a contract research and development company which serves the pharmaceutical sector, the North East Automotive Alliance (NEAA), the largest automotive cluster group in the UK and the Advanced Manufacturing Forum (AMF), the largest manufacturing forum in the North East.

For further information please contact Horizonworks on 0345 075 5955, email hello@horizonworks.co.uk or visit www.horizonworks.co.uk

GATESHEAD COLLEGE CEO RECEIVES CBE IN QUEEN'S NEW YEAR HONOURS LIST

Judith Doyle CBE, principal and chief executive of Gateshead College

A North East business leader and nationally recognised champion of the further education sector has been awarded a CBE in the Queen's New Year 2018 Honours list....

Judith Doyle, who became the first female principal and CEO of Gateshead College in 2013, has received the CBE for her outstanding contribution to education and skills in the North East.

She has committed more than 25 years of her life to the further education (FE) sector in Gateshead, where she has been devoted to improving the social and economic wellbeing of the community. Her inspiring leadership, focus on technical skills and impact on the successful performance of the college has been recognised by Ofsted while her personal achievements were recognised by her peers when she was named FE Leader of the Year 2016 in the Times Education Awards.

Under her leadership, staff have focused on one core vision – making students the most highly prized in the jobs market – have driven up standards and forged strong partnerships with industry. This has resulted in the college being awarded Grade 1 Outstanding by Ofsted with the best student achievement rates in the region and securing a position as one of the top-performing colleges in England.

Not only an advocate of the role Gateshead College plays in developing a more prosperous North East by ensuring people have the technical skills to succeed, Judith is also an active ambassador for the region. Outside the college, she is recognised for influencing and shaping the regional and national skills agenda with seats on several boards and advisory panels.

On receiving news of her CBE, Judith said: "To be acknowledged in this way is a truly humbling experience and I am both delighted and feel extremely honoured; it means so much not only to me but also my daughter Christine and the rest of my family; they are absolutely elated and I simply couldn't do the job I do without their support.

"I am known to be someone who loves the North East and everything it stands for and proudly champion our region everywhere I go. I am passionately committed to doing what I can to support our great region and to be recognised for the difference I have been able to make is wonderful.

"Whilst this is a personal recognition, it very much reflects the work of my brilliant team at the college, all the incredible people I have worked with throughout my career and all the people who have supported me to achieve the very best for Gateshead College."

Robin Mackie, chair of the board at Gateshead College, said: "On behalf of the board and all of the team at Gateshead College I want to congratulate Judith and say how thrilled we are to see her commitment, hard work and incredible achievements recognised with this national honour; it is richly deserved. She has dedicated her working life to education and has worked tirelessly to ensure that our college is performing at the highest level, serving the needs of people and businesses across the region and sharing her expertise nationwide to strengthen support for further education. She is a fantastic ambassador for the region and the further education sector and we are all very proud."

To find out more about Gateshead College and the courses on offer, visit www.gateshead.ac.uk

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Quayside Skyline Changes as Tyne Tees Television Broadcasting Building is Refurbished

Paul Nixon
Partner – Newcastle Office
Henry Riley LLP

A well-known quayside landmark has seen a former TV studio converted into luxury serviced apartments with the cost management led by Henry Riley, a Newcastle based multi-disciplinary construction consultancy.

Aerial House was situated on the location of the Old Tyne Tees transmitter which was part of the City Studio Complex and visible for miles around Newcastle. As well as it being an iconic landmark in the city for over five decades, it also broadcast the groundbreaking television programme 'The Tube' featuring the likes of The Jam, U2 and The Proclaimers.

Henry Riley provided cost management services on the £2.5M refurbishment project which commenced in November 2016. Situated at the city end of City Road, the original four-storey building, designed by Norr Architects, has been extended by a further two floors to create 28 self-contained apartments. Many of the apartments have balconies and outstanding views of the River Tyne.

The complexities of working in an existing building with complex planning challenges meant tight cost control on the scheme was key to ensure costs were closely monitored and the scheme was delivered successfully within budget. Paul Nixon, Partner at Henry Riley took an active role in the project and said 'we are thrilled to have played a role in assisting the Lugano team in the delivery of this prestigious development. The challenges the project faced were met head on by the team ensuring that the client and end users were delighted with the final result.'

The apartments were successfully completed featuring high quality finishes and fittings throughout and are fully serviced with on-site secure car parking and 24-hour reception staff. The property, owned by Lugano Property Group has been let to Dream Apartments who are one of the UK's leading companies in the services apartment sector. This is the second foray into the Newcastle market for Dream Apartments following the success of their Aparthotel in the Bigg Market.

Lugano Property Group's £2.5M investment marks the continued redevelopment of this area following the demolition of the television studios and memorable establishments such as the Egypt Cottage Pub.

"We are really proud to have carried out this redevelopment of such a prominent site in Newcastle and are delighted with the end-result. Tyne Tees Television's base on City Road was a major landmark for the city; we believe the re-purposing of the building is particularly appropriate combining business with leisure facilities and a high quality standard. We believe that, through our investment, the Aparthotel has enhanced the Quayside, created new jobs and brought a great new addition to the accommodation on offer in the city."

Richard Robson
Chairman
Lugano Property Group

YOU'VE BEEN AWARDED THE CONTRACT… WHAT NEXT?

In the fourth part of a six-part series, Louise Dodds, Programme Manager at Prosper discusses what happens once a tender has been awarded.

Louise Dodds

So, you've successfully got the tender, but your hard work is not over yet…the planning process now begins. The first step is the pre-start meeting which is your first opportunity to share your plans for your project. It is important to take advantage of this one-time chance to energise and motivate the group, set realistic expectations, and establish guidelines that will help you complete the project on time and within budget. If this meeting is unproductive, you may put the project at risk from the beginning.

The key steps for success in the planning stages are:

Step 1: Identify and set the project goals and deliverables

All parties involved should already be aware of the goals and what needs delivering as part of the project following the tender process. However, it is important to ensure these things are all re-clarified and fully understood, confirming everybody is aware of their individual role in the team.

Step 2: Identify who will be delivering the project and define their responsibilities

Resource needs vary based on the size, complexity and nature of the project, however, it is essential all partners understand their own roles and responsibilities for delivery. At this point, managing expectations of everyone is vital to effective delivery. If all roles deliver what is required of them, it is highly likely the project will deliver successful outcomes.

Step 3: Develop the preliminary project programme

As part of the tender process, a project programme should be supplied. At the pre-start meeting, the plan must be thoroughly reviewed to ensure all work tasks are included and that the completion deadline is possible to achieve. All elements of the programme should be discussed and tested by the group to ensure it is realistic. For example, are there sufficient people employed to deliver the project on time and to the required quality? Any refinements should be agreed at this point.

Step 4: Additional agenda items

The pre-start meeting should cover a range of areas - for example, on a building project this may include the requirement for planning/ building regulation approvals, waste management plans, location of onsite facilities, any imposed special conditions or restrictions for the site, risk management, safeguarding strategies, traffic management, information provision (drawings), Health & Safety information (Construction Phase Plan, Risk Assessments, Asbestos Surveys, Service locations), customer liaison, etc.

Step 5: Set KPIs and MI

As the project progresses, it is essential to have clear methods of measuring and controlling its performance. This can be achieved by agreeing and monitoring Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), which can be defined as 'a measurement that tells management the precise state of operations at any given point of time'.

There are four components to any KPI:

- What is being measured?
- Who is measuring it?
- At what interval is it being measured?
- How frequently is the information being reported, evaluated and acted upon?

To manage the project, it may also be beneficial to agree and work to SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely) goals with the project team.

Management Information (MI) is very important when analysing trends, helping you forecast the future and solving any problems you identify. A Management Information System (MIS) focuses on the management of information within the project partner organisations to provide efficiency and effectiveness of strategic decision making, for example, invoices being submitted and/or paid on time.

Step 6: Define key success factors

We believe the final step is making sure every project team member knows what it takes to have a successful project. Take the time to define in specific terms each item that will be required for success and make everyone in the team feel valued and that their contribution is fundamental to succeed.

Set a start date and get going!

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Ammar Mirza pic: Peter Walton 2014

CULTURE - THE GOLDEN THREAD

Culture is the backbone of society, it defines who we are, where we live and connects each and every one of us in some way or another.

Within the North East we have one of the best cultural offerings across the globe, with world class settings like the Sage and Baltic, numerous museums, theatres, the National Glass Centre in Sunderland, Lumiere in Durham, and various arts and music venues.

Over the past year having supported the work of Culture Bridge North East, an organisation established by Arts Council England and managed by Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums (TWAM), to connect cultural organisations and the education sector so that children and young people can have access to great arts and excellence cultural opportunities, I have come to realise how culturally uneducated I am. This is even though I have been a staunch supporter and Trustee of TWAM for a number of years and helped support a number of other cultural events and organisations too.

The last 12 months opened my eyes to some of the most innovative, interesting and incredible arts organisations and venues, real hidden gems that are located within our wonderful region. Culture Bridge have more recently supported some transformational initiatives through their Partnership Investment Fund which provides match funding for activities to improve access to culture for young people, alongside tackling real societal issues. The organisations and projects supported include better engagement with young people, tackling mental health issues, improving access to arts for more deprived and disadvantaged individuals, improving literacy, and ultimately improving people's life chances and choices through arts and culture.

Over the coming months the North East will host the first ever Newcastle International Film Festival, shining a light on the Film and Creative Industry that collectively add over a £100Billion every year to the UK economy. The Great Exhibition of the North is taking place centred in and around Newcastle, the Tall Ships are coming to Sunderland and the list goes on. Thousands of young people visit our museums and theatres through a whole range of programmes offered by the Arts Council, all of which helps connect and develop them, in an open and inclusive manner. Art and culture is for everyone.

The importance of culture cannot be overstated and even though I come from an Asian Heritage I was born and brought up in the North East considering myself to be as Geordie as anyone else, and at times even more so. Something that as North Easterners' we can all relate with, we are industrious, hospitable, friendly and above all resilient. Coupled with our rich arts and cultural offering, I think makes us the best region in the world and above all else clearly demonstrates that culture is the golden thread through the fabric of our society.

PS Please watch out for the BIG PIE Challenge- www.pieproject.org - on the 23rd March and encourage your local school to sign-up. This year we have included a creative element with the Newcastle International Film Festival.

Ammar Mirza CBE is the founder and chairman of Asian Business Connexions, Board member of North East LEP and holds various other positions across the public and private sectors.

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ECAILLES DE POMMES DE TERRE… AS THEY SAY IN HEXHAM!

By Michael Grahamslaw

Hexham's Bouchon Bistrot has brought a taste of French country cooking to the north of England with a straight forward, un-stuffy approach. This stone built, characterful restaurant offers a simple set-price business lunch menu with the addition of classic French country dishes on an evening.

Situated on Gilesgate in Hexham, Greg, its French-born proprietor as well as head chef Nicolas Kleist, both hail from the Loire Valley, and serve straightforward country style French cuisine based on their expertise from working in Michelin starred restaurants throughout France. With their wealth of experience, when it comes to traditional French country cooking, they are totally in their element.

In fact, established in 2007, Bouchon was one of the original French restaurants to open in the North East, making Greg and Nicolas pioneers in a region which has only recently started to fully embrace the cuisine.

This expertise has been formally recognised with the restaurant appearing in both the Michelin and The Good Food Guide which is certainly no mean feat. It also won Best Local French Restaurant in the UK on Gordon Ramsay's F Word programme - but in this case, the "F" definitely stands for "French".

Continental cuisine and especially the French variety, can intimidate some people but what you'll find on the menu here is straightforward and instantly recognisable. These simple lunchtime offerings rub shoulders with more classic a la carte French dishes, the details of which our knowledgeable and friendly waiter quietly explained without fuss or embarrassment.

Following a fantastic business week for the magazine, I took a new contact with me as he is a committed Francophile and very knowledgeable about French cooking so I knew I would get an honest opinion from him. To start we chose the crab mayonnaise mousse drizzled with a Citrus fruit vinaigrette which was a superb way to begin. My guest meanwhile opted for the Assiette of Charcuterie, comprising Bayonne Ham, Rillettes & Saucisson. A typically rustic dish, this was lapped up with true French panache with homemade bread and a very good bordeaux.

For mains I chose the seared stone bass with saffron potatoes and chorizo, luxuriated in a rich cockle cream whilst my guest chose the lamb rump with garlic pommes croquettes and wild mushrooms. Très bien!

After a suitable digestive break, we thought it would be churlish not to try a pud and rounded a superb meal off with plateau de fromages as well as the more adventurous prune & Armagnac clafoutis with walnut ice cream.

For such excellent food, prices are very reasonable with starters around the £6-£8 mark, most mains £13-£16 and desserts £4-£6 but at lunchtime between 12 noon and 2pm, there is a choice of a two course menu at £15.95 and a three course menu for just £1 more. Wine prices too are very reasonable with house wines from £16.95 a bottle and half litre carafes also available from just £11.70.

With each dish prepared and cooked in a simple fashion, Bouchon Bistrot is the ideal place to enjoy an excellent business lunch or an informal, laid-back and family-friendly dining on an evening. This unassuming French restaurant ticked all the boxes especially for my dining companion, who said he would never have found such a great place without my invite. Some places are just worth the effort to travel to, even on a busy work-day lunchtime and this is one of them. Job well done, I think!

Hexham's ***entente cordial*** with French cooking continues.

Check its menus out on www.bouchonbistrot.co.uk before booking a table on-line.
Bouchon Bistrot is situated at 4-6 Gilesgate, Hexham (SatNav: NE46 3NJ) T: 01434 609943

HOTEL INDIGO DURHAM

WELCOME

Moments from the historic city centre, Hotel Indigo Durham is located in the former Old Shire Hall building on Old Elvet just 5 minutes from Durham railway station. The hotel is perfectly located to experience all that this charming city has to offer, with the magnificent university, castle and world renowned Durham Cathedral just a short stroll away.

Throughout the hotel you will spot little nods to our UNESCO World Heritage. Our coffee shop, cocktail lounge, meeting room and Marco Pierre White restaurant all retain their Victorian heritage of the Old Hall whilst embracing contemporary popular culture, a nod to the city's ancient history and bright future.

THE TRINITY NEIGHBOURHOOD

Newcomers, friends and weary travellers step onto the set of history at Hotel Indigo Durham, rest your head and explore our 'perfect little city'.

When Bill Bryson called Durham "a perfect little city", the American author wasn't kidding. To a lifelong anglophile such as Bryson, Durham is the quintessential England of Dickens and the Brontë sisters.

At the heart of our charming neighbourhood lies the magnificent university, castle and cathedral, a famous trinity that underpins the city's history and identity.

INSPIRATION IS EVERYTHING

Our 83 contemporary bedrooms are inspired by the city's Norman ancestry whilst combining technology, style and comfort with stunning views of Durham Cathedral.

Marco Pierre White Steakhouse Bar & Grill treats guests to signature steaks, timeless English and French classics, and a comprehensive selection of premium cocktails. The restaurant and cocktail bar is a perfect affordable gathering place with friends and family for afternoon tea, adding a touch of glamour to a celebratory occasion or a conducive environment for that business lunch or private dinner.

Facilities

- 83 Contemporary bedrooms
- 100 seater capacity Marco Pierre White Steakhouse Bar & Grill
- Cocktail lounge
- Tinderbox Coffee shop
- Meeting & Private dining room (60 guests cabaret style)
- Fitness suite
- On site car parking

In all rooms you will enjoy

- Free Wi-Fi
- A complimentary mini fridge with snacks & drinks
- Luxury toiletries
- Smart TV's
- Air conditioning
- Wet room with waterfall shower

Hotel Indigo is part of Intercontinental Hotels Group® therefore all guests and bookers will have access to IHG's free global rewards programme IHG Rewards® & IHG Business Rewards®.

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For further information contact

General Manager: paul.borg@interstatehotels.com
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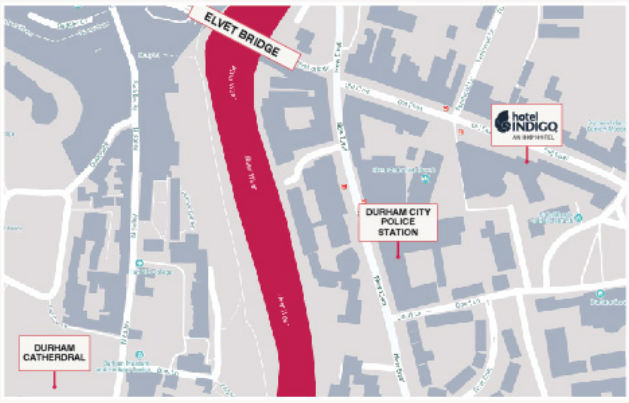

GRADVERT SHARES FREE GUIDE TO BUILDING HIGH PERFORMING TEAMS

There are many ways to create a successful business but it's clear that the power and performance of your teams - and the people within them - play a huge role in driving growth.

We work in teams every day, but what makes a good fit? How can you ensure your employees, at all levels of the business, are working to the best of their ability? And when you do get the magic formula, how can you recreate that across your whole business?

Here at Gradvert, we understand the challenges that building high performing teams can involve.

We've been designing and delivering graduate development programmes for over five years, as well as working with organisations to provide tailored leadership and management training to unlock the potential of anybody at any level within an organisation.

Our mission is to improve business performance by improving people, which is why we've decided to share our free online toolkit.

With top tips on attracting and developing the talent you need to grow your business, the 'Building a High Performing Team' guide covers four steps to help organisations on their development journey.

STEP 1 – 1 Getting the right people in the team in the first place

A team is nothing without the people in it. In this section, we discuss recruiting the candidates with the right experience, the most talent and the best fit for your company – all vital for building a high performing team.

From creating the right profile, to testing during the recruitment process and hiring graduates, this section will get you off to the best start possible.

STEP 2 - Putting a strong leadership development programme in place to help them reach their full potential

Ensuring you have a robust training and development process in place is crucial for getting the best performance from your people. You don't just want a team that's strong now – you want one that can continue to perform better and better in the future, and lead your business to success. Step 2 tells you everything you need to know about making the most of learning and development.

Step 3 – Establish best practice

With tips on how to establish best practice within your teams, this section offers guidance on the ways in which you need your best teams to operate for them to give their best performance.

Being clear about each person's responsibilities and what's expected is so important now you've got the right people in the right place. If they don't know how to work together effectively, they'll never progress.

Step 4 – Work with an expert

Building high performing teams in your business is vital for growth, but it is a huge task for companies and HR departments to undertake alone.

At Gradvert, we work as partners to our clients and become an extension of their HR department, providing access to our services at every stage of the graduate recruitment and scheme development process.

In addition, our Amplifier service offers tailored training and development programmes for all people within an organisation to amplify their skills and improve business performance.

We developed our 'Building a High Performing Team' guide to support you through your entire recruitment journey.

We hope with our help, you can reach your recruitment goals and develop a high-performing workforce that sees your business achieve and maintain success.

To download a free copy of 'Building a High Performing Team' and learn more about what we do, visit www.gradvert.com

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Simon's background is within innovation management and access to finance, working across businesses ranging from start-ups to major corporates and spanning a range of different sectors.

He headed up Newcastle Science City's innovation support activity, leading a team of seven innovation and business growth experts.

Now Executive Director of the Innovation SuperNetwork, Simon's work focuses on developing project ideas and identifying opportunities for collaborative and open innovation working

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INSPIRING CONVERSATION OVER A FINE LUNCH

Mike Jones, SMD CEO.

SMD CEO OUTLINES HIS FOCUS FOR 2018

After 25 years in the business, Mike Jones took the reins of Tyneside-based subsea engineering specialist Soil Machine Dynamics Ltd (SMD) last October.

A director since 2004, Jones replaced Andrew Hodgson as CEO, following a planned two and a half year transition put in place when SMD was acquired in 2015 by Times Electric, a subsidiary of the world's largest railway rolling stock manufacturer, CRRC Group in China. The deal, which was worth £120 million, was part of the firm's strategy to diversify internationally and tap into new markets.

Now, following a string of new project wins and investment in new premises at home and overseas, SMD has its sights set firmly on the future and is laying the foundation for an exciting new chapter at the cutting edge of innovation and service delivery in the global offshore industry.

Mike Jones, CEO, explains: "It's no secret we've faced some challenging times in the offshore industry in recent years. Things are changing after several years of resizing and diversification. The downturn in the oil price led to significant cost-cutting, standardisation and greater collaboration throughout the industry.

"We are two-thirds of the way through a three-year turnaround and remain on target with strong growth and revenue across most of our business divisions. We've invested heavily in our services and R&D, added new products, expanded our global network and lowered operating costs.

"The changes within SMD during the last three years have been significant. We have a new owner in CRRC, and a renewed focus. We are working together, pooling our strengths and expertise to further develop the global subsea equipment market through digital innovation, robotics and improved aftermarket services.

"In dealing effectively with the competitive challenges we face, the business is ready to move forward with confidence. Our focus in 2018 is to continue developing our presence in the Chinese offshore market with the opening of our Shanghai operation last month.

"We plan to continue building our SMD Services, Trenching, Mining, Renewables and ROV divisions to increase our presence within the subsea equipment market for the expanding Offshore Wind industry globally.

"SMD has always been a pioneer in advanced underwater machinery, pushing the North East to the forefront of ocean technology. We have a very experienced, dedicated and talented team backed by a committed and patient owner.

"We operate in some interesting markets with great potential and I'm looking forward to working together with our stakeholders in the North East and internationally to take the business forward and build a great future."

During 2017 SMD secured several major orders and has worked on some high-profile collaborative engineering projects to improve subsea technology and capability. They include a commission to build the world's largest and most advanced subsea trenching vehicle. Delivered last year, it is the most efficient subsea oil and gas pipeline trencher in the world.

SMD is also technical lead on the VAMOS (viable alternative mine operating system) project, a 42-month international research and development venture, which is part-funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme. At a cost of approximately 12.6 million Euros, SMD and its partners in the VAMOS Consortium, have designed and built a robotic underwater mining prototype with launch and recovery technology to perform field tests at four EU mining sites.

Last year the company also invested in the relocation of its growing Services division to the Port of Tyne's Tyne Dock estate in South Shields which provides improved access and capacity for expansion. As well as focusing on new builds, SMD Services aims to increase its presence in the after-market sector by helping customers generate maximum value from their assets and supporting their operations with a range of services such as asset repair, maintenance and upgrades.

SMD Services recently completed an extensive upgrade and modernisation programme for a trenching ROV owned by Prysmian Powerlink Services Ltd, a branch of the Prysmian Group and world-leader in energy and telecoms cables systems.

To find out more visit www.smd.co.uk

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- Over **100 miles of riverbank** protected from **pollution & floods**

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- The WCC is the only standard of its kind in the UK; it ensures:
  - The **right trees have been planted**, in the right place;
  - The carbon capture estimates are **scientifically sound**;
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IT'S NO SECRET – FREEMASONS DONATE £600,000

As 2018 starts and Northumberland Freemasons mark the end of the 300th anniversary of the United Grand Lodge of England, the organisation has given away £600,000 to local and national charities.

Tritlington farmer, Ian Craigs, the Provincial Grand Master of Northumberland explained that this year, The Provincial Grand Lodge of Northumberland has given away £300,000 to local charities to boost worthwhile and deserving projects throughout the region.

"In this special year, we've donated money to charities close to each of our 27 lodge buildings across North Tyneside, Newcastle and Northumberland so that we can really make a positive impact on local projects and causes near to where Masonry takes place.

"Our donations were all chosen by our members and the money has helped the charities concerned carry on their work locally within the community."

Charities benefiting from donations included the Hextol Foundation in Hexham, Morpeth's Mustard Tree Trust and Forest Hall based Percy Hedley Foundation who were each granted £10,000.

Others included the Berwick & District Cancer Support Group, Cramlington's Mind Active Charity and Bedlington's Leading Link Charity who were each given £5000.

In total, 78 charities received cheques for the good work they do to help the people of Newcastle, North Tyneside and Northumberland.

In addition, at the Province's Annual General Meeting in November, a cheque for a further £300,000 was given to the Masonic Charitable Foundation so that their work helping people nationally and internationally could be supported.

"Very often, the general public don't know about our charitable donations and we're now encouraging charities to talk to us as we may be able to help them," said Mr Craigs. "Freemasonry has a terrific amount to offer in today's society and this year we've enjoyed many diverse activities in Northumberland and Tyneside to mark our 300th anniversary including a Classic Car and Bike show, a Celebration Dinner held at St James' Park and a Multi-Faith Ceremony attended by Her Grace the Duchess of Northumberland."

One of Mr Craigs favourite events however was a Teddy Bears Picnic held at Alnwick Gardens in the summer.

The initiative hosted by Masonic Charity, Teddies for Loving Care (TLC) saw more than 200 children from schools in Newcastle, Morpeth, Berwick, Hexham, Alnwick and Cramlington enjoy a teddy bear trail, a picnic box, entertainment by colourful fairy tale characters and of course the obligatory teddy bear which was given to every child.

Freemasons have donated more than two million teddy bears to children who attend hospitals and A&E units. Medical staff use the bears to befriend the children, to reward them for being brave and in some cases to demonstrate what they are going to do.

"It's been a fantastic year for our freemasons from the Tyne to the Tweed and I'm very proud of the work we've done in the community which has made a positive impact on so many people who need our help," said Mr Craigs.

www.northumberlandmasons.org.uk

AKZONOBEL ASHINGTON'S HEAD OF MANUFACTURING CELEBRATES FIVE YEARS AT THE TOP

January 2018 marked the 5th anniversary of Jeff Hope's employment as head of manufacturing unit at AkzoNobel Ashington. In this column, Jeff talks about his AkzoNobel experience so far and how the plant is shaping up for 2018.

I can't believe it has already been five years since I joined AkzoNobel Ashington. Having worked in the North East's industrial sector at Rio Tinto Alcan, landing the job at AkzoNobel's new £100 million flagship manufacturing facility was a dream come true.

Construction at the Ashington site had only been underway for six months when I joined AkzoNobel, so I have literally been a part of the plant's journey from the very beginning and it's amazing to see how far things have come.

The mission was to realise the most advanced and sustainable paint manufacturing facility of its kind in the world; and we've achieved that. Over the years I've been lucky enough to witness a number of important milestones, including producing our first ever batch of paint in November 2016, our official business launch in September 2017 and becoming the new home of Dulux in the UK; but for me personally, I feel the most pride when I look at the team that achieved it. We've got people here that can change the future, people that can show empathy in the hardest times, people that are authentic and are here for the right reasons, people that put something back through their efforts, their values and their determination and people that will take care, in some small way, of our beautiful county of Northumberland.

