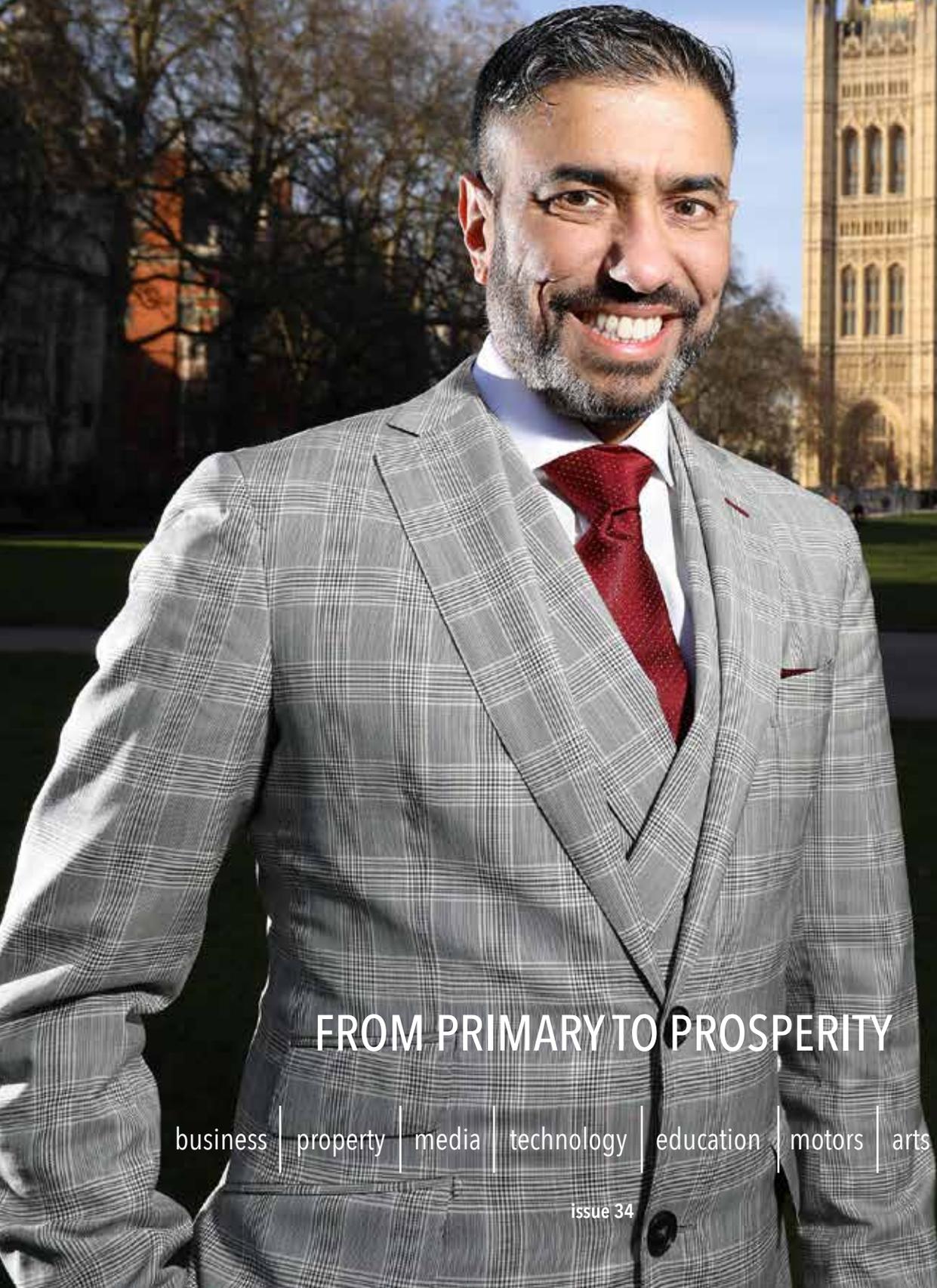


NORTHERN

INSIGHT

APRIL 2018



FROM PRIMARY TO PROSPERITY

business | property | media | technology | education | motors | arts | leisure

issue 34

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FOREWORD

Welcome to the April edition of Northern Insight

In my foreword last month I mentioned the onset of Spring before the "Beast from the East" unexpectedly struck to test the resilience of all local businesses.

Thankfully we have emerged from that unscathed to bring you another bumper edition. Our cover star is Ammar Mirza CBE, founder of the Primary to Prosperity campaign who talks in a wide ranging interview about the importance of championing our North East.

Look out for our major interview with TORRO Cases which is a true story of local entrepreneurship succeeding on a global scale.

Amongst some terrific social coverage we feature the regions amazing sporting success at Sport Newcastle's annual fundraising dinner.

Also check out our visit to the wonderful Colmans Seafood Temple in South Shields. A true catch of the day!

All in all much to enjoy and enthuse.

Thank you for your continued support.
Till next month.

M.J. Grahamslaw
Michael Grahamslaw, Publisher



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NEWCASTLE HIGH SCHOOL FOR GIRLS HONoured WITH LORD MAYOR'S SPECIAL AWARD

The new Newcastle High School for Girls (NHSG) building designed by Ellis Williams Architects and built by Wates Construction has been recognised as an exemplar of architecture and environmental design by the Lord Mayor of Newcastle.

The honour was bestowed as part of the Lord Mayor's Design Awards in recognition of NHSG's new senior school building, which opened in September 2016.

The Lord Mayor, Councillor Linda Wright, was particularly impressed with the combination of works to the existing school and the addition of the dynamic new building, which has created a new learning environment whilst maintaining a historic link with the school's past.

Commissioned by the Girls' Day School Trust (GDST), the 12-month build programme comprised the refurbishment of the school's iconic Victorian buildings at Tankerville Terrace, as well as the creation of a new three-storey block. The new development hosts a multi-purpose assembly hall and performing arts venue, dining room, fitness suite, state-of-the-art science laboratories and additional classroom spaces.

At the same ceremony, NHSG was also a commended finalist in the new building category. The judges described it as an ambitious school project which provided modern facilities in a sensitive manner.

Hilary French, Headmistress of Newcastle High School for Girls, said: "We love our new building and are delighted that it is gaining the accolades it deserves. We are grateful to the teams of people who surpassed our expectations to create what is now an award-winning building."



FLAME EYE UP RECORD FUNDRAISING



Flame Heating Group is hoping to smash its fundraising record after announcing that Newcastle-based Fighting All Cancers...Together (FACT) is now the company's chosen charity of 2018.

The North East-headquartered Heating & Plumbing merchant raised

£14,000 over the course of 2017 for chosen charities within the region. Flame is hoping to exceed this in 2018 in aid of South Shields man Paul George, who suffers from relapse and remitting MS.

Paul was diagnosed with the condition at the age of 30. This fundraising will help him to access life-changing treatment to halt its progression.

Established in 2008, FACT supports people living with cancer and their families through a range of services. It has relationships with health professionals, support groups and services, as well as wider voluntary organisations that help to deliver a range of educational and awareness programmes in the North East.

Joanne Smith, Founder and Chair of the Trustees at FACT, said: "We are absolutely delighted to have the support of Flame Heating Group in our 10th Birthday year. As a local charity, we rely very much on the support of local people and businesses to provide our much-needed services. All of the funds raised will directly help people affected by cancer in our local communities."

John Savage, Managing Director of Flame Heating Group, said: "It's important to give back to communities and worthy causes. FACT does fantastic work across the region to support those living with cancer and to help raise awareness."

There are no shortcuts to creating a brand.



DRIVING AUDIO-VISUALS TO A GREENER FUTURE

A North East audio-visual entrepreneur has overhauled his business to light the way to a better future for our planet. He now hopes that other local businesses will follow his green policy by making changes that will benefit the environment.

Reed Ingram Weir runs two successful audio-visual companies, Ingram AV and Festoon Lighting. His enterprises supply sound and lighting equipment to events, businesses and bands, while his clients include local venues such as Northern Stage and Sage Gateshead.

Reed recently became concerned with his energy consumption. With the aim of creating a greener future, Reed resolved to make immediate positive changes.

To date, Reed's environmental mission has included reducing his diesel vehicle fleet by 50% and choosing a 100% electrically-powered van and a 100% electric car. He's also fitted a smart meter at his business premises that turns off the heating when no one is in.



A PROM DRESS WITHOUT THE STRESS

Online store Dressi has recently opened a new exclusive dress shop on Salter's Road Gosforth with the aim of helping women and girls look their best at social events.

The end of year school prom is now seen by many teenage girls as the most important social event of their lives. More than 85% of schools in the UK now have a prom night and our region's schools are no exception.

Although they already have a successful, specialist fashion presence online, Dressi are now opening their first shop in Gosforth to help the region's party and promgoers get the best possible quality clothing at an affordable price.

Julie Blackie from Dressi said: "Our online store is very popular but we wanted to offer a more personal service. Our shop has specialist consultants who will be able to advise on current trends, colours and styles that will suit everyone and their budget."



NORTH EAST BUSINESSWOMAN LIGHTS THE WAY FOR LIMITLESS ACHIEVERS

A dynamic business woman has set up a new consultancy to help people in the region reach their true potential and leave their perceived limitations behind.

Steph Edusei, from New Hartley, has enjoyed an impressive career. She has successfully held a number of top North East management positions, including Directorate Manager at Newcastle-upon-Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust.

Steph's vast amount of experience has now inspired her to start her own management consultancy, A New View. The agency aims to provide support and training to help people fulfil their business ambitions.

Steph is from a mixed-race background. In her childhood, she remembers at times struggling to feel wholly accepted by her community, which caused her to doubt her own abilities. However, with A New View, Steph will work to help anyone improve their self-confidence by leaving the shackles of other peoples' expectations firmly behind.



PODFO LAUNCHES AN INSOLE MADE FOR YOU

Newcastle-based Podfo Limited recently launched an innovative bespoke biometric insole at the Great North Museum: Hancock.

Podfo offers bespoke biometric insoles which are seamlessly designed for the closest fit to the foot. They support the foot's natural movement to enhance biomechanical performance and improve comfort. Designed using exclusive Geometric Hole Orthotic Support Technology, the insoles are truly unique.

Podfo is distributed through a network of partners who

are located throughout the UK. All partners are qualified podiatrists with specialist interests in MSK conditions, sports injury, treatment and sports performance. Podfo Partners conduct assessments to identify any underlying issues and to tailor the insole to the wearer's individual foot shape and support requirements.

Elaine Hall, Managing Director at Podfo, said: "We have designed Podfo with the wearer in mind. Our trials show its seamless lightweight structure can provide improved comfort. We have already received great feedback from wearers."

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Mike Phillips, Managing Director, Fat Hippo Group
 Matthew Flinders, Head of Marketing, RMT
 Paul Gainford, Director, RMT

FAT HIPPO GROUP STEPS INTO SUNDERLAND WITH OPENING OF NEW £250,000 BONDED WAREHOUSE

A successful North East restaurant group has chosen Sunderland for the launch of its new leisure brand.

The Fat Hippo group has invested over £250,000 in converting a vacant 19th century Grade II-listed building on the city's Fish Quay into the new Bonded Warehouse, a multi-functional venue bringing live music, craft beer and excellent food together in one place.

A tap house on the ground floor offering a range of craft beers brewed locally by Allendale Brewery, while the upstairs area, which includes exposed brickwork, original beams and carefully restored original features, is being used for gigs, events and weddings.

Fifteen new jobs have been created with the opening of the Bonded Warehouse, with another ten expected to follow this year as it becomes properly established.

The total number of people employed across the Fat Hippo group has now moved past the 100 mark, and initial plans are now being considered for where further venues under both of its brands might be set up in the future.

The Fat Hippo management team worked with

Gosforth-based RMT Accountants and Business Advisors on all aspects of the development of the new Bonded Warehouse, as well as the wider management of its operations.

Fat Hippo was founded in 2010 by managing director Mike Phillips, who opened the company's first restaurant in Jesmond after writing his original business plan for the gourmet burger restaurant while still a student at Northumbria University.

Since then, the firm has opened further Fat Hippos in Newcastle and Durham city centres, with its early adoption of social media helping to build up strong brand awareness and loyalty around the region.

Mike Phillips says: "We felt there was a real opportunity to invest in Sunderland, which is a huge market with a lot of untapped potential, and to be at the forefront of a leisure scene that we think will develop substantially over the next few years.

"The Bonded Warehouse is a destination venue that appeals to a wide range of different audiences

at different times of the day and week, and we've had a really encouraging start since our official opening.

"Just as we've successfully taken the Fat Hippo concept to different locations, we're certain that it's a brand that could do very well in other parts of the region and we'll be looking at what options might be available once Sunderland is fully established.

"The RMT team has been instrumental in helping us create the new venue, and there's always been someone on hand to answer any kind of question that we've thrown at them."

Paul Gainford, commercial services director at RMT Accountants, adds: "Fat Hippo has built its reputation on innovation, customer focus and quality, and the Bonded Warehouse is very well set to build on this.

"We work with regional entrepreneurs like Mike in a wide range of sectors and it's great for us to see how their businesses evolve and succeed over time."

To find out more please visit www.bondedwarehouse.co.uk

OUR TIME IS NOW!

By Paul Lancaster, Owner, Plan Digital and Founder of Newcastle Start Up Week

One of the greatest things about the North East is our strong sense of pride, community spirit and willingness to collaborate to get things done.

It's also a truly fantastic place to live with a new survey by the Royal Mail ranking Newcastle as the 4th best place to live & work in the UK (behind Edinburgh, London & Bristol) & 1st for cultural activities.

It's easy to be sceptical of such surveys & rankings but they play an important role in changing people's perceptions of our region both internally & externally. If we want to retain & attract talent, encourage successful businesses to open another base here & persuade investors to put money into our new & growing businesses, these are the type of positive messages we need to be sharing on a daily basis until the noise gets so loud they can no longer ignore it.

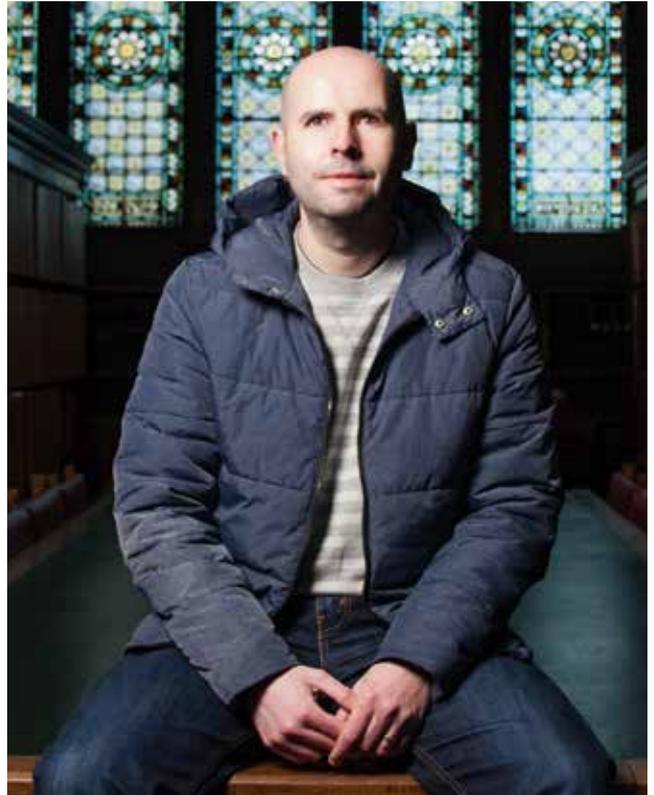
It's for this reason that our #ThisIsMINE (Made In North East) campaign was created in late 2016 as a way for local businesses & organisations to share positive stories on social media about products, services, events & places that

are unique, innovative or special in our region. Anyone in the North East is welcome to join in by including the #ThisIsMINE hashtag at the end of their Tweets & then it will be part of a collective social media campaign for our region which now has a combined reach of almost 2M people! (It's also a useful way just to see what's happening in our region so please search for it on Twitter & retweet any messages that you like).

We also have some amazing events happening in Newcastle/Gateshead over the next few months which provide the perfect opportunity for us to come together in celebration of our region & encourage those from elsewhere to see just how much we can offer:

- Newcastle International Film Festival (29 March-1 April)
- Maker Faire UK (28-29 April)
- Newcastle Startup Week (14-18 May)
- Thinking Digital (17 May)
- Great Exhibition of the North (22 June-9 September) (including 'Business Summit')

Our time is now!



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INTU SPORT NEWCASTLE'S ANNUAL FUNDRAISING DINNER

This region's amazing sporting success in 2017 was celebrated at Sport Newcastle's annual fundraising dinner.

Sir John Hall, Jonathan Edwards and Steve Harper were among the guests who turned out at the Civic Centre to acknowledge our sporting heroes.

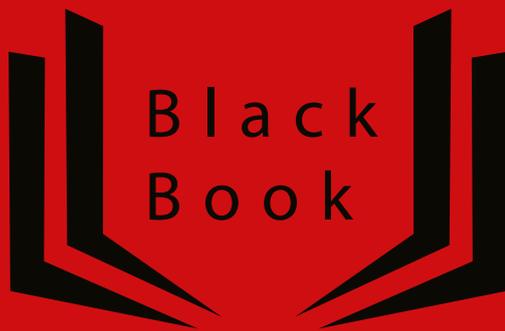
Close House Golf Club scooped the headline prize, the 'Sporting Success Award', for its successful hosting of the British Masters.

Other prize winners included swimmer Emily Large, Newcastle Golf Club, City of Newcastle Gymnastic Academy chief executive Karen Chapman, Paralympic swimmer Matt Wyle MBE, along with 12 of the region's Rising Stars of sport.





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ARE YOU LEADING OR MANAGING?

“A leader doesn't just get the message across, a leader is the message.”

Warren Bennis

Or as Mahatma Gandhi put it
“you must be the change you want to see in the world.”

As owners or senior executives you create the culture of the organisation. As leaders it is your ability to create more leaders and less followers that will support the long term sustainable growth for your business.

Start-up to Scaleup

The various stages of SME growth require different approaches and the shift from start-up to scaleup is where the change is most pronounced. In the start-up phase the motivation and inspiration for employees comes from the personal connection with the founder. From scaleup and beyond it is your leadership skills that will define your ultimate success. Replacing the directional approach with a more collaborative and coaching style will help employees become more engaged and committed to the organisational goals.

'Give a man a fish, feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and feed him for life.'

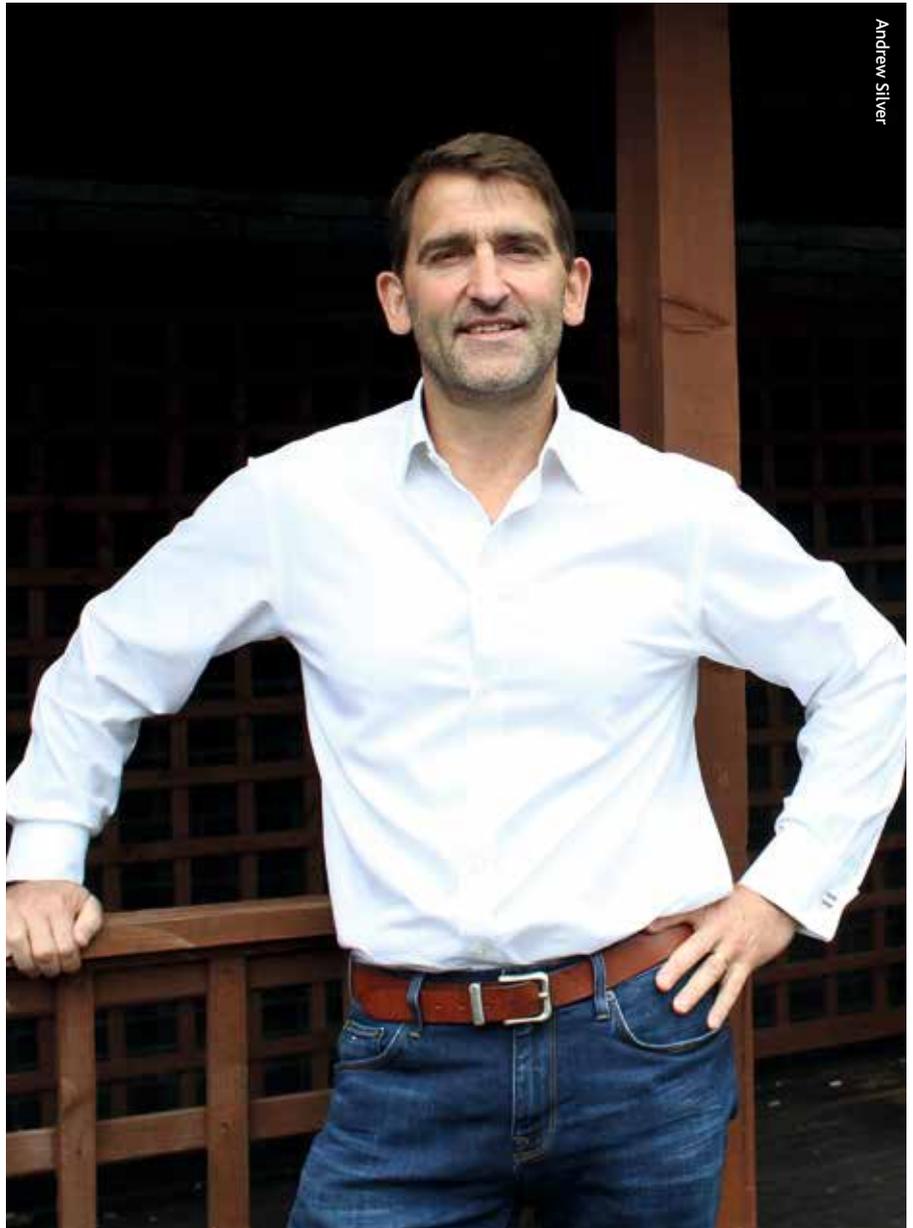
In the busy world of managing SMEs it is all too easy to take control and tell people what to do. It is often the quickest way to get things done. However, it also the best way to stifle creativity, learning and personal growth and the next time you want someone to take the lead be prepared to feed them another fish! Telling, directing and delegating will not grow the team's leadership skills. To make the shift from manager to leader there are some key areas to consider:

Listen more

Ask open ended questions. Take the time to listen to the responses. Be prepared to guide, advise and support rather than tell. Time is limited so remember it is the quality of time you spend with your employees not the quantity.

Align individual and business goals

Helping people make the connection between their own objectives and those of the business will



Andrew Silver

create an energy, direction and motivation to allow leadership to thrive.

Create feedback loops

Take the time to understand what makes your employees tick. Show them the playing field and get off the pitch. Then create the time for two-way feedback on a regular basis. How are you doing and how is it going? The structure will produce better conversations and gives your employees the space to perform while you add value elsewhere.

Influence v authority

Managers create circles of power while leaders create circles of influence. Leaders operate in an open and transparent way generating a culture of trust and respect. Their influence is far greater than their direct authority. Check how many people outside your reporting hierarchy come to you for advice. The more this happens the more likely you are perceived to be a leader.

One size doesn't fit all

Research has shown the most successful leaders have strengths in self-awareness, self-regulation,

motivation, empathy and social skills. They also adopt a range of leadership styles which they use as circumstances dictate. Remember your employees are individuals with their own unique set of preferences. What works for one might not work for another. (See 'Leadership That Gets Results' by Daniel Goleman for more details)

The Mood Elevator

Even the greatest leaders can have a bad day. Larry Senn in his book 'The Mood Elevator' highlights how mood can affect the quality of our thinking and conversations. Consider how being stuck on the basement, stressed, worried and anxious will affect your relationships with your team. Elevate your mood to improve your leadership.

Get some external support

So much is written about leadership and many consultants make a living out of its complexity. There are people who can help you as an individual and support your team in their development of leadership skills. Do something today to help create the long term sustainable growth for your business.

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





Northern Insight's Steve Russell meets Billy Johnson, co founder of TORRO Cases

THE CASE FOR SUCCESS

"Sometimes you have to give up. Sometimes knowing when to give up, when to try something else, is genius. Giving up doesn't mean stopping. Don't ever stop."

Those are the words of Phil Knight, chairman emeritus of Nike Inc, and they've certainly served as a mantra for Billy Johnson, co-founder of burgeoning North-East accessories company, TORRO Cases. Having scooped Newcomer of the Year for the Northumberland and Tyneside region in the 2017 North East Business awards, TORRO is now recognised as a major player in the smartphone and tablet accessories market. Working in partnership with Amazon, their beautifully made but affordable masculine accessories have steadily built a global customer base, and their range has recently expanded from its core of tech-focused products to include clothing, wallets and umbrellas, all of which feature the exquisite quality synonymous with the brand.

However, despite his recent business success, Billy's story has its fair share of surprises. Perhaps the most arresting of which (!) is that both he and co-founder Michael Farnsworth were serving police officers when TORRO was founded. Billy told us: "I joined the force at 18 following in my dad's footsteps and although I enjoyed my career, it was never a passion for me. I admired those officers who were truly passionate but as much as I got a buzz from the job, I was very ambitious and always wanted to do more.

That ambition surfaced in various guises before he found success with TORRO. Harboring teenage dreams of rock stardom, he played guitar in several bands, including Country and Western outfit Texas Gold, but an unfortunate comparison to Chesney Hawkes led him to realise that he may never headline Glastonbury!

He has also operated a few other businesses over the years, and whilst some of them enjoyed moderate success, none ever really took off. In typically positive fashion, Billy views these experiences as valuable lessons,

but it was the emergence of another of his business heroes which ultimately provided the inspiration for TORRO: "It sounds cliched these days but I really admired Steve Jobs. I really bought into the spirit of what Apple were doing and became an avid user of their products."

Having purchased an iPhone 5 in 2013, Billy had his eureka moment when he began searching for accessories to protect his new pride and joy, but couldn't find one commensurate with the quality of the phone itself.

"It was a business idea borne out of searching for something I couldn't find."

Drawing on his experience of manufacturing, he located an Italian tannery and pitched the idea of producing a batch of quality leather phone cases to fellow CID detective and tech-enthusiast Michael. Michael agreed to invest and once Billy had developed the distinctive TORRO branding, he commissioned £500 worth of stock. They sold out within a week via eBay, and it quickly became evident that they had discovered a winning formula. Despite their relative lack of experience, TORRO grew rapidly and they would soon face the dilemma of whether to continue as a part-time operation or go all in and leave the security of their police careers: "Looking at the numbers we were doing then (2014) I can't believe we did it! But I really wanted to give it a go and didn't see failure as an option."

Luckily, the gamble paid off and TORRO went from bedroom operation to a £2 million turnover within 4 years. Going into partnership with Amazon underpinned this expansion, not least for the access it gave them to foreign markets.

There have been some rookie moments along the way, including a comical episode where Billy found himself googling "how to

de-magnetise a magnet" after a problem arose with a batch of Samsung Galaxy cases. Suffice to say, the ensuing events (featuring a fantastical but tragically ineffective Chinese gizmo) won't be earning him any science awards, but thankfully his business sense has proved anything but flawed!

Pondering their success so far, Billy reflects: "Our USP is that we provide the highest possible quality for a sensible price. We are also proud to have built a great relationship with our customer base, who have become loyal to the brand. For example, we recently added a leather glasses case to our range and initially only manufactured a relatively small amount thinking it may be quite an innocuous product. However, we sent a mail shot to our 10,000 subscribers and we sold out within 24 hours."

The close relationship with their customers is something that Billy is keen to maintain but both he and Michael are also ambitious and look upon brands like Fossil and Cath Kidston as the sort of models they'd like to emulate in the long term: "If you think about Cath Kidston, they're proud to have lifestyle accessories as their core business. Our vision was always to recreate that for the masculine accessories market. We are currently market leaders in quality phone covers but have used that platform to introduce our customers to our wider range, which will continue to grow as we do."

The emergence of TORRO is an inspiring testament to the power of perseverance and having the courage to follow your instincts. In person, Billy is modest and naturally self-deprecating, but those qualities belie the steely determination underneath the surface. Don't be surprised if he and TORRO realise their lofty ambitions. Just don't mention Chesney Hawkes!

FROM PRIMARY TO PROSPERITY

With the North East known far and wide for its entrepreneurial spirit and commitment to innovation – spawning inventions like the railway and lightbulb, which have changed the world and the course of history – a 'can do' attitude is a staple of the region and its people.

But over the years, with the decline of many of the North East's traditional industries which have underpinned the livelihoods of generations of families, confidence and aspiration in many areas of the region has understandably been tested.

While new industries are emerging and thriving, with the region being at the very forefront of innovation in the likes of the digital and technology sectors, the ambitions of many people in the North East continue to be modest. But with efforts to address this, now reaping rewards, there are tangible signs of change.

One such effort to address the ambition of people in the North East is the Primary to Prosperity campaign, which combines a number of initiatives aimed at people, at all stages of their education and career, to promote the message that it is never too early or late to advance your ambitions through personal development.

Primary to Prosperity – which includes the hugely-successful Primary Inspiration through Enterprise (PIE) Project, the region's biggest-ever enterprise challenge for primary schools, which this year is being extended into secondary schools – also includes innovative projects such as the Cadet Apprenticeship Pathway, which offers apprenticeship opportunities to cadets, and a wellbeing and business boot camp for unemployed people, through to offering a 'professional MOT' for people already in the world of work.

Such an all-encompassing and holistic project has been created to address aspiration and skills, particularly soft skills, at all stages of life, to offer support and encouragement to people no matter their age, background or circumstances.