Looking forward into 2018 and beyond; the future looks extremely bright for AkzoNobel Ashington. Through utilising our team and the latest pioneering manufacturing technologies, our site is capable of producing up to 100,000,000 litres of paint in up to 33,000 different colours. Over the course of the year, we will be pushing ourselves and our systems to increase capacity so we can produce even more paint for our customers in the UK and European markets.

We also have an exciting venture in the form of our Dulux Academy. Only the second facility of its kind in the UK, the Dulux Academy is a customised training centre for painters and decorators to provide them with the expertise and know-how they need for business success. AkzoNobel's ambition is to train and upskill 10,000 UK decorators by 2020 in order to play a part in tackling the skills shortage in the construction sector, which risks limiting the UK's house building capacity.

Jeff Hope

To find out more about AkzoNobel, visit www.akzonobel.com

INDEPENDENT EVENTS READY FOR THE NEXT TEN YEARS

Multi award winning experiential agency Independent Events (IE) has reached its tenth anniversary landmark and the team is already excitedly looking forward to the next ten.

Headed up by Danae Abadom and Kerry Fairlie, the company is going from strength to strength.

The last 12 months has seen the addition of new services including a full digital offering, encompassing video, website, social media and gaming.

2017 has also seen the team expand – as well as an ever growing host of HQ staff, IE has growing teams of experiential experts the length and breadth of the country working with cleints on pop ups, surveys, retail campaigns and educational campaigns.

Clients include shopping centres, local authorities, marketing companies, retailers, food and drink manufacturers - in fact the list goes on and on.

The festive period was extremely successful for IE with unique and innovative events and campaigns running in five separate shopping destinations across the UK.

And for 2018 a new office is on the horizon, further team expansion, consolidation of existing clients and a growth in portfolio – it is safe to say the future has never looked brighter.

Kerry explained: "Brands, companies and retailers have really quickly realised that whilst digital marketing activity is the new route to market, you can't actually replace a face to face experience with it totally.

"Face to face and digital contact make a perfect mix, along with PR and other marketing disciplines. Face to face interaction creates experiences and memories, which are hugely successful in positioning a message in people's minds. This then affects their choices."

IE is one of the North East's and UK's leading, award-winning, experiential agencies. The company works with huge retail names such as BooHoo, Famous Grouse, Kerry Foods, DFDS and Nissan. Other clients include shopping centres across the UK, Road Respect and many Local Authorities across the UK.

Kerry concluded: "We are delighted to celebrate our tenth year in such good shape, with such a positive future. Our team is key to that, so a big thank you to everyone!"

More information is available at www.independent-events.com

CONNECTING THE DOTS IN THE COMMUNITY...

We are Community First North East, a local training provider based in the north east.

Our company has two main branches; one is working with the business sector, and the other is working with individuals and groups of learners. We are excited to further expand our relationships with other local businesses and offer training courses to improve skill levels within the office.

Community First North East, CFNE, opened in 2010 as a community interest company with our headquarters in South Shields. Our purpose is to offer training and education programmes for both young people and adults up to any age in order to develop a new skill or add to an existing skill set. We work with local businesses of all sizes, including the NHS and Local Authority, by offering employees the opportunity to participate in courses geared towards improving not only the individual, but the business as a whole. Our vast plethora of both national and international clients showcases our ability and success to cater the CFNE experience to the business' needs.

We offer a range of professional programmes in a range of areas. Our courses are readily available to you and cover a vast range of skills necessary for a cohesive and efficient work environment. From leadership skills to conflict resolution and even managing change, we will have a course right for your team.

With us, you have the opportunity to take educational courses such as English, Maths and ICT plus a range of vocational courses such as Health and Social Care and Business Administration. We believe that businesses see the importance of investing in their staff resource and maintaining enthusiasm and creativity. Our courses are designed to match the needs of a specific workplace and we take this into account and whatever the topic, team building occurs.

In return, we value support from employers in relation to work tasters and work experience for learners and brief visits by employers to share their knowledge with our learners. As a community interest company, all profit is re-invested within CFNE and the local community.

Our ethos is built on valuing each individual and tailoring their experience with us to suit their needs. All staff are highly qualified and flexible in their approach and our courses are delivered in a way in which reflection and discussion is valued. We are confident in our approach and in our teaching and our accredited results show outstanding satisfaction in all aspects of our work.

We are always happy to discuss our training programmes and courses that are available to you and will offer ways in which you can implement them in your work place.

If you would like to get in touch then please give us a call on 0191 493 6990 or visit our website at www.communityfirstnortheast.org.uk

IS IT TIME FOR CHANGE?

We live in this fast paced world in which many organisations are target driven, which, in one sense is fine but it can put pressure on people to "make target "at all costs.

I have always been told that people deal with people and that the best form of advertising is word of mouth.

For as long as I can remember I have always tried to treat people as I would want to be treated and it has helped me to develop a lot of very strong relationships over the years.

For the last 12+ years I have been fundraising in the charity sector which, if you look at it, is sales, but for most of the time with nothing physical in return for the donors (unless attending an event or similar).

Over this time I have learnt a lot about relationships and motivations of people across a broad spectrum.

I believe that my integrity and passion in what I do is quite clear which is also why the majority of people I met 12 years ago still support my work now, for which I am very thankful. A lot of these people have become friends now and have since introduced me to even more people.

Working in this sector and evolving relationships with individuals and businesses alike, I can see the opportunities that are out there for charities and companies to grow.

I set up my little company "Change" in 2017 as I felt it was time for change for me and because of the potential out there for others where I feel I can help.

I have to make a difference in what I do so if I can help people along the way in 2018 and beyond, well that is good enough for me.

If you would like a chat about how I might be able to help you, feel free to contact me direct.

All the very best, Danny Mitchell (Founder of Change).
danny@changefr.co.uk

THE IMPORTANCE OF A WILL

Jonathan Grogan

The importance of writing a will is a topic that is often addressed – but as well as the process of documenting your wishes, of equal importance is ensuring it is done properly.

Failure to write a will in a proper manner and in accordance with the Wills Act 1837 could lead to disputes or even negligence claims after death. This can be a long and expensive process to correct, particularly as the person whose wishes are contained in the will is no longer with us, so it is vital it is prepared properly.

Wills are important and often complex documents which, done by someone without the specialist knowledge and experience, can be prone to errors in content and procedure. For example, with homemade wills, people often do not realise that when a beneficiary witnesses a will, they then lose their entitlement under the will.

Mistakes can also be made through a will not being properly prepared – I once saw a will where the deceased had wanted the neurology department of a hospital to receive a gift, but the wording used was urology by mistake. This fairly minor error led to quite a process to resolve the issue.

Furthermore, it is essential that steps are taken to ensure the testator has mental capacity to prepare the will. A solicitor will want to involve a doctor if there is any doubt, thus saving any confusion or arguments afterwards, and will also want to be assured that the testator has not been influenced by anyone in the preparation of the will, for example, by ensuring they take instructions without anyone else present.

It remains the best option to use a solicitor to write a will. Although there are many unregulated professions, like will writers, who may be a cheaper option, there can be some major pitfalls. One of many well-documented cases reported how a £90 will allegedly deprived a daughter of half of her stake in her late father's home, as a result of the document being too simplistic.

Throughout my career, I have vast experience in handling disputes over poorly drafted wills, and have also handled many negligence claims through dealing with problems that have arisen after death.

Through instructing a specialist solicitor, you can be safe in the knowledge that your will is being done competently by someone with the experience and capability to guide you through the process.

Jonathan Grogan is a specialist wills and probate solicitor at Newcastle law firm Sintons. To speak to him about this or any other matter, contact Jonathan on 0191 226 3644 or jonathan.grogan@sintons.co.uk

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STAYING POWER...

Longevity in business is something to be admired. In this series of features, we are celebrating some of the most accomplished professionals from across the North East business community. Aimed at major players with 20+ years' experience in their respective sectors, we provide a fascinating insight into what makes them tick and what we can learn from them.

This month we chat to...

TIM GRAY

Consultant, Mincoffs Solicitors

Did you always envisage a career in the law industry?

I got into University after studying Classics at A Level which I loved. I could not see much future in that as a career and was advised to look at the law, which I came to love even more.

What is your favourite aspect of the job?

Dealing with my clients, many of whom I regard as friends and the pleasure of bringing their matters to a successful conclusion.

What has been your career defining moment?

Before University, I worked with a firm in Newcastle who allowed me to attend court to watch their cases. One day, even with highly experienced barristers, we lost our case comprehensively to the formidable combination of a Solicitor Ted Potts and his brother Humphrey (later to become a High Court Judge). I decided I must try to join Ted's firm which was then John H. Sinton & Co. I joined that firm.

How do you measure success?

By the satisfaction I can give clients, who to me are without doubt the most important aspect of my job.

What have been the biggest changes in the industry since you started?

Massive over-regulation (as far as I can see, with little purpose), the demise of the 'characters' in the law and the preoccupation on the part of too many firms making money at all costs.

How has your skillset developed accordingly?

By seeking to be philosophical about the changes referred to.

Are you a risk taker by nature or more conservative?

There is a need occasionally to take calculated risks, as long as these are understood by the client and agreed. I think this is acceptable and indeed many commercial transactions could not proceed on any other basis.

To what would you attribute your success?

A great education at Dame Allan's School and Cambridge University, caring about people and over the years, working rather strange hours! I have been very lucky in the support that I have had from colleagues over the years, which very much continues at Mincoffs.

What's your biggest weakness and how have you managed this?

Showing occasionally an over commitment to my work which I fear must have affected my family. Since realising this, I have done my best to make amends.

How do you retain motivation?

Motivation does come easily to me. Having retired, I still retained that strong motivation and hence now my consultancy with Mincoffs.

Would you prefer to be liked or respected?

I do not think the two are mutually exclusive. I prefer both!

I'll retire when...

I can derive no fun at all from the law. Given the nature of some of my clients this is an unlikely proposition!

GETTING TO KNOW…

By day Louise Ottaway is an associate solicitor specialising in Residential Conveyancing and a team leader at Gordon Brown Law Firm (LLP), but in her spare time her greatest passion is cycling. She has even replaced her dining table with bikes on turbo trainers as she prepares to cycle from London to Paris this summer for charity.

What is your passion outside of work, how did you get into it and why do you enjoy it so much?

I've taken a keen interest in cycling recently. My daughter took on the Coast-to-Coast challenge in 2017 for charity, so to help her train I needed to support her and take her out on her bike. Prior to this I had only rode a bike a handful of times since my childhood. My husband is a keen cyclist so her training became a real family affair. I quickly started to enjoy the feeling of freedom cycling brought and the added bonus of exercising together as a family. Inspired by my daughter, I've signed up for my own cycling challenge which will take me from London to Paris.

How would you describe yourself in three words?

Hard-working, outdoorsy and family-oriented

What would your autobiography be called?

"The Simple Things"

What do you look forward to most at the end of the week?

Being outdoors with the fresh air, having longs walks with my family and the dog, a bike ride or two and snuggling together watching Saturday night TV.

If you could have dinner with anyone dead or alive, who would it be, and why?

My husband, always. He is my best friend and my rock. We always have plenty to talk and laugh about and even if we don't, the silence is never awkward.

What is the best book you've ever read, and why?

"P.S. I Love You" – a soppy choice I know. In all honesty I am not a book worm so I don't have a vast choice. Whenever I try to get into reading a good book I fall asleep and end up reading the same pages time and time again. I read this book whilst in the hospital when my daughter was born prematurely and was very poorly. It is a book which sticks in my mind.

If you could have one superpower what would it be, and why?

To fly. I have always thought this since being a child. I think the attraction is simply with the freedom it would bring.

What was your dream job as a child?

I had two; I was going to run an old-fashioned corner shop by day, selling sweets by the quarter and slicing cold meats on the big slicing machine. By night, I was going to be a pub-singer. I was a very aspirational child!

What is your greatest achievement?

My daughter is an obvious choice as a parent but my greatest nonetheless. Every day I am in awe of her. That aside, I am really proud of where I am currently in my work-life. Achieving the position of associate was such a big deal for me. I was never what you call academically inclined as a child. I was clever enough, don't get me wrong but it was never on my agenda to aim for university. I went into a business administration apprenticeship at 16 at a law firm. I have remained in law and have worked really hard to gain experience and promotion along the way. I became an associate in May 2017, it is great to achieve the recognition of all the hard work.

What is it about your role at GBLF that inspires you?

When I started with GBLF, the firm was in a different place. It was much smaller and the conveyancing team consisted of myself and two others. The firm has since expanded and the department has grown to around 35 people. I have seen big changes and it has been great to be part of that. My inspiration in the role comes from the development of the individuals and the department, with training, guidance and support. It's great to see people grow and progress and I do get a sense of achievement from it too.

How long have you worked at GBLF for, and what attracted you to the firm?

I've worked at GBLF for almost 12 years. While I was working with another law firm, GBLF was a name which came up a lot. I had completed my apprenticeship and progressed to secretary/legal assistant. The GBLF role for a fee earner/conveyancer came up and it was an exciting opportunity to become a fee earner in my own right as opposed to being a member of support staff. I remember the interview was long and although it might have seemed excessive, it gave me a feeling of a firm which is actually interested in learning more about a person and their abilities to ensure they hire the right person. When I was offered the position, I snatched it up and haven't looked back!

GBLF's Residential Conveyancing team understands that buying or selling a home can be a stressful time. Its experienced conveyancers give informative and straightforward advice and also offers online videos and property guides to help clients through the process.

T: 0191 388 1778 E: info@gblf.co.uk W: www.gblf.co.uk

DATA BREACHES AND VICARIOUS LIABILITY

Associate Solicitor Jane Sinnamon, from Collingwood Legal, examines the implications of the High Court decision that employers are vicariously liable for data breaches committed by its employees.

Jane Sinnamon

It seems like reference to 'data' and 'data protection' is everywhere at the moment, not least because of the impending General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) which come in to effect in May 2018 replacing the existing Data Protection Act (DPA) 1998.

The challenges to employers as 'data controllers' in holding sensitive and confidential data and entrusting such information with employees was highlighted in a decision reached by the High Court on 1 December 2017 in the case of Various claimants v Wm Morrisons Supermarkets PLC.

The facts

An employee of Morrisons was unhappy about a minor disciplinary sanction that had been imposed on him. In retaliation, he used his position as a Senior IT Manager to release the personal details (details entrusted to him in his role) of almost 100,000 employees to a public file sharing website. The data shared included salary information, bank details and national insurance numbers.

The employee's actions rendered him personally liable for criminal offences under the Computer Misuse Act 2009 and the DPA, for which he is serving an 8 year prison sentence. The court noted that in taking this course of action the employee utilised his advanced IT skills to avoid measures Morrisons had taken to avoid data breaches of this kind.

A group of approximately 5,500 employees subsequently brought civil action against Morrisons as the 'data controller' under the DPA. This is the first group action litigation regarding data protection and breaches in the UK courts.

High Court decision

The court dealt with two key questions:

Did Morrisons have primary liability for the employee's breach under the DPA?

The court said 'No'. Once the employee misappropriated the personal data and started sharing it, he became the data controller (not Morrisons) and assumed liability for the breaches where he was acting without authority.

Was Morrisons vicariously liable for the actions of its employee?

The court said 'Yes' on the basis there was a 'sufficient connection' between the employee's employment and his wrongdoing, even though the disclosure itself did not occur on a company computer or during working hours. Compensation in respect of this finding is to be determined at a separate hearing but it is likely to be significant.

What next?

This won't be the last we hear about this case as the High Court gave Morrisons permission to appeal the decision, which Morrisons intends to do.

In the meantime, what does the decision mean for employers?

For employers, this decision is worrying. Essentially this case highlights that there is no failsafe system for entrusting staff with confidential information in order to avoid vicarious liability. However, what it does highlight is that Morrisons avoided a finding of primary liability for a breach of the DPA on the basis it had practices and procedures in place to deal with confidential data and the potential misuse of such data (although the court was critical of Morrisons not having in place an organised system for the deletion of data).

This decision, in conjunction with the new GDPR, emphasises the importance for employers to understand and prioritise data protection and cyber security. If organisations cannot demonstrate that they have taken sufficient steps to ensure technical and organisational measures have been taken to prevent data breaches, then the reputational and financial implications (should a data breach occur) could be significant particularly as heavier financial penalties will apply from May 2018.

We have extensive expertise of data protection laws in the employment context and frequently deliver in-house training on this topic. We are also delivering a number of masterclasses in the coming months to prepare clients and contacts for the new GDPR regulations in May 2018.

If you require specialist data protection advice or would like to attend our GDPR masterclass please contact me on 0191 282 2884 or at jane.sinnamon@collingwoodlegal.com.

Claire Rolston and Yvonne Atherton

GENDER PAY GAP

Companies are now starting to publish gender pay gap information following the introduction of the Equality Act 2010 (Gender Pay Gap Information) Regulations 2017 ("the Regulations") last year.

Put simply the "Gender Pay Gap" is the difference in pay between men and women. According to the BBC News, Ladbrokes, Easyjet and Virgin Money are among the major companies to reveal gender pay gaps of more than 15% in favour of men for mean hourly pay.

Who must comply?

The Regulations apply to private employers in Great Britain with at least 250 employees on 5 April in the reporting year – the first reporting year was 2017.

What must be published?

Under the Regulations, employers must calculate average hourly rates and publish:

- the difference between the mean and median hourly pay for men and women;
- the difference between the mean and median bonus pay for men and women;
- the proportions of men and women who received bonus pay; and
- the proportions of men and women in the quartile pay bands (i.e. those in the lower 25% of pay, the next 25% of pay etc).

These differences should be expressed as a percentage of the full time male hourly rate of pay.

When does it need to be published?

This information needs to be published within 12 months of 5 April i.e. by 4 April 2018 for last year and must also be put on the employer's website and remain there for 3 years.

What are the sanctions for non-compliance?

The Government rejected imposing financial sanctions for non-compliance and there are no civil or criminal enforcement measures in the Regulations. So, the Regulations may be something of a paper tiger. However, the Government has said it will monitor compliance and there is the possibility of being named and shamed as we have seen with minimum wage enforcement. Therefore, the damage to reputation could be very real, even if women are being paid the same rate as men for the same job. It is hoped the Regulations will lead to organisations, and society, addressing the wider issues that create the gender pay gap in the first place.

Please contact Claire Rolston or Yvonne Atherton at CLR Law for further advice about this and other employment law matters hello@clrlaw.co.uk 0191 603 0061

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PERFECTING PRIVACY NOTICES

Stephanie Coulson, commercial law and data protection specialist at Muckle LLP, says transparency is key to the new privacy notices required for May's new General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

A key document needed to comply with the new GDPR is your privacy notice - and there are more requirements than before! Thankfully there's also plenty of guidance out there to help.

What do I have to tell people?

- Who the data controller is
- Contact details for the data protection officer
- Purposes and legal basis for processing data
- Third parties who will receive the information
- Whether the information will be transferred to other countries and what safeguards are in place
- Storage periods
- Individuals' rights (including the right to lodge a complaint to the Information Commissioner's Office(ICO))
- Whether the requirement to provide the information is statutory or contractual
- Whether you do any automated decision-making (including profiling)

Where do I start?

The Article 29 Working Party has released guidelines on transparency and the ICO has published 'Children and the GDPR Guidance'. The

best place to start, however, is looking inwards to identify your audience, what information you need from them and what you are going to do with it. Then apply the guidance when you update your privacy notices.

How do I tell people we have changed the notice?

It's important to tell people when you have made changes. The guidance makes it clear that just asking people in the body of the notice to "check back regularly" for changes is not fair. Why not think about pop-ups or sending specific update messages or other different ways to communicate your changes?

Some tips to help

Keep it snappy: making your privacy notice thorough and detailed might reassure you nothing is missing but the GDPR needs it to be clear, concise and easy for your customers to read.

Captivate: the written word isn't the only way to communicate. Think about combining it with pictures, flowcharts and audio. You could even layer your notices electronically.

Tailor: standard template wording won't do. You need to tailor your privacy notices. If your audience is predominantly children for example, make sure the language you use is child-friendly and consider using pictures, audio or other devices to explain your privacy practices clearly.

Put people first: as with all the provisions of the GDPR, the rights of the individuals (and the need to protect those rights) are paramount.

Review: as technology advances and practices change, don't forget that your privacy notice needs to change too.

Accountability: keep a record of your process when drafting your new privacy notice (including whether you decided to trial it before going live).

To learn more email stephanie.coulson@muckle-llp.com or call 0191 211 7932

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THE POWER TO MAKE ORDERS

Sarah Crilly in the Family Law team at Ward Hadaway explains what a Legal Services Order is and factors the court has to take into consideration before making one in a divorce case.

Choosing to divorce is an extremely difficult and emotional decision, it can feel very isolating and the financial implications can also stack up. This sometimes leaves those involved reluctant to seek advice for fear they will be unable to afford it.

At Ward Hadaway we are often instructed by clients who find themselves in that position when they separate from their partner.

We appreciate that going through a divorce is incredibly difficult for everyone involved. Expenses often start to spiral as soon as the divorce process starts. There are legal fees, court costs, new living expenses and a myriad of other things to take into account.

It's therefore vital for us to help our clients alleviate some of the stress by reviewing the changing financial circumstances in which they find themselves.

In certain situations, that might mean we apply for a Legal Services Order under Sections 22ZA and 22ZB of the Matrimonial Causes Act 1973.

What is a Legal Services Order?

A Legal Services Order is an Order requiring one party to pay money to the other party to enable them to obtain legal services. Orders can be limited to suit particular circumstances and they can include funding for mediation. They can be a one-off payment, or made in instalments, for example on a monthly basis.

If someone is unrepresented, involved in divorce, nullity, judicial separation or Civil Partnership dissolution proceedings or related financial proceedings, they may be able to seek a legal services order to help them with their legal costs.

By virtue of section 22ZA (1), the court may make an order, or orders, requiring one party of the marriage to pay to the other an amount "for the purposes of enabling the applicant to obtain legal services for the purposes of the proceedings."

Factors which the court has to take into consideration:

Before the court can make a Legal Services Order it has to be satisfied that, "without the amount the Applicant would not reasonably be able to obtain appropriate legal services...".

The Applicant would therefore have had to explore other means of securing funding including cashing in savings or investments, whether they would be eligible for a loan and/or whether they could obtain a Charge over other assets of the marriage.

The court must also consider the factors set out under Section 22ZB when determining an application, including:

- **(a)** The parties current and future financial circumstances;
- **(b)** The current and future "needs, obligations and responsibilities" of the parties;
- **(c)** The subject matter of the proceedings;
- **(d)** Whether the other party has legal representation;
- **(e)** Any action taken by the Applicant to avoid the need for the application to be made.

What Orders can the court make?

The court can order the Legal Services Order to be made by way of instalments or by lump sum and payment can be deferred until the conclusion of the proceedings.

For more information on the issues raised in this article, please contact sarah.crilly@wardhadaway.com or call 0191 204 4463.

SWINBURNE MADDISON ACTS IN THORNABY PLANT FIRM ACQUISITION

Swinburne Maddison LLP (Swinburne Maddison), Durham City's pre-eminent law firm, and one of the leading law firms in the North East, has advised Teescraft Engineering Limited (Teescraft) on the acquisition of the entire issued share capital of LH (Quarry Plant) Limited for an undisclosed sum.

The deal, which also included the acquisition of Baxter Crushers Limited, as a wholly owned subsidiary of LH Quarry Plant, drew on the expertise of the corporate, commercial and employment teams at Swinburne Maddison.

The opportunity to acquire LH Quarry Plant came about because majority shareholders and brothers, Nick and Phil Caswell, were looking to retire. The business which employs 40 staff was established in 1968 by their father and has a turnover of around £5m.

Teescraft, has built up an enviable reputation for its precision components for power-related applications. Rob Yorke, managing director, believes that the acquisition will complement and expand the firm's current portfolio of companies. He said: "LH Quarry Plant has a history of building on success to expand and diversify, meeting new industry challenges head on and investing heavily in the business over the years to improve efficiency and meet customer demand. We envisage a truly great future for the combined group.

"The team at Swinburne Maddison have done a tremendous job for us and have provided wise counsel at every stage of the transaction, which, with their help, has progressed very smoothly."

The deal was led by partner, Martyn Tennant, head of corporate and commercial, who added: "We were particularly pleased to have been recommended to Teescraft to undertake this important and strategic acquisition.

"Not only did this deal give us scope to draw upon the wide range of expertise at our disposal, but it is a clear indication that experienced M&A services are available within County Durham.

Thornaby Plant Firm acquired (L to R) – Rob Yorke and Cliff Laverick of Teescraft Engineering Ltd., Martyn Tennant, Swinburne Maddison LLP and Gary Ellis from Clive Owen LLP

"We hope this transaction is only the first of many instructions we receive from Teescraft as it continues to expand and diversify its business and we wish them all success in the future."

Clive Owen LLP, the regional firm of chartered accountants and business advisers, acted on behalf of Teescraft. BHP Law acted for the shareholders of LH Quarry Plant.

www.swinburnemaddison.co.uk

Pele House Middle Road, Shilbottle, Alnwick

6 4 2

A magnificent Grade II Listed family home comprising a stunning Medieval Pele Tower with former vicarage of Georgian and Victorian architecture. It occupies a mature elevated garden site with Artist's Studio and hayloft – a two bedroom attached cottage, currently a successful holiday let.

Price Guide: Offers over £999,500

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Close House Dalton

4 4 3 E

Close House is a fabulous stone-built detached home with beautiful established gardens, a large paddock, grazing area, loose box and stables. The property, which has lovely private rural views, is situated in the picturesque hamlet of Dalton, only a few miles from Ponteland.

Price Guide: £749,950

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Contact rare! From Sanderson Young on 0191 2233500 ashleigh.sundin@sandersonyoung.co.uk www.sandersonyoung.co.uk

STEERING A PATH ROUND SENSITIVE PLANNING ISSUES

Jon Tweddell (left) with Sean Pringle, Longframlington

There is a skill to securing planning permissions and ensuring controversial or difficult planning projects in sensitive rural and urban areas get the go ahead.

Property projects don't just happen and need an experienced hand to guide the development through the planning process. A small housing development in a beautiful part of Northumberland may face obstacles and sometimes even a simple but innovative single designer-house can face neighbourhood objectors.

Developers can waste significant time and money fighting losing battles if they don't find the right planning expert and/or consider compromising on the original plans.

A specialist in this area is JT Planning which has built its reputation by working closely with clients, their architects and local authorities.