Ammar Mirza CBE, founder of the Primary to Prosperity campaign, understands the struggles many people and families face in striving for success when the odds seem stacked against

them. Having been brought up in Newcastle's West End and enduring hardship for much of his formative years, he then went on to become a single parent aged 22, working all hours to support his daughter. But he believes his own experience shows that anything is possible with commitment and determination.

"I was brought up in a big, interesting family – where mum and dad were teachers and eloped to England from Pakistan, but my dad was already married so my step-mum followed them. We lived in a house in Arthur's Hill and my step-mum lived next door. I had three step-sisters, two sisters and three brothers" he said.

"Life changed quite dramatically from being an affluent family with a number of thriving business interests to one day, sadly, my father going off to Saudi Arabia to teach and took my step-mum and all my sisters, leaving my mother with nothing. We had absolutely nothing, we lived in poverty; the highlight of our week was being able to have Jammy Dodgers on a weekend and at Christmas we bought the Radio Times to see what was on TV. My mum worked 18-hour days to try and provide for us all. I was just young, probably 7 or 8, but I remember it so clearly. My mum was a huge inspiration, an amazing person, I was very inspired by her and how hard she worked and even through our hardship we had a very loving upbringing"

"I remember even at that time thinking that I wanted to work, I didn't want to be poor. I got my first Saturday job aged 11 in a shop on the West Road. I didn't know what I wanted to do as a career, but whatever it was I wanted to be the best at it and make money. People often think it is a controversial thing to admit to want to make money or encourage others to do so. "It isn't all about the money" people say, but it is usually those with money that say this. We need to help all of our future generations to recognise and appreciate that money isn't a bad thing and making money provides options, addresses poverty and deprivation, and reduces social challenges."

...continues over

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 private, public and third sectors.





...continued from previous

"My mum worked so hard and went on to build a property portfolio, which she earned the money to buy as she didn't believe in mortgages, I am so proud of what she did. But I think that when you have lived in poverty at some stage of your life, that never really leaves you. Even when she was retired and should have been living very comfortably, she was so frugal and would use her free bus pass to go from one side of Newcastle to the other as she had found a shop where the bread was 4p cheaper."

After a brief stint working in London for the Civil Service, Ammar began a career with United Artists – which went on to become communications giant Telewest – and worked his way up to become responsible for IT service delivery nationally. However, such a demanding job had to be balanced against another role – that of being a single parent to his daughter Yasmin.

"It was difficult; being a single working parent is very challenging. For me, something that was very important for my daughter was getting a good education, I firmly believe good education is at the root of everything. I worked so hard to be able to educate her privately. Was it the best thing for her, I'm not sure. But as a parent, you will always do what you think is best for your children."

That belief in education has inspired much of Ammar's community work over the years, which has seen him dedicate huge amounts of time voluntarily to helping communities, charities, businesses and young people, and saw him acknowledged with a CBE in 2014 followed by numerous accolades and awards from prestigious organisations and institutes including the IOD, House of Lords, Maserati top 100 and Northern Powerhouse to name but a few. Among his many achievements within the North East community are working with local authorities to secure funding for the City Deal, representing the private sector on Local Strategic Partnerships, spending 9 years at Your Homes Newcastle leading commercial activities so that more money could be re-invested in social housing to improve local lives, and setting up Asian Business Connexions to support and promote the region's thriving community. He is also a trustee on a number of charities, a visiting Professor at Newcastle University and a passionate supporter of helping businesses start up and grow through his voluntary role as a board member at the North East LEP.

Leading by example, Ammar has dedicated a significant amount of time on personal and professional development, undertaking a Post Graduate Diploma in Leadership and Management to go on and become a Fellow of the Institute of Leadership and Management. Thereafter, even going back to study full-time in 2014, whilst managing several businesses to gain an MBA with a distinction, followed my numerous distant learn and practitioner courses. Ammar's unquenchable thirst for learning never being satisfied, helping inform the various programmes and initiatives that Ammar has gone on to develop and deliver.

Ammar's business successes has taken him across the globe working with the likes of Microsoft, Barclays, McDonalds alongside helping launch several hundred new businesses, supporting existing businesses to grow, and turning around a number of failing organisations. A qualified programme and project manager, and a leading business management consultant, Ammar has worked across the public, private and third sectors and is now concentrating his efforts on developing bi-lateral trade links with India, opening up opportunities for North East businesses looking to explore international markets.

Recognising the importance that industry plays on influencing education, in his role as Chair of Governors at Tyneview Primary School in Walker, Newcastle, Ammar saw an opportunity to positively engage both children and parents in promoting aspiration and attainment, and spearheaded the creation of the Big PIE Challenge. Now rolled out to scores of schools across the whole North East region, it has seen thousands of children being engaged in a business and enterprise challenge which sees them

rewarded with a vocational qualification at the end of it.

"The Big PIE Challenge has been so successful and businesses have really got on board with it. It was important to me that we didn't go after backing from the likes of Richard Branson or Alan Sugar, we wanted local North East businesses, names that kids and their parents had seen and would recognise. And the North East business community has been brilliant, we have so many backers, a wonderful trust board, and we are continuing to grow. We have now just gone into secondary schools, which gives the opportunity to build on prior achievements. So if a child gets an entry level qualification in primary school, they can then aim for Level One in secondary school," he said.

"And with PIE, it is very much about engaging with the parents too, helping them to understand the benefit of education and developing life skills and business skills from a very early age. We had a big awards ceremony where the kids were presented certificates by Sir John Hall, and through achieving their qualification aged 9, 10 or 11, many of those kids had become better qualified than their parents. To open their eyes to achievement and reward at such an early age is very valuable."

Equally, the Cadet Apprenticeship Pathway is another means of engaging young people at crucial stages of their development, by showcasing the benefits of being a cadet and in securing an apprenticeship.

"Our armed forces are amazing and provide so many opportunities to young people, extra curricular activities in particular. Only around 5-10 percent of cadets actually go on to join the armed forces, so the project isn't really about a career in the forces, it's about the life skills it can teach you, in going on to do whatever you want to do," said Ammar.

"And from the point of view of a business, which we put these young people in front of as part of the Cadet Apprenticeship Pathway, they are seeing a work-ready young person who might well be right for their organisation. The Apprentice Levy introduced by the government has made apprenticeships something that many businesses are now getting involved with, so there are benefits all round to this project."

With the continued growth of Primary to Prosperity that incorporates peer tutoring, using culture and arts including the Newcastle Film Festival to engage with young people, mentoring for individuals looking to grow their businesses and underpinned by the particular success of the PIE Project, Ammar is committed to championing aspiration in the North East.

"We need to encourage people to be the best they can be and provide them with, or show them where, to find the help and support to be able to do that. We are providing support at all stages of life, particularly at the very early stages, in a holistic fashion – I want to show it is never too late and that nothing is a barrier," he said.

"Whilst I am now very happily married with an amazingly supportive wife and a five year old son, I have come from a very challenging background encountering various trials and tribulations. Probably because of these experiences, I now try to be generous with my time and my money. I spend a lot of my time, two or three days every week, helping and supporting good causes or trying to benefit the North East, which I absolutely love. My projects are financed by funding that I secure or else I pay for myself, so there is no cost to the people who use them. I am absolutely committed to this and to helping the North East and the people who live here to realise their talents and potential and to help them succeed."

"At a time when the world is becoming more divisive, it is critical that we all work together to collectively, collaboratively and cohesively support everyone within our community, whether it is volunteering, offering opportunities to those less fortunate, or simply supporting existing activities, we have a moral and ethical responsibility to champion our North East and all that is great within it"

FROM PRIMARY...

CAP seeks to align 'work ready' cadets aged 16-18 with employers, supportive of their continued progression as a cadet and at 18 years old as either an Adult Volunteer or Reservist, whilst satisfying an employers need for a reliable, respectful and trustworthy young employee.

The initiative provides an honest brokering service to join up young people to employers, including offering Degree Level Apprenticeships.



PRIMARY



PIE introduces the world of work and local businesses to young people. Connects businesses to education, provides volunteering opportunities for parents, and upskills teachers in enterprise. Linked to various initiatives including Enterprise Advisors, Gatsby Benchmarks, Engineering and Coding, PIE helps realise ambitions and raises aspirations to address industry skills shortages.

PEERZ Academy is a secure online learning platform that allows verified mentors to deliver lesson content created by expert teachers for GCSE and A'Level Students. PEERZ provide an effective and affordable alternative to costly private tuition; pairing the latest online technology with high impact educational strategies.



Cadet Apprenticeship Pathways (CAP)

Working with those most distant from the labour market, including long-term unemployed, the two-week boot camp delivered by Asian Business Connexions (ABC) holistically addresses barriers to employment including improving self-confidence, problem solving, team working, resilience, alongside professional skills to enter the world of work, consider training or even self-employment. The programme is delivered by employers and offers volunteering and work experience opportunities.

The programme, developed and delivered by employers, offers free professional support to individuals to enhance personal profiles and job prospects.

A five day mini-MBA is offered, delivered by academics and professionals providing theoretical and practical enterprise advice.



The Big Learn is a fully funded campaign that provides an opportunity for businesses to support lifelong learning by accessing accredited industry recognised qualifications.

Using a recognised distant learn model which ensures participants learn at a pace and time to suit them.



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**FEDERATION OF
ASIAN BUSINESS
INDIA/NORTHERN
POWERHOUSE LAUNCH**

On Wednesday 21st March the Federation of Asian Business (FAB) launched the India and Northern Powerhouse report in the House of Commons.

Well established North East based Asian Business Connexions (ABC) have joined forces with North West and Yorkshire Asian Business Association's to create a pan-northern representative body. Over the last 16 months FAB has organised bi-lateral trade visits with India and continues to develop long-term action orientated relationships resulting in increased business between the two nations.

Hexham MP Guy Opperman supported the event alongside various other MPs, dignitaries and enterprise agencies from the UK and India.



ONE VISION. ONE MISSION



OUR VISION

"SME CofE aims to be the physical default and de facto Small to Medium Enterprise (SME) Support Hub for the Northern Power House. A truly collaborative and ethical approach that will provide a one stop high-quality centre for ALL support needs, helping SMEs to start, scale and sustain."

OUR MISSION

"To bring together credible enterprise support and service delivery partners with the single goal of providing the right support, at the right time, for the right price for all SMEs to grow."

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Our Partners Include





NEWCASTLE SALON SHORTLISTED FOR NATIONAL AWARD

Heaton road-based hair and beauty salon Humphrey and Wilson has been shortlisted in the English Hair and Beauty Awards for the Men's Stylist of the Year category, following business advice from accountancy firm Robson Laidler.

In the past two years, the salon has successfully followed its ambitious growth strategy by expanding to bigger premises and taking on two new members of staff. The company aims to continue success by appointing two more junior stylists and moving to even bigger premises with beauty rooms.

The salon has also streamlined its systems using Xero software, following advice from Robson Laidler for all billing and account information.

Co-owner Steph Wilson said: "Introducing Xero software into our salon was without a doubt the best business decision we have ever made. We no longer have to think about our accounts each month as Xero takes this all off our hands."

Humphrey and Wilson also recently gained financial support from The Gateshead Business Centre Enterprise fund, which has allowed the team to expand its product lines into top brands such as L'Oréal and Vita Liberata.

HAINES WATTS EXPANDS WITH TWO TRAINEE APPOINTMENTS

National accountancy firm Haines Watts has appointed two new trainee chartered accountants to join its growing North East team in its Newcastle and Darlington offices.

Fawziyah Ayub and Leo Davey have recently joined the firm and will be working with a range of regional SMEs and not-for-profit organisations.

Fawziyah is a graduate from Durham University with a First-Class Honours degree in Accounting and Finance. Whilst at university, she completed a 3-month internship in London. Her role will involve working with clients on a range of audit assignments and preparing

year end accounts.

Leo has an honours degree and a Graduate Diploma in Finance Business and Accounting from Newcastle University. He is also working towards his ACA qualification.

Donna Bulmer, Managing Partner of Haines Watts, said: "We're thrilled to welcome both Fawziyah and Leo to the team. We are looking forward to tapping into their enthusiasm and putting their fresh ideas into practice."

Haines Watts is a national firm with local offices. They offer a variety of services including tax planning, strategic advice and corporate finance.



CAVU DELIVERS FASTFLOW DEAL WITH LLOYDS AND YORKSHIRE BANKS

Specialist North East finance house Cavu Corporate Finance has recently partnered with two of the region's leading banks to secure a major acquisition for fast-growing Washington firm Fastflow.

Utilities and property services specialist Fastflow acquired Spennymoor affordable housing developer Partner Group for an undisclosed sum.

Cavu Corporate Finance worked with Yorkshire Bank and Lloyds Bank to secure the deal for Fastflow. Shawn Bone, Managing Director of Cavu Corporate Finance, said: "We are delighted to have acted for Fastflow in this key acquisition. Acquisitions are a core part of the Fastflow strategy and Partner

Group is an excellent addition to the business. We look forward to working with Fastflow on future acquisitions."

Fastflow has acquired 100% of the share capital of the Partner Group and will put in place an investment and development strategy to create more jobs and develop sustainable housing communities.

Neil Armstrong, Fastflow Group Chief Executive Officer, said: "We are delighted with the high-quality service provided by Shawn and the team at Cavu Corporate Finance and the support of Yorkshire and Lloyds Banks."

FACE TO FACE
OR IN THE CLOUD



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CASCADING MORE CASH INTO CHARITIES

A portal designed to enhance returns on savings is now proving to be beneficial to a number of charities across the UK.

Cascade Cash Management is an independent and transparent service created to generate enhanced cash returns and increased protection on deposits through professional cash management.

The Cascade team can manage funds on behalf of clients or depositors can use the portal with their advisor to manage their own savings. Partners including IFA's, solicitors, attorneys, accountants and many more can also self-brand the product for presentation to their own clients.

And now a number of charities are also feeling the benefit, with increased annual returns on cash in the bank.

Such clients have earned significantly greater returns through the Cascade service. As an example, a mental health charity earned an additional £20,800 per year net of all fees on their £2m cash when compared with what they had been earning

sat in their current account.

Managing director Dr. Emma Black said: "It is very gratifying to have proved that the corporate financial model we have developed is adaptable and flexible for charities too.

"As a team we have invested a lot of time and resource in getting the portal right, and now to see it benefit exceptionally worthy causes as well as companies and individuals is very exciting.

"It doesn't matter what kind of charity, social enterprise or CIC the organisation is – all can benefit from Cascade. Our current portfolio is very diverse, all that matters is that there is cash in the bank that should be performing better."

The online portal is the only one of its kind in the UK allowing independent and unbiased cash solutions meaning that clients don't have to choose only one bank. With the online portal and Cascade's client support team, all banks are accessed quickly

and easily, on a daily basis. To date the team have administered over £600million for clients, helping them earn significantly more on their hard earned cash.

Dr. Emma concluded: "Many charities hold reserves in the bank. It's comforting to know they have that security so that if something goes wrong with funding short term, that they have the means to keep delivering their all important service. However, if it is just sat in the bank it is missing a huge opportunity.

"By moving those reserves to Cascade they benefit from the best interest rates, but it needn't be tied in as it would be if used for say an investment while also with cash, the funds are less exposed to risk in comparison. The charity can manage the funds themselves or for a small admin fee, we can help. It's a win-win all round for any social enterprise, CIC or charity!"

More information is available at www.cascade.co.uk



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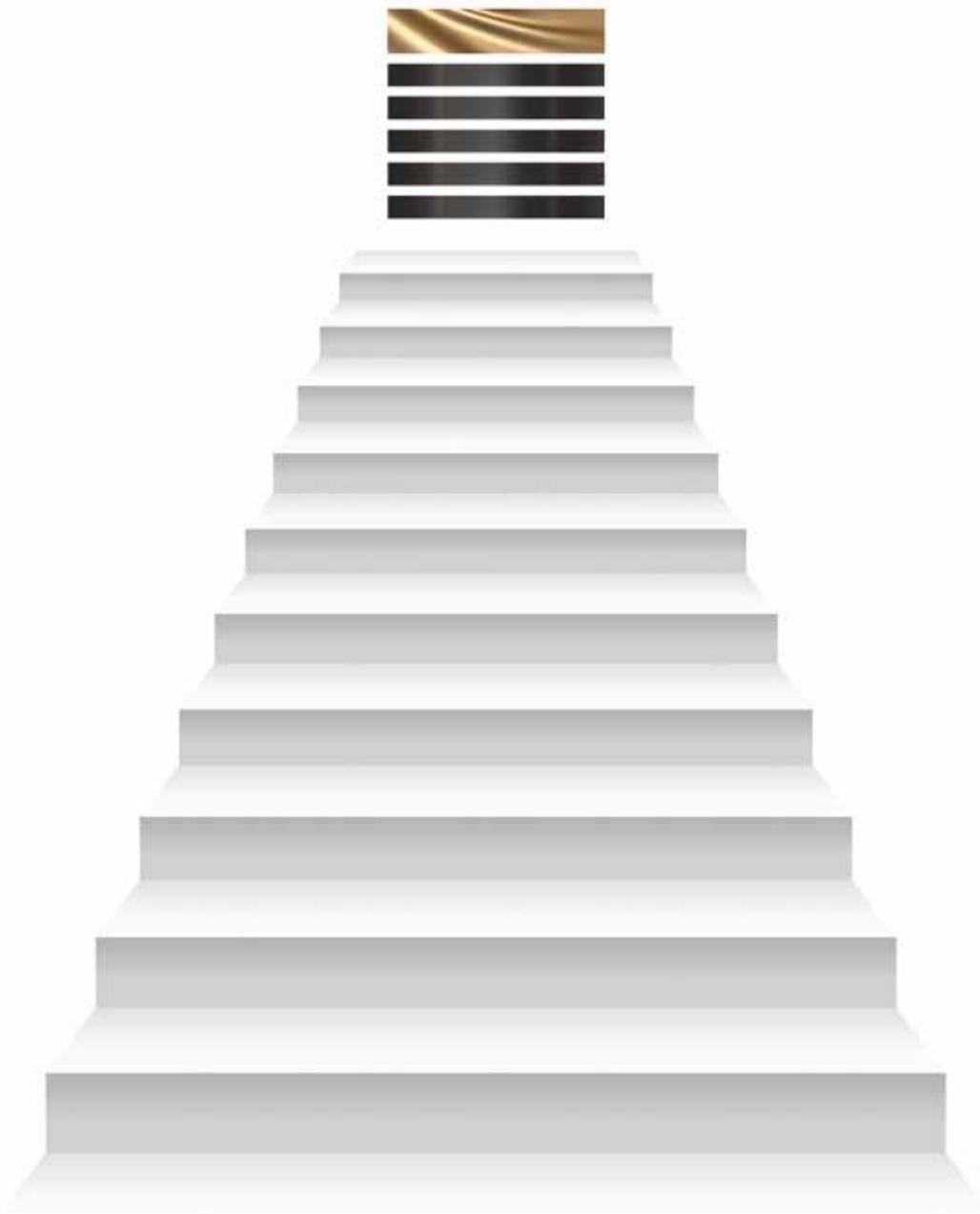
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COMFORTABLY ON TOP OF THINGS

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES AT THE READY AT COMMERCE HOUSE

An iconic Teesside building, which has spent the last year undergoing an impressive £1.2million renovation to create a stunning business community, is now complete and open.

Commerce House in Middlesbrough has had life breathed back into its Grade II Listed structure by Commerce Chambers Limited.

A whole host of fully furnished and serviced office space is available for immediate use, ideal for small one or two-man businesses with up to 14 desk rooms.

There is also an unbelievably chic business lounge, where old meets news creating a relaxing yet professional environment. Partner that with an impressive boardroom and reception, along with top class kitchen and bathroom facilities and why would you want to work anywhere else?

The building, which was originally built in 1872, is in the heart of the city's soon to be thriving commercial district TS1 and is right next to the train station, a stone's throw from the A66.

Every office comes complete with access to all the high-class facilities and high-speed broadband included. There are also a number of offers available on a first come, first served basis.

The luxury setting boasts a contemporary feel with traditional touches, all finished to the highest of



standards. The 43 square meter boardroom, The Chairman's Room, is already proving popular and is available for use by tenants or to hire out, complete with high spec technology and total luxury, ideal for presentations, brainstorming or entertaining.

There business community is starting to build nicely with a number of tenants now in place in their offices, and a number of virtual office customers already benefitting from having a TS1 postcode.

Christine Huntington, facilities manager at the

building, which was purchased from the North East Chamber of Commerce, said: "The transformation is unbelievable. There is real luxury on offer here, which creates the right impression for visiting clients. Our range of space which has just become available won't be around for long so interested parties will have to reserve their space quickly!

"The hot desk facilities and virtual office service are both in demand already too. There are also plans underway to open a coffee shop soon meaning Commerce House really will be a one stop business shop!"

Information and appointments can be made by calling Christine on 01642 917116. Images are available to view on Facebook @CommerceHouse1872 or at www.commerce-house.co.uk

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YOU CAN RECEIVE SUPPORT WHEN ADAPTING TO NEW MARKET CONDITIONS



Joanne Warren

Brexit, trade and tariffs have become a major topic of conversation recently, with the United States looking to change their trading relationship with the rest of the world. Donald Trump sees steel as a major bargaining tool as he looks to put America first, in the words of his election campaign.

This is the start of a series of negotiations that will dictate the way that the UK lives and trades with the rest of the world in the wake of Brexit. And it isn't just physical goods that are affected by this. Trading services can also be influenced by tariffs and trade deals.

And this can have a large effect on the North East as companies need to get used to a new set of rules and regulations – perhaps even multiple sets based on the markets they operate in. The work that a business has to undertake in order to make sure their products or services are appropriate culturally and in a regulatory sense can take up a lot of time and effort. But it is worth it in the end to be able to open up new markets, expand the customer base and access new income streams. Being a business that can look forward is vitally important. Whether you want to trade globally, or just in the local area, there are always considerations such as –

- Developing new products
- Improving the products, you already have
- Coming up with more efficient processes
- Developing fresh ideas

This is the lifeblood of a business, as the ever-changing marketplace dictates what you should provide.

Funding these changes

Getting the money in place to carry out these changes is a necessary part of business. Standing still means that you are falling behind. When external forces such as tariffs, trade deals and Brexit bring unforeseen challenges you can either give up or adapt to suit.

I know which one the businesses of the North East choose. We are a region of inventive and innovative people who look to provide solutions to the challenges we are faced with. If regulations dictate a change in process or product, then we make sure it happens. It's part of business life.

And there is one incentive that is designed perfectly to help a business deal with these specific challenges. The project described above are all examples of research and development projects. You may not think that what you are carrying it is actually what the business world classes as R&D, but quite often it is.

Taking a commercial risk in order to provide a better product or service is a good definition of R&D. If you are trying to get better at what you do, then the government wants to reward you for the risk you take with this. That's where R&D tax credits come in.

An effective way to build a business

And we work with many businesses that use R&D tax as part of their business planning. Knowing that they have a valid claim before they even spend the cash is a comforting way to deal with the rigours of business and grow. We help business owners to understand R&D tax and see their claims for all they are worth.

We have a team of people that are experts in delivering R&D tax success for businesses in the North East and beyond. We understand the process, having represented our clients for a number of years in submitting claims to HMRC. HMRC's R&D Units are extremely helpful and we answer any queries they may have to ensure the claim goes smoothly. This means we have a 100% success rate.

In certain areas of business, you don't have the time to become an expert. You leave your marketing in the hands of an expert, for example, because learning about effective marketing and then going about delivering it takes up top much of your valuable time.

That's why we are here to help with R&D tax claims. We do all the legwork and allow you to get on with the important part of delighting your customers. We deal with the tax man on your behalf and answer any questions they have. I'm sure you don't like dealing with the HMRC, let us take the strain!

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THE SOFTER SIDE OF PRIVATE EQUITY



Shawn Bone

Private equity investment is primarily associated with a large injection. However, this ignores the many softer benefits investees often experience following an investment.

One of the main benefits of securing investment is what a private equity investor can bring to the Board table. As part of the investment process investor and investee will search the market to find an appropriate Chairperson to aid the company's ongoing growth and bring additional skills to the Board. The incoming Chairperson will bring a skill set tailored to the growth plans of the company, whether that is a black book of industry contacts, experience of growing through acquisition or a particular expertise of overseas expansion.

The allure of private equity support will also help attract senior industry professionals to other key roles in the organisation. The increased profile that comes from securing investment frequently results in an increase in incoming job applications – a key softer benefit in sectors where an industry-wide skill shortage is often prohibiting organic growth.

An investment will be followed by significant positive media coverage, resulting in a significantly heightened profile. Private equity funds also increasingly focus on

the benefits of intra-portfolio trading and peer networking of Board members – with portfolios of dozens of high-growth companies the potential for friendly customer introductions can be significant.

Private equity investors are emphasizing these and other softer benefits that come with investment, and a number of funds have established internal operational teams to act as a freely available resource for portfolio companies – giving investees access to deep expertise in marketing, operational improvement, digital, sales, technology, finance and a number of other key functions.

The importance and impact of the softer benefits of private equity investment can be significant both on the growth trajectory and the structural soundness of a company, and should be given thorough consideration when choosing a financial partner. A private equity investor will typically invest for 3 – 5 years so relationship and these softer benefits should be key when choosing a financial investor.

Cavu's deep knowledge of the private equity markets in the UK means that we will always consider the fit between investor and investee – not just the size of the wallet – when introducing investors to a potential opportunity.

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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...

RICHARD BLACKETT

Co-founder and director of a highly successful independent wealth management business, Blackett Walker and sister company BW Medical Accountants a specialist medical accountancy firm.

Did you always envisage a career in the industry?

I didn't like the unregulated and over target driven environment of the late 1980s but definitely did enjoy being able to offer quality advice to people helping them to make crucial decisions with their financial affairs.

What is your favourite aspect of the job?

People ask your advice to help them make informed decisions how best to invest or protect their personal wealth. It is a privilege to be in that position. If I get it wrong and then they have made a bad decision it would affect them and their families for years to come.

What has been your career defining moment?

Setting up an independent business you stand and fall on your own decisions, the least I can do given I expect the people I advise to take my advice.

How do you measure success?

In life it is how happy and content you and the ones you love are. In business it is how respected you are by those you advise and those you work with.

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

We founded the business on principles that today are a common practice and that have been more universally applied since the Government overhauled the Financial Services Sector. The Retail Distribution Review in 2012 has brought a significant and essential step to increase standards and provide greater transparency and clarity on the advice that has been given.

Whilst I do believe there are many challenges to come the sector is now well positioned. People complain that there is too much red tape but if that bureaucracy is ensuring that things are done correctly then it is necessary and red tape is there for a good reason, to maintain standards. We've been applying these principles for many years and it is one of the reasons we've remained firmly independent in the marketplace where this is becoming a rarity.

How has your skill set developed accordingly?

When you are starting out you are impatient to get ahead but as you get older you learn to listen more before you act. I think I've realised I have good people skills and that you should always keep your ear to the ground because acting on good information and learning to trust your instincts are key ingredients for success.

Are you a risk taker by nature or more conservative?

There is nothing wrong with using your gut and taking a risk sometimes when making a decision; but I always try to make the odds work in my favour with the use of excellent research and good old fashioned hard work.

To what would you attribute your success?

I've learned that over the years I have good instincts in business, so it's been a process of honing them and listening to them.

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

My biggest weakness is I can be easily bored at things that I don't see as relevant. Having a great team around you is a wonderful way to mitigate any weakness.

How do you remain motivated?

I make sure I have a life outside of work. My sporting passion is rugby and I have an interest in two rugby clubs namely Morpeth and Newcastle Falcons.

I coach every Sunday, and Blackett Walker has a corporate box at the Falcons. It gives me an opportunity to relax and see first class rugby but also spot talented rugby players from the local area developing and one day, I believe, becoming part of the Falcons set up.

Would you prefer to be liked or respected?

Definitely respected, but I hope that the people that count also like me.

I'll retire when?

When I feel I've got nothing more to contribute and hopefully on my terms.



RYECROFT GLENTON EVOLVES FOR THE DIGITAL ERA DELIVERING CLEAR ADVICE AND CREATIVE THINKING



The Newcastle-based firm, Rycroft Glenton (RG), is building upon its growing expertise in digital accountancy, corporate finance and strategic business services to implement the latest technology-based working practices, which enable it to deliver the highest quality advice to clients.

As part of its strategy to become the leading North East-based independent advisory firm, the business has also evolved its brand to reflect its forward-thinking approach.

Peter Glenton, partner at RG, explains, "Throughout our long history, clients have valued our clear advice and willingness to approach problems in imaginative ways.

"Since the firm was founded more than 100 years ago, RG has always adapted successfully to meet the changing times and now is no different."

"Digital technology is playing an increasingly central role in all our lives. We are combining the benefits of the latest digital developments with the skills, expertise and talent of our people to ensure we can continue to provide a collaborative, agile and conscientious service."

RG delivers joined-up advice across six specialist services:

- **Corporate Finance** – creating a reputation for providing exceptional, opinion-driven, advice that maximises business value, RG's award-winning corporate finance division has a refreshingly different approach.
- **Business Tax** – delivering straightforward answers to complicated questions through the provision of very effective, tax efficient, solutions.
- **Personal Tax** – creating significant tax savings through a collaborative approach that combines careful planning with easily understood advice.
- **Accounts and Outsourced Services** – embracing the latest digital accounting technology to provide an extremely responsive service, which delivers essential financial information for businesses in real time.
- **Audit and Assurance** – helping business

owners minimise risk and run more robust enterprises by providing valuable advice with tangible benefits.

- **Wealth Management** – approaching wealth management with a conservative mindset, based on many years' experience of seeking long term gains.