Jon Tweddell, director at JT Planning, in Amble, said: "We achieve permissions for clients by providing a bespoke service which is very much tailored to the client and their development requirements.

"The planning system is very much 'front loaded' presently, therefore you need to consider a long list of planning issues when advising on individual schemes."

Planning issues include location, design, ecology, contamination, mining, transport, archaeology and landscape impact, to name but a few. Each of these areas require specialist advice to secure a positive outcome and a planning permission for the client.

JT Planning fully manages the planning process by involving the best consultants to ensure the best outcome for clients.

Jon said: "Planning is extremely subjective, especially around matters of design, therefore it is critical to discuss a client's proposals with all of the relevant stakeholders, especially the local planning authority, who will issue the planning decision.

"We have established good relationships with local authorities throughout the North East and beyond to help ensure that our clients receive a fair hearing. This is borne out by the fact we have received a raft of permissions over the last month."

He is particularly proud of a development at Longframlington, Northumberland, for Dacre Street Developments. This is a scheme of 10 executive homes on farmland on the outskirts of the village. Jon explained: "This project involved careful negotiation with the local authority because their initial response was to oppose the development. Careful planning and negotiation meant that we eventually secured a valuable permission for our client."

Managing director of Dacre Street Developments, Sean Pringle, said: "We have only known Jon for a short time but it became very clear that he knows his stuff and has some good relationships with local authorities. We have now involved Jon with some of our other projects because of his expertise in the planning field."

More recently JT Planning has secured permission for a new housing scheme on a greenfield site in Widdrington. Some 16 months in the planning and three planning committee meetings later, the council eventually granted permission.

Jon added: "Endurance and perseverance can be part of the process. Securing permission for the Widdrington development was made particularly tricky because there was a high level of opposition to the development."

"Often, there has to be give and take on the part of all parties, but permissions can usually be found for most projects and developments", explained Jon.

For more details visit www.jontweddell.co.uk

Damiano Rea, Director, Heaton Property

FAKE NEWS

I am not sure 2017 was a worse year for 'fake news' than any other year since the beginning of time, but it was certainly the year in which the expression came into being.

Collins English Dictionary defines fake news as 'false, often sensational, information disseminated under the guise of news reporting' and we are all pretty clear what constitutes fake news in the media.

My concern is not so much the 'Elvis spotted on the moon' type of fake news. Rather it is when politicians generate much quoted soundbites in order to sway a sector of voters. Late last year Jeremy Corbyn targeted 'generation rent' with promises of longer tenancies and the right of tenants to remain in a property when their lease expires.

The spectre of the Big Bad Landlord was conveniently trotted out by newspapers and broadcasters who might have spent a little time checking the facts. Aside from the fact that most landlords are very happy with secure, long term tenants the facts of the matter do not support the knee-jerk view that the private rental sector needs draconian legislation in order to provide security of tenure.

Figures from the Department for Communities and Local Government indicate that on average, private rental sector tenants have lived in their homes for four years. The statistics show that just one tenth of all tenancies in the private rental sector are terminated by the landlord or letting agent. These figures demonstrate that the vast majority of tenancies are terminated by the tenant and that both landlord and tenant are happy with longer tenancy agreements.

At Heaton Property we promote fixed term tenancies which are reviewed every year at no cost to the tenant. The main reason we do not offer longer fixed term tenancies is not because landlords want to hike the rent. It is usually a term in the lease or mortgage that insists upon an annual review. It is hard to see how legislation can overcome that hurdle since banks and building societies are not keen on Government dictating their terms of business.

In Europe where renting is a far more accepted model than here in the UK, longer term tenancies are more common. Longer agreements are generally driven by landlords who seek a long term and mutually beneficial relationship with their tenant. Top-down legislation aimed at protecting tenants will often have the opposite effect as investment dries up and with it, the availability of quality rental properties.

For a whole raft of reasons, Generation Rent is a fact of life and looks set to be so for the foreseeable future. The answer to our lack of affordable homes is not to drive landlords from the market, it is quite simply to build more affordable homes. That and for politicians to stop throwing out juicy soundbites without analysing the background issues. Because, to quote US Congressman Jimmy Gomez, "When fake news is repeated it becomes difficult for the public to discern what's real".

www.heatonproperty.com

Lewis Chambers

BH MORTGAGES DIRECTOR SHARES HIS ADVICE ON PURCHASING A NEW BUILD PROPERTY

BH Mortgages director Lewis Chambers discusses his top tips for buying a new build.

Up to a million new homes are set to be built over the next few years to meet demand for housing in the UK. For the many people who are or will be purchasing new properties, the buying process can be more complicated than purchasing an existing home. For the many first-time buyers who opt for a new build property, it is a new and daunting experience.

With our links to leading chartered surveys and estate agents Bradley Hall, which employs a team of expert building surveyors, land and new homes specialists, we are the best equipped mortgage firm to offer quality new build mortgage advice.

Here are some of my top tips that need to be considered when buying a new build:

Be aware of the tight deadlines for contract exchanges

Developers often have very demanding timescales. Once you have paid a reservation fee, you are likely to have only have 28 days to exchange contracts. That can be a challenge and it's where our knowledge and relationships with mortgage lenders can help.

Our client management team works closely with lenders' new build relationship teams on a regular basis, which enables us to process a mortgage application quicker than usual to ensure the deadline is met. The BH Mortgages team will also work to keep all parties updated, including the developer and solicitor.

Will your mortgage offer last until your new home is completed?

Most lenders may offer a mortgage, but it is likely to only be valid for three months. If your new home is going to take longer to build, then you would have to go to the trouble of re-applying, meaning more underwriting and more credit checking, which can be damaging to your credit score.

We will work with you to recommend the most appropriate lender considering the estimated build date and how long you require your mortgage offer to be valid for.

Do you qualify for Help to Buy? And who are the best lenders for you?

The current help to buy equity loan scheme allows you to buy a new build property with a 5% deposit. We will be able to tell you straight away if you qualify, then recommend the best lender and mortgage deal depending on your priorities.

We will make sure Help to Buy is available through the lender as not all mortgage providers offer on the scheme. The procedure can appear complex, but our professional team will take you through the entire process, even completing the Help To Buy application on your behalf.

Don't pay too much for life insurance

When you take out a mortgage it's very important to be considering quality protection. We will discuss the need for life insurance, critical illness cover and income protection to ensure you stay in your dream home should something strike you off guard.

However, if you are pushed onto a site recommended broker, watch out for loaded insurance premiums, this is where they charge a little more in good faith of using their services. These brokers tend to only use one insurance provider.

We will do a quality job, offer professional and impartial advice and build your bespoke, tailor made plan to protect you, your family and keep you in your home.

If you are looking to buy your first home or move up the ladder we are here to help. With access to 1000's of the latest mortgage deals, a lot of exclusives that can't be found online or even by walking into a bank. Speak to us as a professional broker by calling 0191 260 2000.

Think carefully about securing debts against your home, your house is at risk if you do not keep up repayments on a mortgage

PROPERTY FIRM CONTINUES TO BRING HUNDREDS OF NEW HOMES TO NORTH EAST MARKET

Matt Hoy

Leading North East property firm Bradley Hall is teaming up with the nation's best housebuilders to bring a range of new properties to the region. Director of estate agency, Matt Hoy, discusses the company's plans to bring new opportunities to the region's home buyers.

Thanks to our growing operations, team and reputation, we have been able to partner with some of the leading house builders to bring much needed new homes to the North East market, including luxury family homes to properties for first time buyers.

We recently struck up a partnership with one of the UK's biggest house providers, Home Group, to bring a number of properties to the regional market. Two and three bedroom properties, designed for families and first-time buyers, across Durham including East Rainton and Meadowfield as well as homes in Cramlington, Northumberland, are all available with a range of incentives.

It is common knowledge that the first step onto the property ladder can be difficult for some due to the initial cost of purchasing a first home. Our partnership with Home Group allows us to offer homes which will cost from £96 per week thanks to the organisation's shared ownership scheme. Other incentives include £1,000 towards legal fees and a 5% deposit through the government's Help To Buy Scheme.

In 2018 we will also bring to market dozens of new homes in Sunderland which are currently under construction thanks to a partnership between housebuilders Thirteen Group, Sunderland Borough Council and Keepmoat Regeneration, which is part of the ENGIE group.

Barnes View, near Grindon, is a development of houses, bungalows and apartments which will be available for sale or affordable rent. It includes 23 two and three-bedroom properties, 12 two-bedroom bungalows, 32 two-bedroom apartments and an independent living scheme comprising eight one-bedroom suites.

The current lack of local housing has also led to the implementation of innovative building methods. ORCA LGS Solutions, a design, manufacturing and training company, has developed a forward-thinking way to deliver housing more efficiently than traditional housing methods, while providing new jobs and skills for local people as well as offsite construction technology.

Construction by ORCA LGS on a development of three bedroom and three bathroom homes in a gated community based on Priory Mews, Tynemouth has recently completed, and we are now marketing the properties.

As well as established and national housebuilders, we also work alongside emerging and local experts who aim to bring new home opportunities to the people of the North East. Gatsby Homes, operated by Ollie Curry, who launched successful architecture business 33architecture, is currently constructing 14 luxury and bespoke two, three and four family homes in Bedlington.

For those looking for unusual and contemporary homes within a historic setting, The Walled Gardens, located in Gosforth, one of the city's most affluent suburbs, boasts modern and luxury features whilst set in a picturesque location. The four and five bedroomed properties boast sedum grass and zinc roofs, designed to mirror the leafy surroundings and former greenhouses of the Walled Gardens.

For more information on Bradley Hall's commercial, residential and financial services, please visit www.bradleyhall.co.uk

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HOME FROM HOME WITH EOTHEN

When 66 year old Marilyn Hamilton needed to find a new home, she was glad to discover that, outside of its purpose-built residential home for people living with dementia, Eothen Homes Wallsend, www.eothenhomes.org.uk, also offers eight on site apartments available to rent privately. She moved in last July and hasn't looked back.

Tell us how you discovered Eothen Homes

Before I moved into my flat here at Eothen Homes Wallsend, I lived in sheltered accommodation in Whitley Bay for a year. Before that I was in a privately rented house in Wallsend, which was then sold by the landlord.

I found out about the flats because my sister Pamela works as a carer in the main residential part of the home and told me about the independent living option. It made it very easy to come and have a look!

What is living in Wallsend like?

I'm very happy here as I grew up in Wallsend so I'm close to where I spent my childhood. Pamela lives nearby in the house we all grew up in and my daughter lives not far. It's ideal really as family is close by but there is also proximity to buses and all the local shops, if I ever want to go out.

Tell us about the Eothen experience

From the minute you walk in the door, it feels like a community here. I might live independently but everybody is so friendly.

The team are all very caring and do whatever they can to help if I ever need it when I go down for my post.

There's a beautiful atrium and the grounds are lovely. There is a hairdresser downstairs which I can access and I really like to get my hair cut there.

It's also very inclusive as a care home - even when you live upstairs, away from it all. I was able to help organize the Autumn and Christmas fair last year and when the café opens I plan to get involved with that too.

Ultimately I can do as little or as much as I want and either way I'm made to feel welcome.

What are the flats like to live in?

The flats are really nice - I have my own pictures and things up and my furniture around me, so it feels like home from home.

Everything was already beautifully decorated and carpeted when I moved in so I didn't actually have to do much.

I have an open plan kitchen and living room, which is very sociable and I can do my own washing which is great. Where I was before I had to use a communal washing machine, which wasn't always a good experience.

Ultimately it couldn't be more pleasant, convenient and nice for everyone and I recommend living here highly.

About Eothen Homes, Wallsend

Rents at Eothen Homes Wallsend start at £600 per month, inclusive of maintenance charge, gas, electricity and water but excluding council tax and telephone.

For further details or to arrange a viewing appointment, please call 0191 2819100 or visit www.eothenhomes.org.uk

STORY HOMES CONTINUES NORTH EAST EXPANSION WITH NEW TYNE AND WEAR DEVELOPMENTS

Five-star housebuilder, Story Homes, has now opened the doors to the show homes at two of its Tyne and Wear developments, as part of its ongoing expansion in the North East.

The 70-home Dovecote Place development is based on Newburn Road, between Newburn and Throckley, and 169-home Fairfields Manor is located in Crawcrook. Both are just a few miles from Newcastle city centre so are ideally placed for commuters.

Lyndsey Walton, Sales Manager at Story Homes, said: "Sales at both developments have so far exceeded expectations, and we are pleased that we now have our marketing suites and show homes open to give potential buyers a real insight into living in a Story Home. Dovecote Place and Fairfields Manor are two of the eleven developments we now have in the North East, and we are pleased to be offering more of our high specification family homes in Tyne and Wear.

"We believe that both of the developments offer something different to buyers. Dovecote Place and Fairfields Manor combine the benefits of semi-rural living with excellent transport links into the city centre, and the three, four and five-bedroom homes are finished to a high standard."

Dovecote Place features eight different house types – a mixture of semi-detached and detached three and four-bedroom homes that are built to a high specification internally and externally. More than half of the homes released so far have already been sold, with buyers citing the convenient location, build quality and extras included as standard as key reasons for choosing Dovecote Place.

The newly-opened show home is the four-bedroom detached 'Taunton', which is one of Story Homes' most popular house types across its developments.

The development has been particularly popular with first-time buyers, and features certain house types that are well-suited to those purchasing their first property. For example, the 'Hastings' is a three-bedroom semi-detached property with driveway parking and 955 sq ft of living space. Story Homes is currently offering Help to Buy on this specific property, as well as selected other plots.

With the government-backed scheme, buyers only need a 5% deposit and a 75% mortgage, as the government will lend you up to 20% of the cost of your new home. You are not charged interest for the first 5 years and you can repay this loan at any time.

Lyndsey continued: "We want to support first-time buyers as much as possible, so we are pleased to be able to offer Help to Buy at Dovecote Place. We would encourage anyone looking for a first home with easy access into the city centre to get in touch to find out about the options available."

Internally, the superior family homes benefit from light and spacious interiors and open plan living spaces. This includes bi-fold/French doors to patio, extensive tiling to bathrooms, bathroom fittings by Crosswater, Kelly Hoppen brassware and contemporary staircases with oak newel posts, handrails and painted spindles. Included as standard outside the homes are large block paved driveways, turfed front and rear gardens, paved patios and external sensor lights.

In addition to new homes, Story Homes' developments create employment opportunities for local contractors and further economic benefits for the areas in which the homes are built. The housebuilder also makes financial contributions towards local education and facilities as part of its commitment to supporting the communities that surround its developments.

Visit storyhomes.co.uk for more information on all of Story Homes' developments across the North East.

8 STEPS TO CHOOSING A TOWN PLANNING CONSULTANT

By Chris Pipe, Director, Planning House

If you're planning a development, choosing the right professionals needs careful thought. An architect will design to your specification, however progressing this through the red tape of the planning process without a town planning consultant onboard can be risky. To help you narrow down your selection I've prepared 8 steps to finding your perfect consultant.

1 ARE THEY A REGISTERED TOWN PLANNER?

As with any profession which provides a service, you will want to make sure your town planning consultant is accredited and insured. A Charter Town Planning Consultant is a member of the Royal Town Planning Institute, fully trained and professionally qualified. All members of the RTPI are bound by a Code of Professional Conduct setting out required standards of practice and ethics. The Institute requires planning professionals to meet and maintain high standards of competence and conduct themselves in a way that inspires trust and confidence in the profession. A chartered town planner will usually have MRTPI after their name to identify that they are accredited.

2 DO THEY HAVE EXPERIENCE?

There are many areas of planning so just because someone is a town planner doesn't mean they have been involved in handling planning applications. It's not essential that a consultant has experience in public sector planning, however, if they have experience dealing with planning applications by working in a Local Planning Authority they can have an edge in providing advice to developers on what the best approach maybe for a particular scheme.

3 WHAT IS THEIR SPECIALISM?

Everyone has an area of expertise, a town planner who works predominantly in waste and minerals isn't necessarily going to bring the right set of skills to support a self builder through the planning process. Whilst town planning isn't rocket science each consultant can have knowledge and experience in different development areas.

4 WHAT DO OTHERS SAY ABOUT THEM?

Most planning consultants have a website, do they have references or testimonials to support their work. Do they advertise elsewhere for instance Yell or Google are there reviews you could consider? Do your homework.

5 ARE YOU ON THE SAME PAGE?

When you talk to your consultant are they interested in the proposal? Do they think what you are trying to achieve is reasonable? Talk about timescales but be aware once a planning application is submitted it is generally out of your planning consultants hands.

6 ARE THEY PERSONALLY SUITABLE?

Do you feel comfortable with them? At the end of the day they are acting on your behalf trying to secure your planning consent. Do they know what your aspirations are and what (if anything) you would compromise on? Be honest about what you're looking for and ask them for their honest opinion about your chances of success, but don't discount them if they don't think your proposal is 100% guaranteed – be more worried if they think it is!

7 DO THEY HAVE LOCAL KNOWLEDGE?

I don't mean do they live in the area, rather do they have experience in the local area, have they been involved in other projects? If they have they may provide more realistic advice about your project, local planning policies and what the best approach may be to take your proposal forward.

8 HAVE YOU COMPARED QUOTES?

Everyone loves a bargain; however, every town planner will have their own fee structure, it's really no different to EasyJet and Virgin airlines, both services will get you there but you need to weigh up what's important to you. Do you opt for a no frills service or go for a more personal bespoke service – neither are incorrect. My advice compare your quotes taking into account all of the other steps and I'm sure you'll find your ideal town planning consultant.

PLANNING HOUSE can be contacted on 07944844882, info@planninghouse.co.uk or by visiting www.planninghouse.co.uk

NORTH EAST PR CONSULTANT TAKES HIGHEST OFFICE AT CIPR

North East PR consultant Sarah Hall has become President of the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) in its seventieth anniversary year.

The leading representative body for the PR profession and industry in Europe, the CIPR has a Royal Charter, giving it the power to grant Chartered Public Relations Practitioner status to individuals who meet the required standard of professional distinction. Sarah was the first practitioner in the North East to achieve this.

The president's duties include acting as chairperson for the CIPR and as the representative of the public relations industry within the UK.

Sarah will continue throughout as managing director of Sarah Hall Consulting Ltd, her North East-based PR and marketing consultancy which employs a team of ten. The agency's client base includes the North East Local Enterprise Partnership, Invest North East England and JK Property Consultants.

Sarah said: "It's a privilege to lead the CIPR. My vision is for a dynamic, progressive and assertive organisation to set the agenda and promote the value of public relations."

SENIOR APPOINTMENT AT DURHAM-HEADQUARTERED PR AGENCY

Durham-headquartered PR and marketing communications agency Filament PR has announced the appointment of Sarah Pinch as Non-Executive Director.

Having launched in October 2016, Filament PR provides communications to brands in the lifestyle, leisure and entertainment sectors, both regionally and nationally. With a client list including Enesco, seeing the team work with names like Beatrix Potter and Disney, the business has grown exceptionally in its first year of trading.

As well as her role at Filament PR, Sarah is Managing Director of Pinch Point Communications and Chair of the Taylor Bennett Foundation. Sarah is also a champion of women in business, seeing her listed in the FT and HERoes Top 50 Business List.

Sarah's role at Filament PR will see her provide independent oversight and constructive challenges to the business to ensure plans are in place and the business is on track. She also plans to expand the team over the coming months to help meet growing client demand.

L-R: Sarah Pinch (Chart.PR, FCIPR) - Non-Executive Director of Filament PR
Anne-Marie Lacey (Chart.PR, MCIPR) - Managing Director of Filament PR

NGI SOLUTIONS CONTINUES GROWTH FOLLOWING CONTRACT WINS

Marketing, PR and digital agency NGI Solutions is looking back on a successful 2017 after delivering some high-profile campaigns and receiving a number of key contract wins.

Established in 2014, NGI Solutions has seen significant growth in its first three years of business and is on track to achieve an income target of £470,000 by the end of the 2017/18 financial year. Recent wins include a research project with Intu Eldon Square and a lead generation contract with the joint venture delivering the Milburngate development in Durham.

Throughout the year the research team also delivered projects for Leeds BID, Leeds City Council and Wild in Art. Work delivered included focus groups, interviews and increasingly the use of digital insight techniques.

James Ealey, Director at NGI Solutions, said: "Last year was another successful one for us with a significant increase in our turnover, alongside the width and breadth of our client base. We have ambitious plans for further growth moving forward."

All income that NGI Solutions generates is reinvested back into the work that its parent company, destination marketing agency NewcastleGateshead Initiative, does to promote the North East and drive economic growth.

In our world, Mediocrity is quite a celebrity.
Pretty easy to work with & has a good fan following.
Unfortunately, we're not among them. Sorry.
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HOW PR PROFESSIONALS CAN HELP BUSINESSES NAVIGATE BREXIT

As Brexit negotiations continue, PR consultant and 2018 President of the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) Sarah Hall explains why North East businesses should look to their PR practitioners – and ideally CIPR members - for support in navigating the complexities and long-term transition.

Sarah Hall

The results of the EU referendum sent shockwaves through the world and presented businesses with an unprecedented challenge.

Brexit represents considerable risk but also great opportunity for us all. It will cause monumental change, the impact of which is impossible to predict, across the economic, political and civic landscape.

But amidst the period of political turbulence, North East companies can rely on their PR practitioners to help support them through these uncertain times.

CIPR commissioned report

In a recent report Brexit and Public Relations in 2018, the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) examined the role public relations is playing in preparing businesses for Brexit.

The survey found that fewer than 1 in 10 of the mostly senior PR professionals who responded felt that their organisations were happy with the Government's approach to Brexit.

There was also concern among respondents that organisations weren't yet preparing either quickly enough or appropriately.

Only 40% of respondents stated that their organisations were talking to staff about Brexit; just 30% of respondents felt their organisations were exploring their strengths and weaknesses against the requirements of Brexit; and few were changing policies to prepare for change.

Worryingly, the report found less than a quarter (22%) of respondents felt that their clients or employers were prepared for Brexit and fewer than that (21%) didn't even believe that some of their employers or clients were prepared at all.

More than 60% of respondents to the survey agreed that better engagement through public relations would improve their organisation's Brexit preparations.

PR's role in helping business

So how can public relations practitioners help navigate the complexities of the next few years?

Working across the specialisms - internal communication, public affairs, media relations and investor relations - your PR practitioner can help businesses build resilience through:

- Strong, effective relationships with core stakeholders including staff, customers, suppliers, investors, Government and other key groups
- Using all the skills of empathy that public relations can call on, as well as extensive social research
- Leadership to ensure your organisation's voice is heard
- Political intelligence and influence

CIPR members are being supported by the leading industry body to help organisations prepare for Brexit with confidence and resilience.

To assist members, the CIPR will:

- Work with members through scenario planning meetings and sharing the recommendations
- Offer a basic guide to Brexit, with regular updates on political activity as the date for the UK's departure draws nearer, sharing key questions for professionals that arise from each significant development
- Signpost useful information, key business contacts, best practice from other sectors and commentary on the possible impacts of Brexit
- Offer more guidance on the role of public relations at Board level, including analysis of changes affecting corporate governance and support for public relations as the practice that develops comfort with, and confidence in operating in a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous macroeconomic environment
- Hold quarterly Brexit meetings

This activity will equip CIPR members in the North East with the information and tools they need to help the organisations they work with prepare for Brexit.

As the CIPR report concludes, much about the impact of Brexit is unknown and in times of unprecedented uncertainty, volatility, and ambiguity, organisations must find a new level of resilience.

With a significantly different commercial landscape ahead, North East businesses must be both receptive to new ways of working and communicative. Success will follow those led by flexible, highly-skilled public relations professionals with the depth of knowledge and experience to respond effectively to change.

If you need help planning marketing or public relations activity for 2018 you can contact Sarah at sarah@sarahhallconsulting.co.uk

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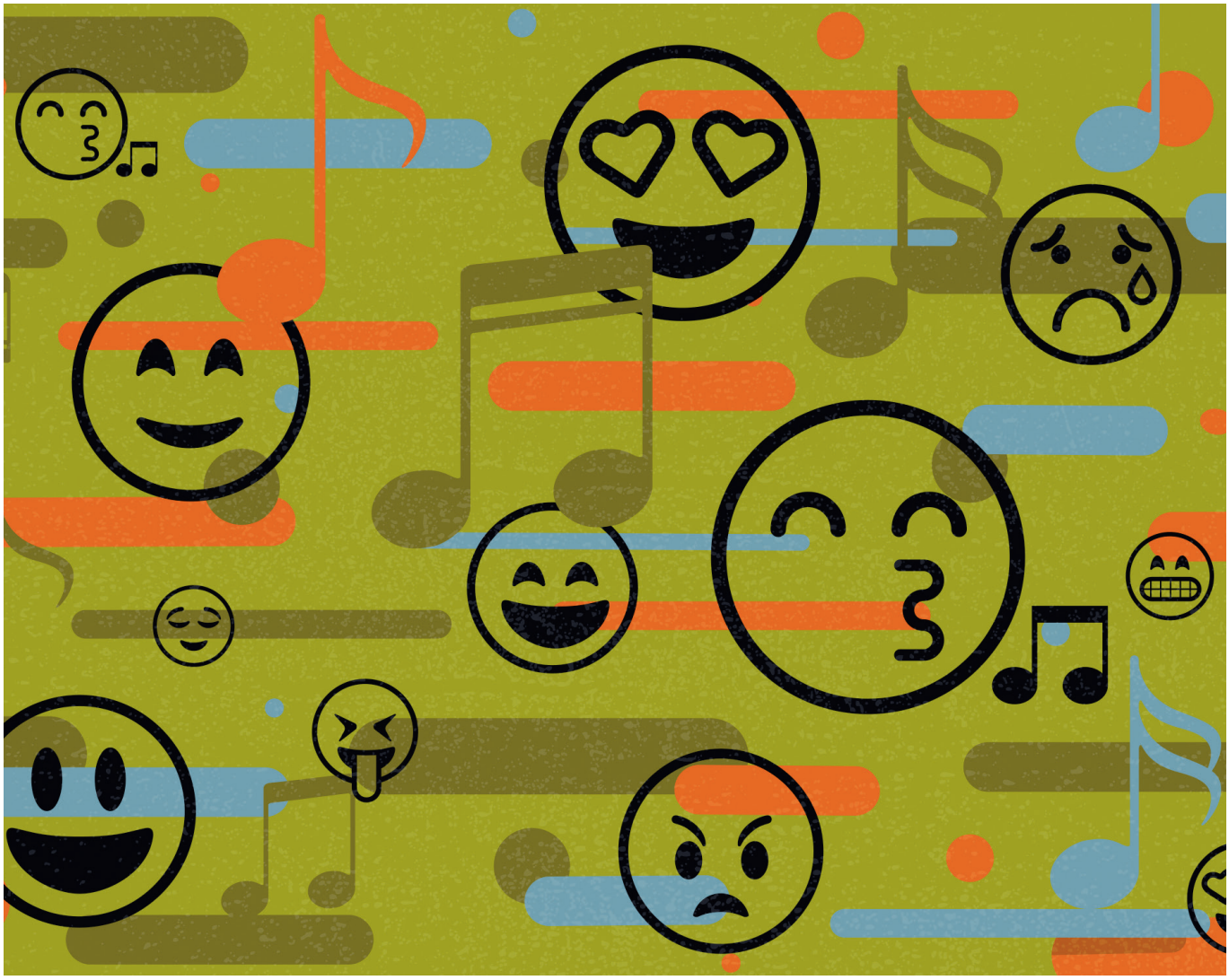

THE UNSUNG HERO OF ADVERTISING

Throughout their 12 years in business, full-service agency The Works has worked with a range of clients on advertising campaigns and brand communications. Here, they discuss the impact music has in advertising.

Great music is something everyone understands. Whether it's the catchy pop song that you can't help singing, the rap you don't really know the words to (but still give it your best shot!) or your favourite movie ballad – music forms part of most people's everyday lives.

When it comes to advertising, if a brand wants to build a connection with the consumer it'll more likely be successful if there's a strong feeling or emotion evoked by the music that accompanies what's on the screen. The wonderful thing about music is how it can trigger an emotion, memory or tell a story. It sets the tone and course of the advert and makes you feel what it wants you to feel, which is why it's such a powerful tool. We consciously listen to music that evokes emotions that we want to feel in a given moment - for example, having a playlist with upbeat songs to get us in a motivated mood at the gym - and music in advertising uses that same psychology. Brands must consider their target audience, and the message of the advert needs to feed through to the music. How do you want viewers to feel? Emotion is so powerful, it's important to get it just right.

Music also enhances the recall for a product, even if the emotion evoked by the advert isn't positive. In branding and advertising, success is defined by impact. It's hard to make a lasting impression on a consumer within a short timescale, but if you can hook them with a jingle that they'll sing for the rest of the day, then you're maximising your ad spend. Go Compare is the perfect example: it drives most of us insane but whether we like it or loathe it, the brand is burned into our brain and we bet it's front of mind when you need a comparison website.

Studies show that adverts with some form of music perform better across four metrics - creativity, empathy, emotive power and information power. So, it makes sense that most creatives take time choosing the best song to fit their advert, making sure the rhythm of song and advert are in sync and that the choice enhances the brand or experience they're looking to create. Choosing a song purely on popularity that doesn't match the theme of the ad just wouldn't work. Look at retail giant John Lewis: their Christmas ad is now one of the most anticipated adverts of the year, and we're just as eager to hear the song as we are to see the story. For the last five years, the department store's Christmas advert song has entered the charts, proving that people do pay attention to the music!

The purpose of advertising is to persuade your audience to do something and to do this effectively, you need to appeal to their emotions. Though big brands are known for their products and services it's the experience they create that builds loyal consumers and brand advocates – and music plays its part in that.

So, next time you're watching the ad breaks or at the cinema, pay attention to the adverts and see how you react to the music. We bet you feel something as the brand tries to win you over with their musical calling card!

To find out more about what we do and how we can help you, visit wearetheworks.com or follow @wearetheworks

Christian Cerisola

FACEBOOK RULE CHANGES MEAN CONVERSATIONS ARE KEY

If you're a business enjoying some success on Facebook, you may soon start to wonder what's just hit you.

The social media giant has recently announced it is changing its algorithms in order to get Facebook users back to what founder Mark Zuckerberg has labelled as 'more meaningful interactions'. Even by its own admission, it doesn't want you spending hours and hours on the site leading to ultimately unsatisfying experiences. So they're changing the goalposts. Facebook is going for quality over quantity.

Facebook hasn't been shy in informing us that this is likely to be bad news for publishers and for brands who use the platform. Instead of using its algorithms to promote posts, videos and updates from organisations it thinks you'll be interested in, you'll see much more from your friends and family once again.

Good news, possibly, for ordinary Joe who just wants to see how John and Charlotte's new cat is doing (and if you don't look out for the great 30-day 'snooze' function you can apply to your really boring friends), but what about all of us at the business end who have come to rely on our efforts on the platform to develop new audiences?

Personally, I'm pretty excited to see how these changes will roll out. Businesses are going to have to think and work harder at developing content that people will want to engage with. Getting John and Charlotte to divert from their new moggie for a second and engage with your own updates becomes even more important. No more will you simply be able to push dull ad-focused content on people in the hope fresh eyes will see it.

Our advice? Don't abandon the key principles of what works best on social. Facebook will remain an important platform to monitor and, crucially, to engage in. You might just have to think about some fresh ways to do that.

So how are you then going to make a success of Facebook? There is a section of your audience who will remain fiercely loyal. They'll go and hunt out your content. Don't disappoint them by giving up on them. Keeping them engaged in conversations is going to be crucial.

Instead of sitting back and allowing the likes and comments to rack up unchecked, you're going to have to put some time and effort in. That comments section, for example, should be a focus. Respond quickly to queries, thank any praise and address any problems. Show that you're an organisation that cares about your customer and, importantly, still cares about the platform. You will get your rewards.

Outwardly and mercilessly flogging your wares will win you no favours or fans, not least from Facebook. Think more about the non-transactional value of engaging with this audience. Insight and intelligence might be great start point. Offer that for nothing and enjoy building loyalty that way.

Also, for customer-facing businesses, keep an eye out for those check-ins. These also offer great opportunities to engage. Ask them why they came, what they're looking forward to, ask them for direct feedback there and then. This is a 'live' opportunity to give a customer an holistic experience of your brand. They're mentioning you because they're proud to be there or want to be seen by their own Facebook friends in the right place. They're chasing social validation, just like you. Don't disappoint them.

And speaking of 'Live', Facebook is also heavily hinting that it wants to become the go-to for live video. Conversations stemming from live video or other highly interactive post types will be among those promoted on peoples' news feeds.

So instead of viewing Facebook's new approach as a threat to your business, see this as an opportunity to hit the reset button on what you're doing on the platform. Embrace their new mantra of 'more meaningful conversations' and start to develop your plans from there.

Christian Cerisola is head of W North, a part of award-winning agency W Communications. www.wnorth.co.uk @WCommNorth

HOW TO HELP CUSTOMERS CHOOSE YOUR BRAND OVER THE COMPETITION

In a busy marketplace how do you ensure your business has a compelling enough shop window to connect with customers and make them choose you, first time and every time?

People often think that clients will spend oodles of time pondering whether you are the right company for them, when in reality it can take just a few milliseconds to decide whether they want to work with you based on the initial look, feel and tone of your brand.

It's important that your presentation and communications are right in order to effectively demonstrate what you're capable of, build trust from the get-go and make it easy for customers to choose your brand over others.

Here are our top tips on helping you stand out from the crowd;

1) Keep it on brand

To create a strong and memorable identity, consistency is key in making sure that every touch point of your brand looks and feels like it is from the same family. Whether it be your website, social media profile or brochure, it needs to feel like one of the same. This is where having a well-thought out and comprehensive brand identity really comes into its own.

2) Create impact

First impressions always count so create a wow factor with impactful photography, a clean simple design or a stylish finish. Beautiful paper stock or special touches such as letterpress or embossing can help to add that touch of luxe to printed materials.

3) Use captivating images

They say a picture paints a thousand words so invest in a collection of photographs unique to your business and that help tell your story.

4) Write compelling copy

So many people tell us how hard they find it to promote their business through creative copy. For us it's about starting with 'you' not 'we', putting the customer at the centre of all content, writing from their perspective rather than your own. Look at what's in it for them conveying the benefits and value that your product or service can bring rather than the features.

It's also important to be concise. Why use seventeen words when three will do? You may start with writing long hand but edit everything down. It will create more impact and less is often more.

Bring energy and passion to what your do. Let your copy shine and your words sparkle. Lose the formal prose and instead write as you speak. This will be so much easier and your clients will love you for it.

5) Invest in good design

Many businesses will carry out their own design work but there is a lot of merit in investing in a professional to help transform your business. Every communication has the power to create rapport or undermine it; build confidence or take it away, form trust or break it down. Great design will make your clients feel valued and really enhance your offering.

6) Attention to detail ....
It's the small things that matter

It's not just design that matters but your brand extends to the way you interact with your clients from the first contact through to the last. Take care of the small things and the way you communicate with your stakeholders and you will create much needed loyalty, referrals and repeat business over time.

To transform your business through design contact Sarah McCrady Co-founder and Design Director at Absolute Agency www.absolute-agency.co.uk email: sarah@absolute-agency.co.uk or call 07595700586

TEAM INTRODUCTIONS: ALEESHA, ONE IT SUPPORT

Hi everyone; I'm Aleesha, the office administrator at One IT Support. I have worked at One IT for just over two years now and it has been two of the most informative, productive and enjoyable years of my life.

I found One IT when I was searching for a place to do an apprenticeship, I knew I wanted to work in business admin and it just so happened that they were advertising. As I had just left school, it's safe to say that I was pretty nervous! However, just an hour and a half after the interview I got a call to say I got the job, I couldn't believe my luck.

When I first started at One IT I was new to everything, but with the support of Piers and Richard, I soon settled in. In fact, one of my first memories of working here is answering a sales call. Every time the guy on the phone asked a question I just said "no". He obviously found this hilarious but I was mortified!

My plans for the future? Well, I have just recently achieved my level 3 in business admin, but now I want to go to the next level. In two weeks' time I will be starting a 4-year degree with QA Apprenticeships in Management. I am so excited to get started and my colleagues have been so supportive in my progression; I couldn't ask for anything more.

One IT is an incredible company to work for and one that I'm proud to represent. I have faith that no matter what problem walks through our office door, our team will be able to find the appropriate solution.

Here's to four more years at One IT!

To find out more about the services provided at One IT Support you can find out more information on the company website at www.oneits.co.uk

WHAT THE HECK IS MARKETING ANYWAY?

Whether you recognise it or not, your organisation is marketing itself all day every day.

The products and services you sell, the people you sell them to, the way you get them to market, the way you price them and ultimately the way you promote them all add up to one thing! Will people choose you or your competition when they make their next purchase?

You may not have a marketing department as such, but decisions are being made all the time as to what the company should look like, what types of products you sell and how you go about selling them.

What is the background of the people making those decisions? Frequently we come across those people who set up the business in the first place – be it engineering, professional services, manufacturing, agency – the breadth of industries is vast. But at some stage there comes a point where through your own success you inevitably need to extend the team to complement the activities that you do. These people will help you deliver the business, giving you time to run the business.

We are training people in marketing and communications every day of the working week. We meet people who have been given responsibility for the whole marketing of the business, without any marketing qualifications and occasionally without any experience either! (We do like a blank canvas!)

No matter what interests or skill sets you need in your business, nesma can make sure your marketing person or team is up to the Job. Marketing first – what are you trying to achieve in your business – before getting too tied up in the tactics – and of course we can help you with those too.

Veronica Swindale, Director, Chartered Marketer, FCIM and CIM Ambassador of the North 2017
Whether it's working on your current skill set or exploring a new area of expertise nesma has all your marketing and communication know-how covered. www.nesma.co.uk hello@nesma.co.uk

JONATHAN JOINS CIM NORTH EAST

CIM is pleased to announce the appointment of Jonathan Sabarre MCIM, as its new Vice Chair for the North East, a role with a focus on driving engagement with the next generation of marketing leaders.

Jonathan, who is the Head of Marketing at Cairn Hotel Group, one of the largest privately owned hospitality operators in the UK, has over 14 years' multinational experience leading digital strategy and communications across a range of sectors including hospitality, entertainment and events.

During his time with Cairn Hotel Group to date, Jonathan has helped to establish a marketing team, bringing a strong set of specialist skills into the business around him, as well as a number of partner agencies as an extension across the UK, for a full communications operation.

The Cairn Collection, a new hand-picked selection of historic hotels in iconic locations, has been a project Jonathan developed from conception to launch and is an exciting chapter for the wider business. Jonathan has also been instrumental in creating Cairn Academy, a training programme for apprentices as a platform for aspiring hospitality professionals to excel in the industry and gain a recognised qualification.

Jonathan said: "I'm absolutely delighted to be officially appointed as Vice Chair, it is an honour and a privilege. I've had an incredibly exciting journey so far in my marketing career, and I would not have been here today without the support and guidance given to me by CIM. I believe there is no greater role than the opportunity to give back, and to help the next generation of marketers. I look forward to working with other organisations, universities and business schools to explore, advance and help students succeed in their marketing career."

Diane Earles, Network Manager for CIM said: "We are very excited to bring on board Jonathan, who has a wealth of experience and is a truly passionate marketer. He will, I am sure, inspire our marketers of the future in the North East."

www.cairnhotelgroup.com

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LEAVING THE RIGHT IMPRESSION

WHAT IS YOUR MARKETING STRATEGY FOR 2018?

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ANALYTICAL DATA

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STICK WITH US...

It's been two years since I first entered Jammy Towers, and what an amazing two years it has been.

Now as the Marketing & PR Executive or as my fellow Jammy Dodger's call me the 'Drama Queen', I have brought my digital marketing passion, creative flair, friendly and approachable vibe to all of our fantastic clients.

As a small, creative team, each of our Jammy Dodgers showcase their own skills and passion for PR and marketing, creating the perfect team with specialist skills. From fake Geordie's to Drama Queens we have it all. And that is why we work! So, it's time to give you all a little insight into my skills (or some may say flaws) ...

Digital Marketing = 90%

Promoting your brand, product or service through various forms of digital media is one of my main daily roles within JAM Marketing. I head up the digital marketing game ensuring all of our clients reach their audience from the use of social media platforms (trust me there's not just one these days) and let's face it, it's 2018 so your business really can't afford to not be online. From developing, implementing and managing your company's online visibility, I'm the Jammy Dodger who creates that vital brand awareness you really need.

Design = 60%

Whoever said diamonds are a girl's best friend clearly never had an iMac. As soon as a design job comes into the office, I'm on my iMac in Photoshop heaven. From adverts, infographics, logo design, visual designs to general client artwork I ensure every one of my clients are visually appealing across all platforms. May that be their advert in print or infographic on Instagram!

Nicolle Horsburgh

OCD = 95%

I prefer to call it attention to detail rather than OCD but the other Jammy Dodger's would strongly disagree. So, we've talked about brand awareness and design, but it really is my pet hate when a company doesn't have a coherent brand. Branding is a way of identifying your business; it's how your customers recognise your company. I believe a strong brand is more than just a logo; it's a coherent guideline across every PR, marketing and business platform: marketing materials, business cards, website, social media, mailers, adverts, everything... even your staff uniform. If your brand doesn't have any brand guidelines please come and speak to me, you'll love my OCD.

Sass Queen = 100%

I really don't know where this comes from? Though this might be my nickname in the office, I get the job done, though it might be with a sassy flair.

Creative Ideas = 80%

I believe that there is one thing that distinguishes highly creative people from others; it's the ability to see possibilities where others don't - or, in other words, vision. I was never your A* Maths genius at high school, but sit me in front of InDesign and you'll have a brand new creative campaign within an hour.

For more information on our Jammy Dodger's visit www.jam-marketing.co.uk or contact me directly at nicolle@jam-marketing.co.uk

YOU'VE "HIGHLIGHTED" OUR BUSINESS

Highlights PR is a successful PR agency run by Keith Newman. Uniquely, their office is a boat based on the River Tyne. Here we look at how Highlights PR have helped one of their clients.

North East Counselling Services is a Gateshead-based social enterprise that offers free and affordable counselling to individuals, couples and young people across the region. They have recently expanded their services to help local businesses deal with stress and mental health issues in the workplace.

Chief Executive Officer, Marjorie Hunter said, "Mental health issues are a rising problem for people in the north-east as they are across the UK. Many people will experience a mental health issue in their lifetime, or simply need some time with a professional counsellor to clarify their feelings. We aim to improve access to help by offering counselling services delivered by a team of 50 professionally qualified therapists.

"We wanted to get that message out to as many people as possible so we approached Keith at Highlights PR.

"Highlights PR identified angles to promote the organisation and then produced press releases which highlighted the key messages NECS needed to communicate to the public. The subsequent story featured in local newspapers and BBC local radio as well as creating a huge online presence. We were delighted that Keith immediately understood our aims and needs and skilfully converted them into tangible PR outcomes for us."

For NECS Call: (0191) 440 8127 Email: info@necounselling.org.uk
For a no obligation chat about your PR and a coffee on-board Highlights – the floating office, call Keith on 07814 397951 or email Keith@highlightspr.co.uk

ASK SILVER BULLET

Jen Macdonald, Account Manager at Silver Bullet Marketing Ltd

"WHY IS VIDEO MARKETING SO POWERFUL?"

Over recent years video marketing has developed to become one of the most influential marketing tools across multiple platforms. 2018 is seeing a surge in video use for businesses in a range of different ways allowing the power of video marketing to expand. Video advertising is rising (mainly across online platforms), video testimonials are increasingly popular and companies are attracting people on social media to watch video, highlighting a popular form of viral marketing.

Due to an increase in advertising and online engagement all distributed video marketing has the potential to go viral. The vast number of people who go online are continuously being targeted with videos which companies are integrating into a viral campaign to direct potential customers to their product or service.

Traditionally, video marketing was concentrated around television advertisements, but with six out of 10 people preferring online video to live TV, online streaming, catch-up TV and on-demand channels are taking over and marketers must therefore be creative with video marketing. This new change has brought the opportunity for viral advertising to be a main focus, however, choosing the correct video platform is important and competition is fierce. Visual content attracts more engagement than stand alone text, and as 65% of the population are visual learners, video is the main form of media that goes viral, making it an increasingly powerful marketing tool.

The impact of traditional television advertising is slowing and contemporary online video marketing is now a popular choice. Video content is high on people's agenda, being used for online advertising, website integration, social media strategy, etc. These marketing ideas are taking over Internet activity and are expected to expand during 2018.

Many companies are attempting to stay current by creating a video marketing strategy whilst marketing experts are increasingly being asked to develop video into marketing campaigns in order to attract more customers. Video is being formatted in company web designs for the purpose of adverts or customer testimonials and this concept should be utilised to gain market share over competitors who may not be using the new technology. The reason this trend is so powerful is due to the vast number of people engaging online - we live in a 'now culture' and as a result of impatient natures a still image or text may not give us the information we need quick enough. Videos enhance the ability to really understand something within seconds, whilst visuals demonstrate company ethics and personalities in a short space of time.

One of, if not the most, powerful and popular video platforms is YouTube receiving over 30 million visitors per day – this online sensation multiplied the value of online video and changed the world of Internet marketing strategies. According to 2017 YouTube statistics around 300 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube every minute and almost 5 billion videos are watched on YouTube every single day. YouTube video marketing has become the norm for some companies because it can be used as a sure way of getting seen by the desired target audience, but can be quite costly. YouTube is one of the key reasons why video marketing is so powerful - starting out as a website for people to upload video content, generally of music and quirky videos, but becoming a business network for viral marketing through advertising, vlogging and informative tutorials. As a pinnacle for online video marketing, YouTube now works with Google for promotion purposes, and since its development companies such as Amazon, Netflix and SKY have followed, becoming Internet royalty.

Social media is another online platform that has improved the power of video marketing – in particular, Facebook holds the majority of advertising and viral videos. Companies can pay to promote their content or advertise their services in order to be seen by consumers. Social video marketing is also an easy and cost effective way to monitor and analyse the engagement of a promotion.

The power of video marketing is predicted to rise throughout 2018 as more people are venturing online for streaming, social media, daily consumption and general content. It is important for businesses to be aware of these new developments in order to stay on trend and relevant.

Do you need 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.

SPOTLIGHT

Want your business to be in the spotlight?

Talk to the PR specialists at MHW PR...

We storyboard and implement communications campaigns that build client reputations. That involves generating and distributing persuasive, engaging content - online and offline.

We have years of knowledge to help make our clients more famous, putting them centre stage. We work across a range of business sectors from the corporate world to industrial, healthcare and hospitality.

Please call if you need your business putting in the spotlight.

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PR & MARKETING

Tel: 0191 233 1300
mhwpr.co.uk

YOUR EYE ON THE REGION...

ANNE-MARIE LACEY

Managing Director, Filament PR,

A communications consultancy working with clients throughout the UK across the lifestyle, leisure and entertainment sectors.

Did you grow up in the North East or did you decide to relocate here in later life?

In short, a bit of both! I'm North East born and raised, having spent my childhood living at home with my parents just on the outskirts of Durham. At 18 I then flew the nest and moved to Yorkshire where I studied Linguistics and Phonetics at the University of Leeds. I met my husband - Liam - there, so after graduation, I stayed in the area for a while and took a job in sales and marketing.

Then, having decided I wanted to complete a Master of Arts Degree to help further my career in Public Relations (at a time when they weren't funded if you had already completed an undergraduate degree), I moved back home with my parents for a year to help with financing the cost of the course while I studied a Chartered Institute of Public Relations accredited post-grad degree at Sunderland University.

From there, I was offered my first job in PR working for an agency in Manchester, so Liam moved across the Pennies from Leeds to join me and we set up our first home together in Salford Quays. A year or so after that, I was then head hunted back to the North East, so we trundled back up the A1 again, bought a property, got married, launched a business, and the rest - as they say - is history.

What do you think it means to be a businessperson in the North East of England?

Having grit and determination to see your vision through while staying true to your values. I'm extremely lucky that at Filament PR, we work with clients in the region and throughout the UK across the lifestyle, leisure and entertainment sectors. So, while our home is in the North East, we really do take a national approach to our work - we haven't really experienced any North/South divide.

Do you think living and working in the North East offers the same opportunities as elsewhere in the UK?

Good question but a bit of a tricky one for me to answer. I've only ever lived and worked in the North (albeit not always the North East).

I think a few years ago my answer may have been 'yes'. But, I think thanks to better connectivity, infrastructure and so on, the UK is becoming a much smaller place and therefore levels the playing field somewhat with our counterparts in the South.

Certainly at Filament PR, being based in the North East hasn't been a hindrance in terms of winning new business with clients from the South or stopping the agency from growing astronomically in its first year of trading.

Do you have a favourite hotspot for a business meeting?

At Filament PR, we work remotely when we're not with our clients. The flip-side of this is that we get to spend so much time on-site with our clients, so most of our meetings take place on their premises. That said, a nice tea shop with a slice of cake and a cuppa is always a welcome change! We're also trialing walking meetings – watch this space (although they'll inevitably end up in a pub or a bar somewhere...).

What is your favourite aspect of life in the North East?

Scale and balance. Living in Durham we're spoiled with a truly beautiful city – it's small but perfectly formed while being steeped in so much history. We're also right on the doorstep of some stunning coastlines. We can go from the hustle and bustle of the city-vibe to the peace and tranquility of being by the sea in less than half an hour. It's just ideal.

Where do you like to eat out in the region?

At our local pub – it's called The Mill. As the name would suggest, it's an old converted stone-brick mill running alongside a little stream. It's all home-cooked, good old-fashioned pub grub. Think mince and dumplings, steak and ale pie, plus they serve proper chips the size of Jenga bricks! An added bonus is it's only a 20-minute walk from our home. We may have been known to walk there on a Friday night for some food and stagger back after a bottle of wine or two...

Where do you like to unwind within the North East?

Any of our beautiful beaches. There's nothing better than getting wrapped up warm, facing the bracing winds and enjoying a winter walk along the coast. I'm sure the sea air helps to clear your head and bring a bit of clarity to our super busy lives.

What do you think is the best view in the North East?

For me it's after a long day of working in London, pulling into Durham train station, and seeing the Cathedral on the horizon. That's when I know I'm home.

Filament PR, Portland House, Belmont Business Park, Durham, DH1 1TW. 0191 375 5790 www.filamentpr .co.uk

COMMUNICATIONS: BACK TO BASICS

Stefan Lepkowski

In today's increasingly interconnected world of instant communications, it's all too easy to lose sight of how best to reach out to your audience. Here, Stefan Lepkowski, Founder of Karol Marketing, an award-winning PR agency renowned for accelerating brand value for over 25 years, shares his top communications tips.

It's quite incredible to think how much communications have evolved over time and how everything is now available at a touch of a button, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. But with so many different ways to connect and communicate, it makes being able to do so effectively more complex and challenging than ever before.

The platforms we choose to communicate through will vary depending on the project or client, but regardless of the situation, or how big or small your company is, it's integral to business success to not feel trapped behind a screen and apply a 'one size fits all' method of communication to everyone you come across. In our fast-paced world of 24-hour news cycles, sometimes the temptation to fire off a message to tick a box can be all too tempting. But, as with any good PR campaign, effective business communications should utilise a package of tools and one of these should be face-to-face communication.

Don't get me wrong - emails, Tweets, Skype and WhatsApp messages are all brilliant practical tools that help to reach new audiences, maintain conversations and create quick and frequent two-way communications. Technology is something we'd all be lost without and we must use it to our advantage.

However, I believe that making the time to talk to people in person still remains the most effective form of communication for businesses. There is no substitute for talking to a person directly as it provides you with a real-life platform to engage, interpret and nurture stronger and more meaningful long-term relationships. You'll have a different relationship with someone you've met in person, even if it's just briefly, over someone you've only spoken to online.

Time is precious, yes, but meeting someone face-to-face can boost efficiency in the long-term and also act as a critical component when it comes to building and maintaining business relationships. Meetings can reveal much more in terms of personality and likes/dislikes for communications moving forward. They build an element of trust and transparency, help to cement relationships and provide you with an opportunity to explore projects and ideas much more freely.

Meeting up with someone doesn't always have to take place in a formal setting either, it can be as simple as going for a coffee or popping into the pub for a pint. These informal discussions have different benefits altogether and can allow both parties to relax and delve into an idea in more detail, ultimately adding more colour to something that you wouldn't normally get from an email or over the phone.

Never underestimate that people are your best assets in business so next time, instead of resorting to email communications, I suggest taking the time to get to know them and soon enough, the results will speak for themselves.

To find out more about Karol Marketing and the services they offer, please contact the team on 0191 2657765.