Peter Glenton added: "With a team of long-standing, experienced and respected partners and directors together with talented, driven and creative younger colleagues, RG is ideally placed to manage our clients' financial requirements, help them clarify their strategic plans and ensure they can build valuable businesses over the longer term.

"This is an exciting time for RG. We look forward to continuing to work with our established client base as well as welcoming new clients to the firm."

TAKING A NEW PRODUCT FROM YOUR MORTGAGE LENDER VERSUS A RE-MORTGAGE ELSEWHERE



Paul Hardingham, Director of Innovate Mortgages and Loans

Virtually all new mortgages have either a fixed rate or a discounted variable (or tracker) rate for an initial period. After this period ends the mortgage interest rate and corresponding monthly payments will usually default to the lenders standard variable rate or SVR.

Almost without exception this SVR will be uncompetitive against the wider mortgage market, so a pro-active review of options by you the borrower is needed.

So, what are the options?

Do nothing and continue to pay the SVR - this is rarely the best option, but can be advantageous if a change of circumstances such as a house move is imminent or you have had a job change or credit problems which could restrict options. However, in all cases a professional review should be carried out so that an informed choice can be taken.

Take out a new product offered by the existing lender - when I say "offered" this will usually be a letter some months before the old rate is due to end and nothing will happen automatically as there has to be some action from you to switch. If staying with the existing lender either on their SVR

or a new "deal" is the right choice, your adviser will be able to confirm this.

Shop around for the most appropriate mortgage product to suit your needs now and moving forwards - the mortgage market has become increasingly complex, so the slight downside to this option is that there is more work involved, although the level of effort can be reduced dramatically by involving an independent mortgage adviser. Most good things in life do take some additional effort and for your largest ever financial commitment, surely a couple of hours of your time working with an expert is worth the effort given the possible costs of a wrong decision? A good mortgage adviser will look at options 1, 2 and 3 for you before deciding upon the best course of action.

At present there is a huge amount of inertia in the mortgage market, with some people thinking that just because their monthly payments haven't increased a great deal for many years they are in a good position. However, we are almost certainly entering a period of rising interest rates so whilst there are still some amazing products around at present, why wouldn't you take a no obligation review to see if you really are on a good deal?

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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FIVE MINUTES WITH...

PETE WATSON, CEO OF ATLAS CLOUD



Pete Watson

Almost two years on from the £1.5m investment Atlas Cloud secured from North East and London investors, Tait Walker asked CEO Pete Watson how the future is looking for the business

Tell us a little about Atlas Cloud

We provide a range of Managed Services such as Hosted Desktops and cloud-based services, mainly with SME businesses. We are passionate about letting business owners focus on building their business and strategy without being distracted and concerned about IT; they can leave it to us and focus on growth.

All of our services are scalable and flexible. Our agile business model and technical expertise enable us to deliver quickly as to their business and industry demands. We pride ourselves on high quality support, services, and being innovative with new solutions. Therefore, our customers can take advantage of new technology that drives productivity, security and compliance around areas such as GDPR without using a huge amount of budget.

How do you see the future for your business? Where will the next 5 years take you?

Most of our customers are North East based, but we do work in other parts of the UK too, including the South East, Yorkshire and the North West. We have grown by over 100% in the last 12 months and we're hoping to continue on this path and expand our expertise. We will be focusing on our core business solutions and our partnerships, with the likes of Microsoft, Citrix and Sage as we are the cloud partner for the UK and Ireland.

What would be your top tip for someone setting up their own business?

My advice would be specifically to owners of fast

growing companies who are looking to raise finance. I'd say 'give yourself more time to execute'. Having been in the position of raising finance, I would recommend giving yourself 18+ months runway to actually take the cash in to your business and execute your plans. It's difficult trying to grow the business if you're constantly raising money. Things always take longer than your best guess.

What do you think are the biggest challenges for fast growing businesses?

It's definitely people and culture. Getting the right people at the outset is a challenge for all businesses, but keeping those people as you grow (especially if it's fast paced growth) has to be the top priority. You want people that you have good working chemistry with. People are the heartbeat of the organisation. You need to maintain the 'small business, innovative culture' that they joined you for, even as your business scales up and changes. You want to be the employer of choice, in fact, you have to be the employer of choice to get the right people in your business.

It's easier said than done. For us, we try not to be a 'stereotypical IT firm'. We like to do things differently. We give our team members the scope to be creative and entrepreneurial, to make sure they always know how they fit in the business, how valued they are and how they can help the business succeed and also meet their own ambitions. We offer unlimited holidays, regular incentives and our team can wear whatever they want to work. We find this builds

great teamwork and people work as many hours as it takes to get the job done when things are a little more flexible. They don't even need to come in to the office if they don't have to, but the work is always done and our team are always finding new and better ways to work together.

I guess my last bit of advice would be to harness the talent and energy of all generations. I think there is a fair bit of stigma around the flexible working preference of millennials. I find that their enthusiasm and talent is great for business, especially one like ours where they already understand what we do and why it's important to business growth. Be a little flexible and be the employer they choose to grow with.

If you could be anything or could have had any job – what would it be?

I've always wanted to build a business, be an entrepreneur and do something different. Even when I was at school, from around the age of 8. I used to get my mum to buy me toys at the Quayside market and then I'd sell them at school. 100% profit! This was maybe not quite business reality, but it was a fun start.

I love the industry I work in. Cloud IT services are growing at a rate of over 20% a year and the managed service market is forecast to grow by 26%. It's a great environment to stay creative and innovative, which is what I enjoy.

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SHOULD YOU BE CONSIDERING ALTERNATIVE FINANCE OPTIONS FOR YOUR BUSINESS?

Allan Kelly, an advisory partner in RSM specialising in debt raising and restructuring, offers a background to the current debt finance market and pointers for businesses to consider when looking for new lending.



Allan Kelly

2018 has already seen many high-profile company failures including Carillion, Toys 'R' Us and Maplin. Whilst the problems associated with these companies have been well publicised, all three have referenced their inability to secure finance as part of their demise.

Demand from businesses for borrowing money remains high but raising any form of finance can be challenging for all but the strongest of businesses.

Historically the first port of call for a business looking to raise or refinance debt was their high street bank. Whilst the high street banks are open for business and continue to lend a substantial amount to businesses, a business may not necessarily fit a bank's lending criteria nor find the bank's product offering meets their requirements.

On the back of this, the political will to increase competition in the market (particularly for SMEs), "disruptors" looking to use technology to challenge traditional lending, together with different classes of investors ranging from retail (individuals) to institutions looking to increase the return on their investments, have caused the UK debt finance market to rapidly evolve over the last 10 years.

Businesses now have a much wider choice of financing partners across an ever-expanding range of funding products to fill the ever-increasing requirements of businesses.

These alternative finance (AltFi) providers include challenger banks; peer 2 peer/crowd funders; direct lenders such as private equity debt funds or insurers; and asset based lenders. They can lend amounts ranging from £25,000 to £10m+ thereby covering a wide spectrum of business requirements.

However, the AltFi lenders tend to focus on niche lending areas such as property (including Durham based Atom Bank), secured loans, invoice finance, stock finance or unsecured cash flow loans but will typically be at a higher borrowing cost due to their

own cost of capital being higher than banks. This may mean that more than one lender is required to fulfil a business's requirements.

With a number of finance options available, how should management ensure that they position their business to obtain the right lending partner and best possible deal?

Engage Experienced Advisers

Given the number of lenders and products available, it is vital for management to use experienced debt specialists to source and structure the lend.

At RSM, our national and international presence gives us a very wide-ranging view of what is available across the UK and trends globally. We frequently see incorrect funding structures, inappropriate for the current or future needs of a business, being applied, resulting in pressures on management and increasing the longer term business cost.

Allow sufficient time to raise the debt

The time taken to raise the debt is often underestimated by management and advisers. We are finding that raising finance is currently taking more time than we have historically experienced.

Requiring funding within a short timescale restricts the options available with both lenders and products.

Ideally, a business should start to engage with potential lenders a year or more in advance of financing to build a relationship and allow the lender to have a greater understanding of the business and make the credit process easier. It will also provide opportunities to discuss lending structures so these can be factored into forecasts and tailored before submitting a formal proposition.

Plan ahead

Different types of lenders have different information priorities and requirements to satisfy the credit team signing off a lend. A one fits all plan may not necessarily be appropriate, raising more questions and delaying the process, particularly, if different types of lend are being sought from multiple lenders.

A plan should address lender requirements from discussions, proposed structures, and most importantly how the debt will be repaid.

Consider the longer-term cost

Debt has been cheap over the last 10 years driven by the low base rates which has become the norm for businesses.

The cost of debt will depend on areas including credit rating of business, security profile, forecast cash flow performance and debt structure.

Management often focus on the cost of debt but should realise that the cheapest debt is not always the best fit and can be more expensive in the longer term.

Communicate regularly with your lender

Once you're with your new lender, maintain a regular dialogue sharing good and bad news. What lenders do not like is surprises, especially nasty ones!



For more advice or information on alternative finance lending, please contact Allan Kelly on 0191 255 7000 or email allan.kelly@rsmuk.com or your usual RSM contact.

THIS TIME NEXT YEAR

It's lunch time and as I sit here with my Cup-a-Soup wishing I had gone for a walk in the park I'm planning what we need to do for the new tax year. There's the increases to Minimum wage, increases to Auto Enrolment Pension contributions, increases to personal allowances, a reduction to the 0% tax band on dividends, further restrictions on interest loans for buy to let properties and the not too distant prospect of Making Tax Digital for VAT just for starters. It all needs planning. But do you know how these changes will affect your business?

We all know the phrase 'this time next year, Rodney, we'll be millionaires' and eventually it came true, more by good luck than by good management. But can you afford to run your business hoping that something valuable will appear and change your fortunes. Small business owners have enough to do just running the business, I'm sure most of you didn't set up your business for the fun of doing the paperwork! But the paperwork can give you some valuable insights.

Making Tax Digital for VAT becomes mandatory for VAT registered businesses trading above the VAT registration limit with effect from 1 April 2019. VAT returns will need to be filed using digital software and using that software gives businesses a huge opportunity to look at

their business in more detail without spending too much time trawling through paperwork.

Most accounting software will process transactions from a photograph on your phone, either directly or through an app, which will save time on laboriously entering details. Bank feeds give you a direct download from your bank account and transactions only need to be allocated. It's that 'allocation' that makes the difference. If your software is correctly set up you can get the information you need at the press of a button or two. Sales don't have to be just sales, they can be by product, by area, by sales rep, you set the demographic and the software does the rest. What better way to work out what is going to make you a millionaire. So when there are changes that's the information that will help with all of this planning.

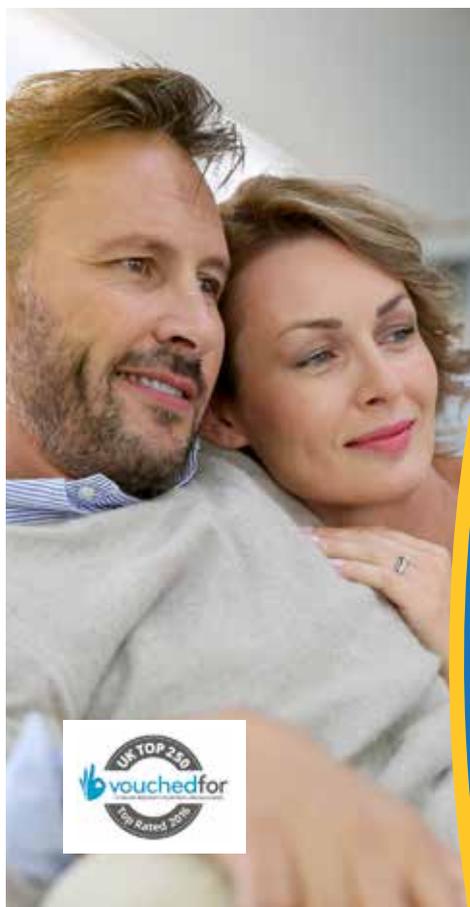
HMRC have also announced the start of a pilot scheme for Making Tax Digital for Business – the famous 'end of the tax return' to be replaced by quarterly digital reporting. It will not become mandatory until at least 2020 but there's no reason not to plan ahead and use the digital technology to help your business now.

Well, that's the planning done, now have I got time to nip out and feed the ducks...



Cyd Smith

Our clients have access to free digital software and our expertise in setting it up to give you the information you need. For more details contact CS Accounting info@csaccounting.co.uk or 0191 4879870



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YOUR EYE ON THE REGION...

DOUGLAS MONTGOMERIE

Brewin Dolphin

Did you grow up in the North East or did you decide to relocate here in later life?

No! Whilst I was born in Glasgow I was brought up in Ilkley, Yorkshire. So I'm a Leeds Utd fan for my sins. After spells with Barclays in London and Edinburgh moved to Newcastle due to a new private banking opportunity. I suppose after 20 years here I'm an honorary Geordie!

What do you think it means to be a businessperson in the North East of England?

Being committed to doing your bit to drive the region forward - and being proud of the region's successes and future opportunities when travelling outside the area.

What is your favourite aspect of life in the North East?

The ability to live just north of the city, in Gosforth, and yet feel as though you are living in the country and close to the coast. There's very few places you get that opportunity when you're only 3 miles from the city's attractions.

Do you have a favourite hotspot for a business meeting?

Not really, although in my new role

at Brewin Dolphin I can see the Central Bean coffee house (in the same building as us) being frequented regularly!

Where do you like to eat out in the region?

Afraid I must admit to being partial to a curry, so the Days of the Raj on the Great North Road relieves me of a few pounds weekly. We also enjoy Adrianos on Gosforth high street - convenient certainly, and good service.

Where do you like to unwind within the North East?

Walks along the coast with our dog, and on the Northumberland golf course (when I'm playing well!)

Are the people really friendlier?

Yes certainly. There is a genuine earthiness to the people here, and they are rightly proud of their region's history and, generally, optimistic for the future.

What do you think is the best view in the North East?

On a weekend it would be looking at my golf ball nestling beside the 18th hole - in the required number!

Seriously though, looking back from

the Tyne Bridge as the Great North Run commences, with the Red Arrows doing their flypast, is always impressive ...when the weather is decent!

Do you think living and working in the North East offers the same opportunities as elsewhere in the UK?

I do. The region is well represented with a variety of successful businesses, particularly in financial services with all the main players - many having a global reach - present in the region. Transport-wise, I just wish the A1 North and the A69 were upgraded tomorrow.

Have you had any experience of working elsewhere and how did it compare?

Edinburgh, as most with experience will admit, is a lovely city to live and work in, though it was never "home" for me.

London, for all its attractions has that frantic pace of life that doesn't suit everybody, leaving very few hours - if any - at the end of the day.

Newcastle has a nice pace of life, pretty much everything you need from a city, and I can be home in half an hour.

ALTITUDE ANGEL SPREADING ITS WINGS AFTER MULTI-MILLION-POUND FUNDING BOOST



A drone safety start-up is planning international expansion after securing significant investment with the help of UNW.

Altitude Angel, which was founded in December 2014 by CEO Richard Parker, received a £3.4m Series A funding round led by Seraphim Space Fund, with backing from Accelerated Digital Ventures (ADV) and Frequentis AG, an Austrian-based air traffic control equipment manufacturer to Air Navigation Service Providers (ANSPs) around the world.

The company provides airspace management data and services for drone manufacturers, working in partnership with UK's NATS to make pilots aware of any potential dangers. Their purpose-built GuardianUTM platform is already offered in over 80 territories, with the venture funding planned to introduce it into other areas.

The cash injection is also intended to increase Altitude Angel's commercial presence and enable

them to open new offices in Europe and North America.

Altitude Angel Founder and CEO Richard Parker said: "Drones have the power to revolutionise business. We are at the start of an aerial revolution that is driven by low-cost drone hardware, and Altitude Angel's technologies are key to unlocking their potential to be flown autonomously, without a human pilot, ensuring they are safe and fit in with aviation traffic and stakeholder's."

Newcastle-based chartered accountancy and business advisory firm UNW worked with Altitude Angel throughout the successful funding application process, with additional support from Paul Wigham at local law firm Watson Burton.

Richard continued: "In UNW, we found a real, trusted advisor. Their expertise in both

domain and industry really helped us navigate a somewhat daunting and complex process to ultimate success. We felt John Healey and his team became an extended part of our team and would not hesitate in recommending them to assist with a fund-raise."

John Healey, Corporate Finance Partner at UNW, said: "Altitude Angel has the potential to be world leading and we are really pleased to have helped the company secure its Series A venture capital fund raise. It is great that we have the expertise in the North East to help high growth businesses find the right funding.

"There is a real opportunity in the current climate for those operating in the UTM space, and we're really excited to see what the future holds for Richard and the team at Altitude Angel."

UNW is a leading independent firm of chartered accountants and business advisors that delivers a wide range of services to its clients. For more information regarding investment or funding advice and support, please visit our UNW Corporate Finance page at www.unw.co.uk/service/corporate-finance

A CARILLION PENSIONERS LOT

I am sure that the Carillion story will run for some time to come. Was the company mismanaged? Did the executives rip it off? Should the Government have done something different?

The purpose of this article is to highlight the position that members of the Carillion Pension Scheme might soon find themselves in. What I describe below applies also to any pension scheme that loses the support of the employer.

The Pension Protection Fund (PPF) was established to pay compensation to members of eligible defined benefit pension schemes, when there is a qualifying insolvency event in relation to the employer and where there are insufficient assets in the pension scheme to provide a specified level of compensation. In other words, where the likes of Carillion and BHS go bust, with a hole in the pension fund accounts, then the PPF steps in to safeguard pensioner rights.

Once a pension scheme has been admitted to the PPF, there are various levels of benefit that may be provided for the members:

If You Have Retired

You will have been receiving a pension from your scheme before your former employer went bust.

If you were beyond the scheme's normal retirement age when your employer went bust, the Pension Protection Fund will generally pay 100 per cent level of compensation, which means it will generally pay you the same level of pension income when your scheme enters the PPF.

Your pension payments relating to pensionable service from 5 April 1997 will then rise in line with inflation each year, subject to a maximum of 2.5 per cent a year. Payments relating to service before that date will not increase.

This information may also apply if you retired



through ill-health or if you are receiving a pension in relation to someone who has died.

If You Retired Early

If you retired early and had not reached your scheme's normal pension age when your employer went bust, then you will generally receive 90 per cent level of compensation based on what your pension was worth at the time. The annual compensation you will receive is capped at a certain level.

The cap at age 65 is, from 1 April 2017, £38,505.61 (this equates to £34,655.05 when the 90 per cent level is applied) per year. This is set by the Department for Work and Pensions.

From 6 April 2017, the Long Service Cap came into effect to support members who have 21 or more years' service with their employer. For these members the cap is increased by three per cent for each full year of pensionable service above 20 years, up to a maximum of double the standard cap. The earlier you retired, the lower the annual cap is set, to compensate for the longer time you will be receiving payments.

If You Have Yet to Retire

Under the PPF, when you reach your scheme's normal retirement age, it will pay you pension income based on the 90 per cent level subject to a cap, as described above.

The bottom line is, if you are in the unfortunate position of working for a Carillion, or a BHS, then there is some protection for your pension, but it may be limited.

Defined benefit pension schemes have always been viewed as the zenith of pension planning. However, particularly for higher earners, this may not necessarily be the case. The strength of the employer, and its willingness to fund pension benefits, are vital ingredients in a successful pension scheme. Unfortunately, Defined Benefit schemes can be very expensive and may bring a financial challenge to some weaker employers.

With defined contribution/money purchase pension schemes, what you see is what you get, and your pension pot is "earmarked" to provide pension benefits for you. Whether that pot will provide sufficient income to live on, is another question.

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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THE FINANCE DURHAM FUND MANAGED BY MAVEN PARTICIPATES IN AN £850,000 FUNDRAISE FOR TECHNOLOGY START-UP HONCHO



(L-R): Cllr Carl Marshall of Durham County Council, Sarah Slaven of Business Durham, Gavin Sewell, CEO of honcho, Michael Vassallo and Alex Marsh of Maven Capital Partners.

Honcho relocates to County Durham following investment and creates three jobs to complete software development and product launch

The Finance Durham fund, established by Durham County Council and managed by Maven, one of the UK's most active private equity firms, has helped raise £850,000, providing £150,000 of the total investment in innovative technology start-up, Honcho Markets Ltd ("honcho"), with CrowdCube investors providing the remaining £700,000. Funds raised will be used to complete the final build of the software and launch the product later in 2018, creating three new jobs based in Durham.

honcho's software is an innovative alternative to price comparison websites (PCWs), and aims to disrupt the market by providing consumers with a new way to buy insurance products reducing the cost of insurance for motorists. Through honcho's m-Commerce reverse auction marketplace, insurance companies transparently bid for the business of consumers, putting the customers' interests at the centre of the transaction.

Founded in 2014, honcho sought to raise £650,000 to fund its app, initially through CrowdCube. With the support of the Finance Durham Fund, managed by Maven, honcho closed the investment window nine days early following the exceptional support it had received. The campaign was overfunded to a capped limit of £850,000 from 713 CrowdCube investors.

Now headquartered in Salvus House, Business Durham's flagship office space at Aykley Heads,

Honcho is now resident in the thriving business community in Durham. Crowned one of the UK's most innovative cities last month, Durham is home to a growing hub of dynamic technology businesses. The relocation of honcho to the County to develop and operate their app will add to Durham's existing network of ambitious, high-growth companies.

The investment in honcho is the fifth deal from the £20 million Fund established with funding from Durham County Council and overseen by Business Durham, the economic development organisation for County Durham. The Fund is managed by Maven Capital Partners, one of the UK's most active private equity houses and SME finance providers, to support the growth of high potential businesses located in, or looking to relocate to the County.

Alex Marsh, Investment Manager of Maven, said, "honcho is a hugely exciting new business and we are delighted to support its plans to launch such an innovative app for motorists that empowers the consumer and ultimately reduces the cost of insurance. The team has identified a clear gap in the market and the overwhelming response from the crowd demonstrates that there's a real appetite for the technology they've developed.

"The Finance Durham Fund can provide the financial resources to back business growth for ambitious companies and with such an impressive and highly experienced management team in place we look

forward to working with Gavin and his team to help the business achieve its growth plans."

Gavin Sewell, CEO of honcho said "We are absolutely delighted to have received such a fantastic level of support from the crowd as well as Business Durham and Maven and to have exceeded our funding target by more than 25%. We are very much looking forward to working with Maven, Business Durham and our other key partners in the North of the country to launch our reverse-auction marketplace for financial services products."

Sarah Slaven, Business Development Director of Business Durham, said: "Business Durham are pleased to have helped honcho move to Salvus House, our prestigious office building in Durham City. Joining the thriving business community at Aykley Heads, honcho will be at the heart of the growing Fintech cluster in the City. It is fantastic that this exciting new company has also been able to benefit from the Finance Durham fund to help it thrive and grow."

The opportunity for businesses

With an experienced North East team, operating from new offices in Durham and Newcastle, and a strong investment history across the North of England, Maven is well-resourced to provide the necessary support to local companies, both in terms of the initial investment process and the ongoing support as those businesses grow.

Our local team are actively looking to work with exciting businesses looking for the right funding to help achieve their growth plans. Please contact Maven to discuss your business and its plans, or visit www.mavencp.com to find out more.

CREATING VALUE

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

MAKING TAX DIGITAL...YOU'VE ALL HEARD ABOUT IT, BUT DO YOU KNOW WHAT IT MEANS?



Making Tax Digital (MTD) will fundamentally change the administration of the UK tax system from 2019. It's a key part of the government's plan to make it easier for you to get your tax affairs right and keep on top of everything, as well as the end of the annual tax return, which for us at Wellway Accountants leaves just one phrase...Hurrah!

HMRC's vision to digitise the UK tax system is already well underway and has been since its announcement in 2017; businesses and landlords will be required to use commercial software to maintain their records and to update HMRC quarterly, starting with VAT.

From April 2019, VAT reporting by all VAT registered businesses with turnover above the VAT threshold will have to be done digitally. From April 2020, at the earliest, income tax and corporation tax will also become digital.

But, what does that mean for your business? Basically, from April 2019 all VAT registered businesses with turnover above the VAT threshold have to maintain digital records and need to send their VAT information to HMRC using a third party commercial software. This includes unincorporated businesses, companies, LLPs, and charities. Businesses registered for VAT but with turnover

below the VAT threshold can opt in and file their VAT information via MTD if they wish, but it is not mandatory.

MTD may, so far, sound great, however, if you are not already using an accounting system which will meet the new requirements, now is the time to start planning. There are a number of options available which can keep and preserve records in a digital form and make the necessary submissions to HMRC for your business. Some of these will also be able to offer a lot more. Depending on your company requirements, our team at Wellway can advise you on what's best for you and your business, so get in touch and speak to our experts before going in blind.

The best advice we can give you at this stage is - don't panic! If you, like many businesses who've been very set in their ways for years, still store your invoices and receipts in a big box before handing

over to your bookkeeper or accountant, this needn't change; you can continue to do this and we can do the digital data capture for you. Our gold partnerships with some of the UK's leading cloud accounting software providers, means our team can liaise and assist in real time so that you and your business are fully supported. Alternatively, we can provide you with all the support and training you need to use the new software in-house.

MTD does have some great positives! It's a fantastic way of giving you access to the information HMRC hold 24/7. This also means that you won't have to wait until the end of the tax year to get that tax bill you've been dreading. You can prepare and get real-time information on how much this will be.

As the months roll on to the big launch month in April 2019 there'll be more and more information available to you to help you understand all about MTD.

In the meantime, if we can help clear things up for you, please visit the website at www.wellway.uk.com or call 01670 514 433.

AKZONOBEL ASHINGTON REACHES PRODUCTION MILESTONE

Designed to be the world's most advanced paint factory, AkzoNobel Ashington, the UK home of Dulux, has reached its first production anniversary.

Just one year on from the transfer of our first product, we are delighted to report that our new flagship facility in Ashington is already producing the equivalent of 32 million litres of paint a year for our market-leading brands; Dulux, Dulux Trade, Cuprinol, Polycell and Hammerite.

"It's incredible to think how far we have come in just 12 months," said Shirley Spoons, production manager at AkzoNobel Ashington.

"The site was brand new and we were starting from zero, but after accepting our very first product transfer of Cuprinol Garden Shades Base from our facility in Slough, it only took us six weeks to increase to one million litres of paint after we also started to take on production of some of our most popular Dulux and Dulux Trade products.

"Product quality is always our top priority, so we have had to work extremely hard to ensure that our customers continue to receive the superior products they are accustomed to while transfers to Ashington have been taking place. Now that we're in

production and our other sites are starting to be decommissioned, it is all systems go and we are aiming to increase our production capacity further by the end of 2018.

"I'd like to thank our outstanding team for their commitment and tenacity throughout our first year. None of this would have been possible without you and you should all feel extremely proud of what you have helped to achieve."

AkzoNobel's investment in the new facility in Ashington, which officially opened its doors last September, is the largest single investment the Dutch headquartered company has ever made.

The £100 million facility boasts world-first technologies and has the capacity to produce up to 100 million litres of paint per year in up to 33,000 different colours.

"We're just getting started," Shirley added.

"Looking ahead, our Ashington site will become the centre of UK production for AkzoNobel and will also enable us to increase our supply of products into the European market. If the first 12 months is anything to set a benchmark by, the future of the site looks extremely colourful!"



Shirley Spoons, production manager at AkzoNobel Ashington.

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

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ARCINOVA AND STERLING PHARMA SOLUTIONS ANNOUNCE MAJOR COLLABORATION

Contract research and development organisation Arcinova has announced a new collaboration with Sterling Pharma Solutions in a move that will significantly enhance the two companies' service offerings to their global client bases.

Alnwick-based Arcinova will now have access to Sterling Pharma Solutions' scale up and pilot plant assets, which will complement the company's existing facilities. The facilities include pilot plant assets ranging from 50lt up to 1300lt capacity, with 5-100kg batch generation capability. The combined service offering will create an integrated facility to meet clients' drug substance requirements.

The scale up process will be executed by trained

Arcinova personnel and supported by the long-established skills, infrastructure and capacity of Sterling Pharma Solutions.

Arcinova provides integrated end to end solutions and standalone services to pharmaceutical and biotech companies. It works across drug substance synthesis, drug product manufacture, bioanalytical and metabolism services and radiolabelling synthesis.

Sterling Pharma Solutions is a world leading provider of small molecule API development and manufacturing services to the global pharmaceutical industry.



MAGNUM ELECTRONICS ACQUIRED BY HINDLEY CIRCUITS

In line with its ambitious growth plans, Cramlington-based electronic assembly specialist Hindley Circuits has announced the acquisition of fellow Northumberland company Magnum Electronics.

Magnum Electronics was established 10 years ago by Managing Director Steve Crosby, who now becomes engineering manager at the rapidly expanding Hindley. Steve started Magnum following a 30 year career with TT Electronics as part of its electronics assembly division in Blyth. In his new role, Steve will oversee site infrastructure, process engineering and maintenance.

Richard Whitehead, Chief Executive Officer at Hindley Circuits, said: "We are delighted by the acquisition of Magnum. Bringing Steve on board is a real coup for Hindley. He has vast experience of the electronics assembly sector and offers a real global perspective."

Magnum is the first acquisition made by Hindley and is part of a growth strategy that includes significant and ongoing investment in people, technology and equipment. Hindley Circuits has already doubled turnover in a year.

Steve said: "It will be exciting to be part of a business that is committed to continual investment in the latest technology and processes."

INVESTMENT IN TALENT CONTINUES AT STADIUM

Electronics technology manufacturer Stadium Group has announced the appointment of Gabriel Iancu as quality and test manager and Paul Adgar as senior test and technical engineer at its Hartlepool plant.

Gabriel has vast experience having led the team responsible for a range of engineering processes at ZT TFW Automotive. Having previously worked at the company as a senior test engineer, Paul returns to Stadium Group to help Gabriel as he shapes his quality and test team.

Established in 1984, the European operation of Stadium Group's electronics assembly division is based in Hartlepool and employs over 130 staff. In 2016, the Hartlepool facility was established as the leading European Manufacturing Centre of Excellence for the group.

Managing Director Chris Short said: "I am delighted to welcome Gabriel and Paul at a very exciting time for the business. Our aim is to continue to build on the strong foundations already in place and that includes bringing in highly experienced and innovative talent to work alongside our well established workforce at the Hartlepool facility."



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L-R: Samantha Davidson, Managing Director at Horizonworks, Rachel Boon, Creative Director at Horizonworks and Elaine Hall, Managing Director at Podfo

OUR JOURNEY WITH...PODFO

Samantha Davidson, Managing Director of leading B2B marketing agency Horizonworks, explains how the company helped a leading North East innovator to reposition and launch its bespoke biometric insole into the orthotics market.

Following consultation with hundreds of orthotists, podiatrists, collaborators, businesses and industry experts, Podfo - an innovative bespoke biometric insole which is seamlessly designed for the closest fit to the foot was ready to launch. The company appointed us to support them on their journey of taking their product to market, building its profile and increasing engagement in priority sectors with a focus on the sports market.

As Podfo's marketing partner we created a strategic integrated marketing campaign to launch Podfo into the orthotics market and position it as a leader and innovator in the development and manufacture of bespoke biometric insoles. The new brand and visual style we developed presented Podfo as vibrant, innovative and technically advanced and helped the product to engage more effectively with the target audience. This was supported with new messaging which would resonate with the wearer on a personal level and reinforced the benefits of Podfo as a superior product that can tremendously benefit anyone who requires an orthotic; whether it's optimising sporting performance, supporting injury recovery or simply making everyday life

more enjoyable... Podfo is made for you. A new website and marketing collateral was created to underpin their strategy and nurture, educate and raise awareness of Podfo to new and existing clients, and the market in general.

The product launch event was held at the Great North Museum: Hancock to unveil the new brand, website and marketing plans which will help drive its strategy forward. We provided full event management and are now supporting in the delivery of the plan on an ongoing basis – marketing tactics include PR, digital marketing, social media and targeted campaigns.

Elaine Hall, managing director at Podfo Ltd said: "Horizonworks has quickly developed a sound understanding of our business and has played an integral part in our product launch. They have developed a modern and vibrant brand to help us reposition Podfo in a very competitive industry, providing collateral to support us in making our footprint in the orthotic market. We look forward to working with them on the further development and execution of our marketing plans, they really have become an extension of our Podfo team!"

Samantha Davidson, managing director at

Horizonworks, said: "We love working with leading edge innovators and Podfo is a fantastic example of a company which are at the forefront of its industry. It's also great to launch a product which has been developed and manufactured in the North East to a national consumer market."

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 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, Cellular Solutions, a business communications and systems provider, The Expanded Metal Company, an expanded metal mesh manufacturer, 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.



PODFO LAUNCH EVENT AT GREAT NORTH MUSEUM: HANCOCK

Newcastle-based Podfo Limited recently launched its bespoke biometric insole at the Great North Museum: Hancock. CEO Chris Peacock and Managing Director Elaine Hall unveiled the company's new brand, website and plans to launch into the consumer orthotic market. Guests also heard from Podfo Partner Kevin Kennedy of Gosforth Physio & Wellness, as well as clients Jacqueline Etherington, Great North 5K Winner 2017 and British Masters Steeplechase Champion 2017, and Jonathon Richardson, a Golf Professional, who explained how Podfo has made a positive impact on their careers.





HARWORTH TO START NEXT STAGE OF MULTI-MILLION POUND DEVELOPMENT AT FORMER ALCAN SITE, LYNEFIELD PARK



A complex, 18 months demolition and excavation programme to clear and prepare more than 175 acres of brownfield land for 1.3m sq ft of development at the former Alcan aluminium plant has been completed with owners, Harworth Group, announcing plans to start the next phase of ground engineering work.

Lynefield Park, a multi-million pound industrial site at Lynemouth, Northumberland, is one of the largest brownfield regeneration projects in the North East and its redevelopment is being seen as the masterplan for growth in an area where the closure of traditional manufacturing and coal mining industries has had a significant impact on the local economy and surrounding communities.

Demolition work carried out so far has included the safe removal of the pot rooms, associated buildings and extensive ground clearance where the smelter plant's former iconic chimneys once stood. This month also marks six years since production at Alcan ceased and almost three years since Harworth Group purchased the site.

Harworth Group, one of the UK's leading land regeneration and property development organisations, has worked closely with its ten existing tenants to ensure minimal disruption and provide new opportunities for growth and employment creation. The company now plans to start a phased, four-stage ground engineering and earth moving programme to prepare over 40 acres of land for the approved development using 400,000m³ of inert engineered fill.

Eddie Peat, Director North East & Corporate Development commented, "Given the size, scale and nature of the site, this has been a complex operation but now demolition is complete, we're looking to enter the next phase of engineering work soon. Our aim is to generate growth, attract new investment and encourage large organisations to the North East and Lynefield Park could be a real catalyst for the region, its economy and the wider business community."

"This next stage will start Summer 2018 and will allow land to be prepared, filled and released for development in a phased approach, especially in relation to bespoke-build units. We expect engineering works for individual areas to be carried out over a 12 months period.

"Whilst we have a number of existing B1, B2 and B8 industrial units currently available and ranging from 9,000 to 40,000 sq ft, planning permission also allows us to accommodate future units of up to 500,000 sq ft on a freehold or design and build basis and we're currently working closely with a number of organisations interested in the site and the North East."

Harworth Group has a long and successful track record transforming sites like Lynefield Park into

strategic business zones and sustainable places to live. Its flagship Advanced Manufacturing Park at Waverley, Rotherham is an example of such a transformation having attracted leading commercial occupiers such as Rolls Royce, Boeing and McLaren Automotive as well as national homebuilders.

Lynefield Park is home to existing tenants including H-Mix, Cook & Turnbull, Lynx Precast, NB Clark and Harmison Fitness and has world-class companies such as AkzoNobel within a few miles of the site. Close to main road, rail and sea transport links, it has planning permission for four industrial zones.

Eddie added, "Lynefield Park could become a key strategic site for organisations looking at the North East to invest and expand current operations, or provide the ideal location to compliment nearby companies as part of a regional supply chain. We are working very closely with key stakeholders including Northumberland County Council and the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) to attract new interest and appeal to a wide range of industries. The planning permission allows us to offer huge development potential in phases along with the opportunity of job creation to stimulate further investment."



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APPRENTICESHIPS CAN ENGINEER SKILLS FOR THE FUTURE



L-R: Apprentices Liam Rowden and Matthew Reilly with Gateshead College tutor Anthony Jeff

An engineering giant has championed an innovative training scheme as a way of boosting the uptake of apprenticeships and helping the region's manufacturing industry build sustainable workforces for the future.

Ford Engineering Group has joined forces with Gateshead College to deliver a six-month traineeship which equips young people with the attitudes, skills and knowledge required to start an apprenticeship in this sector.

As a result of the programme, Ford Engineering has been able to strengthen its skills base with the recruitment of four talented apprentices.

Three seventeen-year-olds – Reece Bell from Washington, Matthew Reilly from Jarrow and South Shields teenager Kieron Drew – will work at Ford Aerospace in South Shields, where they will learn key skills in precision machining, tooling and product quality control.

A fourth engineering apprentice, 16-year-old Liam Rowden, will ply his trade at North Shields-based Ford Components, which supplies pressed components to the automotive sector and related industries.

Matthew said: "I've really enjoyed my time at Ford Aerospace so far. The traineeship has given me the initial skills, experience and confidence I needed and now I can continue to learn my trade on the shop floor whilst earning a wage."

Matthew is one of 28 candidates who will shortly complete the programme, which equips trainees with core skills and competencies needed for key engineering tasks such as preparing and using milling machines and lathes, and producing mechanical engineering drawings using computer aided design (CAD) technology. The programme also covers

health and safety, work preparation methods, and literacy and numeracy skills which allow students to gain essential English and maths qualifications.

As part of the traineeship, the students embark on a four-week work placement which provides valuable experience of a real-life engineering environment and are given the chance to secure a formal interview at the end of the programme. They study at Gateshead College's purpose-built Skills Academy for Automotive, Engineering, Manufacturing and Logistics, which has benefited from a recent investment in state-of-the-art, cutting-edge machinery and tooling equipment.

Ford Engineering and Gateshead College run the traineeship to help manufacturing and engineering firms tackle skills shortages and create sustainable workforces for the future. The scheme also allows Ford Engineering to create a work-ready pipeline of talent for its apprenticeship programme, with places reserved for the best candidates who demonstrate their skills and aptitudes on the traineeship. Those who don't get a place on the programme are supported by the company in their attempts to find an apprenticeship with another engineering firm.

Geoff Ford MBE, chairman at Ford Engineering, said: "I'm a firm advocate of apprenticeships. The engineering and manufacturing industries need an influx of new skills, which is why we teamed up with Gateshead College to run the traineeship – a vital stepping stone to progress onto an apprenticeship.

"It's great to work with an organisation that understands the needs of our business and the wider engineering sector. Schemes like this will help to protect the future of the industry, boost the economy and prepare more young people for the world of work."

Ivan Jepson, director of business development at Gateshead College, said: "Securing an apprenticeship can be difficult for some individuals and this intense training programme provides students with the opportunity to get the skills, experience and qualifications they need to become an apprentice.

"Our aim is to help employers build workforces which make their businesses more productive and competitive. This is particularly important for the engineering sector, which has traditionally suffered from key skills shortages.

"We work with forward-thinking employers, including Ford Engineering, to help them plug skills gaps and access skills that can generate business growth. In doing so, we also introduce more young people to the world of STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) and give them the tools to forge a successful career in these industries."

This is the latest milestone in a long-standing relationship between Gateshead College and Ford Engineering. The college runs apprenticeships at Ford's sites across the region, and has also managed a project to upskill its employees and provide them with exciting engineering career opportunities.

Applications are now open for this year's Ford Engineering Academy intake starting in September and an Open Event will take place on Wednesday 18th April. For more information visit www.gateshead.ac.uk/ford



Stephen Hall

HOW PROPEL BY DELOITTE CAN PROVIDE THE ROCKET FUEL SMES NEED TO GROW

Stephen Hall, office senior partner at Deloitte in the North East, explains more about Propel and how it's helping start-ups and SMEs grow with its subscription-based accounting and analytics packages designed for ambitious and growing businesses.

Deloitte has a passion to make an impact that matters, and what better way than by supporting the lifeblood of the UK economy through helping start-ups and small/medium enterprises (SMEs) to grow. That's why a small team at Deloitte started building Propel – to understand the challenges that ambitious businesses face, taking our vast knowledge and expertise working with larger businesses and making it relevant for smaller businesses. We got to know lots of business owners from around the country in order to try to understand what their pain points were, and found that business owners were lacking actionable insights and struggled with keeping on top of their finances.

The purpose of Propel is to support ambitious start-ups and SMEs to grow by providing them with a subscription-based accounting and analytics package, which utilises the best-in-class cloud software and apps. These apps can be plugged into the Propel Dashboard, which enables entrepreneurs and business owners to proactively track how their business is performing in real-time. Business owners now have access to measure bespoke financial KPIs (powered by Xero, QuickBooks Online or Sage One Accounting) to track daily sales performance, how long customers are taking to pay or the gross

profitability of different product lines. Additionally, the dashboard has the ability to measure non-financial KPIs such as social following (Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn), website traffic (Google Analytics) or blended KPIs such as marketing activity (MailChimp, Campaign Monitor).

Bookkeeping and accounting is just the start – at Propel we add value in different ways such as supporting businesses with their fundraising activities (cash flow forecasting, investor readiness, introductions to investors), tax advice around their internationalisation strategy and making sure that they are fully utilising Government tax schemes (SEIS, EIS, R&D).

Helping SMEs grow – Getting your finances in place

Getting your finances in order is crucial in helping companies raise and borrow money in the future. Doing so will allow you to give potential investors assurance that their funds are likely to be in safe hands, as well as providing a sound basis for being able to put together a forward-looking cash flow forecast or model which can be backed up with reasonable assumptions.

Accurately recording your costs and revenues

will allow you to assess the gross profitability of different revenue streams across periods of time, to identify things like seasonal trends in your sales data.

Additionally, this activity can then be used to benchmark future performance. You may wish to measure online marketing spend as a percentage of sales (if you are an e-commerce business) or your monthly recurring revenue (if you run a SaaS company).

Imagine being able to see the current performance of your business anywhere at any time. What are my best selling products? What is my most profitable product this week? The Propel dashboard provides the answers.

Propel by Deloitte was developed with one aim in mind; to help start-ups and small businesses grow. We'd like to know more about your business and learn how we can support its growth by offering you a free business consultation with one of our team members.

To book a free consultation please email propel.marketing@deloitte.co.uk quoting 'Northern Insight April 2018 - free phone consultation' in the subject.



Gillian Marshall
Chief executive,
Entrepreneurs' Forum



THE GREAT 'HOSPITALITY' OF THE NORTH

By Gillian Marshall, chief executive of Entrepreneurs' Forum

The North East has long been renowned for being a warm and welcoming place, and is fast becoming a serious area to do business in too.

The same can be said for the region's thriving tourism and hospitality sectors.

While the 'Beast from the East' may have dominated news agendas and bulletins recently, the North East was equally in the spotlight in the national media and wider zeitgeist, when the Great Exhibition of the North was officially launched on 27th February.

Scores of VIPs from across the region's business community, entrepreneurs, corporate guests and entertainers gathered for the launch of the NewcastleGateshead Initiative's summer-long celebration of cultural diversity in the North of England.

The 80-day exhibition, which will take place from 22nd June to 9th September across Newcastle and Gateshead, is the largest event of its kind to be hosted in England, in 2018.

When the three-month long celebration hits, there will undoubtedly be opportunities for many of the region's bars and restaurants, hotels and other forms of accommodation for visitors to the city and region.

The entrepreneurial community, especially within the tourism and hospitality sectors, certainly have a part to play in the celebration - and all-year round, for that matter. It is the entrepreneurs and business owners who provide these vital services to guests and who are making the region a desirable place to visit. They are also the ones investing in their companies

to create the jobs to deliver these services effectively, which benefits the wider economy.

Newcastle, for example, is home to a lively nightlife and array of accommodation. The Crowne Plaza, at Stephenson Quarter, is just one of the many fine hotels located in the city that proves popular for long and overnight stays, functions and events.

Malhotra Group can also count itself among the city's leisure and hospitality elite, operating numerous bars and hotels, while fellow Entrepreneurs' Forum member Cairn Group, boasts an equally impressive portfolio in Newcastle and throughout the North.

You'd expect bookings to be fiercely contested and possibly hard to come by this summer, especially after the official launch of the Great Exhibition of the North, but increased footfall in the region over the summer months will provide a welcome boost to the regional economy.

The latest figures from VisitBritain alone revealed that in the first half of 2017, tourists were found to be staying in the region longer, bringing in £108m - up 14% from a year earlier - which just goes to show how much tourism contributes to the North East.

Initiatives such as 'Alive After Five' and 'Restaurant Week' by NE1, the city's Business Improvement District, are helping to drive footfall into the city centre.

Luxury serviced accommodation is another alternative to hotels, and is proving popular with people visiting the region for business, while also catering to the needs of high net worth individuals, footballers and other celebrities in town.

Properties Unique, a multi-award-winning company, which specialises in such services, offers a tailor made package for leisure and business travellers across Newcastle and Gateshead. The firm delivers a warm and welcoming environment for guests, as they are personally greeted on arrival and operate 24-hour assistance.

Then, of course, there are plenty of complexes situated outside of the region's towns and cities, with the likes of Close House, home of last year's prestigious British Masters golf tournament, and Rockliffe Hall to name but two of the North East's luxurious spa and hotel locations.

It is shaping up to be another positive year for the North East, with events like the Great Exhibition of the North exemplifying the region's credentials as a tourism hotspot that will continue to boost our burgeoning hospitality industry.

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.

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An Entrepreneur Interview with..

ANDREW TOMLINSON

Andrew James

Tell me about your background in business

I left home at 17, with no real qualifications and did a number of jobs, mostly working in factories. It was three years later when I set up my first business in the food manufacturing industry, with support from The Prince's Trust.

I have had my fair share of ups and downs, and it is the low points that have allowed me to take stock, learn from my mistakes and make positive progress. It was prior to setting up my own business that I experienced my lowest point; I really didn't have much money – eating cold spaghetti and raw onions! I thought to myself, there is nothing lower than this!

From there, I took on a number of sales and logistics positions, which were great learning experiences that stay with me to this day, leading to the creation of Andrew James.

How was Andrew James formed?

It was in 2005 at a dinner party with my cousin, James Buckle, at his home, which was the inspiration behind our business venture. We cooked our own meals using a raclette grill from Germany, which fascinated me, and was very much the topic of conversation on the night. The grills were popular in Europe, but virtually impossible to source in the UK, and that was our "Eureka" moment!

We spoke to (blagged it!) a supplier in China and ordered 3,000 raclette grills, and that was the moment Andrew James was born.

In your own words, describe what it is that Andrew James does?

Andrew James is a fast-growing e-commerce business that specialises in and sells a range of useful and pioneering products for the home, and much more. While our focus has always been on the promotion and development of our product range, our recent move into our own Distribution Centre has enabled us to begin offering storage and distribution services to other businesses too.

Tell me about your Andrew James journey

It was a bit of a struggle initially with 3,000 grills littered all over the place – literally everywhere around the house, from the loft to the garage and everywhere in between! We funded the order on credit cards, and immediately splashed out £6,000 on magazine advertising, which didn't really work out as expected.

It was when we shifted our focus to trade shows, particularly agricultural and food ones, when our investment began to pay off. We went to the customer, rather than waiting for them to come to us!

At the time more people were choosing to shop at farm shops, as opposed to supermarkets, and our niche raclette grills were proving to be very popular. Surprisingly, it was during the recession when business really started booming. With money tighter, people were starting to think

more about their purchases and buying more efficient and smart products.

We worked out of a small unit in Ferryhill for two years and, as turnover began to grow rapidly, we had no choice but to expand into larger premises – a 10,000 sq.ft facility in Bowburn, before moving to an even larger, 80,000 sq.ft premises in the village.

When the 'Black Friday' phenomenon hit the UK, business really took off as we received more than 40,000 orders, which was absolutely fantastic, but proved to be an equally testing period. Our infrastructure at the time couldn't handle the demand and volume, and the company didn't properly recover until April! We actually had to cut our entire marketing spend and strategy to avoid further interest and orders, as well as put on hold some of our exporting activity.

It was around this time we knew we needed to invest heavily in the future of the company, to be able to confidently meet demand and gear up for continued growth. In 2016, we invested £10m in a state-of-the-art, 125,000 sq.ft distribution centre in Seaham.

The first 10 years of the company were spent solidifying the business model and getting the right systems in place, and now I am in a position where I want to extend the Andrew James brand. We now support businesses by offering supply chain management to firms and helping them to grow from B2B to B2C as well. With cutting edge technology throughout, this centre really is "one of a kind" in the North East, and we have had interest from across the world looking to take advantage of what it can offer.

I am passionate about aiding North East companies, so our Head Office and Distribution Centre, with high-end executive facilities, is now a hub for businesses from across the region. I love the North East and want to do my bit in helping to champion it as a legitimate place for doing business.

Future challenges, not only for Andrew James, will be the implications of Brexit. It hit us hard – at one point we were losing £120,000 a month, in the aftermath of the referendum result. But, as with any change, we realised we needed to negotiate more effectively with our suppliers, as a result of the fluctuations of the currency exchange.

It has actually made us stronger and we are overcoming the hurdles, so in the short-term we were hurt, but we will benefit in the long run because of the changes we have implemented and the streamlining we have done. Only time will tell, though, on the true impact of Brexit.

What is your proudest moment with Andrew James?

We have enjoyed a number of proud moments, such as winning prestigious awards and being recognised for our strong growth in the Sunday Times Virgin Fast Track table – being recognised

for Effective Use of Capital by Sir Richard Branson (which was specifically down to the investment in our Distribution Centre) was an incredible moment for us.

Being named North East Business of the Year in 2015 was a massive moment, as it really marked us out as one of the strongest businesses in the region. But what makes me feel the most pride, is the fact that our first employee still remains with the company. Barry Robertson has been with me and the company throughout its 13-plus year journey, and he remains an integral part of the business. That for me is greater than any award win.

Are there any big mistakes you have made while in business?

During our periods of strong growth, I wish I had put systems in place earlier that would have managed it more efficiently. But, with these things, you can't foresee the level of growth that we achieved, which, in many respects was a double-edged sword.

We have now put a lot of money into taking on more staff and training them, while also investing in our compliance systems, to prepare for the future growth of the company.

What is Andrew James' USP?

Our values. We are a down to earth, family-owned company, built on delivering excellent customer service. It's a bit cliché, but I know what it is like to have nothing, without a proper education. I've worked hard to get where I am and I take nothing for granted, which runs throughout Andrew James and our three corporate values:

1. Respect
2. Honesty
3. Commitment

These are the three values that we follow when dealing with all customers and suppliers, and are at the core of our business model.

What are the future plans of the business?

To develop and grow the Andrew James brand further and globally. We are hoping to break into the US market and grow our presence in Europe too, which will be vital post-Brexit. I am also committed to helping firms go from B2B to B2C, so growing the advisory element of the business is a huge ambition of mine.

Our new Distribution Centre will transform our business and really transform the business landscape of the North East. There isn't another facility like this between Leeds and Edinburgh, so for businesses looking to expand in the North of England, the facilities and opportunities we offer really are second to none. It is a £10m operation, and fully compliant with Amazon and DPD distribution requirements, so we know it is as good as it gets, and we want to allow other businesses really take advantage of it, and help them be as ambitious as we are.

W James

STY • COM



Andrew Tomlinson is a member of the Entrepreneurs' Forum, a group of like-minded people who come together at inspirational events to share best practice, create valuable connections and help each other to grow their businesses. For more information, visit www.entrepreneursforum.net



APPRENTICESHIPS – WHAT NEXT FOR THE NORTH EAST?

North East LEP Skills Director Michelle Rainbow gives the lowdown on apprenticeships and calls on the Government to listen closely to businesses and help create more demand.

The Government plans to create three million apprenticeships by 2020. It's an increasingly ambitious target, not least because the number of apprenticeships has dropped since the Apprenticeship Levy was introduced in April 2017.

So what's going on? Here in the North East it's a mixed picture. Having seen apprenticeship schemes promoted heavily, pupils, parents and schools have understandably bought in. Conversely, businesses have been hanging back, waiting to see what the quality standards will be like – so there is supply of eager applicants but less demand.

The complexity of the Apprenticeship Levy hasn't helped. An early assessment report by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) shows that 22% of employers don't know whether they have to pay the Levy or not.

This plays out here, where SMEs continue to seek clarity. There is a big difference between sectors which are used to hiring apprentices, such as

construction, manufacturing and engineering, and those for whom this is still a new innovation. It's one of the reasons our case studies focus on the fields of pharmaceuticals and law as they're not traditionally associated with this type of scheme.

Right now our ask of Government is that it continues to liaise closely with employers to understand their needs, provides reassurance about quality standards and simplifies how the Levy works – and this has to include clarification on how unspent monies will be used to set the record straight.

We need an agile system which can flex and respond to opportunities and issues in a much quicker timeframe. We also need to create real business demand.

Better qualifications and better jobs for all

Here at the North East LEP we particularly welcome higher and degree apprenticeships as we strive to create more and better jobs to support the local economy.

The North East Growth Hub lists the various providers and is well worth a look for those looking for more information.

However we are keen that the government takes steps to ensure these remain open to everyone.

Access to affordable degree-level education will of course prove popular across the board as more people understand the opportunity and move to maximise this. As such there is a particular need to engage with the more disadvantaged and not just the squeezed middle classes if we are to raise ambitions, keep a level playing field and make sure no one gets left behind.

Ultimately the apprenticeship drive is moving in the right direction but implementation always brings new challenges, as well as the need for expectation management.

Rest assured, we will continue to work with the business community, schools and parents to represent their needs with Government and do all we can to achieve the greatest success possible.

To find out more about how the North East LEP is working to improve skills, please visit www.nelep.co.uk/skills/. To find out more about apprenticeships, please visit www.northeastgrowthhub.co.uk.

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IN CONVERSATION WITH...

STEVEN RAWLINGSON

CEO, Samuel Knight International

Did you always envisage a career in recruitment and how has your career progressed?

When I was young I actually wanted to become a paratrooper because I thought the idea of jumping out of a plane into a hostile environment sounded really exciting! However, in 2003 at the age of 21 I started in a slightly less extreme role, as a resourcer with ATA Recruitment. This gave me my first taste of engineering recruitment and shortly after I went on to specialise purely in the Transmission & Distribution and Renewables sectors whilst working in a Business Development role. Following this, I worked for a company called Earthstream before moving to Michael Page after being offered the role of Director for Energy. After learning all that I could in this role I felt it was time to take the plunge and try and create my own market leading recruitment business. Samuel Knight was born!

Tell me about your current role?

Central to my role as CEO is devising a core strategy for our business and ensuring that every department understands it, believes in it and helps deliver it. I've focussed on building a strong senior management team and I work closely with them to ensure that our vision, values and core behaviours are embedded throughout the teams. Together with our finance team, I allocate funds to the company's priorities, helping to ensure continued growth and development.

How has the recruitment industry evolved since you started your career and how do you see it continuing to change?

What we've started to see as the industry continues to evolve is more and more specialist recruiters (like ourselves) appearing, as opposed to horizontal generalist recruiters. Specialist recruiters focus on niche vertical sectors and for us these are Energy and Rail. Due to the fact we concentrate on learning all we can about our industries, our consultants are experts who fully understand the roles they're recruiting for and the needs of clients. In addition to this, our database is solely made up of specialist Energy and Rail CV's, meaning we can quickly source candidates who are best sorted to the role.

In terms of how the industry will continue to evolve... I think that the way people apply to jobs, with a piece of paper, hasn't changed fundamentally and I think that it will. I think AI, machine learning and automation could all play a part in this. Technology



will definitely have a significant role to play in the future of the recruitment industry.

What is the most exciting thing you are currently working on?

After growing successfully over the last few years and establishing three UK offices (Newcastle, London and Bristol) we're now entering an exciting new phase of international expansion. We'll be opening our first US office in Houston soon and shortly after, another in Florida and an office in Germany. We've recently acquired an AI company too and have some very exciting plans in mind. Hopefully Samuel Knight will be right at the forefront of the industry, driving digital transformation in the recruitment. Watch this space!

Where do you see the business in 5 years time?

I'm hopeful that we'll be thought of as leaders in our market and recognised as innovators and thought leaders within the recruitment sector. I'd like to see the company and brand well known across the globe and achieving an EBIT of around £10 million. We all share the same vision here and that is to become a £100 million pound turnover company! The sky is the limit.

What is the best piece of business news advice you have been given and what advice would you give to an aspiring business leader?

The best piece of advice I could give would be to

follow your dreams today, trust your instincts and don't be afraid to make mistakes. When you do make mistakes make sure you learn from them, they'll make you stronger.

Work hard to make every part of your business equally strong and ensure all areas can work cohesively together. I was very focused on the sales and operations areas of the business and it has been the back office functions that have given me the biggest headaches recently. Teamwork makes the dream work is relevant across the whole business; you cannot make money if your back office support doesn't measure up to sales.

Who are your heroes and mentors in and out of business?

Samuel Knight is also named after my Grandad because he was a hero and a role model for me when I was growing up. In terms of business mentors, I worked with a fantastic CEO at Earth Stream called Paul Beak. At the point I worked with him Paul had already successfully grown three large recruitment businesses and I learnt so much from him. As well, Samuel Knight's Chairman and co-founder Todd Grondona. When I wanted to start the Samuel Knight journey he gave me unwavering support and he continues to do so today. He allowed me to take the reins and mould Samuel Knight in my own image, even if that meant making the odd mistake along the way. He's been a great mentor, business partner and friend and Samuel Knight would certainly not be where we are today without him.

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RECRUIT, RETAIN, RESIGN, REPEAT

Bryony Gibson, managing director of Bryony Gibson Consulting, talks about what really makes people want to join your team and why they also want to leave.



If you want to recruit the very best you need to be prepared to fight for them because, right now, the war for talent is on and it's skilled people who have the upper hand.

When trying to fill a job vacancy, the first thing you should do is find out what it is that people want from their next career move.

In a recent survey by CV-Library, 1,200 professional workers said that the most appealing feature of a new job was a good salary (58%). While that may come as a surprise to some, it's perhaps not a huge shock given the financial and economic uncertainty we have seen for quite some time now.

Of course there's definitely more to the motivations of talented people than money. Friendly colleagues (48%), a great company culture (40%), room for progression (34%) and personal development (28%) also feature highly, as does a nice boss (22%), proving that you really do have to offer the 'full package' if you want to build an amazing team.

What's really interesting about this study is how motivations appear to be changing. A couple of years ago, all of the research pointed towards the scope of responsibility in a job being the deciding factor for a move; and I still believe that talented and ambitious people are driven by being happy in what they do and contributing toward a purpose they believe in.