Brett Jacobson

2018'S DIGITAL DEVELOPMENTS

With 2018 in full swing, you should already be working on your digital strategy for the coming 12 months. Award-winning digital marketing agency Mediaworks explains the digital trends you can't afford to ignore this year:

As we enter our 11th year of business, we've seen it too many times; the companies who ignore digital progression and ultimately eliminate themselves from their market or, at best, end up playing catch up against their competitors.

So how do you avoid this in 2018? Here are the digital trends that we anticipate will have the greatest impact this year:

Mobile

The continued strength of mobile isn't a prediction; it's a reality. Mobile's domination over desktop has been evident for the past few years, strengthened by Google's mobile-first index which prioritises mobile functionality as a ranking factor. We can't stress enough the importance of having a fully functional mobile site, both from a search engine and user perspective. If you haven't already, 2018 must be the year you go mobile-friendly.

Personalisation

By 2020, it's anticipated that the customer experience will become the primary reason a user will choose your brand, outweighing both product and cost. As brands clamber to improve their overall online presence, personalisation could be the point of differentiation. Harness the power of data to better understand your customers, improve targeting and tailor your services accordingly.

Attribution

With omnichannel approaches to marketing growing in popularity, it's important to know how successful each of your marketing efforts is. Without this business intelligence, you could be wrongly assigning resources, time and budget to poorer performing areas and ultimately limiting your digital growth. Again, this is rooted in data; devise a multi-touch attribution model to create smarter digital strategies and reach your goals in 2018. With fewer than 27% of advertisers doing the same, it could give you a competitive edge this year.

Voice search

The popularity of voice search agents Siri, Alexa and Cortana will open doors for marketers in 2018. By 2020, over half of searches will be performed by voice, so start your preparations this year by optimising your site around search intent. Consider mobile users when doing so, creating content to target on-the-go visitors to your site.

There you have it; four of the biggest trends set to impact your business in 2018 and beyond. Time is ticking; if you're going to make 2018 your brand's year, you need to act quickly.

For help conquering these digital trends and mastering your strategy for success, contact Mediaworks on 0191 404 0100 or email info@mediaworks.co.uk

TECH FIRM NURTURES GROWTH WITH NEW UNDERGRAD SCHEME

A growing North East tech firm has launched an undergraduate recruitment scheme with the appointment of a Northumbria University marketing student.

The move is part of Gosforth-based ION's commitment to bridge the skills gap and nurture young talent. The new scheme aims to employ and develop undergraduates into fulltime employees across multiple roles.

Kate Flett, 20, is studying for a degree in marketing management at Northumbria University. Her role will see her working with the nine-strong team at ION to develop new and existing marketing materials for prospective and current clients.

ION's placement scheme covers not only the technical and IT skills that students need for their future roles but also delivers an all-round commercial understanding of business and the skills required to perform at the top.

SMART TECHNOLOGY GIVES ACCOUNTANCY FIRM THE CUTTING EDGE

Newcastle-based Robson Laidler Accountants is one of the very first accountancy practices in the North East to launch its own App to help its clients manage finances at their fingertips.

The mobile App is the latest technological development for the firm, which is preparing its clients for the digital tax revolution via a range of cloud accounting software packages and business advisory services.

The App, which can be downloaded free onto iPhone, iPad or Android devices, gives users invaluable tools and features such as a GPS system to track business mileage, tax calculators and tables, instant access to the latest financial news and the ability to file important dates and deadlines.

CCS LAUNCHES NEW SERVICES TO SUPPORT FINANCIAL SERVICES SECTOR

Leading telecommunications provider CCS has partnered with an industry leader to offer practical solutions for financial services firms following introduction of new legislation.

CCS Mobile, a leading independent telecommunications provider based in the North East, has partnered with Red Box Recorders, an industry leading voice and data recording solution, to further enhance its telecommunications services for financial services organisations required to comply with new EU regulation MiFID II.

The MiFID II legislation legally requires financial service organisations to capture, store and reconstruct all communications between buyers and sellers, including recording extra details about when and how the transactions take place.

Red Box Recorders and CCS are therefore working closely to offer North East businesses a communications solution that meets the new regulations. The service provides the ability to capture, monitor, store, replay and analyse back office, front office and mobile communications.

MYFIRMSAPP MAKES IT SIMPLER AND MORE AFFORDABLE FOR CLIENTS

Darlington-based MyFirmsApp, operators of the largest global custom App platform in the world for accountants, has announced the introduction of a completely new concept in bespoke Apps.

The OneApp platform now offers the next generation of future proofed custom Apps in line with the growing expectations users have. It delivers quick functionality and development so accountants can have their profile available to download from the App store in a matter of weeks.

All Apps on the new OneApp platform will be updated, managed and looked after by the highly skilled technical team. Particular attention has been paid to the way data is collected to give accountants and their clients complete peace of mind that their data is protected at all times.

Ready to reduce costs and achieve more from your IT spend?

Call us now and find out how.

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Cyber attack, a very real danger?

ITPS, EXPERTS IN CYBER ESSENTIALS

Forty-one percent of businesses surveyed by Barclays cited the threat of cyber attacks as one of their top two fears for 2018.

Cyber-attacks can cost organisations thousands of pounds and cause massive damage to trading and reputation. Criminals don't just attack banks and large companies, they target any organisation that isn't properly protected, exploiting basic weaknesses in IT systems and software. If you don't have a plan for what you would do if your customer database was stolen, your website was forced offline, or you couldn't access your email or business-critical data, your business is at risk.

Talk to our security experts about how tools such as the Government-backed Cyber Essentials scheme can help you reduce the risk from common internet-based threats.

ITPS THE PEOPLE BEHIND **DATA SOLUTIONS**

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ITPS DATA CENTRE SERVICES.

CYBER CRIME CONCERNS TOP LIST OF BUSINESS WORRIES

According to latest figures from the annual Barclays Hopes and Fears Index of SMEs, 41% of them cited the threat of cyber attacks as one of their top three fears for 2018.

The news comes on the back of SMEs becoming increasingly positive about technology, with 48% believing that the availability of better technology will have a positive impact on their growth during 2018, as opposed to 37% who believed that a year ago.

Cyber-attacks can cost organisations thousands of pounds and cause lengthy periods of disruption, damaging trading as well as reputation. A loss of company and client data could see businesses fined under data protection laws, which when the new General Data Protection Rules (GDPR) come into force in May 2017, are set at up to 4% of turnover or 20 million Euros.

If you don't have security measures in place or a plan for what you would do if your customer database was stolen, your website was forced offline, or you couldn't access your email or business-critical data, you are putting your business at risk.

Cyber criminals don't just attack banks and large companies, they target any organisation that is not properly protected, exploiting basic weaknesses in your IT systems and software.

So what can businesses do to prevent attacks?

One of the first steps you can take is to carry out assessments and implement processes such as those set out in the Government-backed Cyber Essentials and Cyber Essentials Plus schemes.

Cyber Essentials has been developed by Government and industry to help organisations put in place the basic controls to mitigate the risk from common internet-based threats. It addresses the most common threats, specifically those that use widely available tools and require little skill. The scheme considers these threats to be:

- **hacking -** exploiting known vulnerabilities in internet-connected devices, using widely available tools and techniques
- **phishing -** and other ways of tricking users into installing or executing a malicious application
- **password guessing -** manual or automated attempts to log on from the internet, by guessing passwords

Since 2014 Cyber Essentials certificates have been mandatory for suppliers of Government contracts which involve handling personal information and providing some ICT products and services.

Cyber Essentials is not a silver bullet that will remove all cyber security risks. It is not designed to address more advanced, targeted attacks, and organisations who face these threats will need to implement additional measures, but it is a sound starting point on the road to becoming GDPR compliant.

Our cyber security experts can guide you through a clear, step by step process designed to help protect your business. Give us a call or come along to one of our regular security briefings to find out more.

For more information call 0191 442 8300, email contact@itps.co.uk or visit www.itps.co.uk

WHY SOLICITORS NEED BETTER DATA SECURITY

Professional service providers need to act now over GDPR

General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) will be one of the most significant changes in data protection legislation for over 20 years when it comes into effect from May.

Solicitors and other professional service providers are being urged by Stephen O'Connell, sales director of Advantex, to safeguard their IT systems against the cybercrime threat.

With cybercrime hitting UK businesses to the tune of £30bn in 2017, there's no question that solicitors will need to legislate for greater data security if they are to avoid falling foul of the new GDPR requirements and avoid punitive fines. Indeed, any breach of data such as that caused by a computer hack, which results in lost or stolen data can have potentially devastating consequences for the company in question – they could be fined an eye-watering £17m, or 4% of global annual revenue, whichever is the highest amount.

It is essential professional service providers such as solicitors, who hold large volumes of confidential client data, start planning their approach to GDPR compliance sooner rather than later. This may involve implementing new procedures to deal with greater transparency and improved IT security: a proactive approach will contribute to minimising disruption, reputational damage and financial costs if you do come under cyber-attack.

There are some simple, yet effective steps, that you can undertake now that will help to minimise the risk to your information security requirements and technologies while going a long way to help avoid seeing your profits disappear in a 4% cybercrime 'tax'.

Risk-based assessments

Carry out a risk-based assessment of your firm's information security requirements. Take these active steps to make information security part of your normal business risk-management procedures. Disseminate key security principles among your staff to ensure that they become part of your firm's culture.

Checks and balances

It should always be good practice to make sure that IT systems are properly protected and safeguarded against external and internal threats. But it's surprising how often this can get overlooked amid other priorities and distractions. Take steps to ensure appropriate security measures are in place and that computer systems, including anti-virus software and algorithms that check for unusual activity, are automatically backed-up. If you use third-party managed IT services, check your contracts and service level agreements, and check that whoever handles your systems and data has these security controls in place.

Reviewing systems and procedures

After reviewing your security and implementing any requisite changes, continue to test, monitor and upgrade your security controls and protocols on a regular basis. Dispose of any software or equipment that you no longer need, ensuring that it contains no sensitive information, and review and manage any change in user access, such as the creation of accounts when staff members join the firm and deletion of accounts when they leave.

Essential post-breach action

It's important that if your firm is disrupted or comes under attack, you ensure that any post-event response includes making the proper notifications to authorities and removing any ongoing threat - such as malware - and that you understand the cause of the incident. If appropriate, close any gaps in your security or loopholes that have been identified following the attack.

There's little doubt that GDPR is set to have an impact but how much remains to be seen. It will affect all organisations that handle personal data and failing to secure your data could cost you dearly (potentially millions of pounds in fines). You must ask yourself if it's worth the risk?

It's vital you act now to have the wherewithal in place by the time GDPR kicks-in. Advantex, which is fully certified in data security and disaster recovery software that can help you protect your data, has the experience, expertise and technologies to help you stay safe.

More at www.advantex.uk.com or tel. 0345 222 0666

THE CLOUD REVOLUTION

Cloud and IT specialists Aero Networks, was established in May 2006. They have revolutionised IT in the North East, and further aim to transform the meaning and usage of Cloud Technology, specifically SharePoint Online, in the New Year.

The family run company delivers face to face IT Services to aid business goals and support technology solutions for each of their clients. With the current uprising of Cloud Technology, "Aero Networks are exceeding to provide clients with a tailored Cloud service that fits their specifications and needs." Paul Curry, Managing Director comments.

The father and son led company strive towards the ambition of "Empowering the Cloud" across the SME sector. The structural integrity of the company and their relationships with clients is extremely coherent with each service Aero Networks provides. Each member of the company works together in a well organised and professional manner, in order to spot and resolve IT issues before they compromise clients' technology. Some of the services provided by Aero Networks include SharePoint Online, Hosted Exchange, Online Data Backup, IT Infrastructure, Office 365 and IT Support. All of these services individually fulfil the needs of its clients, in a personal demeanour, which makes working with Aero Networks, a smooth and steady process towards exceptional IT and Cloud services.

One of the main focuses for Aero Networks in 2018 is pushing the integration to SharePoint Online for clientele; it is the pinnacle of success for Cloud Technology in the 21st century that allows businesses to run in a seamless and straightforward manner. It is a one-stop shop portal that allows users to collaboratively manage documents, content, knowledge and applications, which allows businesses to seamlessly collaborate their work. This accessible, and effortless cloud-based service is perfect for a company of any size to incorporate into their business. Aero Networks can provide this cloud-based service straight to your company, through a process that will only take a matter of steps, depending on company size.

"We are very excited to introduce SharePoint Online. This is a cloud-based service that allows organisations to share and collaborate with colleagues, suppliers and clients. With SharePoint Online you can access internal information from anywhere with an internet connection, at the office, at home or from a mobile service." Paul Curry advises.

"This is brilliant for the SME sector, as a replacement for traditional server infrastructure, as there is no requirement to purchase expensive hardware to run a modern IT infrastructure." Ben Curry, Director, explains.

Aero Networks is a family run and owned business, which distinguishes itself from all other IT companies in the North East. The personal touch you receive from a family run business means that any current, or potential future client will receive the upmost care and aid with their journey to Aero Networks, and IT services. There is a channeling sense of commitment from this company; the strong relationship between father Paul, and son Ben, is transparent in their prioritisation of clients in order to deliver an authentic service.

At Aero Networks, we welcome any companies' interest in SharePoint Online to get in touch. There will be great incentives on this service during February, including us personally coming out to your office and offering a free demonstration of SharePoint Online.

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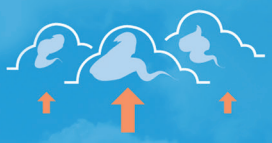

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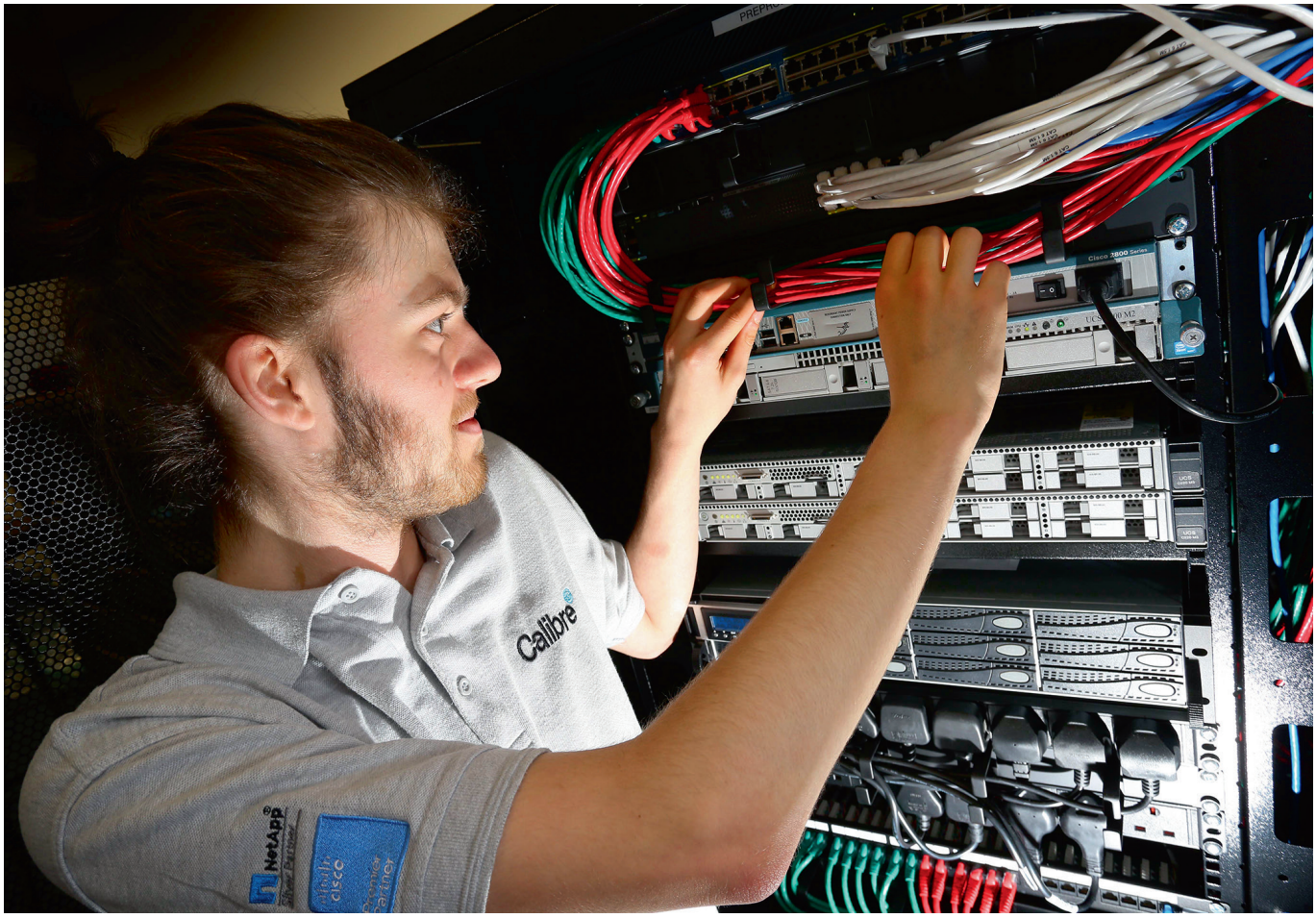

BUDGETING FOR SUCCESS

Budgeting is a critical aspect of effective IT planning.

So, if you're thinking about funding for new projects, Karen Nelson, managing director of Calibre Secured Networks, offers some advice to ensure your plans add-up.

Prudent budgeting increases the predictability and efficiency of IT planning; driving greater transparency, accountability and collaboration, while also enabling accurate decisions to be made that better support critical business priorities.

Without a budget, you may be forced to request or justify every IT expenditure as it arises, which can generate unnecessary overheads. You can also end-up with a patchwork of technologies sewn together from budget products, or worse, stuck with the incumbent supplier simply because they're cheap or you don't have the time to shop around for a new one.

Good budgeting involves the process of allocating monetary resources to various IT programmes and projects, and can span recurring expenses such as hardware leases and staffing to expenses dedicated to a fixed-duration project. It should be regarded as a manifestation of your IT strategy - every line on the budget should tell a story that maps back to this.

Budgeting is obviously important, a critical tool for identifying and executing the IT initiatives that will power your projects in the months ahead. Your budget should provide direction as well as a holistic view of your funding requirements. It will let you see whether resources are overstretched in one area or another, and lets you benchmark your spending against similar departments: consider the budget as a tool to prioritise your IT initiatives and validate that your monetary investment matches your strategic priorities.

A well-balanced budget should represent the numeric manifestation of your IT strategy. Consider how deeply the budget can affect your organisation at all levels and devote time and energy into its construction. A good tip is to start developing your new budget immediately the last one has been approved. Make sure you have the wherewithal in place to monitor your spending against last year's budget as you progress, and as you see variances or ways to allocate funds more effectively, use them as input to an ongoing draft budget.

Also, reviewing the most recent budget will help you to identify those areas that could be reduced or reallocated. If you work for a business that demands justification of every line item, it's especially important to start selling your budget before you even write the first line, while securing consensus for your IT strategy. It's always easier to justify project investment at budgeting time when everyone knows its purpose, impact, and objectives, rather than further down the line when people are distracted by other priorities and those unforeseen spending requirements crop-up.

And if you don't a have an IT strategy already, use the time you have now as an effective opportunity to craft an outline plan to help secure your budget - if you have a cohesive and well-conceived plan, the money to execute that plan is less likely to be questioned.

Finally, if you are required to make significant reductions in various areas of proposed budget, always make sure that you highlight the capabilities that will be affected by the cuts. As you review the budget, remember it's a prioritisation of initiatives and capabilities as opposed to simply a pot of money for your department. Remember that the closer you can map your budget to past results, the easier it will be to justify future expenditures.

Partnering with an adept, nimble-footed provider enhances success when it comes to delivering IT, facilitating cost savings that one-off or regular purchases simply can't match. It can serve you well through the provision of objective, high quality advice around the implications of legislative changes such as GDPR. Measuring performance levels and KPIs are also easier with the guidance and objectivity of an external partner.

More at www.calibre-secured.net

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TOP 5 TIPS I LEARNED FROM 2 YEARS RUNNING A RECRUITMENT BUSINESS

By James Blackwell, CEO, Ronald James

This month saw the 2 year anniversary of my business, Ronald James. When I first started, I took a huge risk and started up with just a £15,000 loan, one credit card, running the business from my home and a small serviced office.

Today, we have a team of 5 in the office, 12 remote staff and have nearly reached the £1 million revenue mark in just under 2 years. I wanted to use this article to not only share some unique tips and insights of what I have learnt within the first two years, but to showcase to others, that anyone can set up their own business.

Tip Number 1 – If you are thinking about starting a business, make sure you're the leader of the business.

It required extreme grit and determination throughout our first year to establish the brand, get the 'Ronald James' name out there, and market myself as the figurehead of the business. During this time I met with as many business owners as I possibly could, to ensure I surrounded myself a strong network who became our fundamental client base within the first six months. It's important to note here that a crucial feature of securing your first clients is adding value. As a business owner you must give value first, and with that will come the monetary reward.

Tip Number 2 – Surround yourself with mentors.

Self-development has become extremely instrumental to me; from day one I have invested a substantial amount of time into personal improvement. I ensured that I surrounded myself with successful people who could share with me their unique tips and tricks on how to effectively operate and maintain a successful business. Before starting the business I would meet with them for a coffee and make sure I found out some key 'golden nuggets' of information on what it truly meant to be successful.

Tip Number 3 – Always have a day plan.

As a business owner, planning your day allows you to maximise your time. From day one I have had a day planner in which I would list my tasks to do, targets to hit, goals to strive for and document everything I needed to achieve that day. Now I even go one step further and colour code my tasks, allowing me to work on the business, not in it.

Tip Number 4 – Always watch the cash.

"Cash is King". An infamous phrase shared with me when Dragons Den's James Caan was looking to invest in my recruitment business. It is a quote that has stuck with me and has since encouraged me to keep cash at the forefront of my mind. In the beginning. I dedicated a lot of my time to maintaining our finances- I would ensure our invoices were paid on time and closely manage our outgoings. Although a strategic decision for a start up, this mindfulness did mean we had to make sacrifices within the office, such as cutting back on expensive business tools and office tools in the beginning.

Tip Number 5 – Enjoy the journey

As business owners we are always working towards the end goal, and it's important that we don't lose sight of that. However, it's vital that you enjoy the journey. Running a business isn't all about achieving the end goal, it's about how you get there. Make sure you celebrate your success, enjoy the moments where you secure new clients, attract new talent, grow your team. Balance work life with family life, especially in the early stages as it's easy to get consumed by the excitement of your new business.

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SKILLS INVESTMENT HELPS ICONIC HISTORY MUSEUM BUILD BRIGHT FUTURE

From left-right: Michelle Lagar from Beamish, Ivan Jepson from Gateshead College and Celyn Williams, people development officer at Beamish

The North East's most popular open-air museum is investing in the future of its workforce after taking advantage of a free business skills programme.

Investing in workforce development is a smart move for any business wanting to secure its future and remain competitive. North East companies of all sizes have done just that, by signing up to Go>Grow, a regional skills and enterprise programme led by Gateshead College in partnership with 30 local training providers.

Launched after the college secured £15m from the European Social Fund through the Education and Skills Funding Agency, the programme enables North East businesses to take advantage of free training to develop their workforce.

Now one of the region's most iconic attractions is benefiting from Go>Grow as it steps up plans for major expansion.

County Durham-based Beamish, The Living Museum of the North, has enrolled its staff onto a series of free Go>Grow courses delivered by Gateshead College. Staff have completed courses in several areas, including search engine optimisation (SEO) and Microsoft applications.

The training is part of a wider plan by Beamish to transform the museum and create a range of new ways for people to experience the heritage of the North East. A £10.9m grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund is supporting the £18m "Remaking Beamish" project, which will see several new attractions emerge including a reconstructed 1950s town and the recreation of a Great North Road coaching inn, The Three Tuns, which once stood at Scotch Corner.

The idea behind the project is to attract more people to Beamish, create more jobs and equip staff with the skills to give visitors a memorable experience.

Michelle Lagar, Remaking Beamish project officer (skills), said: "For a museum steeped in history, we're very excited for the future. We are currently gearing up for a period of significant expansion and aim to create 95 jobs and up to 50 apprenticeships with our Remaking Beamish project.

"The training delivered by Gateshead College was tailored to our needs. These bespoke courses have been well received by the staff that attended and they are now keen to apply what they have learnt in their job roles. The main aim for us all is to continue to provide the best possible experience for visitors."

Gateshead College said it was proud to help such an iconic North East museum through its next phase of growth.

Ivan Jepson, director of business development at Gateshead College, said: "We designed bespoke training to specifically meet the needs of the organisation and its customers following detailed meetings and discussions with the Beamish team. The feedback was fantastic and we look forward to continuing our partnership with the organisation in the near future.

"Our aim is always to work closely with organisations to support their business success and development."

The training is being delivered by Gateshead College and Amacus as part of a wider skills programme for Newcastle Gateshead Cultural Venues (NCGV), which includes the Baltic, Sage Gateshead, Newcastle Theatre Royal and City Hall. These organisations are working in partnership with Gateshead College to ensure staff are equipped with the right level of skills to support visitors and boost audience numbers.

Go>Grow training is structured around a programme of courses for start-ups or small businesses looking to widen their skills base or employers who want to upskill or strengthen their workforce.

Courses are also available to support people who are looking to get back into work, or those at risk of redundancy. For more details, visit www.gogrow.org.uk

Could your business benefit from free training?

If your business is based in Tyne and Wear, Northumberland or County Durham, funds are available until July 2018 to develop your workforce and strengthen your business.

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IN CONVERSATION WITH...

ANITA BATH

Headteacher, Sacred Heart High School

What were your key achievements of 2017?

Undoubtedly this has to be the continuing success of our students' achievement in 2017; our students attained more A*/A grades than ever before with almost two thirds of the grades A* - B. Overall the average grade achieved was a B. What this means, is that Sacred Heart girls have successfully met their University offers and gained places on their first choice destinations. We were particularly pleased for the girls who are now reading Medicine at Cambridge, Medicine at Oxford and Geography at Cambridge. A Sacred Heart education has always been about helping our students to realise their personal dreams and ambitions. So it is wonderful to report, that our students continue to leave us with excellent qualifications, embarking upon some very exciting university courses and apprenticeships. Once again, Sacred Heart has been listed as one of the top 250 secondary schools in the whole of the UK. The list compares over 3,000 state funded schools and ranks them in order of their GCSE and A-Level results. Sacred Heart is one of only 5 schools in the North East to be listed in the top 250.

What will the New Year bring?