Enjoying your job should be non-negotiable and it's all of these factors that you need to try to demonstrate you can offer when meeting with potential new employees.

Once someone has been recruited in the US, on

average they spend 4½ years at a company. Data for the UK is trickier to find, but that seems fairly comparable as, in my experience, between three and five years is typical.

Your next challenge as an employer is to keep people motivated for longer than this and, in order to do that it's important to remember that what persuaded someone to join your company isn't necessarily going to be the reason why they will want to leave.

While there are lots of reasons for people switching jobs, the truth is that the majority of resignations are because of a manager.

In a Gallup study, about 50% of the 7,200 respondents said that they left their job to get away from their boss.

The research found that too many managers are so focused on the business aspect of things that they forget their employees are people; and that these people are the backbone of their success.

Micromanagement was a big factor, as highly skilled people expect autonomy and are usually willing to take responsibility and be accountable

for the results. Micromanaging creates a stressful environment where it's hard to perform at your best and, without trust, talented people will soon become disengaged.

Similarly, a lack of empathy when an employee is facing an issue, whether personal or professional, can destroy a working relationship. When people feel like they go above and beyond what is expected and in a moment of need their manager responds with inflexibility and insensitivity, then a connection can be lost.

Not supporting work life balance and failing to recognise and reward achievement were also cited as ways managers make staff demotivated and, with the current low levels of unemployment, people with the right combination of attitude and ability are at a premium.

With so much competition you need to have a recruitment strategy and the right people in place within your leadership team to make sure you are not only treating people honestly and fairly, but you are staying in touch with what they are thinking, so you can head off any potential retention issues before it's too late.

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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PROCUREMENT IS ABOUT MORE THAN COST



Rod Brasington

In the final part of their six-part series, Rod Brasington, Chief Executive of Prosper, summarises why he believes his organisation's processes ensure the best outcomes for their partners are always achieved, and why procurement is about more than cost...

In the book *Lady Windemere's Fan*, Oscar Wilde had Lord Darlington quip that a cynic was 'a man who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing' (1892). In my opinion, never has a truer word been written.

For too long, the procurement industry has focussed on buying products, materials or services at the lowest possible cost. But finally, the debate around price versus quality and delivery has gained some traction in our industry and I feel like we're really starting to get somewhere.

As a public-sector procurement consultancy, at Prosper we see daily the impact good procurement can have. There's a pre-conception that procurement is a really difficult process carried out by people who sit in a dark room somewhere tucked away. We see procurement as being a very straight-forward, yet comprehensive process, that can have a real impact on a lot of people.

In the past two years, we've made several changes to our operating model to focus on the value and delivery of a project, rather than just cost, and have found in that time, the partners we procure on behalf of, now have far more successful outcomes

against their business objectives when following this new approach.

We sit down with everybody involved in a project before we do anything else, identifying exactly what the project needs to achieve so that everyone is clear from the off what the scope is. This means clear, unambiguous specification can be set so that everyone who tenders are costing the project like-for-like and so that no project creep can occur later in the process. A clear set of requirements, and a robust spec means that effective tender and evaluation criteria can then be quickly designed and implemented.

Once all tenders are submitted, evaluations can begin. We sit with our partners and work through all submissions, checking all information required has been provided, before a final report including all evaluation scores is prepared so our partner can make an informed decision when awarding the project work.

But where some organisations would see this as being where their work stops, this is where we differ. We set up pre-start meetings to identify and set project goals, key performance indicators (KPIs)

and management information (MI) and make sure everybody involved in the projects knows the role they play. Once the project is underway, we have regular catch ups with all the project team (generally monthly), where we continuously monitor performance and the targets agreed to ensure everything is on track and to ascertain if there are any issues that may affect the scheduled programme of works. Once the works are complete, we evaluate the project, to see what worked, what didn't and what could be done better next time to ensure we're always learning and improving.

In an ever-changing economic environment, we understand more than ever the pressures organisations face to manage budgets and the requirement to deliver more for less. As a consultancy firm, we know how important it is to look at value for money outcomes and process efficiencies that create positive outcomes. And effective contract management like ours can ensure those outcomes are achieved. It can be said that our clients aren't cynics, they know the price and value of everything by working with us, unlike Lord Darlington...

To find out more about Prosper, their work, and how they can help you, visit prosper.uk.com

HOW TO CREATE GENDER EQUALITY IN THE WORKPLACE

Last month, International Women's Day highlighted the importance of gender equality in the workplace, between friends, in relationships, and within communities across the world.

Whilst progress is being made to achieve gender equality in workplaces globally, there is still much more to be done, and it's important to recognise whether your business is taking the necessary steps to achieve gender equality.

Hadrian HR is passionate about maintaining a company culture rooted on a platform of equality and gender inclusivity, and understands the steps that businesses must take to create and promote gender equality.

To make your workplace more comfortable for men and women alike, and to ensure equal opportunities for both sexes, a business should provide training on gender equality to its management team. Starting with management is extremely important, as a good management team can transform a business and company culture, and gender equality is most effectively achieved when promoted from the top down.

The Equality Act 2010 protects people from being treated differently because of their gender and managers need to be aware of the law as well as the company's respective policies in order to effectively oversee and coordinate effective working relations.

In order to achieve true gender equality in the workplace, all employees should be made aware of job openings, and advertisements should not be tailored to one sex but be made open to both men

and women, with the stereotype of certain jobs suiting a certain sex removed. However, it is also essential that specific duties are detailed as this will allow people to self-select out of the process if they do not feel that the duties would suit them.

To ensure that all employees are treated equally, a business must recognise and celebrate the successes of men and women in the workplace alike, with no difference in the rewards offered between men and women.

For example, if a woman achieves a notable client win, or hits a target in the business, this should be recognised and celebrated as much as if a man had achieved that same goal and vice versa.

All employees should be aware of the importance of an equal workplace, but it's not always easy to get this message across, especially if your business is large.

An effective way to spread this message amongst a team is to create a position for an employee to be responsible for the promotion of equality in

the workplace. This employee could hold monthly focus groups to get staff feedback on how the business is working towards equality, and could attend external events and workshops in order to bring insights and tips back to the team.

Finally, a business should be open about the childcare options and flexible working policy that it offers, and this should be extended to both sexes, with male employees in a business being made aware that they are entitled to family leave also. An HR department within a business should ensure that all employees are made aware that parental flexibility is available for both men and women.

Hadrian HR understands the need for assistance in promoting gender equality in the workplace which is vital to the success of any business. Its team of HR specialists are on hand to provide advice on creating an equal environment for employees, with consultancy advice ranging from one off contracts to a full audit of current policies and provision of customised contracts and handbooks.



Deb Tweedy

LATEST NEWS FROM THE BIC



NICHE PET-SITTING SERVICE SLITHERS INTO SUNDERLAND

A scientist has recently launched a pet-sitting service with a difference, following support from the North East BIC.

Helen Glenwright, has created Cosy Chameleon, a pet-sitting and boarding service in Sunderland which not only cares for common household pets like cats, but also reptiles including tortoises and snakes.

Helen, who currently works part-time as a laboratory technician at Newcastle University and at a veterinary surgery on weekends, said it's her passion for animals which inspired her to start the business.

"I've owned pets my whole life so their well-being is very important to me" said Helen, "I currently own a variety of pets including seven snakes and I also care for stray animals which are brought into the vet's."



DARLINGTON FIRM PLOTTING DIGITAL SCALE-UP AFTER OFFICE MOVE

Westpark Estate Agents, moved to Business Central due to a change in the market in which their customers began largely operating online.

The firm now advertise property online on behalf of landlords as well as offer a tenant acquisition service, and Ms Chandler says that their office move was necessary to focus on boosting their sales and presence online.

She said: "Just in our first few months here we have been able to collaborate with other business owners which resulted in us having a new website built to advertise our available properties."



INNOVATION ADVISER APPOINTED TO SUPPORT NORTH EAST SMES

The BIC has recently appointed an innovation adviser to help drive its SME Innovation Programme.

Michelle Hambleton will mainly support Durham-based businesses on the programme to help them realise their innovative ambitions by developing new products and services.

"The Innovation Programme attracted me due to the sheer diversity of businesses I'll be able to work with," said Michelle, "it's inspiring to see how hard the North East's business owners work to be as innovative as they can be."

"From running my own business I've learned how important it is to keep up with emerging trends and technological developments." Michelle commented.

TEACHER LAUNCHES INNOVATIVE MENTORING PLATFORM

Peerz Academy has launched an online education platform to facilitate peer-to-peer mentoring to students across the North East who require additional academic support.

Founded by former teacher Wayne Harrison, Peerz Academy was funded by the Innovation Programme and has already recruited four new employees.

Peerz Academy is working with five North East universities through the FutureMe programme to support 108 schools, delivering lessons to children who have the potential to go to university.

The aim of Peerz Academy is to improve learning opportunities and boost GCSE success rates in the North East providing affordable access to peer mentors in a secure online learning environment.



CREATIVE COMPANIES UNITE

Two leading North East businesses have come together with an aim to adopt and develop emerging technologies within the interior and architectural field.

North East interior designers and architects Space I.D. have collaborated with digital marketing agency Glass Frog to provide their clients with an immersive Virtual Reality experience coupled with interactive, photo-realistic 3D computer generated walk through of their interior design proposals.

The collaboration between the two companies, both based at the North East Business and Innovation Centre in Sunderland, has already had a great impact on Space ID and they will continue to explore the use of technology with Glass Frog.

MEET GRADVERT'S ALAN SHAW, A SPECIALISED COACH IN LEADERSHIP MANAGEMENT TRAINING

How did your relationship with Gradvert come about?

I've been working with Gradvert for the past couple of years. Funnily enough I saw an advert on LinkedIn noting that Gradvert was on the hunt for coaches who were used to working with large organisations from the manufacturing and engineering sectors, which suited my experience perfectly.

At the interview I knew immediately there was a good match – the team's strategic and delivery methods for training matched my thinking and were a perfect fit with my personal values. I was impressed by the dynamism behind this young and growing business. I'm really enjoying the work and varied client base we have delivered for and continue to deliver on.

You deliver leadership and management training, change management and coaching. Tell us about this work.

Business challenges are often the same, regardless of size or sector.

These can be about leadership style, not implementing change effectively, not having robust planning processes in places and poor internal communication.

This means my work frequently centres around transformational leadership – helping directors and managers to move from an autocratic, transactional style to a more open and democratic approach, with a collaborative culture and flatter hierarchy.

A critical part is helping and supporting the C-Suite to become leader role models, which entails setting the standard for everyone else to follow, from behaving with honesty and integrity and living the company values, to engaging properly and coaching others.

Often, it's about enunciating the purpose behind

the organisation, making sure there is a clear vision of the future, and that everyone supports the mission (what they are trying to achieve). Then it's about ensuring there are strong processes and people commitment in place to support the operational delivery.

It's a very rewarding job. When there is investment in training for management and teams it can bring about immediate and measured change within the business.

It's a great thing to see team leaders become more confident and voice and implement ideas when previously they had been reticent to come forward.

Using my years of experience in different client sectors I encourage people to present change as an opportunity not a threat and how to suggest changes that could make tangible benefits to the team and business. It's amazing how much more proactive and cohesive it makes a workforce.

You also train the trainers within organisations. How does that work?

That's right, I also work with those who have responsibility for training and coaching others within a business.

This is all about ensuring the trainer has the relevant knowledge and insight, as well as resilience in the face of adversity, because it can be a challenging job.

What I do is help trainers to choose the right training models and frameworks and understand different learning styles and techniques.

I also work on their confidence so they can deliver presentations within the training environment to a high quality standard. By the time I leave, each trainer has the ability to generate positive group interaction and manage group meetings/challenges in a really engaging way.



If you'd like to know more about the leadership needs of today, please visit www.gradvert.com/insights/guides/ or give Gradvert a call on 0191 607 0225.

ARE YOU A HEROIC SALES LEADER, OR ARE YOU HARBOURING ONE IN YOUR BUSINESS?



Nicola Cook, CEO of Company Shortcuts.

Without a sale, no other department in the business need exist, so it's no surprise that capability and expertise in selling should be placed front and centre in any business growth strategy. However, if the owner/entrepreneur is a natural sales person themselves, ironically that natural ability and heroic sales flair can actually become an inhibitor to scale as the company matures.

A Heroic Sales Leader, is someone who leads the sales effort from the front, who keeps all of the customer related information in their head and who has built a sales system around themselves – fine when you're a start-up and your only goal is gaining that initial sales traction. However, when the company begins to enter the scale-up phase, that same person often becomes a frustrating bottle-neck that strangles growth potential.

There are two main reasons why Heroic Sales Leaders exist;

1. On an unconscious level the owner/founder gets an ego kick out of knowing everything about everything to do with every customer and prospect. They'll likely deny this is the reason and will

express their desire to move beyond the day to day sales function, meanwhile continue to meddle in every transaction and client relationship.

2. The business has tried and failed to build the right type of sales team to achieve their growth ambition. So after burning a ton of cash and losing time recruiting, inducting and managing a sales team (or often an expensive Sales Director hire), they sack everyone and decide that once again they'll have to take over this unmanageable problem child in their business.

A growth business needs to learn how to leverage people and systems in order to build the right sales function. The type of Sales Engine a business needs will change depending on the type of business, the type of customer they serve and therefore the necessary customer journey and route to market and although no one Sales Engine is exactly the same as the next, one thing is for sure, no business can successfully scale with a Heroic Sales Leader leading the charge from the front.

To watch a video on the four key steps to remove a Heroic Sales Leader from your business follow this link; www.companyshortcuts.com

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ST.PATRICKS DAY CELEBRATIONS

To celebrate St.Patrick's Day in true North East style, Allied Irish Bank welcomed almost 100 clients, professional partners and staff to the Sandman Hotel for a night of entertainment.

Allied Irish, the specialist business bank who serve medium and large businesses throughout the UK, used the event to say thank you to those who were involved in their success over the past year.

Guests enjoyed a sumptuous buffet and of course a few pints of the black stuff.

A great night was had by all and Allied Irish would like to thank everyone who made the effort to attend.







ONLINE COMPANY COMPLETES CROWDFUNDING ROUND

Law firm Ward Hadaway has represented North East online company Honcho Markets Ltd on its latest crowdfunding round.

Honcho Markets has developed a reverse auction marketplace app which allows insurers to enter a competitive real-time bidding process to offer the best price to customers. Rather than being charged a commission like comparison sites, insurers pay a £1 fee to bid. The funding will be used by Honcho Markets to run and operate the app in Durham's growing fin-tech cluster.

Legal advice and negotiations on the transaction were led by Corporate Partner Richard Butts at

Ward Hadaway's office in Newcastle.

Richard said: "We are delighted to have had the opportunity to work again with the team at Honcho. Dealing with the requirements of Honcho's investors was challenging but I was impressed with how the management team charted their way through the process."

Gavin Sewell, CEO of Honcho Markets Ltd, added: "We couldn't have achieved what we have without the technical excellence of the Corporate team at Ward Hadaway."

Honcho is expected to launch in the summer of this year.



HAY & KILNER PARTNER TAKES OVER AS PRESIDENT OF NEWCASTLE LAW SOCIETY

Alison Hall has become president of the Newcastle upon Tyne Law Society, a professional organisation which covers an area stretching from Berwick upon Tweed down to Durham City.

Alison, who is head of the private client department at Hay & Kilner Law Firm, will serve a 12 month period in the role. She will represent the region's legal community at both a regional and a national level.

Commercial property and regulatory specialist Chris Hugill of Ward Hadaway has taken on the vice president's role, while Nick Kincaid, a partner at North Shields firm Hadaway & Hadaway, becomes deputy vice president.

Originally from Yorkshire, Alison moved to the North East to study at Northumbria University. She has worked in the region ever since completing her legal qualifications and has served on the committee of the Newcastle upon Tyne Law Society for the last five years.

The Newcastle upon Tyne Law Society is one of the largest in the UK. It is one of the founding members of the newly-formed County Societies Group which represents over 5,000 solicitors.

PROMINENT LAWYER JOINS TEESSIDE'S ENDEAVOUR PARTNERSHIP



Leading North East dealmaker Nigel Williams has joined Stockton-based Endeavour Partnership as the law firm continues with its growth plans.

Throughout his 25-year career, Nigel has advised many locally-based, privately-owned businesses, as well as national and international clients such as Sembcorp Utilities and PD Ports. He has worked on a variety of high value corporate transactions with particular focus on the manufacturing and chemical sectors.

Nigel, originally from Middlesbrough, joins Endeavour as a partner in the corporate department. He will be responsible for transactional work, business development and mentoring other members of the team.

At the end of 2017, Endeavour Partnership announced its most successful year in the firm's 18-year history. The firm now remains on track to deliver its five-year business planning objective of doubling its turnover. Endeavour currently employs a team of 54 and hopes to create around six new jobs in 2018.

Paul Bury, Managing Partner at Endeavour Partnership, said: "Nigel is one of the North's most prominent commercial lawyers. He joins us at a very important time in our development. We have some big growth plans to which Nigel will be pivotal."

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Gillian Scribbins

WILL I LOSE CONTACTS AFTER GDPR?

You might, but should you really care? Gillian Scribbins, in Muckle LLP's data protection legal team, tackles the key question on every marketer's lips.

A silent war of wills is raging in our office at the moment, and it's akin to many we know to be going on in businesses throughout the North East, and we suspect in offices Europe over.

The bone of contention is this: can we continue direct marketing to our existing customer database after the 25 May? The camps are divided - 'yes, we have a legitimate interest', and 'no, we don't have compliant consent'.

As in any good debate, there is no right or wrong answer. At the recent Direct Marketing Association (DMA) conference, Elizabeth Denham, the UK's information commissioner, explained the sticking point is because we are waiting for an update to the Privacy and Electronic Communication Regulation (PECR), which sits alongside GDPR.

At the minute PECR allows for a soft opt-in, where businesses can assume that certain existing or former customers are happy to receive direct marketing, subject to certain conditions. However, this looks set to change and all consumers will be required to actively opt-in to receive direct marketing.

Legitimate interests

The DMA and others successfully lobbied for

legitimate interests to be a lawful basis for direct marketing under GDPR. However, because of the way GDPR corresponds with PECR, it is only really an option for B2B marketing, postal marketing and for emails to soft opt-in customers.

And there are conditions to using legitimate interests as a legal basis for direct marketing. You need to declare what that legitimate interest is, and you need to be sure it isn't overridden by the interests or fundamental rights and freedoms of the person you are contacting.

Consent

Consent is the only other basis you can rely on to send direct marketing, but it's not as simple as clicking yes. Consent is stricter now than it has been, meaning even if at one point you had consent, it may not fulfil all the criteria of consent under GDPR.

So what does this look like in practice?

If you're completely satisfied that everyone on your marketing database is an existing or former customer, who has recently engaged with you and has not requested to unsubscribe; your communications always provide a clear option

to unsubscribe; and your marketing is only for products or services similar to what they have purchased from you in the past, then you have a soft opt-in legitimate interest to continue email marketing (not phone or text) to these customers.

If you are not confident of the above, then you need new, GDPR compliant consent. This means an active opt-in, specific and granular, clear and separate from any other service, affirmative action which confirms that an individual wants to receive electronic marketing from your organisation, and via which medium.

If your marketing goes via a third party, then that needs to be explained as well, and every subsequent communication should remind customers they can withdraw their consent at any time.

You can read lots more on consent and legitimate interests at www.ico.org.uk. In the meantime, I'll leave you with another quote from Denham's address to the DMA: "It seems to me that a lot of energy and effort is being spent on trying to find a way to avoid consent.

"You say you will lose customers. I say you will have better engagement with them and be better able to direct more targeted marketing to them."

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SHARING THE JOY OF SHARED PARENTAL LEAVE

Shared Parental Leave (“SPL”) was introduced 3 years ago but recent figures suggest take up could be as little as 2%. The government has now launched the “Share the Joy” campaign to change that.

What is SPL?

SPL is a flexible way for parents and adopters to take leave in the first year after the birth of a child or placement for adoption.

It enables the parents to share up to 50 weeks of leave (the first two weeks of leave after birth being compulsory maternity leave). In theory, couples can take the leave together (so long as they don't exceed their joint entitlement); or it can be taken consecutively; or leave can be taken at different periods of time.

For example, a couple may decide to both take 25 weeks of SPL together; or the mother may decide to take, say, the first 6 months after birth as maternity

leave then share the remaining 24 weeks.

Who is eligible?

Both the mother and partner have to meet eligibility criteria in order to qualify for SPL. This includes having qualifying length of service or being in work for a certain period of time and meeting particular earning thresholds. The government believes around 285,000 couples every year will qualify for SPL.

Is it paid?

SPL is paid at the statutory rate which is £145.18 a week (from April 2018) provided the individuals meet the eligibility criteria for Statutory Shared Parental Pay (SSPP).

What do I need to do?

The provisions around SPL are quite complex in terms of eligibility, notice requirements and requiring declarations from the other partner. Having a properly drafted SPL Policy which sets out:

- eligibility criteria;
- how leave may be taken;
- notice requirements;
- rights during SPL; and
- entitlement to SSPP and any additional contractual pay

will make this a much easier issue to navigate for employers.

Should you have any queries around Shared Parental Leave and how it operates, please get in touch with Claire Rolston or Yvonne Atherton, specialist employment law solicitors at CLR Law on 0191 6030061 or hello@clrllaw.co.uk

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Sarah Crilly

DIGITAL ERA AND CRYPTOCURRENCIES BRING NEW ISSUES FOR DIVORCING SPOUSES AND THE COURTS

Sorting out the finances when it comes to divorce can be a painful and tricky process, especially in cases where the assets are virtual, complex and liquidity is an issue, says Sarah Crilly, a partner in the Family and Matrimonial team at Ward Hadaway.

The rising popularity of cryptocurrencies as investments are presenting divorce lawyers with a new challenge when it comes to dividing up a couple's assets.

With more people's assets involving a currency that is both hard to value and also hard to trace, the divorce process can become more expensive as well as time-consuming. This process can take the best part of a year if the matter is going through a court process and sometimes even if parties are proceeding on a voluntary basis.

Given the nature of divorce and the lawyers' desire to protect their clients - both parties tend to assume the other may be lying or hiding assets or even playing down their true value. A large part of the time it is straightforward as lots of information can be gleaned from parties' bank statements, employers, the Land Registry and Companies House as well as accountancy evidence.

However virtual currencies such as Bitcoin, Litecoin, Ripple and Ethereum are a new challenge for lawyers as they are plagued with not only issues of valuation but also traceability. Lawyers need to equip themselves with knowledge of the asset as they need to understand what they are trying to track and value.

While parties have a duty to provide full disclosure of their assets in a divorce, the anonymous nature of cryptocurrencies can potentially make them appealing for spouses wishing to hide money from a partner.

If one side decides not to disclose or provide evidence of their holdings in cryptocurrencies, the divorce process could then result in one party failing to get a fair share of assets. This can amount to a lot of money because judges generally, depending on the length of the marriage, order a 50-50 split of assets.

"Cryptocurrencies traded using an online investment platform or bought with funds from a bank account can be easier to trace and value. When cryptocurrency is purchased directly and moved offline, it then becomes more difficult. There are digital forensic experts who could search through a spouse's various email accounts to determine what transactions have taken place. However, this is a slow process that can be very costly and disproportionate to the value of the currency itself."

Lawyers need to ask the right questions from the outset of a divorce.

Cryptocurrencies also bring the problem of valuation. The price can fluctuate wildly within the course of a divorce.

It's not as straightforward as valuing investments and ordinary shares. There will have to be valuations made throughout the whole period of a case. You would then have to agree a value on the date of the final hearing.

This means that although a partner could have built up a substantial crypto fortune when filing for divorce, it may have diminished by the time of settlement and vice versa.

Such price shifts are likely to lead courts to split the cryptocurrency (the risk-laden asset) itself and take their chances selling on an exchange. This way both parties carry equal risk with any copper-bottomed safe assets such as property etc also being divided equally.

At Ward Hadaway, we have experience of dealing with cases involving cryptocurrencies and can provide couples with advice on any issues they might have by providing high-level support when times are tough.

For more information on the issues raised in this article, please get in touch with Sarah Crilly at sarah.crilly@wardhadaway.com or 0191 204 4463.

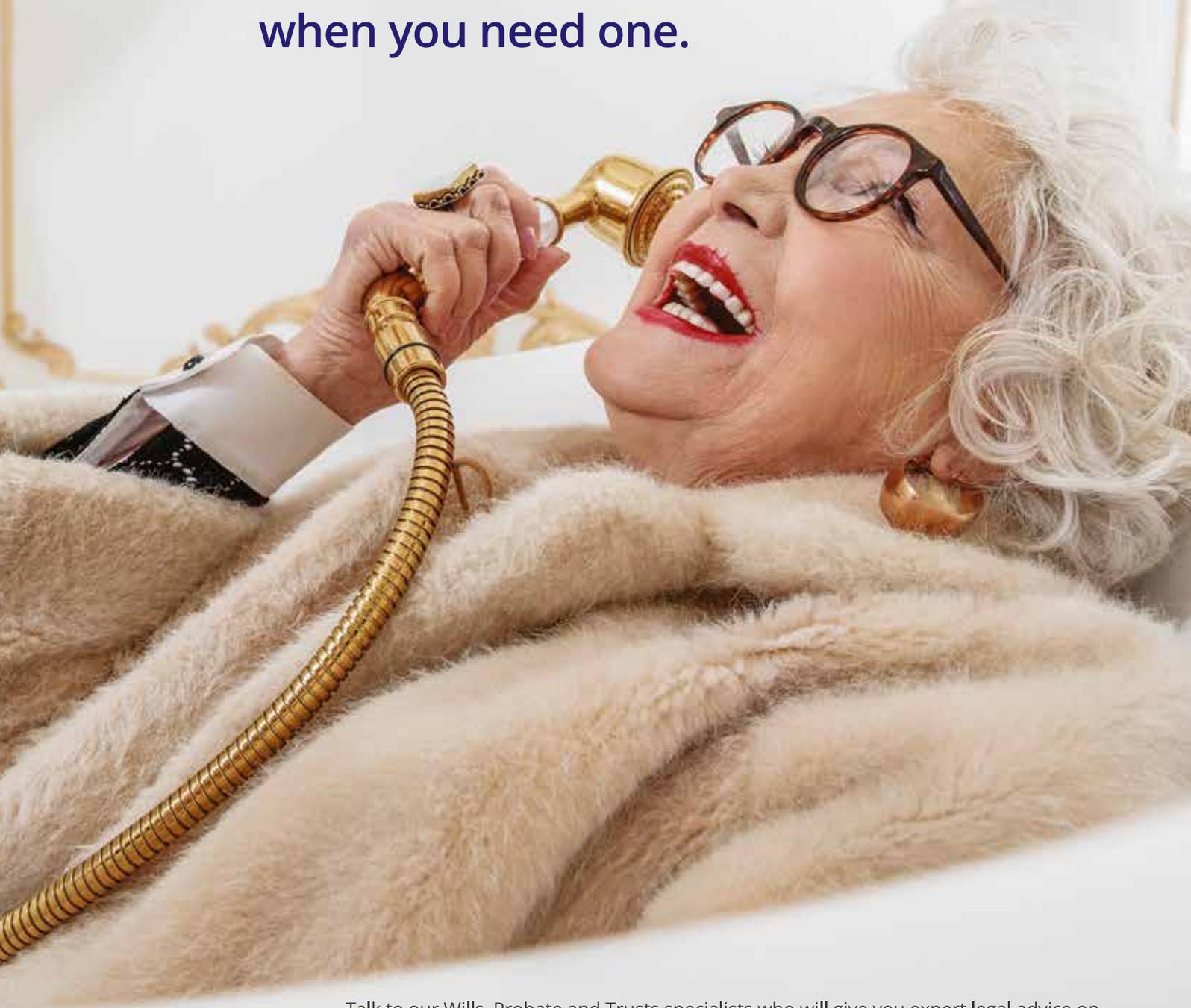
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MONEY ON THE MIND

6 April 2018 marks the start of the new tax year and is synonymous with people getting their finances in order. Charlotte McBride, Solicitor at boutique employment law firm Collingwood Legal, explains why April is an important month in money terms for employment law.

A number of changes come into effect this month which affect employers and employees alike. The changes may be more graciously received by staff but the employers amongst you should take note as the cost of not getting your figures right could be significant. Here we outline the key information you need, to make sure everything adds up for you!

National Minimum Wage increase

Each year the Low Pay Commission publishes its recommendations to the government in relation to minimum wages for various age categories in the UK workforce. From 1 April the increased minimum hourly rates of pay will be:

- £7.83 for those 25 and over (known as the National Living Wage)
- £7.38 for those aged 21-25
- £5.90 for those aged 18-20
- £4.20 for those under 18

Failure to pay the NMW can lead to civil or criminal prosecution and also potential claims in the Tribunal from workers claiming arrears of pay. There is also the reputational damage for businesses to consider should the company be publically "named and shamed" like Primark and Sports Direct were in 2017.

Statutory Pay increases

With varying means of recovering whole or part payment from HMRC, employers will need to be aware of the new increased rates for the following payments to eligible staff:

- Family-related leave (incl. maternity, paternity, adoption and shared parental pay) at £145.18 per week.
- £92.05 per week for statutory sick pay.

Compensation limits in the Tribunal

No business ever wants to face a claim in Tribunal from a former member of staff not least because the costs involved can be substantial. Each year limits applied to certain awards are increased in line



with inflation. The government recently announced the caps that come into force from 6 April:

- In unfair dismissal cases, tribunals will award a basic award. This is calculated using a formula that is also applied to statutory redundancy calculations. The calculation is based on multiples of a week's pay which is subject to a cap of £508.
- Compensatory awards for ordinary unfair dismissal claims are also subject to a cap. Since July 2013 this has been the lower of either 52 weeks' gross pay or a set figure. For dismissals on or after 6 April 2018 this will be £83,682.