We opened our new auditorium in January 2018. It is a fabulous resource and provides our girls with a fantastic professional theatre which seats nearly 500 and can accommodate a full orchestra. The sprung floor means our dancers have a wonderful place to perform and the Undercroft space provides an ideal social area for intervals and following performances. So we are now looking forward to the many shows and performances that are scheduled throughout the year ahead, including our annual visit from the Royal Shakespeare Company in spring.

Tell us a little more about the RSC visit?

We have an ongoing relationship with the RSC as Sacred Heart is one of 10 schools nationwide who act as a 'lead' school as part of the RSC's national Associate Schools programme. As an RSC Lead Associate School, we demonstrate a deep commitment to sharing Shakespeare's work with children of all ages and abilities using RSC approaches. To do this, staff work intensively alongside practitioners from the RSC, Newcastle Theatre Royal and Northern Stage to learn how RSC actors approach Shakespeare in the rehearsal room. This year we are hosting four performances of Julius Caesar on 1st and 2nd March, where some of our students will actually feature in the performances. We are also hosting, a performance of Macbeth on 26th and 27th April where the cast members are from Sacred Heart and our five Hub partner schools. The students involved will rehearse and take direction from the RSC.

Do you have any other trips/projects coming up?

As well as the usual language and skiing trips to European destinations, this year our students have two incredible opportunities ahead of them. In the summer, a large number of students will travel to Sri Lanka where they will undertake an array of activities that will help them to develop their personal resilience and confidence, including working with deprived children in a rural village: they will expand the school's provision and deliver lessons in English as well as visiting a range of cultural sites. Another group of students will travel to Kenya and work with our sister school in Nairobi: working in a school in the township and then experiencing life with the Masai Mara including, further charitable work in a village for young widows. This is a regular trip that takes place and has proven to be a life-changing experience for students in the past.

How would you describe the approach to learning at Sacred Heart?

The relationships between our teachers and students is at the heart of our philosophy about learning. The girls know that their teachers care deeply about them and will support them fully to succeed. Our teachers view being an educator as a vocation, which means, 'going the extra mile' for the girls in their care. We also place emphasis on the need for clear explanations in lessons and staff having expert subject knowledge. Finally, the current curriculum and examination system is very challenging for students today, so we know that a vital part of our girls' success is their resilience and so we actively develop their courage to undertake difficult tasks and so develop their confidence in themselves.

What extra-curricular activities do you offer?

School is about so much more than academic learning. It is about finding out what makes you unique and where your talents lie. Therefore, we run a wealth of extra-curricular opportunities: from chamber choirs and rock school, to a full orchestra; from netball and basketball to football. STEM subjects are very strong at Sacred Heart. The Science club is one of our most popular and girls have visited the Kielder Observatory as well as the Hadron Collider. For languages we offer both Latin and Mandarin as an after school option and this year our girls took part in the inter-schools Latin Recitation and Classical Literature in Translation competition held at the Royal Grammar School winning prizes in several categories. We really value and promote these activities which build unforgettable memories for our students.

What changes could we see to education in 2018?

With a very recent, newly appointed Secretary of State for Education, I am not entirely sure. However, what I would like to see is a recognition that childhood should be a joyful and precious time, and that children's emotional wellbeing is as important as academic prowess. I have no doubt that this constant high stakes measuring of children through testing, is contributing to the crisis we have in mental health. As a school that has always championed the Arts, we would also like to see a renewed appreciation of their importance to a child's wider development.

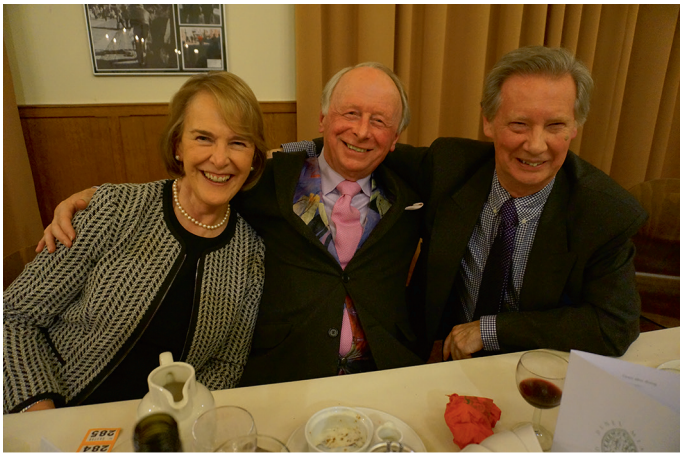
How will you continue to improve the school this year?

In September 2017 we became a Multi-Academy Trust, along with one of our feeder schools, St Michael's. Soon, we will be joined by Sacred Heart Primary School. All three schools, who already work closely together, are benefiting from a deep understanding of how curriculum works for their respective age ranges. We have undertaken exciting projects to seamlessly link what we do across all subjects; both the pupils and teachers involved are learning from this partnership. I believe that some of the most effective work we can do to transform young lives occurs in the early years of schooling and I am looking forward to continuing this work over the coming year.

How can we arrange a visit?

If you would like to visit us during the day and have a tour, please contact the school.

Telephone: 0191 274 7373 Email: enquiries@shhs.org.uk Facebook: @SacredHeartCatholicHighSchool



OLD DUNELMIAN LODGE CHRISTMAS DINNER

Former pupils of Durham School and their friends from the Masonic tradition gathered after the end of term Carol Service in the Cathedral for a Christmas feast in the School's historic Exhibition Room. A roaring fire and a warm welcome greeted all comers to this annual event hosted by the Old Dunelmian Lodge and Headmaster, Mr Kieran McLaughlin MA.

NORTHUMBRIA LAW ACADEMIC ADVISES NORWEGIAN GOVERNMENT ON INTERNATIONAL MARITIME SAFETY LAWS

Research by a Northumbria University academic is helping an influential Norwegian Parliamentary Commission investigate and improve international maritime safety laws.

Craig Laverick, Northumbria University Law School lecturer.

Northumbria Law School lecturer Craig Laverick's work and expertise is also contributing to the debate surrounding the legal case and defence of Francesco Schettino, the master of the Costa Concordia cruise ship that capsized off the Tuscan island of Giglio in 2012. The disaster cost the lives of 32 people.

Craig and other international experts were approached to submit a statement to the Norwegian Commission, which as a leading maritime nation is looking at the role and development of the International Safety Management (ISM) Code. This seeks to ensure safety at sea as well as prevent pollution and loss of marine life. Recent high-profile accidents at sea have, however, called the effectiveness of the Code into question.

Craig's involvement follows ongoing collaboration with the Norwegian-based Skagerrak Safety Foundation, which advises the Norwegian and other governments and is regarded as a leading international voice in maritime safety. The Foundation has previously raised concerns over Carnival and Costa Cruises' treatment of Francesco Schettino, and has urged greater investigation into the safety systems and role of the company as the owner of the Costa Concordia.

Following his submission, Craig has now been told he could be called to give evidence to the Norwegian Parliamentary Commission.

He said: "Based on my research and work with the Skagerrak Foundation I was able to tell the Commission that while the international maritime community is aware of the ISM Code and its benefits, enthusiasm for it among seafarers is waning and it is not being used to its full potential. For example when something goes wrong, it isn't used to establish whether the master or the company of a vessel were to blame.

"National legislation is used instead, which can lead to issues such as companies plea-bargaining within the legal process and removing themselves from the full scrutiny of an investigation. If all the blame is put on a ship's master following a disaster, then important information about the corporate role and any culpability can be overlooked. We see this in Italy and the Costa Concordia where any mistakes made by the company cannot be properly considered or addressed. This is not in the interest of safety.

"There is evidence in my research to show this is having a negative impact on the implementation and effect of the ISM Code. The Code is an important legal instrument but maybe it is time to look at how it can be better implemented, better enforced and better used."

Craig's research is now looking at how national criminal law can potentially be used to ensure better implementation of the ISM Code and act as a means of punishing and deterring offending.

For more information on research at Northumbria Law School please visit: www.northumbria.ac.uk/law

ARE CHILDREN REALLY ADDICTED TO TECHNOLOGY?

By Kieran McLaughlin,
Headmaster, Durham School

For youngsters these days, mobile phones, iPads, laptops and other paraphernalia are a part of life. However, are children truly addicted to technology?

Concern about the exposure of young people to screens is not new, but the matter recently took an interesting turn with even some of Apple's biggest investors, holding $2bn of stock, calling on the company to look at "better controls" of tech use to avoid issues around teenagers' mental health and self-esteem.

The evidence they cited was worrying: according to a study carried out in the US, "teenagers who spend 3 hours a day or more on electronic devices are 35% more likely, and those who spend 5 hours or more are 71% more likely, to have a risk factor for suicide than those who spend less than 1 hour." Also, the study found, "teens who spend 5 or more hours a day (versus less than 1) on electronic devices are 51% more likely to get less than 7 hours of sleep (versus the recommended 9). Sleep deprivation is linked to long-term issues like weight gain and high blood pressure."

I read the results with interest. Over the Christmas break, the McLaughlin family conducted something of an experiment. A ban on all screens – whether on a phone, iPad or TV –was introduced each day until 6pm for a period of one week; TV was then permitted for my three young sons until bedtime. As you might expect, when McLaughlin pater announced this move, there was much wailing and grinding of teeth. The much-anticipated Christmas present of Fifa 18 had just been unwrapped, and there were a variety of gaming apps ready to be downloaded onto my eldest boy's phone. It took an iron will and a Victorian approach to parenting to enforce the ban on the Tuesday morning.

But, begin it did and the gaping chasm of the last week of the Christmas holiday yawned. One or two events were planned for the afternoons, but aside from that, the post-Christmas lull made for an unspeakably desolate prospect. However, once the initial dismay evaporated, something strange happened: books which were usually only read at bedtime found themselves opened during daylight; long-forgotten board games were dusted off and played with enthusiasm; I even found my youngest child acting out scenarios and stories with his favourite dinosaurs. Truly, a Christmas miracle took place without any sign of Kris Kringle.

What was even more striking was how much more my children spoke to each other. None of them is a teenager, but they do occasionally lapse into silence or monosyllabic utterances when given the opportunity. But no, proper conversations amongst themselves and between them and us as their parents were held. They also played more with each other: cricket and football in the frosty garden, as well as the indoor games.

I would be lying if I said that there never came the plaintive cry to relax the ban; equally, I cannot pretend that the hour when the TV could be switched on was not keenly anticipated. However, what I was struck by was how quickly my children adapted to the lack of electronic distraction. I also noticed, if I am honest, the increased demand on our parenting that the ban required. I daresay that an easy option for busy parents is to (unwittingly or not) passively allow their children to spend rather too much time on devices as a form of babysitting. It's easily done and it is unfair to be too judgmental.

The final observation on my experiment is also one which is slightly difficult for me to digest. Children model their behaviour on adults, and their parents in particular. The ban reinforced to me how much time I spend on my phone looking at my Twitter feed or "just checking emails". Castigating children for spending time online can rather remind one of the tale of beams and motes.

So, will the experiment be repeated? I rather suspect it will. School terms are busy, and my children are not able to spend too much time online during the school day, but it feels a good idea for holidays. Also, I have a feeling that the next time we do try it, the resistance will be just that little bit less.

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TEACHING BOYS

Mr. David Tickner, Headmaster at Newcastle School for Boys reflects on the benefits of a single-sex education and his first-hand experience of teaching boys.

I didn't set out to specialise in boys' education. Having spent the first eight years of my teaching career happily in a co-educational school, the type of post I sought to progress my career arose in a boys' school.

For the next five years, as a Head of Middle School in Cambridge, I supported and taught boys only. By this stage of my career, it had already been suggested a number of times that boys were pretty straightforward. With boys, what you see is what you get. My experience increasingly suggested otherwise.

Overseeing boys' preparation for GCSE's in Cambridge led to my next appointment as Deputy Head establishing the new GCSE programme at Newcastle School for Boys. The School had been formed in 2005 out of the merger of two prep schools – Ascham House and Newlands - and planned to extend its age range up to 18. In 2010, the School reached maturity as a fully-fledged 3 to 18 school and in 2012, I became Headmaster.

Thus, I find myself having accrued over sixteen years' experience in single sex boys' schools.

Over the last 25 years, there has been a steady shift towards co-education at independent schools and a reduction in the number of single sex schools. The drivers have been as much economic as educational or social.

However, the success and appeal of single sex education is built on observable gender differences. To engage boys successfully in learning, their characteristics need to be recognised and some of them even celebrated! Boys' strengths and challenges are different to girls'. The education of boys shouldn't seek to make them more like girls or, worse still, ignore their boyishness. That will only lead to disenchantment and disengagement.

Experience suggests boys have a set of preferences and dispositions when it comes to learning. In our single sex boys' school, these inform our practice. They resonate with our teachers and parents. Most importantly, they engage and motivate our boys to learn, achieve and develop.

The School is currently taking applications for September 2018. To register your interest or for any queries, please contact 0191 255 9303 or admissions@newcastleschool.co.uk or for more information, please visit www.newcastleschool.co.uk .

NO PAIN, PLENTY TO GAIN...

It's that time of year again, everyone is dieting, the gyms are bursting at the seams as their memberships are taken up, only to be forgotten by February and you can't get away from the healthy eating conversations that are taking over from last nights' TV choice as we all battle the bulge and excesses of the festivities.

But, what if there was an alternative to hours of pounding the gym? What if there were non-invasive treatments that work but mean that you can simply get off the therapy bed and carry on with your day, without taking time off work to recover?

Enter the 3D Lipo Ultimate Package, which was newly introduced to the market in January 2017. At the Park View Lipo Clinic they can offer non-invasive treatments, as they believe that with today's cosmetic technological advances, costly, invasive or risky surgical procedures or chemical treatments are an unnecessary way of achieving the perfect look.

Instead, they provide treatments that are so safe and easy to undergo that their clients can receive fantastically effective results. Whether it be fat reduction, inch loss, skin tightening, lifting or rejuvenating treatments, all are performed without even having to experience any real pain or the need for extensive recovery time.

The 3D Ultimate Package tackles cellulite, skin tightening and fat removal and is delivered to you by medical professionals, so you can rest assured that you're in good hands.

If you're looking for a non-invasive treatment that delivers great, long-lasting results, then the Park View Lipo Clinic is the place for you.

Based in Houghton-le-Spring, for the new year, new you, why not give them a call on 0191 501 6798 or visit their website; www.parkviewlipoclinic.co.uk

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THE ALL-NEW MAZDA MX-5 RF IS A PACKAGE FOR ALL-SEASONS

James Chorlton, general sales manager at Jennings Mazda in Sunderland, with the MX-5 RF model.

With the winter solstice already behind us and the nights noticeably starting to grow lighter for longer as the warmer spring season fast approaches, staff at Jennings Mazda are reminding customers about the capability and handling of the award-winning Mazda MX-5 RF (Retractable Fastback) sportscar model - whatever the weather.

In addition to selling the Mazda2, Mazda3, CX-3, CX-5, Mazda6 and MX-5 soft top at the group's new Stadium Way dealership in Sunderland and the Cargo Fleet Lane site in Middlesbrough, both branches also house the award-winning all-new Mazda MX-5 RF.

The model features a retractable hardtop that delivers superior cabin comfort and refinement, while maintaining the original MX-5's characteristic agility, exhilaration, and superior handling.

James Chorlton, general sales manager at Jennings Mazda in Middlesbrough, said; "The Mazda MX-5 RF offers all-season driving to customers with the superior comfort and security of a retractable hardtop roof.

"It's the roadster without compromise, offering a hardtop roof which allows customers to experience the car's thrilling handling and performance whatever the weather – overall it's a package for all seasons with sensible pricing and supreme driving enjoyment."

The Mazda MX-5 RF offers dynamic handling and outstanding fuel efficiency thanks to Mazda's SKYACTIV technology. Featuring the award-winning SKYACTIV-G petrol engine, the all-new Mazda MX-5 RF can reach 62mph in just 7.4 seconds, and achieve a combined fuel consumption of up to 40.9mpg.

To date, the all-new Mazda MX-5 RF won four accolades in 2017, including 'Roadster of the Year' in the Auto Express awards, 'Best of the Best' in the Red Dot Product Design awards, 'Best Sports Car' in Car Buyers awards, and 'Best Drop Top' at the Scottish Car of the Year awards.

For those who prefer the soft top version of the MX-5, there will be a new limited edition MX-5 Z-Sport launching at the start of the spring season. Boasting a deep cherry red fabric hood, 17" black BBS wheels and machine grey metallic paint, Mazda's limited model is expected to go on sales from 1 March 2018.

A range of quality used cars are also available at both dealerships, in addition to a Motability service being on offer for those eligible to lease a new car from the selected range through the Motability programme.

Customers can also take advantage of a range of aftersales facilities, including service, MOT, and a parts department, selling genuine Mazda parts, on site at both dealerships. The Middlesbrough site also operates an accident repair centre.

For more information about the range of products and services at Jennings Mazda, contact Sunderland on 0191 5623399, Middlesbrough on 01642 256655, or visit www.jenningsmotorgroup.co.uk

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The official fuel consumption figures in mpg (l/100km) for the Mazda MX-5 range: Urban 28.0 (10.1) - 35.8 (7.9). Extra Urban 51.4 (5.5) - 57.6 (4.9). Combined 39.2 (7.2) - 47.1 (6.0). CO_2 emissions (g/km) 167 - 139.

The mpg figures quoted are sourced from official EU-regulated test results obtained through laboratory testing. These are provided for comparability purposes only and may not reflect your actual driving results.

Retail sales only, subject to availability for vehicles registered between 15.12.17 and 31.03.18 at participating dealers. T&C apply. Model shown features optional Soul Red Metallic Paint (£670). OTR price includes VAT, number plates, delivery, 12 months' road fund licence, first registration fee, 3 year or 60,000 mile warranty and 3 years' European Roadside Assistance. °Test drives subject to applicant status and availability. Details correct at time of going to print.

SUCCESSFUL ANNIVERSARY YEAR FOR TYNE THEATRE & OPERA HOUSE

January 2018 marks three years since Tyne Theatre & Opera House became an independent venue, and since then the business has gone from strength to strength. The magnificent building recently celebrated its 150th Anniversary and welcomed 80,000 customers through its doors in 2017.

A major part of the 150th Anniversary programme included several collaborative events, such as The Cinema Years, which saw the theatre team up with Whitley Bay Film Festival, and a partnership with Customs House, which brought their smash-hit show Geordie the Musical to the Newcastle stage.

The theatre hopes that this is just the beginning of many exciting collaborations to come. 2017 was a wonderful year for musicals, with the theatre's very own Tyne Theatre Productions presenting their own grand version of West Side Story as part of the 150th celebrations. Tyne Theatre Productions comprises solely of dedicated volunteers, with all funds raised going back into the restoration and preservation of the theatre.

The theatre has also become the place for stand-up comedy in Newcastle, with many top-name comedians gracing its stage for sold-out shows. 2018 is set to be another phenomenal year for comedy, with the likes of Joe Lycett, Ed Byrne, Tim Vine and Sarah Millican performing.

Tyne Theatre & Opera House ended 2017 on a particularly high note with the success of its Pantomime, Snow White & the Seven Dwarfs. Enchanted Entertainment will return with an Easter Pantomime, Beauty & the Beast, and tickets are already selling fast for this year's Christmas pantomime, Cinderella.

The theatre has begun to achieve part of its restoration plan with funds raised by Tyne Theatre Productions and generous donations. 250 seats in the auditorium have now been completely refurbished and the Bistro Bar has been redecorated.

LID IS LIFTED ON THEATRE ROYAL'S 2018 SEASON

Newcastle Theatre Royal's 2018 season will offer breath-taking dance, thought-provoking drama, feel-good musicals and family shows aplenty.

Dusty the Musical (17-21 July) is a landmark new show based on the authorised biography of Dusty Springfield. It features many of her blazingly soulful pop hits, including I Only Want to Be with You and Son of a Preacher Man.

Perhaps the most anticipated of the season is Kinky Boots (29 Oct – 10 Nov), winner of the 2016 Olivier Award for Best New Musical. This dazzling show is a joyous story of Brit grit, taking audiences from the factory floor of Northampton to the catwalks of Milan.

Dance fans will also delight with big names including the breath-taking Ballet British Columbia (13-14 Mar). This 18-strong company of dancers will astound UK audiences with their unique blend of classical elegance, contemporary flair and extraordinary skill.

For drama lovers, Sherlock Holmes – The Final Curtain (8-12 May) is a gripping new stage show with an all-star cast. When a new case presents itself, Holmes is determined to kill two birds with one stone by solving the mystery and confronting his own demons.

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NORTH P&I CLUB SPONSORS UK PREMIER OF THE LAST SHIP

North P&I Club has recently announced its sponsorship of Northern Stage's production of The Last Ship which will run 12 Mar-7 Apr.

In its UK premiere, Sting's personal, political and passionate musical comes home to Newcastle, in an epic tale of community, hope and a great act of collective defiance.

The Last Ship tells the story of a ship-building town and its people. Sailor Gideon Fletcher returns home from half a lifetime at sea to discover the ship-building life he left behind in chaos. Picket lines are drawn as foreman Jackie White and his wife Peggy fight to hold their community together in the face of the gathering storm.

Paul Jennings, Managing Director at North P&I Club, commented: "Northern Stage is one of the main cultural centres in Newcastle. Their production of The Last Ship has strong historical resonance for us as a leading mutual marine insurance group."

Lorne Campbell, Artistic Director at Northern Stage, said: "North's sponsorship of our production is wonderful news as it will contribute to our charitable work in the North East. Specifically, the funding will be allocated to our local talent development and community support programmes."

RECORD OF THE MONTH - FIRST AID KIT 'RUINS'

The Scandi Sisters return with Ruins, their eagerly awaited 4th album. The folk duo have amassed a large following worldwide thanks to their woodsy, folksy harmonies and melodic knack. This album sees the band adopt a rawer sound in an attempt to capture the magic which defines their live performances. Lyrically they deal with themes of love and heartbreak and also takes inspiration from classic country and 1970's folk. The album features a number of collaborations, most notably with REM guitarist Peter Buck and Wilco drummer Glenn Kotche. Ruins features a series of vignettes of thwarted love with the sisters seemingly in better voice than ever; their harmonies melt together so well they're almost indistinguishable. First Aid Kit embark on a nationwide UK tour later this year, don't miss out.

WHAT'S ON THIS FEBRUARY?

War of the Worlds
February 1-10
Northern Stage T: (0191) 230 5151
www.northernstage.co.uk

Shrek the Musical
February 1-11
Sunderland Empire T: (0844) 871 3022
www.atgtickets.com

Bill Bailey
February 2-3
Newcastle City Hall T: (0844) 8112 121
www.theatreroyal.co.uk

Elkie Brooks
February 9
Sage Gateshead T: (0191) 443 4661
www.sagegateshead.com

Jason Manford
February 10
Newcastle City Hall T: (0844) 8112 121
www.theatreroyal.co.uk

Seal
February 13
Sage Gateshead T: (0191) 443 4661
www.sagegateshead.com

Breaking the Code
February 13-17
The People's Theatre T: (0191) 265 5020
www.peoplestheatre.co.uk

Thriller Live
February 15-17
Sunderland Empire T: (0844) 871 3022
www.atgtickets.com

Sunday for Sammy
February 18
Metroradio Arena T: (0844) 493 6666
www.metroradioarena.co.uk

The Script
February 19
Metroradio Arena T: (0844) 493 6666
www.metroradioarena.co.uk

Pressure
February 20-24
Newcastle Theatre Royal T: (0844) 8112 121
www.theatreroyal.co.uk

Morrissey
February 23
Metroradio Arena T: (0844) 493 6666
www.metroradioarena.co.uk

Paul Weller
February 24
Metroradio Arena T: (0844) 493 6666
www.metroradioarena.co.uk

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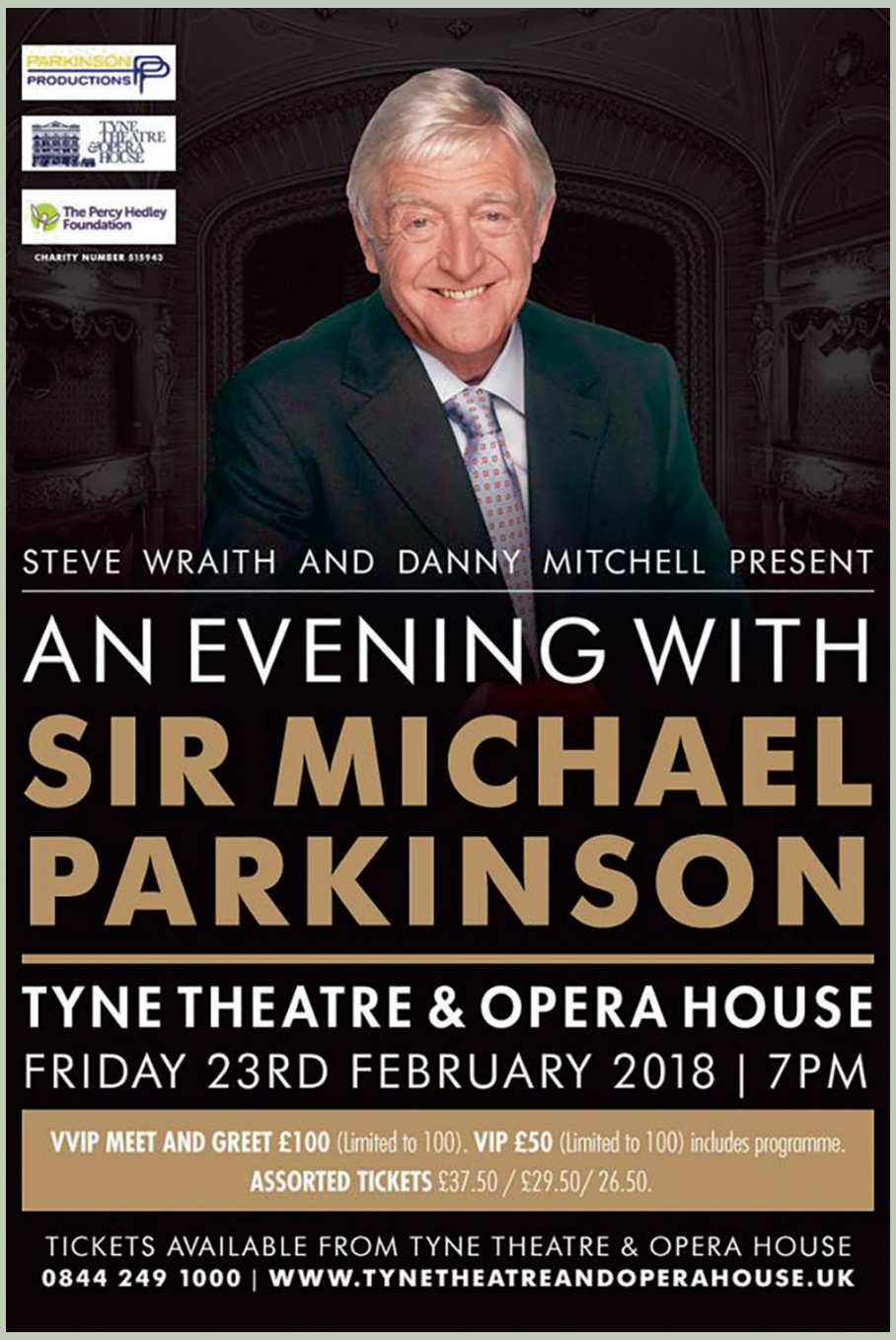
PARKY HEADS TO TYNESIDE

Having interviewed, literally, thousands of celebrities over his six decade career, national icon Sir Michael Parkinson, heads to Newcastle in a few weeks as part of a national, dual tour.