Employers should nevertheless be aware that workers and employees can bring other types of claim that have no upper limits such as claims for discrimination or whistleblowing. Taking appropriate independent legal advice on how to handle workplace issues is crucial to minimising the risk of claims.

Tax treatment of termination payments

Finally, new rules are planned to come into force from 6 April 2018 which will affect the taxation of some non-contractual payments in lieu of notice.

Payments in lieu of notice ("PILONs") are

generally subject to deductions for tax and NICs if an employee's contract gave the employer the right to make such a payment rather than have the employee work their notice. Conversely, where no contractual right exists an employer has traditionally been able to pay the monies that the employee would have earned in their notice period tax free (up to £30,000) as the payment is treated as damages for breach of contract.

However, the new provisions will mean post-employment notice pay ("PENP") will no longer benefit from the £30,000 tax free exemption. If an employer makes a non-contractual PILON, that element of any termination payment will be regarded as PENP and the basic pay that would have been paid for the notice period will be taxable and subject to NICs notwithstanding the fact the employer has no contractual right to pay in lieu. From April 2019 employer NICs will also have to be deducted from all termination payments (including PENP) over £30,000.

This is a significant change in the tax treatment of some elements of termination payments which employers have been able to use to incentivise employees in the past. Complying with these new provisions will be critical to avoiding scrutiny from HMRC.

If you need any support or advice about any of the topics covered in this article please contact me at charlotte.mcbride@collingwoodlegal.com or on 0191 282 2883.

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PERSONAL INJURY CLAIMS

By David Low, a partner with Swinburne Maddison LLP

Having an accident is not only stressful; it can also be life-changing. When it happens, and you decide to make a personal injury claim, there are some important points to note before accepting any offer.

Recently, I acted on behalf of a gentleman who had been involved in a road traffic accident while out cycling. The circumstances of the incident were that the client was knocked off his bike by a car emerging from a side road.

Initially, it appeared to be a relatively straightforward accident claim of limited value. However, it soon emerged that the injuries sustained to the client's left leg were life-changing which resulted in him being medically retired from his job.

The deterioration in his condition meant that the value of his claim rose significantly. Initially, the offers received from the third party's insurance company were unacceptably low, and, as we were unable to reach a satisfactory settlement, Court proceedings were issued.

It is important to stress that in these cases, claimants should be wary of accepting the first offer, especially if it is a 'pre-medical offer' which we can never advise clients to accept given the risk that there are more serious underlying conditions which may significantly affect the value of their claim and which are not initially apparent.

It is tempting to the layperson to accept what might appear to be a generous financial settlement. However, by allowing time for careful consideration and negotiation of the offers put forward, and the obtaining of clear expert medical evidence, I'm delighted to say that, in this case, we achieved a settlement figure of £180,000; a significant achievement given that the insurer's first offer was a paltry £15,000.

The success of this case clearly demonstrates the level of specialist knowledge and experience which Swinburne Maddison can offer, as well as the tenacity of the firm to secure the best outcome for our clients in everything that we do.



For more information, David Low can be contacted on 0191 384 2441 or by email on djl@swinburnemaddison.co.uk

JB SKILLS GROWS ITS EXPERT TEAM



JB Skills Training has invested in the future of the company by bringing a range of new talent.

Leading the way in finance now for the award winning North East based company is Vanessa Stobart. Vanessa has joined the team as finance director and brings with her over 20 years experience working in finance across a diverse range of businesses.

The 41-year-old who is from Easington Village, Co Durham, has three children and is married to a farmer. She is delighted to join the senior management team at JB Skills and will be focusing on developing financial models, forecasting and analysis, ensuring working capital management and profit maximisation. She said: "This is such an exciting time to join the business. There is a lot of growth on the cards and the existing team is embarking on some new challenges and opportunities that I am keen to be part of."

"The team is very inspirational but also down-to-earth, so I am looking forward to working closely with them to produce a strategic financial plan looking to the future to ensure we are ready to embrace it."

Vanessa isn't the only new addition to the

team. Paul Harm, IT trainer and assessor, has also boosted the training team, ensuring the social media and ICT courses are available. Karina Nelson and Cheryl Gowland also join the team as trainer and assessor too, as does Charlotte Bunce, a specialist Health and Social Care Assessor. The compliance team gets a boost with the addition of Saysha Trusty.

Dave Macmillan, managing director, said: "It has been an opportune time to grow the team and to add in some specialist roles such as creating a finance director position. I am sure that Vanessa and the new additions will all make a huge difference and I am delighted to have them all on board."

"As JB Skills now have contracts to work with both Levy and Non-Levy employers we are keeping ahead of the growing demand for our service with the addition of extra assessors – we are working closely with many companies advising them on the best way to either grow their team with talented apprentices or boost the skills in their existing team through apprenticeships. We are confident now we have a strong team in place to grow upon this service even further."

More information is available at www.jb-skillstraining.co.uk or by calling 0191 510 5519.

GETTING TO KNOW...

As a solicitor in the family team at Gordon Brown Law Firm (LLP) and a member of the Law Society's Children Law Accreditation Scheme, Sam Wardle is dedicated to helping people who are experiencing any kind of Family Law issue. However, her second passion is shoes, and the more unusual the better.

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

My passion is collecting shoes. To be honest, I don't really remember how I got into it, as I was a tomboy growing up and hated anything remotely feminine; my mam was forever putting me in Laura Ashley dresses, and I was always getting told off for climbing trees and building dens while wearing them.

I think things changed when I graduated from university and entered the workplace. As conventional business dress can often be sombre colours, shoes are a great way of expressing individuality. Plus, as my shoe size has been the same for close to 20 years, I know that if I look after them they'll last forever, and they're just fun to collect. I don't care about what brand or season they are - I love a bargain and seeing the boxes in the wardrobe, all neatly stacked. I forget how many I have and then when I open the boxes I remember what's in there and where I was when I wore them, who I was with and what I felt like at the time, and that's comforting to me.

How would you describe yourself in three words?

Honest, friendly, cheeky.

What would your autobiography be called?

'How do these things continue to happen?'

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

It's simple, but it's turning my phone and laptop off, getting the house clean on Saturday morning (as I can't relax otherwise), and then just enjoying time with family and friends over the weekend.

I insist on a making a roast dinner every Sunday as the lives of my family and friends are so busy, and I like to have at least one meal a week where we're all together, phones switched off and just talking and catching up. It's an open house so if friends are free, they know they're welcome, especially if they bring a pudding.



Sam Wardle

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

Prince - I love that man.

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

Any of the Tudor novels by Philippa Gregory, they're easy to read and I feel like I'm learning something.

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

Superhuman speed.

What was your dream job as a child?

I was going to join the ThunderCats and be like Cheetara. I still have that dream.

Failing that, I wanted to be Donnie Wahlberg's PA so I could be with him all the time. That one could still happen. New Kids on the Block are still together and I'm convinced all I need is an introduction!

What is your greatest achievement?

I don't know that I've achieved it yet, as I've still

got lots to do in my personal and professional life.

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

Helping people is the aspect of my role that inspires me the most.

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

I've been here over 8 years now. I joined the firm hoping they would allow me to be myself as well as being all that is professionally expected of a solicitor. I haven't been disappointed and I'm grateful that I've been encouraged to maintain my individuality as well as being part of a strong team.

GBLF's dedicated family team understands the anxiety and distress that family disputes can cause. Its team of experienced solicitors represent clients to always ensure the best possible outcome for everyone, and are on hand to help on a range of matters including divorce, separation, children, matrimonial finance, social services, prenuptial agreements and domestic violence.

NAYLORS CONCLUDES £2.25M OFFICE INVESTMENT ACQUISITION



Commercial property specialist Naylor's has completed a £2.25m investment acquisition at Team Valley Gateshead.

Marquis Court on Kingsway South, which comprises 21 individual offices totalling 31,000 sqft, has been purchased by Bronze Investments.

The investor plans to undertake a programme of refurbishment works before making the offices available to purchase and has retained Naylor's

to provide property management, building consultancy and agency services.

Naylor's will be managing the full project for Bronze Investments and will be marketing the individual refurbished offices at a starting price of £150,000.

Fergus Laird, Director and Head of Property Investment at Naylor's, said: "We are very pleased to be working with Bronze Investments. We anticipate that there will be strong interest from small

businesses and company owners, plus individuals who wish to invest in commercial property."

A spokesperson for Bronze Investments added: "We were particularly attracted to this opportunity due to the strength of its strategic location within the region's largest business park. Marquis Court enjoys a prominent position and is within walking distance of Retail World, so there are many benefits which make the offices a sensible purchase option."

KNIGHT FRANK SECURE MOST PROPERTY INVESTMENTS IN THE NORTH EAST

A bumper year for Knight Frank Newcastle has seen the agent take the top spot for the most property investment deals transacted in the North East in 2017. Knight Frank handled an impressive 22 investment property deals worth in excess of £110m.

The two biggest deals were No 2 St James Gate, a £20m acquisition where Knight Frank acted on behalf of purchaser Palace Capital Plc, and the £16.15m sale of the Royal Mail Sorting Office in Gateshead where Knight Frank represented landlord BMO Global Asset Management LLP.

National property publication Estates Gazette has named Knight Frank's Capital Markets team as the 'Most Active Investment Agent' in the North East. The Capital Markets team, based on Newcastle's Quayside, is headed up by partner Dickon Wood and works on behalf of a wide range of clients including pension funds, property companies and private individuals.

Dickon Wood, partner at Knight Frank, said: "The North East remains an attractive location to invest in real estate especially due to the discount on yield that we enjoy over other regions, and this looks set to continue."

PONTELAND TO GET 60 NEW HOMES



Plans to build 62 new family homes near Ponteland, Northumberland, are to go ahead.

Following finalisation of a Section 106 agreement, housebuilder Bellway will begin development of four and five bedroom homes within the settlement of Medburn, west of Darras Hall village. The new development will feature areas of landscaped open space.

Northumberland County Council planning committee approved Bellway's plans for the 15.8 acre site.

Bellway was supported by expert planning and design consultancy Barton Willmore in securing consent for the scheme.

Martyn Earle, Associate Planner at Barton Willmore, said: "This is a brilliant scheme for Medburn which will provide important family homes for this part of Northumberland. Housing is much needed here, and Bellway's vision for a sustainable development that fits with the surrounding area will provide just that."

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Oakview House Netherton Moor Farm, Hartford Bridge

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Oakview House is an outstanding country home enjoying a most stunning position with views over magnificent Northumberland countryside. The property is situated in an excellent location and has versatile accommodation, gardens with hot tub, integral double garage and driveway parking.



Price Guide: £725,000

rare! From Sanderson Young

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St. Albans Place Tynemouth

A beautiful, double fronted Edwardian family home offering superb accommodation with period features and stunning river views. Located in this highly desirable area, well known for its stunning beaches and priory, the property has gardens to front and rear and on-site parking.

Price Guide: £795,950

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Ashlea Middle Drive, Woolsington

4 4 3 D

A charming and substantial detached family home with fantastic character and located in a popular residential area. The property is set on a mature garden site extending to approximately 0.72 acres with two summer houses, a detached double garage and beautiful views over farmland.



Price Guide: £1.1 Million

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SUMMERSIDE HOUSE, HINDLEY FARM, STOCKSFIELD



PRICE GUIDE: £1.375 MILLION

Summerside House is a very special property, one of a small number of luxury homes converted from an old farm steading. This five bedroom family home, beautifully combining traditional charm with luxurious contemporary fittings, enjoys a magnificent location on the south-western edge of the development, providing stunning rural views. The gardens were designed by Jamie Dunstan, a Gold Medal winner at Chelsea, and are immaculate with lawned areas, patio terraces, external lighting, mature planting and a putting green. An outstanding feature is the recently built, oak-framed outdoor barbeque/bar room, providing a fully-utilised Australian-style entertaining space with professionally fitted barbeque, beer tap, integrated appliances and bi-folding windows opening to a tremendous terrace and al-fresco area with outdoor seating; the total grounds extend to approximately 3.6 acres including paddock.



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



SHOW HOME SET TO OPEN AT STORY HOMES' LATEST NORTHUMBERLAND DEVELOPMENT

Five-star housebuilder, Story Homes, will soon be opening the highly anticipated show home at its most northerly development in the North East, Chancel Place.

Located five miles from Alnwick in the historic village of Longhoughton, Chancel Place launched in September 2017 will bring 66 exclusive, high specification family homes to this picturesque area of Northumberland.

With ten different house types and a mixture of semi-detached and detached three, four and five-bedroom homes, the development has so far attracted a wide variety of buyers. Homes have been reserved by first-time buyers, local residents looking to upsize, and retired couples keen to move from busier towns to this peaceful location near the coast. There has also been significant interest – from those who live within as well as outside the North East – who are looking to purchase a holiday home.

The forthcoming show home at Chancel Place will be the four-bedroom detached 'Taunton'. This will give homebuyers a chance to see the superior features that come as standard in most Story

Homes, such as bi-fold doors leading onto turfed gardens, bathroom fittings by Crosswater, tiling from renowned Spanish brand Porcelanosa and brassware by Kelly Hoppen.

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.

Yvonne Wilson, Story Homes' sales executive at Chancel Place, said: "I have been based at Chancel Place right from the start, and it has been great to see how popular the development has been and to meet the variety of people who are interested in living or having a holiday home here.

"Longhoughton is a beautiful place to live or

to enjoy a relaxing break. Residents will benefit from village life while being well-connected to locations both north and south via the A1. These high quality homes are different from anything else in the area. I am enjoying seeing the week-by-week progress of the development and how the exteriors of the homes have been designed to complement the surroundings. We are looking forward to the development becoming a real part of the community once residents start to move in later this year."

Having expanded rapidly into the region over recent years, Story Homes now has 11 live developments across the North East, with more set to launch over the coming year.

The date of the show home opening will be announced very soon. Visit storyhomes.co.uk for more information and updates on all of Story Homes' developments.



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Damiano Rea, Director, Heaton Property

COMPLAINING TO HER MAJESTY

I am proud of our Complaints Procedure. It is an escalation from "Can we sit down and talk about this?" to "call in the Ombudsman you poltroon".

I am most proud that we have never had to implement it in all these years. Lavazza coffee and Italian biscuits solve most disputes. If an ACAS officer happens to read this, that is the answer right there.

There are exceptions. You may complain about loss of freehold on your property. The documents will refer to the new freeholder as "Her Majesty". Her full title is "Queen Elizabeth the Second, by the Grace of God Queen of this Realm and of Her other Realms and Territories, Head of the Commonwealth, Defender of the Faith."

As negotiations go, this is not good. You are the leaseholder. The freeholder is The Queen of Everything. She owns your freehold through Crown Estates. Crown Estates will negotiate. With a big smile because they hold all the cards. And your freehold.

How can this happen?

Our block management division took instruction

from leaseholders who found their freehold was now owned by Her Majesty. This was a block of six apartments where the leaseholders had set up a company to own the freehold. Perfect. Each of the leaseholders owned one sixth of the freehold.

But the company failed to notify Companies House of the names of the Directors. Companies House struck off the company and the freehold was declared 'Bona Vacantia', Latin for 'vacant goods'. Vacant goods pass through The Treasury Solicitor who has more pressing business so the freehold is passed to Her Majesty.

Her Majesty has a fair amount of land and is not averse to having more. The leaseholders were now dealing with Crown Estates. Who are impervious to Italian coffee and biscuits. After two years of negotiation I am happy to say, we have a resolution. We now own the freehold.

But after expending a five figure sum and accumulating a three inch thick file of correspondence, do the leaseholders have cause

for complaint since the freehold they owned was snatched away?

No. Having neglected company law, Companies House acted and struck off the company, as they are bound to do. The same is true of the Treasury and Crown Estates, both of whom adhered to the law. Leaseholders might write to Her Majesty but I wouldn't be watching the letterbox for a reply.

There are no grounds for complaint. But an important lesson to be learned and it is this. If you sign a lease you are entering into a binding contract which the law assumes you fully understand. You may not read the T&Cs when you download an app but an app is unlikely to cost you tens of thousands of pounds if you get it wrong.

If you do not fully understand the contract or freehold law, talk to someone who does. The expression "an Englishman's home is his castle" is attributed to the 17th century politician Sir Edward Coke. Wise words, so long as you retain ownership of the land upon which your castle is built.



HELP TO BUY, IS A FIVE YEAR 'TIMEBOMB' ABOUT TO GO OFF?

BH Mortgages director Lewis Chambers provides his insight into the Help To Buy bubble.

Thousands of new build buyers who used the government's Help to Buy mortgage scheme could be hit with expensive fees on their loans as they come to the end of their five-year interest free period.

The equity loan scheme, which is just about to reach its five-year anniversary, allowed buyers to make use of a five-year interest-free loan from the government of up to 20 per cent of the value of a property so that they could get on the housing ladder.

Those who bought their homes on the Help to Buy scheme back in 2013 will pay an average of £652 this year on their loan if they live outside London or £927 if they live in the capital.

So far, there have been few mortgage products made available to help those with maturing interest free periods on the Help to Buy mortgages.

As the interest free period nears the five-year marker, customers will need to start paying rising fees on their equity loans or come up with another plan, which could include re-mortgaging.

After the five-year interest free period is up, borrowers must pay a fee of 1.75 per cent of the value of their loan, increasing each year by RPI plus 1 per cent, unless they can pay the loan off, usually by re-mortgaging.

The Help to Buy scheme only applied to new-build homes, and customers now may be left paying expensive fees if they do not have the equity left in their homes to re-mortgage - especially since new-build homes don't always increase in value at the same speed as other homes.

That said, our new build clients are pro-active about addressing this. We at BH Mortgages don't leave matters until the last minute, and ensure

our clients are well educated upon all affordable housing schemes and their implications. We have already seen great examples where we have re-mortgaged to repay the equity loan which also resulted in lower monthly repayments.

It's a complex transaction as you can be hit with re-valuation and additional legal fees, however, with our expert advice we can see you through the entire process in the most cost-efficient way.

I expect the lenders will come to the market place with an ex-help to buy re-mortgage offering, but when is yet to be seen. Most lenders have shifted toward offering a middle of the road retention deal allowing a transfer to another product.

If you have a help to buy equity loan, nearing the end of its term and need to discuss re-mortgage options, contact me or my professional team for impartial advice by calling 0191 260 2000.

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



THE HOUSING CRISIS

By Chris Pipe, Director, Planning House

Anyone who follows the news will be aware that the UK is in the midst of a housing crisis. With political debates, media coverage and declarations from the Prime Minister that more homes need to be built, its little wonder that there is so much disagreement as to the potential 'fix'.

But what does this mean for the planning profession, well aside from being blamed as one of the causes for the housing shortage through an overburdened bureaucratic process, changes are currently being consulted on in terms of national policy (the National Planning Policy Framework).

Planners had the radical and much needed change to national policy in 2012 when 1,000 pages of planning policy were consolidated into a single document. This 'update' of national policy comes after much litigation on interpretation and wrangling on whether the document goes far enough to effectively tackle the inequalities in housing.

The question on everyone's lips: Is the proposed national policy change going to boost the supply of housing? I sincerely hope so, however, I can't help looking at the proposed planning consultation and think that this just scratches the surface, we know the housing market is failing to keep pace with supply and demand, but I am doubtful that the changes in policy will be enough.

Whilst changes to planning policy wording are being picked over and debated by both Local Authority Planners and Private Practice Planners alike its importance to remember that planning first and foremost is about 'people and places' and whilst there are different planning roles and sectors the housing crisis isn't just about changing wording it's about action.

Whilst the proposed policy changes are a step in the right direction more needs to be done to assist the planning process, such as ensuring Local Planning Authorities have enough resources to efficiently and effectively deal with applications and by speeding up the decision making process, which also applies to the Planning Inspectorate in dealing with planning appeals. Reducing the red tape and properly resourcing to ensure we have a system which doesn't put overly prescriptive barriers to development will assist in being proactive rather than reactive.

Inevitably the need to boost housing will not be welcomed by all, however the message is clear Britain needs to build more homes.

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



Bradley Hall group managing director Neil Hart, director Richard Rafique, finance director Geoff Davis and group director Peter Bartley

NORTH EAST PROPERTY FIRM NAMED TOP RETAIL AGENT

A North East property firm has topped a regional leader board for retail property activity compiled by the UK's leading commercial property data and analysis publishers.

The commercial property team at Bradley Hall chartered surveyors has been announced as Estates Gazette's most active agents in the retail property sector, also coming a close second within the office and leisure and hotels categories.

The firm, which has followed an aggressive and strategic growth strategy over the past 18 months to expand its team and services, has experienced success across a range of sectors and quickly became one of the most active agents in the region.

Bradley Hall's retail activity included dozens of sales and lettings of premises, acting on behalf of some of the region's leading independent and corporate retailers and investors.

Bradley Hall group managing director, Neil Hart, said: "Our growth strategy has resulted in an expansion of the team which has increased our capacity to take on even more new and exciting projects.

"Thanks to our large regional office base, which deals in all aspects of both commercial and residential markets, Bradley Hall now has a greater reach and broader outlook than other agents in the North East.

"This prestigious accolade and acknowledgement comes thanks to the hard work and dedication by the commercial team on behalf of our clients. It further



cements us as a market leader within our sector and encourages us to continue the company's success and growth.

"The North East is an exciting area of development and we look forward to this continuing following various investments and projects which will create further business and employment opportunities."

Bradley Hall has offices in Newcastle, Gosforth, Alnwick, Morpeth, Sunderland and Durham. For information please visit the Bradley Hall website www.bradleyhall.co.uk



PROPERTY DRINKS

Mincoffs recently hosted their first 'Property Drinks' event bringing together the region's property community.

Held at Newcastle's YOLO Townhouse, 'Property Drinks' was one of a series of events planned to mark the firm's 70th anniversary celebrations and follows on from the success of the popular 'Tech Drinks' events which the firm has been running since 2016.

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OPPORTUNITIES STILL SHINE THROUGH THE BREXIT FOG OF UNCERTAINTY



Peter Bowden

Peter Bowden, Head of Office at Knight Frank Newcastle, shares his thoughts on the North East commercial property market and tells us why there are reasons to be optimistic.

I get asked a lot about how the market is going to react and adapt to the challenges of a slow economy, Brexit and the lack of prime space in the region. And my answer is this. Economic growth is still positive – and there are still opportunities to be had.

Our forecast for economic growth in 2018 is 1.5% which, although below the 20-year average of 2%, it is still progressive. Yes, there's uncertainty around Brexit. And that, inevitably, brings caution into the market. But because there is still demand from the growth sectors, and because the region lacks good quality office and industrial stock, rents are driving upwards, speculative industrial development is back on the agenda and landlords can get better returns by investing cleverly in their buildings.

Sheds demand is rising

Statistics show there is around 4.2m sq ft. of industrial space currently available in the North East. However, only 485,000 sq ft. of that space could be considered modern. This lack of supply is already pushing rents up and for the first time in a long time, speculative large sheds could be set to make a comeback.

Nissan's current tendering for suppliers has given some hope to developers and owners of large

factories that 2018 could be a good year. Although, of course, we have yet to see how many of these companies eventually secure contracts and take space.

The letting of UK Land's new build 57,000 sq ft. unit on Tyne Tunnel Trading Estate was a notable deal in the latter half of 2017. The unit was let during construction at a rent of £6 per sq ft. And the speed it went under offer in the first month after construction began has potentially given encouragement to other developers sitting on planning permission for larger units.

The industrial market is proving to be resilient. We expect to see continued enquiries in the sub-10,000 sq ft. range and a continued steady demand for larger units around the 50,000 sq ft. to 150,000 sq ft. mark.

Office opportunities

When it comes to offices - rents and lease lengths have not yet reached a level where new development, without some form of public sector support, is viable.

However, we go into 2018 with around 170,000 sq ft. of Grade A office space available and, we believe, around 250,000 sq ft. of active city centre requirements. So more rental growth is on the horizon.

The smart landlords are refurbishing their offices to meet the rapidly changing requirements of occupiers. Inspiring, contemporary spaces are leading the way. Landlords are realising the need to provide amenity rich, highly serviced spaces which, together with the occupiers fit out, serve to aid talent attraction and retention.

A shining example of this is Earl Grey House, a 58,000 sq.ft Grade II listed mixed-use building in Newcastle city centre. This pioneering refurbishment that turned convention on its head to deliver innovative space distinct from the usual Grey Street style has set new headline rents for Grey Street.

Barclays House, also on Grey Street, will deliver a significant refurbishment in the next few months, further enhancing the offer to occupiers who are demanding so much more from their office space.

Inward investment

And finally, our region is on fire when it comes to being a prime location for inward investment projects. This is a very real opportunity for the North East. Our competitive cost base, skilled labour pool, strong universities and the availability of high quality office space such as that at Quorum Business Park are all key ingredients, particularly to compete for 'North Shoring' opportunities.

BOLDER IDEAS NEEDED TO ADDRESS HOUSING SHORTAGE

By Jon Tweddell, Director of JT Planning



Bold moves are needed to address our housing shortage and the initial government response was the recent publication of a consultation on proposed changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

When the NPPF was first published in 2012 under the Conservative/Liberal Democrat Coalition, it was a significant shift from previous policy and I think it was a game changing moment.

It was published during the financial crisis and was one step that the government took to help increase house building. It has worked to some degree, but we still aren't quite hitting the targets that many think we ought to be.

There is mixed opinion on the consultation draft, but many do not think it goes far enough to tackle the housing crisis and increase the output of affordable homes. I tend to agree.

There are some interesting changes and I do feel they will help, but in my opinion more fundamental changes around Green Belt policy were needed if we are to realise the 300,000 new homes in England per year.

The Conservatives have taken a stricter stance on Green Belt development. We have experienced this first hand in places like Northumberland where a

new administration scrapped their Core Strategy because they said it would have seen the county 'concreted over' with new housing.

But bold moves are required to address the country's housing problems. The consultation draft NPPF continues to afford a lot of protection to Green Belt; developing it is seen an absolute last resort. I disagree with this approach.

Many of our large towns and cities are surrounded by Green Belt, boundaries are often drawn tightly around the built-up area with little room to expand. Previous policy of developing previously-developed (brownfield) sites within settlements has been exhausted for decades – most of the sites are now developed; are not viable; or are simply not attractive to the market. Where do we develop if we can't expand into edge-of-settlement Green Belt?

A great example of local authorities being bold with their approach to housing is Newcastle and Gateshead. Their joint Core Strategy deleted large

areas of Green Belt to realise new housing. This was land that had been protected for decades and that local residents were ferociously fighting to keep as open fields.

It is these bold moves that will increase housing supply to a level that we need, but there's not enough local authorities with the vision and boldness to do this; this must change.

I do think there are other ways we can achieve more housing, other than simply developing Green Belt. New settlements, such as Garden Cities, is a brilliant tool to provide a critical mass of new development planned around new infrastructure. Again, controversial I know, but these are the sorts of things we must do.

I welcome the changes to the NPPF, but they simply do not go far enough. I fear that my entire career will be punctuated by this debate, but I remain positive that one day we will achieve what we need, more homes for families and more affordable homes for our kids.

For more details visit www.jontweddell.co.uk

NEW OFFICE LAUNCH AND MORE JOBS AT RAMARKETING



Pharmaceutical and life sciences creative agency ramarketing is set to open a second UK office as the company gears up for another year of significant growth.

The award-winning company is setting up shop in Manchester and will expand its team by 25% with the creation of several new jobs in the North East and North West.

Last year, the marketing business, which specialises in design, digital and PR services for an international client base, posted growth figures of 60% and doubled staff numbers to 20.

The new roles that will be available include a head of operations, a senior marketing manager and an agency marketing manager. Other PR account management and design positions are also available in both Manchester and ramarketing's head office in Newcastle.

Founder Raman Sehgal said: "We are predicting significant growth in 2018 due to our increasingly strong position in the global pharmaceutical and biotech outsourcing space, hence the search for new members of the team. Exciting times lie ahead for ramarketing, and we need to make sure we have the right people and the right balance of skills on board to meet our targets."

O INVESTS SIX FIGURE SUM IN GROWTH AS IT MOVES TO NEW OFFICES

Newcastle agency O Communications is investing £650,000 in new space and hires as it gears for growth in the creative and digital services.

The creative communications agency, whose client list includes Flymo, Goldsmiths and British Masters, has bought a circa 4,000 sq ft office space to provide room for growth.

Richmond House in Old Brewery Court will feature a digital studio for creative content design, photography and videography, as well as a large open-plan client services department for its growing team.

Dating from 1831, the Sandyford property has three floors including a significant basement. Refurbishment plans will include a ground floor space to host O's regular Ocademy events.

Investment in recruitment has included new roles in content marketing, social media and account management.

Kari Owers, Founder and Managing Director at O, said: "We have been looking for somewhere to expand the business and are delighted to have completed the deal at Old Brewery Court."

The property was purchased from Graham Hall of Graham S Hall Chartered Surveyors, with legal advice provided by Hay & Kilner and finance from Lloyds Bank.



DECIDE CELEBRATES WINNING SILVER

Creative agency DECIDE has won a Silver Award for its work on The Travelling Bee Company brand at the DBA Design Effectiveness Awards 2018 which were recently held in London. The awards recognise projects that focus on the strategic and commercial value of successful design.

The creation of The Travelling Bee Company brand increased sales by over 500%. It also helped to secure listings in premium retailers such as Fenwick Food Hall and has featured in luxury design-led publications such as Vogue.

The brand identity is nostalgic with a hint of wit to communicate the craft skills that lie

at the core of the proposition. The tagline 'Following the flower' helps communicate the company's approach to business which involves transporting colonies of bees to locations around the North East of England and Scotland. The constantly changing location gives the bees access to specific flowers and trees so that the honey produced features seasonally unique flavours and a wide variety of health benefits.

Grant Marshall, Creative Director of DECIDE, commented: "To achieve such a radical increase in sales through the re-branding of The Travelling Bee Company is a true representation of how design can contribute to a brand's success."



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IS YOUR ORGANISATION A COMPANY CITIZEN?

In the face of political turbulence and years of austerity, and at a time when public trust in business, government, NGOs, and the media is at an all-time low, there is a growing recognition that organisations need to do more to contribute to society.

Companies are increasingly called upon to have a social purpose linked to their objectives that underpins everything they do, replacing standard, bolt-on corporate social responsibility programmes.

I recently read *The Company Citizen: Good for Business, Planet, Nation and Community* by Tom Levitt, which is based on the premise that business doing good is doing good business.

Here are ten of my favourite, most thought-provoking quotes that set out a strong case for change.

1. A company citizen is a body corporate, owned and run by people...[it] respects and engages with others and plans for the long-term. Aware of its environment, fiscal, market and physical, it responds to changing circumstances as guided by its judgement and values and as allowed by its resources.
2. Ultimately only conventional business drivers will drive large scale change: existing businesses need conventional business motives to make the idea of Company Citizenship sustainable.
3. Citizens care, vote and interact through cooperating, volunteering, creating and maintaining communities [...] companies do all of those things. Thousands of social enterprises use the tools of business to deliver a social or environmental object, not ignoring the need to be financially sustainable but not being dictated to by any perceived need to maximise dividends.
4. Those who exercise power should do so responsibly, not simply to mitigate the negative impacts of their activity on

society or the environment, but in socially constructive ways...Businesses which behave outside accepted moral frameworks cannot be true Company Citizens.

5. How a company uses its profit tells us about its values.
6. It's no surprise that our poorest communities are often, literally, hopeless. Those least able to afford it have borne the brunt of spending cuts. [...] The economic case for being involved in the relief of poverty is that poor people are poor consumers.
7. Decent citizens care for the welfare of their neighbours; they work with them to address common issues in the community; are generous with their time, skills and other resources. The Company Citizen is actively engaged, not in Party politics but in lobbying for what's right and helping mitigate what's wrong.
8. Ask community organisations and small charities what they need most and they'll probably say money, but they're wrong. They need skills to plan their operations, to strategise, to lobby. These are essentially

business skills that can be donated by a company at little cost in the course of an ongoing and committed relationship with a community. Get these skills right, and whilst the money won't necessarily look after itself, at least it will go further. Better still, skills transfer is a two-way street and workers will become better employees, better people, through such involvement.

9. Philanthropy can undoubtedly enhance reputations but this falls apart when a company acts in ways which undermine the values associated with their philanthropic gestures. This is 'greenwashing.'
10. Many ways for business to engage with a community are more sustainable than simply writing cheques:
 - Employer-supported volunteering can transfer, boost and extend employee skills;
 - A business with a sense of purpose better engages its employees, thus boosting productivity;
 - A values-led, ethical and sustainable value chain enhances reputation and can drive sales, while making sourcing practices more efficient and legally compliant.



Sarah Hall

Sarah Hall is the owner of PR and marketing agency Sarah Hall Consulting, founder of #FuturePROof and President of the Chartered Institute of Public Relations for 2018.

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ASK SILVER BULLET...

“WHAT IS A CHATBOT AND WHAT ARE THEY USED FOR?”

The word chatbot could be an alien term to many of you, but this growing form of marketing was actually developed over 50 years ago. ELIZA was developed in 1966 as the first chatbot to connect people with technology. Some years later and with vast improvements, companies have realised the potential of the chatbot and are using it as a unique marketing tool to connect with customers. A chatbot is a computer program that conducts a conversation as a way of gaining an insight to customer behaviour.

Otherwise known as a 'chat robot', a chatbot can simulate convincing human conversation. When conversing on a company website you are generally talking to artificial intelligence rather than a human employee. People interact via a chat interface, which is generally an automated message, in order to talk to a company via their website. Some chatbots using artificial intelligence actually have the ability to make decisions by using algorithms. For instance, if you ask a chatbot for a refund on a consumer website they have the ability to view your account and decide whether you are eligible.

As a result of the development in artificial intelligence, multiple companies use chatbots as a conversational agent, providing instant and personalised customer responses. A talking bot can benefit a company dramatically by not only increasing customer satisfaction but can also save hundreds of thousands of pounds in manpower. So in this respect, robots really are taking over humans.

A chatbot works by using algorithms picked up by customer behaviour and managing the information so it can react to the consumer. A site hosting a chatbot allows shoppers to believe the staff and customer service is exceptional, it is in fact the chatbots studying behaviour and attitudes working out what the customer wants to see and reacting to it.



Jen Macdonald, Account Manager at Silver Bullet Marketing Ltd.

It is a common conception that some of the best chatbots are feeding into millennials need for instant gratification. With polite conversation and flattery, chatbots are giving some young shoppers satisfactory discussion about what they like and what suits them. For some millennials it is a way to leverage conversation as digital technology is a primary form of communication, chatbots fit in to a convenient lifestyle – they are designed to be a quick and uncomplicated way to find the answers a consumer may be looking for.

There are many companies who are branching out to this popular method of marketing communication. Some of which are using common platforms such as Facebook messenger to reach a larger audience, others have these conversation tools built into their website or app. Facebook chatbots are a good idea for businesses as an autonomous digital assistant, these chatbots are used via Facebook messenger to automatically answer FAQ's. Using this tool enables companies to monitor customer behaviour across multiple sites and channels.

An example of a company launching a chatbot is the global brand Pizza Hut. The restaurant allows you to make orders through their Facebook messenger chatbot and can connect your personal Facebook account to the Pizza Hut account in order for it to see your order history for future promotions or re-ordering. The brand wanted to make it as easy as

possible for customers to order food without even having to pick up the phone.

MasterCard are another universal brand that use a Facebook messenger chatbot so customers can find out information about their bank accounts without having to log in via the website. Chatbots are created to understand human interaction so can gather information with a simple question, for example a customer can ask MasterCard "How much did I spend in Supermarkets last month?" and the chatbot will simulate the result and deliver it in a conversational style to the customer. This impressive form of marketing is changing the way companies communicate with their clients.

Starbucks have a similar chatbot available that also articulates when your order is ready and how much it will cost. This chatbot is somewhat different as it is on the Starbucks app rather than a third party platform; this means that you don't have to connect any of your other accounts to the company for them to see your history, ultimately making it pretty secure.

These chatbots are allowing technology to generate an instant conversation as a way of keeping customers satisfied. Talking to artificial intelligence is bridging the gap between human interaction and machine capability and may well be seen as the future of market research.

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.

DON'T WRITE RADIO OFF JUST YET



'Radio is dead'. Words we've heard too many times in the past few years, but here full-service agency The Works discuss why they couldn't disagree more and why they believe radio is here to stay.

When we started out more than a decade ago, most of our campaigns focused on printed ads in newspapers and magazines, direct mail pieces, TV and radio. It's undeniable that we now live in a digitally focused world, but surprisingly, we aren't all choosing digital media over its traditional counterparts. As our clients' needs have changed, we've diversified into new territories, but we know that content still works across more traditional methods. There never has and never will be a one-size-fits-all approach to advertising - it's all about what works for the audience you're trying to target, and radio is still one of the most effective communication tools.

People think radio is outdated, after all it's 2018 and everything is going digital, but radio continues to beat its digital competition. Radio offers a number of unique advantages to advertisers. It has the ability to reach people at relevant times and places. With over 300 commercial radio stations across the country, it's one of the most efficient methods of targeting. It's also one of the most appropriate channels, because you can hit your audience when the ad makes sense to them. If you want to talk to them about work, you can target

them in their workplace or if you're selling cars, you can target people in their car. Figures from the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising show that radio increases awareness by 83% for motor brands - now that's a statistic you can't ignore!

Last year, advertisers spent £679.2m on commercial radio, a record spend for the second year in a row, which isn't surprising since new research published by the European Commission confirmed that radio remains the most trusted medium in Europe. Audio has always been recognised as a cost-effective form of advertising, which is why we'll always recommend it to our clients (as part of a broader media mix), providing it fits the budget and is right for the audience, of course.

Naturally, we engage with media via voice and consume more media through our ears. Last year, there was a significant rise in the number of people listening to radio online and via apps, with total hours increasing 13% year on year, a faster growth than any other platform. This rapid rise can be attributed partly to the uptake in voice activated devices such as the Amazon Echo and Google Home. Bauer Media is launching Alexa

skills for all of its radio brands, starting with KISS, Magic Radio and Absolute Radio. Users will be able to shift through stations by simply saying 'Alexa, next' or find out what's playing on each station with commands like 'Alexa, ask Absolute 80s what's playing?' - that sounds much more '2018' to us!

With digital advertising, you tend to find that people will do anything to avoid ads, whether that's using ad blockers or refusing to watch a video because of the 30 second ad that appears before it, but with radio, ad avoidance is much lower and harder to do, after all, you can't close your ears. Radio listeners are happy to listen to good quality radio ads, the ads don't seem so 'in your face', you just accept that they're there.

It's no surprise that audio is the most trusted medium, after all, it's always there! Audio is the only format that can truly follow you throughout your day - from waking up in the morning, in the shower, on your drive to work, throughout your day at work and in bed as you fall sleep. So, don't give up on radio just yet, it's not down and it's certainly not out!

Christian Cerisola



DO GOOD COMMUNICATIONS ACTUALLY MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

In this profession, I'm often asked: 'What can PR actually do to affect my business?'

In the last few weeks, we've had a client feed back to us that, as a result of an article in a trade publication, they had a call from one of the UK's largest insurance companies. 'We don't yet know exactly how you can help us,' was the message, 'we just know that you can. Let's meet.' And so a small tech-related North East company is now working in partnership with a giant in the insurance business on developing new, bespoke tools for them. Job done.

But here's a really interesting case study of client work affecting the decisions of one of the globe's biggest brands. You may have seen the news that Cadbury has reduced the price of their Freddo chocolate bar. Anyone with kids will know those little froggy-themed bars can turn any subdued toddler into a sugar-fuelled maniac in seconds. But that's straying from the point.

Why would Cadbury decide to do that? Well, a week beforehand, W had released information on behalf of its client, MoneySupermarket.com about the 'value' of £10 now against the value of £10 back in 2000. Then, you could buy 19 loaves of bread with a tenner, but today that same tenner would get you just nine.

The news was released on the day the old £10

note officially went out of circulation (PR lesson – release information that has relevance to that day's news agenda. It'll give you a much better chance of success). With some hard and in-depth desk research from the W team, we'd looked at all the different things that had risen in price over and above the price of inflation.

And we found the humble Freddo topped the charts, increasing by a whopping 200 per cent. You could have bought one for just 10p in 2000. Now, they've rocketed to 30p. And so the media honed in on how and why Freddo bars had suddenly become so bloomin' expensive. Electric bills (133%), house prices (132%) and the price of a pint in the pub (106%) was left trailing in that little green Frog's wake.

To name but a few, the Daily Mail, The Sun, Metro and the Huffington Post all led on the alarming rise of the price of that smallest of chocolatey treats. The story then naturally gathered unstoppable pace on social media. How on earth had we all allowed Cadbury to get away with increasing the price of one of their chocolate bars by 200 per cent since the turn of the Millenia? (Another PR lesson – mainstream media still has enormous power and ability to set the agenda).

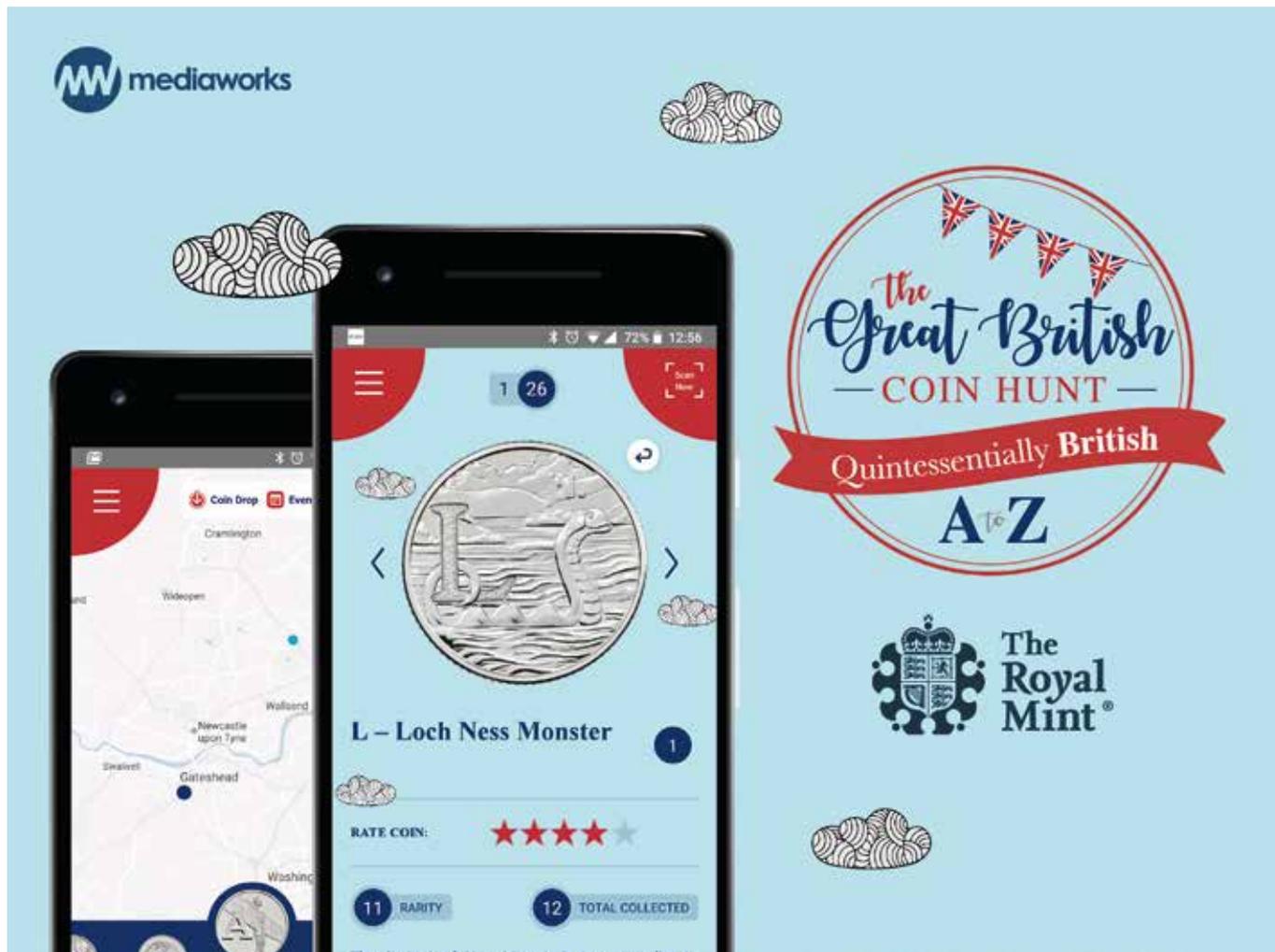
The noise and the pressure was too great. Cadbury crumbled like a Flake (who's price hasn't fallen, sadly) and within seven days they had issued statements that the price of a Freddo would fall back to 25p. If you've ever eaten a Freddo, you'd know that these really are one-bite wonders, but here was MoneySupermarket.com getting a second bite at the story just a week later. Every story that ran with Cadbury's announcement referenced the initial findings from MoneySupermarket.com a week earlier.

So, was it MoneySupermarket.com's intention to get the price of Freddo down? Not for a second. It was, however, their intention to be seen as the eyes and ears for people trying to save a few quid in these most straightened of times. A Freddo coming down by five pence is hardly likely to make the difference for you and I on whether we're choosing between Butlins or the Bahamas for the family break this summer, but the message was loud and clear: MoneySupermarket.com has your back when it comes to watching the finances.

So, yes. If you're doing it right, PR does have an impact and it can sway the decision making of some of the very biggest in business.

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

MEDIAWORKS' SUCCESS CONTINUES WITH LAUNCH OF THE ROYAL MINT APP



The expansion of Mediaworks' web and app development department is leading to continued success for the digital marketing agency. Here, they tell us more about their latest app release for The Royal Mint.

This month, Mediaworks celebrated the launch of one of our most exciting projects to date. We were recently chosen to design and develop an app for The Royal Mint to support the rollout of their new Quintessentially British 10p coins — and we're pleased to say the app is now live and available to download.

The ambitious Great British Coin Hunt app was created to encourage people to collect the new 10p coins, which feature an A-Z of quintessentially British items, locations and personas, from Stonehenge to James Bond. As such, it needed to connect with a diverse range of audiences, from the general public to serious coin collectors. To do so, we used our creative approach to implement a range of functionality in the app.

One of the core aims of the app is to provide a tracking system that can be used to log the coins

that are found, essentially creating a digital record of a user's progress. To ensure this was accurate and avoid any 'fake' coin logs, we used image recognition technology, which compared scanned coins against a catalogue of images. Through machine learning, this technology will get smarter as more coins are logged, meaning even disfigured or damaged coins will be recognised.

To support users in completing their coin collection, we incorporated map functionality to show where the coins have been found and released, as well as details of swap shop events.

Gamification elements were also included to help us broaden the appeal of the app. Users can view the rarity of the coins, as well as how many have been found and logged using the app. This visibility encouraged users to actively look for more of the coins. In recognition for coin unlocks, users can

earn trophies and awards, which again adds to the gamification elements.

In addition, the app includes a 'Create-a-Coin' feature that allows users to use Great British Coin Hunt elements to design their own digital coin. These can then be saved in a digital wallet and shared socially.

The app recently launched to phenomenal success, with over 7,000 downloads within the first 24 hours of its release. Since then, the app has accumulated over 17,000 downloads, despite just one of the coins being released into circulation.

The Royal Mint project is the latest in Mediaworks' award-winning portfolio of app development work. We continue to expand our talented design and development team and explore new technologies to support our clients' digital ambitions.

The Great British Coin Hunt app can be downloaded from Google Play and the App Store. For more information about Mediaworks, visit www.mediaworks.co.uk.

GETTING STUCK INTO MARKETING

So you often hear radio and TV adverts about how great apprentices are, and how they add great value and input to the business. But what about un-paid work placements?

Have you thought about actually replying to one of those umpteen emails requesting some work experience? It may just work! A student fresh with university knowledge, determined to work their hardest to make it in the industry - it's a win-win situation for student and employer alike.

Emily Wilkinson, current intern at JAM Marketing lets us in to her view of work experience:

After a whopping sixteen years of education, as a final year university student the thought of what comes after graduation is utterly terrifying. I study English literature and history, a degree to which the typical response is "oh...that's nice...what are you going to do with that?"

In the current competitive climate of the graduate employment process, having a degree beside your name is no longer enough. Everyone is looking for that little bit extra. After spending my life preparing myself for the world of work, I decided it was time to get out of the comfort zone of Shakespeare and the university library and apply for some experience.

I was lucky enough to land a weekly placement with JAM Marketing Limited back in November 2017, and I could not say a big enough thank you to the team. Despite having no previous experience in marketing or PR, no matter how many stupid questions I asked, the Jammy Dodgers were always so supportive. Every day is completely different as JAM work with such a wide range of clients, from



restaurants, estate agents, to accountants - just to name a few. Throughout my time here, I have thoroughly enjoyed putting my creativity to more practical use; from learning the professional practices of social media, to writing editorials, mailers and blogs - here I am writing my very own column, which I can confirm is every English student's absolute dream!

For anyone considering embarking on a work experience placement, or perhaps offering this capacity in their business for the first time, I couldn't encourage it more. In my opinion, an internship is such a rewarding concept. We lovely work interns

put in 110% for your business and liven up the office with fresh ideas. And in return? For students whose degrees do not lead to a definite career (like me) the skills which work experience provide are invaluable in acquiring that desirable "something extra" and setting us apart from thousands of other graduates.

The slogan "Marketing Ideas That Stick" could not be truer for me. The lessons I have learnt from the Jammy Dodgers will stick with me for life, and I am equally, sweetly stuck on the ambition of making my mark on the marketing industry in the future.

KINGS OF THE SUPER LOCAL; WHY REGIONAL MEDIA IS SO IMPORTANT



Stefan Lepkowski

Local newspapers, radio and television stations aren't scaled-down versions of their national counterparts; they are specialists in their patch, shining a light on local issues long after the fleeting attention of national outlets. Assuming there's any national attention in the first place.

We've all noticed the difference when we watch the national TV news followed by the local version: how a huge local story can be whittled down to a couple of lines and a quick camera shot on the national stage.

The unique nature of local media came back to the forefronts of our minds recently. We heard that Darren Thwaites, editor-in-chief of Trinity Mirror North East, was departing for pastures new as part of a shake-up of the company's editorial team. It made us pause for a minute and think – hard – about how important knowing everything you can about your local outlets is.

In an age of social media, it's easy for some businesses to underestimate the importance of their local media outlets. But this really underestimates the ongoing relevance of regional media - and how they serve their local communities.

Familiarity with these outlets, including flicking through a print edition on the way home or even knowing someone who works there, can be very different from understanding what will really appeal to them and lead to good coverage. Sustained interest in a story and its developments will only come from a real grasp of this. Otherwise, a story involving a business can end up being a one-off with no interest in how things evolve. It could even leave journalists thinking "we've already covered that" for any story involving a particular company.

Local businesses need to think what they're doing will mean for their community. They need to give local journalists a reason to care.

For example, does a new acquisition mean more local jobs, more money? If so, is this in one go? Or in newsworthy milestones that can appear again and again to pique the interest of journalists and refresh the story for readers? Perhaps the business is part of a bigger story of a region-wide boom? Understanding your local media's news agenda means the stories can be tailored perfectly.

Local news outlets often follow local stories in close detail. They are kings of the super-local. Their journalists become experts in picking up on minute changes, on tiny details. Electron microscopes have lesser powers of observation. If there's a seemingly insignificant change of phrasing in a planning document, they're onto it.

Local papers need to fill column inches of course, but they're very picky. They know if something doesn't grab the reader, they will flick onto the next page and that this, eventually, leads to the circulation dropping. Any story that makes that more likely won't get a look-in.

Journalists are also pushed for time, so if businesses haven't worked hard to make it easy for them to see why an issue is important, they'll go with the stories that have. Good, tight and well edited material that can be published with the least amount of changes is what they need.

Understanding the local paper also means knowing who's who. Keeping up with changes is vital. For example, what does the expanded geographical brief for Darren's successor, Neil Hodgkinson, who will be working across the North East, the Humber and down into Lincolnshire, mean for the editorial agenda of our favourite regional titles.

New faces might want to run stories with a different approach. Businesses need to know what they're after or they might find stories, which had worked well before, are suddenly ending up in the bin, rather than getting anywhere near the readers. Well-crafted press releases can suddenly become annoying junk.

The flipside, however, is that a new face could be a new opportunity. They may want to make their mark, so reaching out to them to find out what they want and then tailoring your approach could see your story break out of the business section and march its way to the front page.

At its best, the relationship with the local media and local businesses becomes a two-way street, exchanging ideas to get the best results for both and also the most interesting output for the readers. These readers then become satisfied customers for both the local press and the local businesses.

Great stories means great coverage. Anything else isn't worth the paper it's printed on; or more likely, not printed on!



(L to R): Aidan Sunter and Ben Maughan of Epic Social.

A START-UP WITH EPIC POTENTIAL

With a rapidly growing workforce, a move to a larger office space in the pipeline and a client list to die for, it's hard to believe that Epic Social is just six months old.

The biggest new disruptor to join the North East's booming digital arena, Chester le Street-based, Epic Social, provides results-driven, highly creative social media advertising solutions for clients operating across a range of industry sectors, including retail, automotive and real estate.

Recognising a niche in the market for a high-end social media advertising agency based in the North East, Epic Social was created by tech innovator, Ben Maughan, and portfolio entrepreneur, Aidan Sunter, to provide a solution for businesses which would combine the disciplines of 'outside the box' creative content with highly-targeted paid advertising, to help brands get their products and services in front of an engaged target audience.

"There is a real lack of resources for good social media management in the North East," said Ben, managing director at Epic Social.

"We wanted to create something that would deliver tangible results and return on investment for clients while also giving them something of value that engages their audiences and raises the profile of their brand."

Initially pitching its unique services at small to medium sized businesses, Epic Social quickly discovered that its client 'sweet-spot' actually lay

with multi-national, franchised organisations that needed help localising their social media channels in order to appeal to their franchise's unique demographics. In just under six months, the agency counts licensed outlets of McDonald's, Porsche, BMW and Mini among its growing client base.

"Our start-up experience from where we were six months ago to where we are now has been one giant learning curve," says Ben.

"Everything from how we approach new business leads to the type of companies that we target has changed completely and has had to be taken back to the drawing board.

"We have had to stay agile and continually adapt our services to meet the evolving needs of clients and the ever-changing market in order to get to where we are today, but through new client wins and continuous investment into staff and resources, we're well on our way to becoming one of the UK's fastest growing social media agencies."

Currently employing seven, highly-skilled members of staff, including specialist social media account managers, graphic designers and award-winning videographers, Epic Social has big plans to more than double its headcount by the end of 2018 and move its operations from its current base to the heart of Newcastle city centre.

"Substantial investment in the best people and the best quality equipment was key to making Epic Social a reality," said Aidan, director at Epic Social.

"Having previously been a client of a small agency, I was surprised at their inability to create content that I felt represented my big vision for the business. I anticipated that other business owners may have at some point felt the same, which is where the idea for Epic Social was conceived.

"It became clear that there was an opportunity to establish an agency which could produce high-quality content, optimised for social media, to create a true point of difference between the user-generated content many smaller businesses are producing. This has become our niche.

"We enjoy challenging ourselves to create more and more exciting content for our clients and if we need to continue to invest in order to improve, that's what we'll do. We won't stand still!"

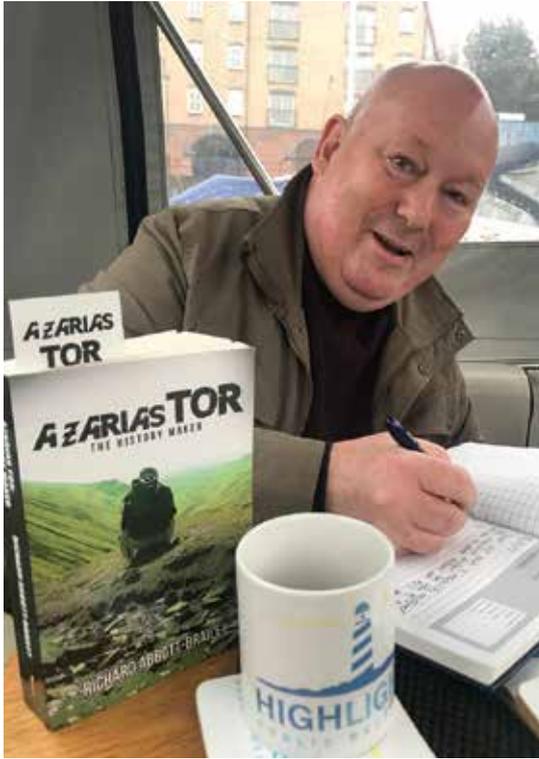
"We've got big plans for the future," Ben added.

"Despite our initial success, we don't take anything for granted and we will continue to put our everything into making Epic Social the North East's leading social media advertising agency."

Epic Social offers a range of fully-managed, bespoke social media and creative packages to accommodate businesses of all shapes, sizes and budgets.

To find out more, visit www.epicsocial.co.uk

YOU'VE "HIGHLIGHTED" OUR BUSINESS – RICHARD ABBOTT-BRAILEY



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.

Northumberland author, Richard Abbott-Brailey has received critical acclaim for his debut novel; Azarias Tor: The History Maker.

Based in our region, with numerous references to familiar locations around the area, the story focusses on the protagonist's journey of discovery into the possibilities of time travel and, indeed, the restrictions on those who choose to slip between times. The plot explores complex and fascinating paradoxes, posing questions about the impact of changing our future by travelling to the past and the potential consequences of doing so. The reader will also enjoy pondering how time travellers may be perceived by those who encounter them and whether time travel is a reality already in our world?

The plot takes a literary tour around the North East and Cumbria, taking in such locations as Northumberlandia near Cramlington, The Rose Tree Inn at Shincliffe, Durham and King's Meaburn in Cumbria.

Highlights PR placed Richard on BBC Newcastle, in a number of newspapers all around the UK as well as in magazines, internet news sites and author related publications.

Richard said; "What can I say about Highlights PR and Keith Newman? I can start by noting that Highlights PR has helped to raise my author profile, and book title, to a larger audience in a matter of a few weeks than any other outlet has done in the year since the release of Azarias Tor: The History Maker.

"Within 24 hours of meeting Keith I was booked for an interview on BBC Radio. Since then I have appeared in a number of newspapers and magazines up and down the length and breadth of the country. This has led to potential book to movie interest, which is currently being pursued. If you have doubts in your project Keith, with his enthusiasm, will help you believe in yourself. Thank you Keith - you helped to make this happen."

Azarias Tor: The History Maker is available to order through most bookstores, from Amazon, and the publisher. Available in paperback and for Kindle. www.austinmacauley.com/book/azarias-tor-history-maker.