Appearing at Newcastle's iconic Tyne Theatre & Opera House, 'Parky' as he is more affectionately known, will talk to fans about his lengthy career, those he has interviewed, those he didn't like interviewing, and those he wishes he had interviewed.

Starting in the swinging sixties when, as he eloquently puts it "a little band called The Beatles were in the background and a skinny little lad called George Best joined Manchester United," Parky hit the fast-track to stardom.

Serving an apprenticeship on some the nation's news desks, including the Sunday Times, Parky quickly found himself at first Granada TV, then, as fate served him, at the BBC as his talk show took off, in stunning fashion.

"I didn't really know what it was I was doing and I stumbled into that career in the most unlikely way," began Parky.

It was to be a young Parky's lightbulb moment on his first ever television interview, when, in 1963, he would interview Mick Jagger and The Rolling Stones. An overnight, and the unlikeliest of sensations, was born.

"I suddenly became a household name, I was hot property, although it probably helped being sandwiched between two episodes of Coronation Street," he continued.

"Then along comes the BBC which, at the start, when I moved there, I was used more as a journalist and war correspondent (although the British Army's youngest ever captain during his National Service during the fifties, being a war correspondent was far from the top of his list, as his passions lay more in sport and music).

"Parkinson (the chat show) happened by chance, and it was actually only supposed to be a 10-week run." It ended up being 540 episodes over three spells between 1971 and 2007, the last episodes being broadcast in the December that year.

"We wanted, even needed, a big name to kick-start the show though so we went for Orson Welles and was made to jump through hoops before finally getting him on – after that all the big names wanted to come and suddenly it became the show that everybody wanted to watch."

Since then he has interviewed anyone who is, well anyone, from any genre – film, music, science, literature, comedy, they have all pretty much been 'grilled' by a gentleman who was knighted ten years ago.

Often publicised as being Parky's favourite interview, the great Muhammad Ali is joined on that pedestal by Professor Jacob Bronowski (a member of the team that developed the atom bomb and presented the documentary, The Ascent of Man) and Catherine Bramwell-Booth (an officer in the Salvation Army who lived to 104), as being two of the specific encounters Parky looks back on the most fondly.

"I never got close to Ali, he never wanted that," recalled Parky.

"We noticed that, in the book we released last year (Muhammad Ali: A Memoir) about the four interviews I did, not only was he a remarkable man but he was also terribly conflicted. He is probably the greatest fighter that ever lived, and will live though."

Promoted by Steve Wraith and Danny Mitchell, An Evening with Sir Michael Parkinson takes place at the Tyne Theatre & Opera House on Friday 23 February with tickets priced £28-£50 available from the venue's Box Office 0844 2491 000, or online via tynetheatreandoperahouse.uk/events/an-evening-with-sir-michael-parkinson/ (booking fees will apply on all purchases).

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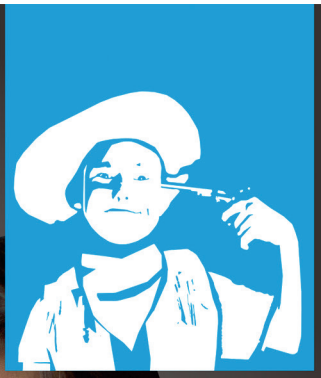

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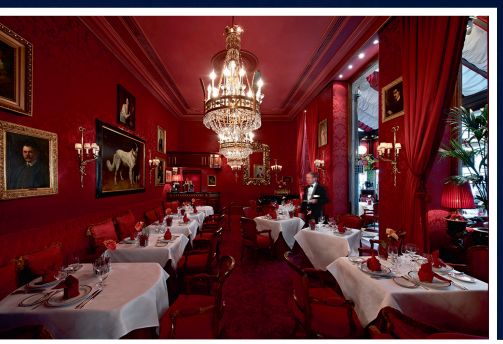

Photo by Dimitry Anikin on Unsplash

A VIENNESE WALTZ!

Vienna is one of Europe's most romantic cities, conjuring up images of majestic balls in grand palaces where couples waltz to the strains of the finest orchestras.

Its stunning buildings and monuments, in styles from Gothic to Renaissance and Classical to Baroque, line the famous Ringstrasse that surrounds Vienna's historic Innere Stadt, and the city which was once the cultural heart of Europe still breathes charm and sophistication.

Having visited recently Travel Bureau's personal travel expert Garry Sharples agrees Vienna has lost none of its power to impress and is so rich in cultural history it offers something for everyone...

For art critics

The Kuntshistorisches Museum (Museum of Fine Art) is widely acknowledged as one of the finest art museums in the world, with highlights including works by Vermeer, Rembrandt & Raphael. The Belvedere Palace, as well as being one of Europe's most stunning Baroque landmarks and a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is also home to the world's largest collection of paintings by Gustav Klimt, one of Austria's most celebrated artists, including his most famous painting, "The Kiss".

For history buffs

Approximately 25 minutes out of the city centre is the world famous Schonbrunn Palace, the former imperial summer residence of the Austrian Royal Family. The palace has a long and rich history, having witnessed the birth and death of an emperor, hosted diplomats and received visits from iconic leaders such as JFK and Krushchev. Schonbrunn is now preserved as a museum and UNESCO World Heritage site.

For music fans

A performance by the Vienna Mozart Orchestra at the beautiful Musikverein is a unique Viennese experience in an impressively opulent venue in the heart of the city. The performance includes iconic pieces by Mozart, easily recognisable even if you're not a classical music aficionado. Singers join the orchestra on stage for some of the performance and all performers are dressed in traditional costumes from the period of Mozart's life.

For animal lovers

The Spanish Riding School, which is within the Hopfburg Palace complex, is the stunning venue for performances by the world famous Lippizana Horses. This experience needs to be booked in advance and is an amazing spectacle not to be missed.

For foodies

The Kaffeehaus is a Viennese institution, you can sit for hours with just a single cup of coffee or indulge in a patisserie and drink several. The Demel, which also has its own chocolate factory, is arguably the true home of Austria's most famous cake. Invented by Austrian Franz Sacher in 1832 for Prince Wenzel von Metternich in Vienna, the Sachertorte is a true Viennese culinary specialty. Sacher's eldest son Eduard perfected his father's recipe, creating the Sachertorte as we now know it while he was training at the Demel.

Garry's top hotel picks for a romantic weekend away...

The Imperial Hotel

From the moment you step inside the 5* Imperial Hotel's elegant entrance, you are surrounded by luxury. Its wonderful grand staircase, wood panelling, tapestries and oil paintings will stop you in your tracks. The décor throughout is traditional and sophisticated; sumptuous materials and antique furnishings adorn the bedrooms while the marble bathrooms feature a decadently large bath tub. If food is your passion then The Imperial is the place for you as the hotel has its own Michelin-starred restaurant, Opus.

The Bristol Hotel

Another grand 5* hotel in an outstanding location opposite the Sate Opera House. The Bristol really provides the "wow factor" and its vast suites are guaranteed to leave you lost for words as you grasp for every superlative going. Celebrating a special occasion? The Bristol is ideal for honeymooners or a big anniversary, splash out on a suite and indulge in your own luxurious corner of heaven.

The Sacher Hotel

The Sacher was built in 1876 and is the Grand Dame of the city's hotels, attracting many dignitaries and celebrities over the years. Indeed, a number of the Sacher's famous guests can be spotted in the hotel's Picture Gallery. The hotel is opulently decorated, with a wealth of antiques on display creating a unique eclectic style and subdued atmosphere. The hotel's Café Sacher offers a mouth-watering display of cakes, including the world famous Sachertorte. Those who come to Vienna for the art will love The Sacher, over 1,000 paintings that hang in the hotel make it the largest private picture gallery in Europe.

Travel Bureau's Garry Sharples travelled to Vienna last year with Kirker Holidays. To find out more about Vienna or get Garry's personal recommendations call Travel Bureau on 0191 285 9321, send an email to holidays@travelb.co.uk or visit travelb.co.uk.

OUT & ABOUT - PITLOCHRY, PERTHSHIRE

For a winter break in February, before winter turns gradually into spring, consider the Scottish Highlands, and particularly the Perthshire town of Pitlochry which welcomes visitors all year round.

There is a direct train from Newcastle every day, the Highland Chieftain to Inverness, which calls at Pitlochry but it leaves mid-afternoon and returns in the morning, which rather eats into your days away. I changed in Edinburgh and travelled with Virgin Trains East Coast and Scotrail for £45 each way First Class, cheaper still in standard.

It was icy underfoot when I arrived, so I was pleased to see the McKay's hotel clearly at the end of the road from the station. Check-in was friendly and efficient, and the barman took me over the road to the annexe (in his shirtsleeves no less). I would have stayed in the grander Atholl Palace Hotel but they wanted £516 for two nights as opposed to £92 in McKays. But I did go to the AP for a Christmas concert on my night of arrival.

On the Monday I had a walk around the Pitlochry Festival Theatre, which was busy, and walked past the fish ladder to the hydro power station and new café and exhibition centre. There was little snow in Pitlochry – in fact I saw more in Stevenage later the same week – so I elected for a train trip to Dalwhinnie which has a remote distillery off the A9 and a brisk walk from the tiny railway station which boasts only a few trains each day, including a Sleeper to/from London.

The journey from Pitlochry to Dalwhinnie crosses the Drumochter Pass, and because my train was cancelled owing to a signalling problem, I got to travel by taxi along the road in one direction and by rail on the way back. En route, the railway reaches the greatest height of any line in the UK at Drumochter Pass (as the highway authority calls it) and Druimauchdar (in railway parlance) at 452m (1484 ft). Purists will be interested to know that the highest station is Corrour on the West Highland Line, but the Pass is higher than Corrour station.

I was provided with a taxi, incredibly, from Perth which arrived at Pitlochry nearly an hour later. I was on the point of abandoning my trip, but I knew Dalwhinnie had recently won an award for their distillery tours, and, to celebrate, they were offering a free distillery tour which beckoned, and the advantage of the taxi arriving 75 minutes late was that I did get a full refund of the train fare. The tour was good, and so I could catch the train back, they allowed me to do the tasting before the tour and absent myself at the end. I bought a bottle of Winter's Gold single malt, a product of Scotland's coldest distillery.

On the Tuesday I visited the Blair Athol distillery in Pitlochry and decided to walk up to the AP for lunch. I enjoyed the signature Cullen Skink with fresh bread and a large glass of wine, overlooking rural Perthshire. I enjoyed the grounds, the museum, the ambience of the Stag's Head bar, my lunch and (two nights before) the concert.

There was snow on the ground on arriving home. A great opportunity to open up my Dalwhinnnie distillery bottle of Winter's Gold in a lovely icy blue bottle. The bottle was a pleasure to open and savour and when a bit of fresh snow dropped into the glass it revived it into something else.

Alex Nelson, Stationmaster. pitlochry.org athollpalace.com

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MANAGING DIRECTOR MASTERS HOSPITALITY IN THE NORTH EAST

A lifelong commitment to hospitality has led the managing director of a Northumberland hotel to become the only member of the prestigious national society of Master Innholders in the North East.

Bernard Bloodworth, Managing Director of the award winning Matfen Hall, Golf and Spa, was accepted into the Master Innholders after being publicly recognised as a standard bearer for the hotel industry.

The Master Innholders aims to influence standards and extend professionalism by promoting discussion and research into areas affecting hotel management. This includes management development, training, education and recruitment.

Becoming a member of this select group is a difficult process as applicants must submit an essay on a given subject and attend a rigorous interview to demonstrate their commitment to improving standards within the industry.

Bernard has 33 years' experience within the hotel industry. He has also been a key member of the North East Hotel Association (NEHA) for the last 15 years and has represented the hotel sector in various business forums across the North East including North East Chamber of Commerce (NECC) and Visit County Durham.

Becoming a Master Innholder means that Bernard is looking forward to bringing the benefits of his membership to the hotel industry in the North East. This includes providing better access to national and international training and development for hotel employees.

The Master Innholder scholarships were developed to help rising stars access management training opportunities which are few and far between. They are awarded annually, and successful candidates are granted places on a two-week management development course at Cranfield University, Cornell University (USA) or the École Hôtelière de Lausanne (Switzerland).

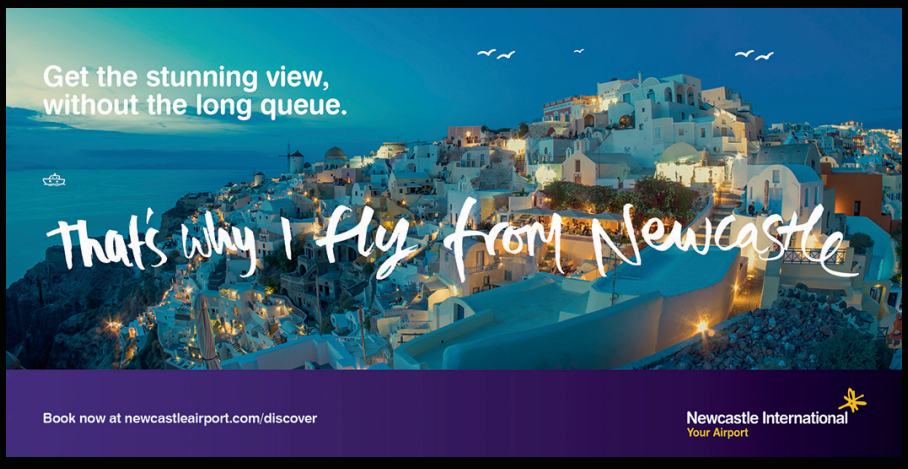
AIRPORT LAUNCHES 'THAT'S WHY I FLY FROM NEWCASTLE' CAMPAIGN

Newcastle International Airport recently unveiled its newest multi-channel marketing campaign, 'That's why I fly from Newcastle', to highlight its award-winning airport experience.

The airport, which recently placed fifth on a list of the world's happiest airports, reaches over 3.5 million people with its multimedia campaign across the whole of the North East, as well as a wider area stretching up to the Scottish Borders, down to Yorkshire and across to Cumbria.

Through a range of radio, press, outdoor and digital advertising, 'That's why I fly from Newcastle' aims to highlight the airport's unique selling points, including its friendly staff, low queuing times, punctual flights and multitude of exciting destinations. The campaign is also supported across social media with animated GIFs and specially created video content.

Newcastle Airport has also launched its very own TV advert, which recently premiered on Border TV. The ad shows holidaymakers enjoying themselves on a variety of different trips whilst the local voiceover highlights the benefits of the airport.



Nick Jones, Chief Executive at Newcastle International Airport, said: "The campaign showcases our unique personality, the fantastic services we offer and the wide variety of great destinations passengers can fly to. I'm incredibly proud of it."

EDWARDIAN ELEGANCE WEDDING PACKAGE...

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RECIPE OF THE MONTH

with Dave Coulson, Chef Patron, Peace and Loaf Jesmond.

SALMON AND MEADOWSWEET

David Coulson has created a delicious alternative to the average salmon and cream cheese canapé.
Treat your dinner guests to a salmon and meadowsweet dish with a Couslon twist, perfect alongside an ice-cold G&T.

INGREDIENTS:

Side of Salmon

1kg salt

1kg sugar

500g fresh meadowsweet (or 300g if powdered)

2 whole cucumbers

50ml gin

Small bottle of tonic

1 tbsp ultra-tex

METHOD

1. For the salmon, first make the meadowsweet cure. Take 1kg salt and 1kg sugar. Pick the flowers off the meadowsweet (unless using powder) and blitz together with the salt and sugar.

2. Spread some of this in the bottom of a tray and place the salmon skin side down. Next, use the rest of the cure and completely cover the salmon. Cling film the tray and leave in the fridge overnight. The next day wash the cure off the salmon then take the skin off and portion to desired size.

3. For the compressed cucumbers, peel the cucumber and use a melon baller to cut out the cucumber balls. Place these in a plastic container with half a pint of gin and tonic and then place this into a vaccum pack machine and run the cycle to compress the gin and tonic into the cucumber.

4. For the gel, take a pint of gin and tonic and whisk a tablespoon of ultra-tex in until you reach the desired consistency. Reserve for plating.

5. Place the cured salmon and scatter some cucumber balls over that. Add a few dots of G&T gel and finish with seasoned herbs and flowers.

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A 24 CARAT EVENING

By Michael Grahamslaw

The Diamond Inn, Ponteland is an iconic North East boozer. Established in the early 18th century as an old coaching inn, the hostelry served as a watering hole and lodgings for travellers and has since remained at the heart of the Ponteland community.

Today, the Diamond is renowned as a purveyor of fine food and drink and offers accommodation in its adjacent hotel. The pub is even reportedly a favourite of a certain former Number 9, so Northern Insight's two bustling centre forwards (myself and son Jack) thought we'd review the experience.

After a particularly "January" working day, we headed up the A1 and were soon revelling in the Diamond's cosy embrace. On hand to meet us was Paul Holliday, owner and resident diamond geezer, who was happy to provide a tour of the rooms.

The Diamond boasts 12 en-suite bedrooms which are set in a quiet spot adjacent to the hotel itself with 24 hour access. Rooms are priced very reasonably with singles from £65 per night, standard twins from £79, deluxe doubles from £85 and a full suite from £99. We thought this offered a great alternative to a taxi fare home for those visiting the area – especially with a slap-up breakfast included.

Needless to say, all rooms are impeccably decorated and very well-equipped. Our twin bedroom featured an LCD TV, telephone, writing desk, tea & coffee making facilities and complimentary wifi access.

Nicely settled in, we agreed that a good belly-filling was in order. Admittedly, Ponteland is blessed

with many great eateries though on a bitingly cold evening we chose not to stray from the cosy confines of the Diamond. We were not to be disappointed.

The pub serves up a number of wholesome, traditional English dishes which are all cooked from scratch. This means waiting times are slightly longer than usual though we didn't mind drinking in the atmosphere. A real log fire sputters in its grate whilst there's a bountiful selection of real ales to choose from.

This was no-nonsense cooking which would really put smiles on our faces. Jack chose the bangers & mash with authentic Cumberland sausage and a rich onion gravy whilst I opted for the homemade beef burger with onion rings and thick cut chips. Sometimes only unabashed comfort food will do and I must say, those dishes really hit the mark.

Following our meal, we lingered (longer than we should have) into the night over a few pints before retiring next door to our rooms. Owing to the quiet village surroundings, there's a nice tranquillity about the rooms and we rose the next morning after a restful nights sleep.

Breakfast is included in the room price and is again cooked to order. Jack enjoyed freshly scrambled eggs on wholemeal toast whilst yours truly despatched a wonderful 3 egg omelette with all the fillings. All in the name of media fuel, you must understand!

The Diamond Inn is a pub with a lot to offer. It possesses the feel of a historic country pub yet also offers easy transport links to Newcastle, the airport and the Northumberland coast which makes it the perfect dwelling place for travelling executives or those simply looking for a change of scene.

Added to the mix is a spacious, upstairs function room with a capacity exceeding 100 persons. "The Rock" is a venue with a contemporary twinkle featuring bar and lounge areas, not to mention a private balcony.

All in all, The Diamond Inn remains a multi-faceted gem.

For more information, visit their website www.thediamondinn.co.uk

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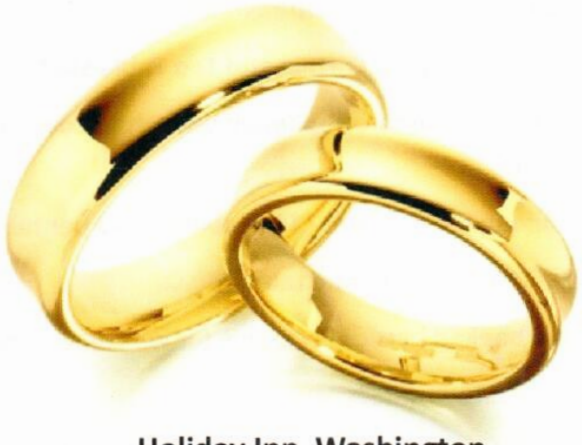

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GRAZIE SIGNOR!

The cork is out of the bottle as Signor Prosecco lands on Tyneside

I recently heard on the grapevine (every pun intended) that Signor Prosecco is a new prosecco & Italian tapas bar situated on Newcastle's Quayside. Housed within the iconic Italian restaurant Sabatini, the venue takes advantage of the previously-underused front section of the property and serves quality food & drink to its swanky city centre clientele.

The venue is managed by Cristian Saba – son of Fabrizio a local restaurateur of Sabatini and Fratelli renown. Cristian has noted a real boom in UK prosecco drinking in recent years (probably in large part due to my wife) and has devised an offering to quench this thirst.

We thought this sounded like a wonderful concept, so I pitched up one evening with my son Jack and wife Lisa – Northern Insight's chief fizz correspondent.

Visiting midweek, we noted a lovely after-hours ambience. The interior is very elegant with taupe leather seating, polished oakwood expanses and mood lighting. There's some stunning views over the quayside whilst an easy-listening acoustic soundtrack provides a warm, cosy vibe which makes it a great place to loosen the tie or untangle the hair after a tough day at the office.

Of course sparkling conversation demands a sparkling drink and Cristian has curated an exciting prosecco menu which showcases the drink in all its varieties from the driest Brut to the sweeter Demi-Sec. The venue serves 9 different types in total with each sourced from the historic Bortolomiol winery, one of the Boot's most esteemed producers. Unsurprisingly, Lisa was in her element yet others drinkers aren't forgotten as there's also a comprehensive range of beers, wines and spirits.

Jack and I fancied getting on the red and were sagely pointed in the direction of a silky Sicilian red named "Silenzi" which I must say, really hit the mark.

To accompany this, Signor Prosecco also do a fine selection of Italian tapas – or Cichetti to more enlightened folk. This is the perfect drinking food and -sharing a building with Sabatini- this is authentic Italian fayre at its very best.

We were advised to order 6/7 dishes in total which were all reasonably priced at around £5/£6 each. We settled on; the deep fried calamari with fresh lemon, pork & beef meatballs in a rich Napoli sauce, shaved mullet fish roe with celery and a drizzle of extra virgin olive oil, chicken fillets in a sassy paprika dressing, warmed artisan breads with butter and olives and finally the traditional antipasto featuring a mix of cured meats and cheeses.

This all arrived stylishly presented on small plates and sharing planks and we were free to pick and choose as we fancied. The meal was a great, social experience which unfolded at a leisurely pace whilst the friendly and attentive staff frequently swept over to recharge our glasses.

If all of this wasn't enough, the Signor Prosecco team are also offering a superb range of deals and promotions. "Pizza & Prosecco Tuesdays" entitle guests to a free pizza for every bottle purchased whilst "Bottomless Fridays" mean unlimited fizz for just 20 pound per head. We'll definitely be taking part and we can't wait to see what else lies instore in the months ahead.

Not only is this a fantastic extension of the long-established Sabatini site, but an exciting new venue in its own right. The perfect spot to grab a bite with friends, stage a date night or indeed enjoy a hard-earnt, post-work quaff. Salute!

For more information on Signor Prosecco, visit their Facebook page www.facebook.com/pg/SignorProsecco

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TOP TIPS ON KITCHEN DESIGN IN HOTELS

With over a decade of experience of transforming catering facilities across the UK, we know the key considerations to take into account when designing a kitchen for a busy hotel restaurant.

Here's our top tips on creating an efficient, on-trend kitchen that will keep customers coming back for more.

Key Considerations

An effective workflow with minimum workspaces ensuring staff have everything nearby is a key aspect that needs to be considered. Sufficient storage – chilled, ambient and dry, is also a key consideration. To help to reduce energy costs it is essential that there is energy efficient and multi-functional equipment and that the building has acoustic treatment to the walls dividing the restaurant from the kitchen. This in turn helps to maximise staff output and ensures excessive staff are not needed to run the kitchen.

A Collaborative Approach

It is very important to have a collaborative approach to the design layout from the beginning of a project. It is important to listen to the Chef's point of view and incorporate ideas into the design so they will be able to produce a range of foods from the kitchen and operate in a safe environment both in terms of food safety and working practices.

Design Trends

Open plan kitchens are a current trend in the design of kitchens, so diners can see into the kitchen, have a "live experience" and feel involved in the whole dining ambience. There is also an emphasis on locally sourced, locally produced food and letting the customer know where the food came from.

What about Ventilation?

It is very important that ventilation is carefully designed from an environmental perspective so kitchen odours are kept to a minimum externally. From an operator's point of view ventilation needs to be at a suitable working temperature with fresh air input.

Putting in UV systems can help to control external kitchen oudors. It is also particularly important from a planning perspective especially on new builds.

The sorts of equipment that are available to help deal with the problem include: carbon filtration and electro static precipitator (ESP) filtration systems. Infra-red activated ventilation systems can also help to significantly reduce energy use and running costs.

To find out how RDA can help you with your next catering project call 0844 873 4993 or visit www.rdalimited.co.uk

A STERLING SUNDAY LUNCH

By Michael Grahamslaw

Sunday lunch is a big deal for the Grahamslaw clan so I wanted to set up somewhere which would really impress. Eagled-eyed readers will note that I've been playing a lot of golf (if that's what you call it) at Warkworth GC recently – an absolute gem of a track. Following on from this we've often enjoyed a 'debrief' at the Hermitage Inn, a cosy country pub set in the heart of Warkworth.

The Hermitage serve fresh food 7 days a week and are locally renowned for their Sunday lunch offering. With this in mind, I packed my wife Lisa and daughter Holly into the car and headed for the picturesque little village.

The Hermitage Inn has all the hallmarks of a traditional hostelry. There's real log fires, chalkboards telling of the latest specials and a mouthwatering selection of beers on tap. At the front, the snug bar area has a convivial feel whilst at the rear of the property there's a deceptively large dining room offering extra space. After a warm Northumbrian welcome this is where we took up post, and were pleased to find a number of "reserved" signs on neighbouring tables – always a telling barometer.

In terms of choice the menu offers plenty to get your teeth into with starters and main plates available alongside the Sunday carvery consisting of 3 types of meat.

Being somewhat of a traditionalist, I kicked off with a sprightly prawn cocktail whilst Lisa and Holly elected for the Homemade sweet potato & red onion soup. Sans bread for Lisa, who remains on the diet wagon. At least that makes one of us!

The carvery offers the choice of 2 out of 3 meats – in our case beef and pork – which were both cooked expertly here. This served was served with lightly-seasoned roasties, giant Yorkshire puddings and a huge tureen of vegetables. Safe to say this was all outstanding whilst Holly –who fancied a taste of something different – reported that her Lasagne was similarly top notch.Throughout our meal, the service was incredibly friendly, landlord Lawrence and his team really do make you feel welcome.

Whether you're in the area or, like us, looking for a change of scene on a weekend this cracking pub really offers something different. It's also the perfect antidote to a Sunday morning golfing horrorshow!

More information on the Hermitage Inn can be found on their website www.hermitageinnwarkworth.uk

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Sat 11.30am to 5.30pm
Sunday closed

A RARE GEM

North East jewellery designer Kellie Daniels is quite literally leaving no stone unturned when it comes to expanding her business, as Emma Walker discovered.

From aquamarines and amethysts to rubies and rose quartz, the American-born designer, who has made her home on Tyneside, sources the finest gems and crystals for her Salome jewellery brand.

And the designs, which celebrate the stones in their natural form, are finding favour as far afield as London and New York,

Founded in 2015, Salome's bespoke, handmade, collections – stocked at Newcastle's The Biscuit Factory - were quickly snapped up by Edinburgh's high-end Covet store and Wolf & Badger, in London's prestigious Mayfair.

Such was the brand's success that Wolf & Badger's New York store and Hemline, in New Orleans' fashionable French Quarter, followed suit.

And sales of Salome's necklaces, earrings and bracelets have outstripped even Kellie's most optimistic expectations.

"Obviously I knew from the success of the collections in Britain that there was a strong and growing market for my jewellery," said Kellie, "but even I had no idea it would catch on as quickly in the US as it has.

"Within two weeks of going on sale, I had repeat orders from both shops and as a result I am working around the clock to meet demand."

The collections – crafted with stones sourced from locations as diverse as California and the South Pacific – are designed to reflect the beauty of the natural world and, because of variations within the stones themselves, no two pieces are exactly alike.

Among the collections within the Salome brand are the newly released L'Etoile Collection – which features star cut stones in rare blue aventurine, noir quartz, and smoky quartz– and the more stylised Le Reve, which explores movement, suspension and light through natural stone and metal.

Henrique Pinto, manager of the Wolf & Badger store at Grand Street, New York, NY, said: "The collections have been incredibly popular and the customers love them as much as we do.

"Salome's Tribal Collection – featuring stones such as jasper, sapphire, aquamarine and labradorite - has received the most attention from customers, who truly appreciate the wide range and variations in style."

The full range, along with Salome's other collections – featuring precious gems such as ruby, sapphire, pearl, emerald and grey opal – can also be purchased online at www.salomedesigns.co.uk.

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BLUE BELL CHIMES ALL THE RIGHT NOTES

The Blue Bell is a pub with a burgeoning local reputation. Steeped in student-friendly Sandyford, it's always been a preferred boozer of mine, and now, once again under the management of James Fitzakerly continues to go from strength to strength.

The pub boasts a snug, wood-panelled and interior and welcoming vibe which makes it the ideal venue for a number of occasions. In addition to serving guest ales and classic pub grub, James –a man of great warmth and humour - comperes a quiz on a Wednesday night. My crack team of quiz galacticos "The Rafa Cakes" (coined in the haze of a Guinness session) thought we'd review the experience.

The Blue Bell boasts a cracking winter-warmer menu which makes for the perfect pre-quiz fuel. Two of us shared an epic starter platter (for brain food purposes) consisting of chicken goujons, chicken wings, cheesy garlic bread and French fries. Our other starter was the tempura prawns, served on a ramekin of salad with a sassy, sweet chilli dip.

With starters surpassing all expectations we moved on to main course. I tucked into Thai green curry - a fragrant, aromatic dish in both smell and flavour. Consisting of chunks of pepper and mushroom, this had clearly been freshly prepared.

My pal Michael ordered the grilled halloumi burger with sweet potato fries which was proclaimed "pick of the day." A renowned halloumi fan (well, who isn't?) Michael noted the halloumi was the desired shade of golden brown which melted perfectly into the brioche bun.

My other pal Matthew – in line to become Northern Insight's chunky correspondent – walloped the traditional gammon, egg and chips medley. A man of simpler tastes, Matthew commented that this was fresh, honest food which ticked all the boxes for him.

Totally replete, we kicked back and waited for the main event to begin. James – who has been dubbed the Sandyford Michael Buffer – is a charismatic host who creates drama by dimming the lights. The quiz encompasses everything from current affairs to films to sport to general knowledge and concludes with its trademark music round.

Audience participation is encouraged with James staging great knockabout banter with the various teams. The quiz is also followed by a raffle with an abundance of prizes to be won including wine, prosecco, salon vouchers and beer tickets. Indeed, few left empty-handed or worse, sober!

The Blue Bell is a local pub with a lot to offer its guests. Its enthusiastic management always endeavour to try new things (see Poker Nights, Steak Thursdays and Sunday Lunch deliveries!) whilst its food offering continues to improve. What really stands out though is their commitment to providing the best possible customer service.

The Blue Bell deserves a ringing endorsement.

For more information, visit their Facebook page www.facebook.com/bluebelljesmond.
The Rafa Cakes are: Jack Grahamslaw (C), Michael Anthony Grahamslaw, Matthew Redshaw, Luke Vinton (absent)

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FALCONS TO PLAY AT ST JAMES' PARK IN 'THE BIG ONE'

Newcastle Falcons will break new ground on Saturday March 24 when St James' Park hosts their Aviva Premiership match against Northampton Saints, a game which has been dubbed 'The Big One'.

Newcastle United Football Club's 52,000 capacity stadium will be the venue for a 5.30pm kick-off, preceded by a 3pm curtain-raiser between Newcastle University and Northumbria University.

Mick Hogan, comercial director of Newcastle Falcons, said: "The Big One promises to be a major rugby occasion for the entire region to really get behind with adult tickets starting from just £10 and juniors from £5.

"We have set ourselves a target of 20,000 tickets sold for what will be a great day at a fantastic venue, one which has already shown itself to be more than capable of hosting top rugby events.

"The Land Rover Premiership Rugby Cup in the morning will see more than 100 junior teams participating at Kingston Park Stadium before the focus turns to St James' Park, which will host the city's Varsity Match. That is a fixture which attracts a big following in its own right given the huge student population in Newcastle, and there will be a fan plaza outside the stadium with food, drink and entertainment.

"Newcastle Falcons' Aviva Premiership match against Northampton will provide a fitting climax on what promises to be a massive day of rugby for a region which thrives upon staging these major events."

St James' Park successfully staged three matches during Rugby World Cup 2015, has hosted three Super League Magic Weekends and will be the venue for the 2019 European Champions Cup and Challenge Cup finals.

Newcastle Falcons director of rugby Dean Richards spoke of his excitement at The Big One, saying: "St James' Park is an incredible stadium and this is a fantastic opportunity for us to take a game there.

"The passion for sport in our region and the commitment from the public in supporting major sporting events is second to none, and it will be a memorable day which people will want to be part of. I was working at Harlequins when they began a similar initiative of playing a game at Twickenham every season, and they really are great occasions."

As well as offering a day of top-class sporting entertainment The Big One will also raise funds and awareness for The Doddie Weir'5 Discretionary Trust, following the recent Motor Neurone Disease diagnosis of the Falcons and Scotland great. Details of this will be announced in due course.

Newcastle Falcons season ticket members will be entitled to a free East Stand ticket for the day, with season car park pass holders eligible for free parking. Falcons season ticket members wishing to access this ticket should contact the Falcons box office by calling 0871 226 6060, emailing fans@newcastle-falcons.co.uk or visiting in person during opening hours.

Falcons captain Will Welch spoke of his enthusiasm around The Big One, saying: "As a kid from this area I was brought up watching Newcastle United games at St James' Park and experiencing the amazing atmosphere there.

"For us as Falcons players to now go play a game on that stage will be something truly special, and I'm sure our supporters and the wider public in our region will buy into it."

Lee Charnley, managing director of Newcastle United, said: "We've earned ourselves an excellent reputation in recent years for hosting top class rugby events at St James' Park. As a wonderful precursor to the Dacia Magic Weekend taking place in May, we're delighted to play host to 'The Big One' as the Newcastle Falcons take on Northampton Saints on March 24.

"Of course the opportunity to watch the varsity match between Newcastle and Northumbria universities at the stadium beforehand is certain to provide spectators with a superb day of rugby and we are, once again, proud to be the venue of choice for yet another great occasion in the North East's sporting calendar."

Call 0871 2266060 or visit www.newcastlefalcons.co.uk

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ASAP's chief executive James Foice said: "We still believe that accreditation of serviced apartments to ensure certain standards is fuelling interest among businesses and promoting growth of the sector. The challenge we have now is scaling up…We need that stamp of approval because competition is coming in quickly, if suppliers have not got something to prove their credentials they will lose business."

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HOW TO FLATTEN YOUR ABS… FOREVER

By Duncan Edwards, BSc Hons Sports Science, HLC 2, CP2, CMTA

Most people would love to have a flat tummy or a well-defined six-pack. However, for many it's not just as simple as cutting down on what you eat and doing some sit ups. That's why we have put together a five-part series of top tips to help you flatten your abs…forever

For the last few months, Bodyguards Health & Fitness have linked up with Northern Insight to be able to provide you with two top tips each month that will help you to achieve a more aesthetically pleasing abdomen and develop a functionally strong core. At Bodyguards, we often meet clients who tell us that they "need to lose two stones to be fit and healthy again", and then we tell them that in reality, they "need to be fit and healthy again to lose two stones… forever". Bodyguards Personal Trainers encourage a 'balanced', 'whole' approach and endeavor to educate our clients not only how to train intelligently and balance their exercise routine but also how to balance their diet and their lifestyle so that they can develop robust health and maintain it - keeping you feeling good on the inside and looking great on the outside.

Previous articles explained how 'Real' Foods, a Balanced Exercise Routine, a Balanced Diet, Core Conditioning, Healthy Digestion, Posture, Stress Management, Rest, Recovery and Sleep all contribute to improved health, body shape, weight loss, muscular definition, fitness levels and well-being allowing you to Flatten your Abs… Forever. When you begin to understand that the human body is a complex system of systems that are all connected and inter-related you begin to understand the underlining importance of taking a 'balanced' or 'holistic' approach.

Whole = The Sum of All Its Parts

In this fifth and final part we discuss the effects of Correct Breathing and the importance of living a Balanced Lifestyle.

9. Breathing

I'm going to state the obvious – breathing is essential ! But you're probably wondering why breathing is so important for your abdominals ? It's more a case of breathing properly i.e. breathing primarily from your belly and not solely through your chest, neck and shoulders (inverted breathing pattern). Belly breathing activates a vital inner core unit muscle known as the diaphragm which allows a deeper breath, supports/protects your spine and improves posture. As part of the inner core unit, working alongside the Transverse Abdominal (corset muscle) and the Pelvic Floor muscles (in fact innervated by the same nerve), the diaphragm plays an integral role in being able to develop a strong base (core) from which the majority of the

other muscles and limbs hinge, greatly improving control and performance. A functional inner core also helps to create a flatter abdominal wall on which the outer, more superficial and more visible abdominals sit. So, by learning to breathe correctly you can help to flatten your inner abs allowing the six pack muscles to be aesthetically more prominent and better-defined.

10. Find a Balance

As mentioned earlier, the trick to maintaining health, fitness and consequently a flat tummy is Finding Balance. Taking a balanced approach to health allows for sustainable results. Specifically, I refer to a balance of the two opposing branches of the Autonomic Nervous System (ANS) which sub-consciously controls important bodily functions such as breathing, heart rate, blood pressure, the release of hormones and many other important bodily functions.

The two branches of the ANS are known as the Sympathetic (fight or flight/survive) branch and the Parasympathetic (rest & digest/thrive) branch and each one controls the function of particular organs, glands and systems within the body.

Fight or Flight

When you're stressed or your body is under excessive load, your autonomic nervous system shifts toward activation of the sympathetic (SNS) branch. When active, the sympathetic nervous system prepares your body for survival, for a fight or for a flight (runaway) response. Your heart rate and blood pressure increases, you take quicker, more shallow breaths and you release catabolic hormones like cortisol (which breaks down muscle and coverts it into blood-sugar - gluconeogenesis) and adrenaline so you have immediate energy to be able to deal with the threat at hand. There's nothing wrong with activating your SNS, in fact without it we'd have struggled to survive to be top of the food chain today. However, problems occur when we remain sympathetically active for prolonged periods of time, eating away at our muscles, causing our metabolism to slow right down meaning we burn less fat, feel tired but wired, lose any sex drive and become more irritable, nervous and fatigued.

Conversely but equally importantly, whilst your sympathetic nervous system is active your parasympathetic nervous system is consequently suppressed meaning poor quality sleep, poor digestion and slower recovery and regeneration.

Growth & Repair.

Your parasympathetic nervous system (PNS) allows your body to rest and digest, repair, regenerate and grow. It triggers an opposite effect on the body to the SNS: It slows your heart rate, lowers blood pressure, slows and lengthens your breaths, increases digestion and releases growth and repair hormones (such as testosterone) which help to build lean muscle tissue, increase metabolism, and therefore burn more fat

The 80:20 Rule

Balancing our autonomic nervous system helps your body to maintain a state of homeostasis and thus health. Fat loss should occur naturally when you maintain a 'healthy balance'. Don't just survive, thrive!

Try and use the 80:20 rule. If you look after your body 80% of the time, avoid excessive stress or physiological load, eat real foods, keep hydrated, slow down, relax and get suitable amounts of rest and sleep then your body is more than capable of looking after you for the remaining 20%…

For more information about Personal Training, Nutrition or advice on how to implement these top tips into your lifestyle, please contact:
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WELCOME TO THE EXERCISE REVOLUTION…

It's that time of year when the day of reckoning has arrived.

Too much drink, too much food, too many late nights – it all contributes towards that resolution that it's time to get fitter and healthier.

For most people that determination barely lasts past Valentine's Day, when the gym membership gathers dust thanks to the fact that there simply isn't the time to spend on getting in shape.

Add to that the thought of the inevitable aches and pains which go after a workout and the result is the perfect storm of excuses for slipping back into your old ways.

That was of course, before Speedflex. The revolutionary exercise concept offers high intensity training with a difference and it is from a base here in the North East that it is showcasing how getting fit doesn't need to be painful at all.

Speedflex, which operates from the Fleming Business Centre, Jesmond, was developed to help improve people's fitness without the strain usually associated with exercise.

The specialist machine, which allows people to work at their own pace and only needs to be used three times a week for 30 minute sessions, was brought to the UK from the USA by former NUFC footballer and physiotherapist Paul Ferris and The Sage Group founder, Graham Wylie.

It was here in the North East that the Speedflex group training concept, which features a personal trainer and heart rate monitoring, was developed, resulting in a fitness regime which is truly unique.

"People often find their enthusiasm for getting fit wanes very quickly, particularly if they're not used to exercise. Their good intentions mean they go at it all guns blazing and then find they are in real pain the following day," said Paul Ferris, CEO of Speedflex UK & Ireland.

"The beauty of Speedflex is that the often unbearable pain doesn't follow, because the machines focus on concentric movements, users don't experience the micro tears to muscles which cause the soreness. This coupled with the low impact nature of the sessions, means there's minimal, if any, next day suffering."

The fact that it's a firm favourite of sporting stars such as Alan Shearer doesn't mean however that it's only for those already in peak condition.

Speedflex is described as high-intensity training (HIIT) with a difference, and offers cardio and resistance training in a group sessions. The client's effort level is used as force instead of traditional weights, and this lets the user train at their own personal level.

Regular group sessions are held at Speedflex under the supervision of an experienced trainer.

"Speedflex is effective for both complete beginners and those who are very fit and active," added Paul.

"Alan is a regular user, he could be in the same session working alongside someone who hasn't exercised in 20 years, and the effect and benefit to each is exactly the same.

"It's our aim that those people who have had bad experiences with exercise in the past will come and try it for themselves and see that exercise doesn't have to be painful."

Speedflex Newcastle is currently offering a range of options, with membership starting from £30 per month, a six week experience with unlimited access for £160, and day passes for £10.

For full information on all packages available, call Speedflex on 0844 543 3630 or visit the website: www.speedflex.com

NORTH EAST WEATHER PROVES NO OBSTACLE FOR REGION'S FIRST PRIVATE OUTDOOR GYM

The Tyneside based fitness company which brought the first original beach boot camp to the region is proving once again that the north east climate is no obstacle to outdoor training with the introduction of the region's first outdoor private gym.

David Fairlamb Fitness, which this year celebrates 20 years of helping people to adopt a fitter, healthier lifestyle, has created the north east's first dedicated outdoor gym at its private training facility in North Shields.

The dedicated floodlit facility will provide access to a range of obstacles and fitness equipment such as monkey bars, gymnastic parallel bars and a climbing wall, designed to cater for the rapidly growing number of people now taking part in obstacle course style challenges and the increasing popularity of training outdoors.

As one of the first personal trainers in the region, David Fairlamb and his select team of experienced fitness professionals have gained an enviable reputation as the go-to fitness and nutrition experts and for being at the forefront of the fitness industry.

Famed for leading the hugely successful Fit Factor programme, which has helped people all over the north east to swap their unhealthy lifestyles for exercise and healthier eating habits, the team are now looking to help people preparing for the challenges of obstacle courses and beginners just starting out with a bespoke outdoor facility.

David said: "When we first set up our beach boot camps more than ten years ago, people laughed and asked us who in their right mind would chose to train on a windswept, freezing cold beach in the north east. Our beach sessions however, continue to grow in popularity as people increasingly chose to train outdoors in the fresh air. You would be amazed by the number of people who join us every week on Tynemouth beach, regardless of the weather and to date we have never had to cancel even a session!"

"However, whilst people like to train outdoors, for a fully rounded training programme, it's important to include more than just cardio and body weight training so our outdoor gym provides all the functional equipment you might find in an indoor setting with the added bonus of being outside."

He added: "We are fortunate to have private outdoor space at our gym which we have been able to transform in to a dedicated training facility with all the equipment needed to get people obstacle course ready or get started with functional training. In many ways it's like a playground for adults with a range of monkey bars and other obstacles to tackle; while this playground will be lots of fun, it will be hard work too but our team will tailor the exercises to individual's abilities!"

David Fairlamb Fitness will be running specific small group training classes at its new outdoor gym initially every Wednesday and Friday evening but eventually offering daily classes for beginners to seasoned athletes. The classes will be open to members and non-members on a pay as you go basis.

To find out more about outdoor gym classes or accessing the outdoor gym contact www.davidfairlambfitness.co.uk

healthwatch STAR
Newcastle
Dr Jiri Dolezal
healthwatch STAR
Newcastle
Dr Ruth Grant
healthwatch STAR
Dr Carolyn Paes

A HEALTHY NEW YEAR ON THE CARDS THANKS TO HEALTHWATCH

It's been a busy 2017 for Healthwatch Newcastle and Healthwatch Gateshead. Here we look back at the work they've done during the year and look forward to 2018.

Healthwatch Newcastle and Healthwatch Gateshead cover all publicly-funded health and social care services for both adults and children. They work hard to champion the rights of those using services in their areas and, secondly, act as a watchdog to ensure that social care and health systems correctly engage with the public.

They collect feedback on services from people of all ages and from all communities through a network of voluntary and community sector organisations, and during events, drop-in sessions and listening events at a range of venues. This information is then collated and recommendations made to health and social care authorities and other professional bodies.

The Healthwatch Newcastle team became independent at the beginning of 2017 with the establishment of Tell Us North CIC (community interest company). Around half of the Healthwatch organisations across England are now independent, giving greater autonomy and flexibility. Another milestone was the joining together of Healthwatch Gateshead and Healthwatch Newcastle to create a strong team, working together on key issues and sharing expertise and skills.

As well as building a stronger regional team, Healthwatch Newcastle was recognised and commended at the annual Healthwatch Network Awards. Chosen from over 150 entries, their work on home care services was highly commended in the 'engagement in service improvement' category at an awards ceremony in July.

As a result of Healthwatch Newcastle's home care research, six report recommendations were also incorporated into Newcastle City Council's service specification for a new home care contract.

Steph Edusei, Healthwatch Chief Executive, said: "We were delighted that so many of the recommendations arising from our home care research were incorporated into the new contracts. The council recognised the need for continuity of care and there will now be a small named team per client, which is especially important for people with dementia. We were also pleased to see that medicine management will follow the latest NICE guidance in order to address concerns that some service users told us they had about safety."

Gathering the views of the special educational needs and/or disability (SEND) community was a priority work area last year. As a result of the research, 12 recommendations were made under four broad headings:

1. ***Service users should participate as fully as possible in decision-making***
2. ***Information and support to be provided to service users to enable them to participate in decisions***
3. ***Prepare effectively for adulthood***
4. ***High quality provision needed to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND***

An action plan to respond to all of the recommendations is being developed by the SEND programme board, chaired by Newcastle City Council. This will include the key recommendation for a single point of contact for service users to help improve communication and service user participation.

Feedback from the public is very important and the Healthwatch Stars scheme recognises health and social care professionals who have gone the extra mile to help those in their care. Healthwatch Stars are a way of celebrating positive comments with the people who are on the frontline of care in hospitals, doctors' surgeries and other services in Newcastle and Gateshead.

Fenham Hall Medical Group was given its fourth special award at the end of last year in recognition of outstanding care for its patients.

Practice Manager Helen Gunn was delighted to receive the latest award on behalf of the practice.

"It's lovely to know that the work we do is appreciated by the public. The doctors are the first to agree that these awards are a recognition of not only their sterling work but that of the wider team too. We have adopted a number of initiatives lately that have made a real difference to the care we provide and they seem to be working well."

The new initiatives include an improved same day appointment service and employing an Advanced Nurse Practitioner and pharmacist who are able to treat patients in certain circumstances without the need to see a doctor.

The coming year looks set to be as busy and active as 2017 for the Healthwatch teams.

First on the agenda is a thorough process of analysis and consultation during spring 2018 in order to set out work priorities for the coming year.

This will include analysing feedback from the public and examining local, regional and national intelligence on health and social care issues. The teams will go out into local communities with a shortlist and ask people which health and social care priorities they would like them to tackle. Attendees at the Healthwatch conference on 25 April will also have the opportunity to help decide which themes to focus both Newcastle and Gateshead.

During 2018 Healthwatch will continue to make sure that service users, carers and the public are involved in any proposals and have their say in how the new services will look.

As Steph explains, 2018 is not without its challenges, "We expect that 2018 will be another challenging but exciting year. Health and social care services will continue to experience great demands as council funding continues to be squeezed impacting on social care services and how they are delivered. Also, the November budget was criticised by NHS leaders, concerned that insufficient funding will impact on health services and waiting times.

"Now Healthwatch Newcastle and Healthwatch Gateshead have joined forces we have an even stronger voice and want to make an even greater impact on service improvement in our area. We will keep listening and making sure that everyone's voices are heard."

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Telephone: 0191 338 5720 Text: 07551 052 751 Email: info@healthwatchnewcastle.org.uk

ON THE TEE BOX

At Birtley Golf Club

LOCATION

Birtley Golf Club is located above the town of Birtley which lies on the A167 (or old A1 Great North Road) midway between Newcastle and Durham and approx. 2 miles north of Chester-Le-Street.

SETTING

Due to its location the course has views of the Angel of the North and St. James Park to the North and the hills of Stanley/Consett and Weardale to the South West.

LENGTH OF COURSE

Whites: 5,729 Par 67
Yellows: 5570 Par 67
Reds: 5,085 Par 70

TYPE OF COURSE

Birtley is a parkland course with tricky par threes and 6 par fours over 400 yards. The course is a nine-hole layout with 18 different tees . It has recently been described as "A little gem on the hillside of Birtley" by Golf Monthly. Be prepared for a testing start as the first hole is a 238 yard par 3 followed by the second hole dog leg par 4 measuring 453 yards! Recently, we have made significant improvements to the course and the tremendous work carried out by our Head Greenkeeper and enthusiastic volunteers is taking effect. Visitors will be warmly welcomed and face a tough but very enjoyable golf experience.

FACILITIES

9 hole course with two different tees for each hole providing an excellent 18 hole challenge. Clubhouse with bar (limited hours). Practice green and chipping area.

LONGEST DRIVE

The 238 yard par 3 opening hole requires a well hit tee shot to carry the ravine just short of the green. The small green is well guarded by 3 bunkers. A green with tiers to the front and back does not necessarily mean a good tee shot results in an opening par. Any player walking off with a 3 on this hole will be mightily relieved.

TOUGHEST HOLE

At 453 yards the uncompromising par 4 7th hole is stroke 1. Despite the hole being dead straight trees lurk to left and right for an errant tee shot. In order to reach the green two ravines must be carried, the latter lies only 20 yards shorts of the green which catches many approach leaving a tricky partially blind chip up the green to save par. If you do manage to reach the green in 2 you will be faced with a sloping green leaving very little chance of a birdie.

SIGNATURE HOLE

Without doubt the par 4 14th is the signature hole of the course. Whilst not the longest par 4 on the course measuring only 410 yards this dog leg right requires an accurate tee shot before a long iron into the green. The tee shot has a risk and reward element with longer hitters able to cut a small amount of the corner to gain a few more precious yards ready for their second shot. However, long grass to the left and dense trees to the right await any errant shots.

COMPETITIONS

Competitions run every weekend from April to September. Please contact the clubhouse for tee availability during this time.

PRICES

Monday to Friday £10.00 per round.
Weekends and Bank Holidays £12.00 per round
Full membership £460.00
Society Packages available

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