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NEGT: NORTH EAST'S GOT TALENT

Let's keep it. At a senior marketer's lunch held at Wynyard Hall last autumn, there was discussion around whether there was a genuine brain-drain of marketing talent heading south out of the region.

We recognised that people do indeed migrate south to more lucrative and more substantial roles to progress their careers and CVs. However, we concluded that there had been a recent trend of people returning to the area to enjoy the quality of life we have here and the excellent environment for their families to grow up in.

Now into our third phase of delivering the new CIM Marketing Leadership programme, we have started to explore why some of the candidates are participating. While we might assume it is to gain the fantastic analytical, strategic planning, change management and business growth management skills that our candidates acquire on this course; the truth is that some employers find it the perfect way to invest in and retain the talent that they have at senior management level.

It is, in fact, cheaper to pay for a masters' level course like the CIM Marketing Leadership programme, which equates to £6000-7000 as a one-off for your valuable team member rather than a salary rise, which of course is repeated year on year and creates an expectation for further increases.

In times of current uncertainty, although indeed there is scope for a great deal of optimism, in the long run, investing in this programme provides a fantastic way of showing that you value your staff, of course, the mutual benefit is the work they produce while on the programme. Effectively 18 months of marketing consultancy guidance and plans that they can present to the board to help you ensure the company is looking at and gearing up for the future rather than just waiting to see what's going to happen.

If you are interested to find out more we are holding an open evening on the 2nd May to allow you to understand the course, our approach to teaching it, meet the tutors and chat with students who have already completed their first module.



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

HOTELS VS SERVICED APARTMENTS... THE GREAT DEBATE

The face of business travel is changing. No longer are hotels seen as the ideal place they once were for the corporate traveller.

Rich Markus has over two decades worth of experience in markets including business travel. In an article for 4hoteliers.com, he poses a scenario; "on a 45-day long project with four colleagues would you rather stay in a hotel room with bed, bathroom and continental breakfast, or a furnished apartment with all the appointments?"

Lately, it appears more and more are choosing the latter.

A number of online sources put this switch in expectations down to several key factors including improved space, privacy and simple home comforts – beyond a bed and shower.

Such is the extent of the growth of the serviced apartment industry, that the demand for apartments is actually outstripping supply due to an increasingly global workforce and longer stays where cramped hotel rooms are often not suitable. It's also interesting to note that as of figures from the Global Serviced Apartments Industry report, for travellers who have stayed in hotels and apartments, 79% preferred apartments.

Changing attitudes have seen hotels become just okay for short term stays, but for anything longer



and more permanent, they simply don't cut the mustard anymore.

Simple frustrations like paid Wi-Fi being difficult to connect to and strict hours on breakfast contribute to the shift in attitudes of business and corporate travellers. The extra freedom afforded by serviced apartments has also played a part in their surge in popularity.

A serviced apartment has been branded a "home-from-home" experience which in turn has a positive effect on guests. The freedom to choose a location which suits their needs whether local, national or global and the flexibility which isn't available with a hotel are just some of the benefits guests appreciate

in a serviced apartment.

Likewise, there's more normalised and consistent amenities in serviced apartments throughout the world; in short, travellers know what to expect from serviced apartments.

It's something we at Week2Week have taken note of with the most requested features available across our portfolio. Our apartments are available in and around Newcastle upon Tyne, and for your convenience we also have access to apartments across the world from Adelaide to New York City, so no matter where you are going; there is an alternative to a hotel near you.

To find out more about Week2Week serviced apartments visit week2week.co.uk or contact us on email at info@week2week.co.uk or call +44 (0) 191 281 3129.

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IN CONVERSATION WITH...

KARI OWERS

Managing Director, O Communications

What were your career ambitions growing up?

I was the one who hung out in the art room and read books, so as a girl I just wanted to do something creative.

I studied art and then fashion design but it was a love of the written word that led me to my career in comms.

Tell us about the inception of O

I started O Communications in 2005 when my daughter was a new born. It quickly grew from the kitchen table and I realised I really enjoyed building a team as opposed to working alone so we became an agency – becoming a mother made me more ambitious than ever.

What services do you provide?

We are known for our PR but O has grown its digital services considerably in the last few years.

Our digital team helps clients become more visible online through robust social media management, influencer relations and by creating SEO strategies around great content.

Creative content is our fastest-growing service, as we are now becoming a nation that prefers to digest images over text. Our studio manages all creative design, video and photography primarily for social media marketing.

What's your proudest business achievement?

We were a finalist in Best Agency Outside London at PR Week Awards last year which has been our vision from day one - to work on exciting

brands and be happily HQ'd here in Newcastle.

I'm very proud to see the young people grow within our company and work their way up to senior roles and help shape the business.

What challenges have you encountered?

I think for any SME it's a challenge trying to move to the next level and break into larger companies, yet we've worked with global brand names like Dr. Martens where our size and location was actually an advantage.

Breaking the door down of that dream client can be a challenge, but small entrepreneurial businesses are agile and creative and we bring fresh perspective to large corporates.

We have a strong creative and digital scene with some superb agencies here in the North East that are doing world-class work, so perhaps our sector just needs to shout a bit louder, which is why I am a board member at Digital Union.

How has the industry changed in the last 10 years?

The biggest change has been our biggest opportunity - the rise of digital media.

Every business needs to embrace how people now search for products and services, engage with brands and share their passions – digital, and especially social media, dominates those behaviours.

Local press for example is still one of the most trusted sources - but so is

a recommendation from someone you follow on social - so we have to be strategic about understanding the customer and their journey and look for ways to tell that brand story at every opportunity. Our work is travelling across so many more channels than 10 years ago.

What are you currently working on?

The refurbishment of our new 4000sq ft office, we have invested recently in a great agency space in Sandyford which was part of an old brewery dating back to 1831.

What is the best piece of business advice you have been given?

Know your numbers.

Is there a mantra you always aspire to do business?

Enjoy it, why else would you do it?

Who are your heroes in and out of business?

I'm obsessed by other entrepreneurs' stories, especially women. At the moment I'm in awe of Marcia Kilgore who founded Bliss spa, Soap & Glory, Fit Flop and now Beauty Pie to disrupt the luxury beauty industry. I'd love to meet her.

How would you describe yourself in 3 words?

Work in progress.

How do you like to unwind?

Hotpod yoga – it's a perfect mix of sweat and serenity.



RECENT APPOINTMENT AT CALIBRE

Award-winning North East IT security specialist Calibre has made a key appointment to support its continued growth. Tony Roxburgh joins as Commercial Director with a brief to leading and developing the commercial arm of the business.

Calibre utilises the latest Cisco technology to deliver cutting edge security and network solutions. The firm brings these elements together in an integrated, whole business environment for mid-sized and enterprise level organisation in both the public and private sector.

Tony commented: "I'm really looking forward to working with such a highly skilled team at Calibre. It's an exciting time to be joining as cyber security continues to develop further and organisations look for new ways to prevent security breaches."

Managing Director Karen Nelson added: "I'm looking forward to working closely with Tony as we look for new business in our core markets and continue to support our existing customers with their IT needs."



HERONGRANGE INTEGRATES IEVO ACCESS CONTROL SYSTEMS

Northampton-based security system provider Herongrange Ltd has become the latest organisation to integrate biometric fingerprint readers into their security access system which are designed and manufactured by Newcastle-based ievo Ltd.

The integration with Herongrange systems offers clients a multi-layer security service to meet the changing needs of site access and workforce management.

The biometric lead solution reduces the risk of unauthorised access to sites, as well as the time associated with traditional PIN or card controlled systems. The data provided by the fingerprint readers also provides site managers with information on exactly who is on site at any one time.

Keri Feeny, ievo's Central Region Account Manager, said: "The integration with Herongrange's access control system is another demonstration of ievo's constant development. The partnership is incredibly valuable in helping us advance within our target markets."

NEW COMPANY IS SIRIUS ABOUT COMMUNICATIONS

After a professional relationship that has spanned almost ten years, a team of telecommunications experts in Washington have set up Sirius Telecom to help businesses across the UK streamline their communications solutions and reduce their spending.

At present, the team has partnerships with BT Openreach, Vodafone and Zen Internet. These partnerships allow them to resell market leading telecommunications products, ensuring that they remain ahead of the game.

In partnership with Zen Internet, Sirius hopes to provide G.fast technology, an up and coming product that utilises existing copper networks. This will see an impressive leap forward of internet speeds of up to 300Mbps.

By creating a base of loyal partners and customers, the team at Sirius hope to establish themselves as a well-known and respected Telecoms business both in the North East and further afield. As the business develops, they hope that the team will grow with additional staff, apprentices and graduates.

TYNESIDE TECH FIRM CELEBRATES FAST-GROWTH IN FIRST YEAR



Tradespeople offering day-to-day domestic services are being sought after for a new smartphone app that is about to be launched.

Sorted House is a new digital app which aims to remove the headache for customers who want to source suppliers for a wide range of domestic jobs such as window cleaning, gardening and carpet cleaning.

The app will put an end to the frustrations many small to medium sized operations feel when attempting to generate new business through online platforms that charge substantial fees. There will be no charge to be listed as a supplier on the app and Sorted House will only take a small administration fee.

The organisation has already secured relationships with many suppliers in and around the North East including North East Clean and NEPS Gardening Services. They're now looking to add more to their listings across all sectors.

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THE POWER OF STRONG PARTNERSHIPS IN BUSINESS

Garry Sheriff, managing director of IT managed solutions and services specialist ITPS, highlights how strong supply chain partnerships are crucial to commercial success.

As North East managed IT solutions and services experts we attribute much of our 18 years of steady growth to building strong partnerships.

Nurturing client partnerships is one of our key strengths, but good relationships with high calibre partners are equally vital in supporting our own business and those of our clients.

For example we hold strategic partner status with Virgin Media Business (VMB), a level only available to a select few within the UK, and an award that is measured on customer feedback, technical expertise, volume of business and the ability to support VMB's product range at the highest level.

We have invested over £1.2m in a peer to peer, high speed, large capacity communications and infrastructure at our ISO27001 Tier 3 North East data centres. While we deal with other carriers, we partner and lead with VMB for its ability to deliver

21st Century fibre network solutions. It guarantees our customers reliable, scalable connectivity with reduced latency, faster access, and no other unknown parties involved in their connectivity solutions.

As one of the UK's acknowledged IT connectivity experts, we are one of only a few suppliers currently permitted to sell connectivity and services such as unified communications, security and cloud services for the new Health and Social Care network (HSCN). This will replace the N3 network, one of Europe's largest virtual private networks, which currently connects 1.3 million NHS staff.

HSCN is a vital element in the digital transformation of NHS services and the criteria for qualifying as a supplier is, quite properly, extremely stringent. The network will eventually connect thousands of health and social care organisations,

delivering reliability, efficiency and cost-effective connectivity, and giving them the freedom to choose network services to suit their needs.

We are committed to helping all our clients find the right solution, one which will reduce costs and negate risk, increase service levels and improve availability, security and efficiency. The VMB partnership means we can give clients access to discounts, a portfolio of 60 VMB products, and a level of VMB extended support not open to others.

The combination of our investment in the HSCN infrastructure and our strong VMB partnership is two-fold, delivering immense benefits to our existing clients, and leveraging new opportunities.

The power of forging long term partnerships cannot be underestimated. We are here to help our clients succeed, and if they succeed, so do we.

CYBER CRIME: THE BATTLE'S ON FOR THE LEGAL SECTOR



With the legal sector under attack from cybercrime, one of the North East's leading IT companies, Advantex, is hosting a free webinar this month to provide expertise on how local solicitors can better protect themselves.

The legal sector is a vital cog not only in North East business and government infrastructure, holding personal, business critical and commercially sensitive information, but also the wider UK, contributing significantly to GDP. But it's a sector under attack. It's estimated that 62% of UK law firms have been victims of a cyber attack in some capacity; while only a third (35%) of firms are believed to have a plan in place to protect themselves.

Resourceful hackers and organised criminal gangs are looking to extort and defraud solicitors, targeting IT systems, client files, or using carefully nurtured relationships in order to conduct an attack carried out by a third party. A hack can have devastating consequences for a firm's reputation, not to mention the impact on financial loss. Client confidence can also suffer, while firms can find themselves in breach of contract and liable to compensate clients for breaches involving data loss.

Under the Law Society's practise rules and standards of conduct, failure to introduce satisfactory security measures can be interpreted as a breach of obligation and result in a misconduct finding. Firms may also find themselves in breach

of the new General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which comes into effect from May. This requires higher standards to protect the security of data along with eye-watering fines for breaches - as much as €20 million or 4% of annual global turnover, whichever is greater.

Remote working, the use of personal IT equipment, out-of-date software and failure to back-up systems properly, present some of the myriad opportunities available to hackers using malicious software (malware), spoof email addresses and domain names (phishing), and ransomware, which locks users out of their IT systems until they've paid off the cyber-terrorist. Waterholing, vishing, macro infections and virus are also terms employed to describe other nefarious activities.

So, what can solicitors do to protect themselves? Steve O'Connell, sales director at Advantex, says: "Time is pressing and solicitors must act to make sure they are properly and effectively protected.

"Education and risk assessment practices can play a part in delivering this, but firms should have a set of prescriptive policies in place that everyone follows to reduce the risk. These can be paramount and will explain how to act in the event of a data breach - a

blue print for comprehensive safety and security."

Advantex's free webinar will examine how solicitors can stay a step ahead of the attackers and explain the role of a multi-layered defence, and how it integrates with existing IT systems to prove effective in countering the known and unknown threats. The event will also provide advice and practical examples of how firms can protect themselves before, during and after an attack using advanced technologies such as Cisco Umbrella.

Steve O'Connell adds: "Solicitors will undoubtedly benefit from the free advice we will provide as they face up to developing strategies - maybe in partnership with an IT supplier - to deal with the cyber threats impacting on the legal profession. If you run a practice, or perhaps have responsibility for the IT, and want to secure the future of your business, you must ask yourself: how much longer can I afford to ignore the risk?"

The 'Secure the Network Perimeter & Defend Your Cloud Territory' seminar will take place at 2pm on 25th April. Secure your place by signing up now at www.advantex.uk.com/secure-your-network-webinar/ A free trial of Cisco Umbrella will be available to participating delegates.

START YOUR CLOUD JOURNEY WITH AERO NETWORKS



Aero Networks are making 2018 their year. The Cloud and IT specialists company have enterprising and ambitious plans for pushing the breakthrough of cloud technology, especially within the SME sector. With cloud computing, comes the sheer importance of cloud data backup and innovative security.

Managing Director, Paul Curry, aims to aid and educate existing and future clients about the need for cloud services, cloud security, and its relevance to modern day technology. "Aero Networks believe the future of business is in the cloud. Its capability, and the opportunities cloud creates are endless." Paul comments.

The current digital era we live in has prompted and proposed the idea of a cloud-based world, which complements Aero Networks as they have been able to cater their services around the versatility of cloud technology. There is no vital usage for traditional backups anymore, now that companies are swiftly migrating into cloud-based environments. Cloud data backup provides an automated backup strategy, with support across multiple operating systems and applications. It has the ability to restore single files or entire applications, so your data is available when needed.

Aero Networks pushes the boundaries of onsite backup systems, by offering an automated and faster backup, which is more reliable for the future. Still not sure whether to switch from traditional

external backup to cloud backup? Here are some vital reasons why Aero Networks can provide you with a cloud backup service that will suit your requirements. It is a convenient, safe and affordable service, which allows for seamless file sharing, provides an exquisite amount of security, and can be accessed anywhere with an internet connection.

With cloud backup, there is no risk of security breaches, loss of data, or excessive hardware costs, which traditional backups may be accustomed to. Whether your company has one computer, or one hundred; switching to cloud data backup with Aero Networks is a no-brainer.

"Here at Aero Networks, we strive to provide robust backup strategies, to fit our clientele's needs. Cloud backup is the perfect first step in your journey towards molding your company around the cloud." Paul comments.

We live in a world where we need the confidence of knowing our business-critical information can be accessed at any time, and is secure in its place. As our needs for quick accessibility of data increases, securities can be compromised, without cloud

services in place. Aero Networks can provide the finest amount of cloud security that entails your specified requirements.

Migrating to cloud services can be a strenuous process, but Managing Director Paul, and the team at Aero Networks, aim to provide an utmost level of security and a sense of easiness when it comes to their cloud services. Aero Networks hosts the majority of their own servers, which stores their clientele's cloud data.

"There are no compromises when it comes to protecting our clients' data in a secure, and stored environment. We take away our clients' insecurities of un-safe and lost data as soon as we help build their cloud journey, with a promising amount of security." Paul states.

Cloud technology is becoming more relevant and significant to the business world each day, we strongly welcome any company to get in touch if you want to start your cloud journey with us. If you are interested in the cloud data services Aero Networks provides, or simply want to know more about our other services; we can offer you a free demonstration or trial, to see if it suits you.



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We help UK businesses manage their IT infrastructure and design robust strategies to move towards the cloud



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ARROW HITS THE TARGET

It's a brave person who claims to know all about how technology works.
Too many of us just take it all for granted.

But, are you using the most appropriate technology to suit your circumstances? Is it the best possible way for you or your business to operate? Are you confident that the bill you're paying for all of your telecommunications is the right one and when was the last time you reviewed it?

If you have answered yes to all of the above, then you really are on the ball...or...more likely...you THINK you're on the ball.

And that's where Arrow Comms comes in because they know the answers.

Simon Ward and Paul Clark launched the company in 2016 and it would be fair to say that this arrow is flying. Add together their collective experience of working in the telecoms industry and you have two guys who, over forty years have evolved as technology has.

If you approach them for a solution to your problem or ask them to design a solution for a

new project, you will quickly discover that they know precisely what is required and have probably carried out installations of a similar nature.

The fact that they been approved by a number of major telecoms vendors and service providers demonstrates how well their skills and experience are regarded.

Arrow Comms, based on the outskirts of Gosforth, now boast six staff. The reputation that both Simon and Paul have built over those forty years has produced a client list made up of local, regional and national organisations covering manufacturing, legal, local government, healthcare, hospitality, finance and the charity sector.

Arrow Comms provide traditional premises-based telephony solutions (PBX) and Hosted Telephony Solutions with Unified Communications to enhance staff productivity, mobility solutions to allow agile working and call reporting and recording solutions to allow clients to demonstrate compliance. These

solutions coupled with vast experience in providing network cabling in many types of environments and direct access into BT Openreach give Arrow Comms the ability to offer a truly turnkey offering to suit almost any telecommunications requirement.

Most business relationships start with a consultation. Tell Simon and Paul the issues you are currently experiencing with both the technology you use and how this affects the day to day efficiency of your business and they will put together a report with recommendations on how to improve efficiencies whilst quite often lowering costs at the same time.

The best idea is to speak to either Simon or Paul. Call them on 0808 164 3040 or email enquiries@arrowcommsltd.co.uk. Check out their website www.arrowcommsltd.co.uk where you'll find a full rundown of what they offer and some examples of how they can help.

Want to hit the target with your telecommunications? Get in touch with Arrow Comms.

Our school is just like home.

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truly
begins
at home.*



ARGYLE
HOUSE
SCHOOL
SUNDERLAND

SCHOOL AIMS POINT TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHARACTER

By Mr. David Tickner, Headmaster at Newcastle School for Boys.

A school's aims are something that should be understood and appreciated by the whole school community: pupils, staff, parents and governors. Independent school inspections judge the extent to which a school is successful in meeting its aims.

At Newcastle School for Boys, our aims are two-fold. Firstly, we seek to challenge and support each boy to maximise his individual academic learning and progress. The second is to produce boys and young men of excellent character.

The first aim is about the distance a boy travels academically in his time with us – the progress he makes. We carefully assess each boy's starting point and their progress at key points throughout his school career so that we can track and monitor that progress – intervening as and when required to ensure that he continues his journey as successfully as possible.

Our second aim of producing boys and young men of excellent character is

expressed in language that some might consider lofty or old-fashioned. Although harder to measure than academic attainment, personal development is something that we do equally successfully.

This process is underpinned by core values that we identify in our school character compass whose points are community, integrity, resilience, courage, leadership and empathy. Each half term has a specific focus on one of these qualities. They are also very much a part of the everyday language and values of daily school life.

We are seeking for our boys to develop the qualities and attributes that will not just help them to acquire so-called 'soft' skills for further study or employment, but hopefully qualities that are going to allow them to lead happy and fulfilled lives beyond school.

To achieve our aims, it is important that everybody understands them. It also seems fair that we are judged against the extent to which the School and our boys realise them.



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.

A WORLD OF LEARNING

By Kieran McLaughlin, Headmaster, Durham School

Politicians will often look to overseas when trying to effect change in our own education system. Favoured countries range from Singapore to Finland and Canada to China when they try to make a point about how British youngsters need to compete with their global peers on skills from mental arithmetic to teambuilding and creative thinking.

There is no doubt that there is much we can learn from our neighbours in aspects of educational practice; no doubt also that global measures put the UK firmly mid-table in outcomes in Maths and Science. However, it isn't as easy as it sounds to transplant what goes on in schools all round the world into the UK environment.

Recently I have visited schools in China and Dubai. In both cases, the schools I visited were huge by British standards: over 4000 pupils in each occupying huge campuses. However, the two experiences couldn't have been more different. China relies very much on explicit instruction: the teacher explains how to solve a problem in, say, quadratic equations and the class will then attempt an example. The teacher will support and explain and, in the Shanghai "Maths Mastery" approach, won't move on until every pupil in the class is able to solve the equation.

In Dubai, in the school I saw at least, the approach was very different. Every child has a laptop and all the resources were available electronically. Tasks set are often quite open-ended; group work is common



and pupils work together collaboratively. The teacher acts as a learning facilitator, steering pupils through the activity and helping them on an individual basis as the lesson progresses. The focus was very much on self-assessment, with pupils identifying their own strengths and weaknesses and developing strategies to address them.

Both education systems are very successful. Chinese children leave school with a significantly higher level of numerical and computational skills than their counterparts in the UK. Dubai children are sophisticated, well-informed mature young men and women who have the qualities needed to succeed in a global, cosmopolitan world.

So, which education system should we in the UK try to emulate? Should we, as traditionalists would argue, stick to tried and tested teaching methods: teacher-led instruction, classes sat in rows, frequent

testing along the way? Or, as the more progressive wing in education would prefer, should we allow pupils to learn in a personalised way, using the latest developments in technology to explore ideas at their own pace and then work with others to synthesise the information in a project-based task?

As ever, the question is a little more complicated than that. The two educational systems are so different because the societies in which they have grown up are different. Chinese children, and indeed their parents, are hugely invested in education; youngsters in China will regularly attend extra lessons in the evening and at weekends to improve their test scores in the famous Gaokao exam. Dubai parents are equally ambitious but their children live in a sophisticated, materialistic society where formal qualifications are only part of what it needs to succeed. Each educational system is a mirror of the society it inhabits.

In the UK, we sit uncomfortably between the manufacturing industry, which needs to be reinvigorated if our economy is to prosper, and the service/gig economy which reflects changing lives in the 21st century. We have the unenviable task of serving both of those masters when preparing pupils for adult life. So the next time a politician pontificates on PISA scores, or the next big thing in education, look at the bigger picture and ask yourself what kind of society you want. That will tell you the kind of education you want for your children.

For further information about Durham School, or to arrange a visit, call 0191 386 4783, email admissions@durhamschool.co.uk or visit www.durhamschool.co.uk



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IN CONVERSATION WITH...

DR. JANE TODD

Owner, Do Re Mi Day Nursery

What were your career ambitions growing up?

I always wanted to be a teacher but also loved administration and organisation. I spent time working for my Father's company from the age of 16 in school and university vacations and loved the business environment; organising conferences, working at conferences, selling and finance.

What was your background prior to launching Do Re Mi Day Nursery?

I came to Durham University to study Education in 2000. I graduated with a first class degree and went straight on to study for a masters degree in Educational Policy whilst teaching. I completed that with distinction and focused on my time in school. I spent five years at Barnard Castle Preparatory School and thoroughly enjoyed teaching there. I moved on to Teesside High Prep School in 2008 as Director of Music. Whilst there I also took on management responsibilities including spending a term as Acting Director of Prep School. In 2008 I had also started studying for a Doctorate, which I was completing whilst working full time in 2012. In 2012 my first child was born, and it was whilst on maternity leave that my active brain started working on plans to set up my own business. Alongside running Do Re Mi I also lecture at Newcastle University in the music department.

What are you currently working on?

I have just finished working on an expansion project. In February 2018 we opened a whole new floor at Nursery, doubling in size. With my University hat on, I am currently working on a research project into children's emerging musicality in the early years.

What have been your proudest achievements in your career so far?

Pre-nursery, I think it would have been completing my doctorate. Opening the nursery originally, on a shoe string, and acting in faith was pretty big.



Then the purchase of the nursery, expansion and renovation, to produce a working environment for staff and a play environment for children that is so beautiful. Last September when we were graded Outstanding by Ofsted was an incredibly proud moment. However, it is often the little things in this job, that I believe are the big things... the child that settles, the mum that is so pleased with the care we give. That's what I am proudest of on a day to day basis; knowing the difference we are making for these children.

What are the greatest challenges you face in your role?

The unpredictability of the role! Last week it was 'do we close in the snow'? Staffing is a big one – getting the right staff and dealing with staff absences (which could affect whether you can open or not). Decisions you are making for the children's well-being that you have to get right. The greatest challenge ultimately is that I am responsible for the safety, well-being and learning of these children daily, and that is huge.

What changes would you like to see in education?

How many words do I have? This is my soapbox... I want to see more value on QUALITY learning in the early years, with Early Years Practitioners having a

higher status (and better pay for it). I would love to see change to the formal education system where we are expecting 4 year olds to be sitting at desks writing their names. I spent time out in Budapest last year, in the kindergartens where children were 3 to 6 and go to school after that. It was enlightening! I strongly support the 'Keeping Early Years Unique' movement who are promoting learning through play in both Early Years and Key Stage 1.

Who are your heroes in and out of business?

I don't know if I would use the word 'heroes', but there are certainly people who have inspired me along the way. They are not 'big names' though.

What 3 words would you use to describe yourself?

Busy, passionate and tired!

How do you like to unwind?

I love spending time with my two boys (3 and 5), reading, playing the piano.

What are your plans for 2018 and beyond?

To enjoy what I have created, and find a happy equilibrium of work/life balance. To continue to operate in an ethical business manner, promoting ethical, fair and people-centred practice to my staff and other businesses.



“I want to be a child again”

doremi day nursery

First class learning, development and care
(Ofsted Outstanding, September 2017)
Early Years Funding available for 2-5's
Creative, hands-on approach to learning

Embedded do re mi musical learning programme

What Ofsted say about Do Re Mi:

- 'Leadership is inspirational'
- 'Staff plan activities that significantly enhance children's learning'
- 'Teaching is exemplary'
- 'Staff provide superior levels of support'
- 'Children demonstrate exceptional skills and make high rates of progress'
- 'They are extremely well prepared for school'
- 'Meticulous care and attention are provided for children's emotional and physical needs'



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Franchise manager, Steven Flack, with the Optima PHEV, at Jennings Kia in Stockton.

DRIVING TOWARDS AN ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY FUTURE WITH HYBRID RANGE AT JENNINGS KIA

Jennings Kia, part of the multi-award winning Jennings Motor Group, offers a range of plug-in hybrids and electric vehicles for environmentally conscious customers at its Stockton, Washington and new Sunderland-based dealership.

In 2016, Kia launched its first plug-in hybrid electric model in the UK - the Optima PHEV.

Steven Flack, franchise manager at Jennings Kia in Stockton, said: "Hybrids and electric cars are becoming commonplace as a result of more customers becoming increasingly conscious about the impact emissions are having on the environment, in addition to a number of financial advantages being on offer, including government grants and the lower cost of "filling up" compared to a tank of petrol.

"The wide range of hybrid and electric vehicles available at Jennings Kia all offer fuel economy and styling, active safety technologies and high levels of specification, as well as offering Kia's

unique-in-the-UK seven-year or 100,000-mile peace of mind warranty."

With a range of up to 33 miles in all-electric mode, the Optima PHEV is able to complete many regular urban commuter runs with no tailpipe emissions, with a CO2 figure of just 37g/km means company car users pay just 9 per cent benefit-in-kind taxation in 2017/2018.

The Optima PHEV combines a 154bhp 2.0-litre direct injection petrol engine with a 50kW (67bhp) electric motor powered by a 9.8kWh lithium-ion polymer battery pack. The electric motor replaces the torque converter in the smooth shifting six-speed automatic transmission.

A package of aerodynamic, styling and technology features contribute towards the Optima PHEVs low CO2 emissions and potential fuel economy of up to 176.6mpg.

2016 also saw the addition of the all-new Niro Hybrid Utility Vehicle to Kia's expanding range.

Combining crossover looks with hybrid technology, the all-new Niro boasts a parallel hybrid system that switches between petrol and electric power, or uses a combination of both, and charges the battery whenever it can.

A 1.6-litre GDI (gasoline direct injection) petrol engine, engineered specifically for hybrid applications, is paired with a 32kW electric motor and a lithium-ion polymer battery pack.

Other models on offer in the hybrid range at Jennings Kia include the Niro PHEV, Optima Sportswagon PHEV, and the pure-electric Soul EV

The group's three dealerships also sell Kia's entire new car range, which caters for everyone's needs with a wide choice of compact, mid-sized, MPVs, SUVs and Saloon models, all on display and readily available to test drive at Jennings Kia.

A range of aftersales facilities, including service, MOT and genuine parts and accessories are also on offer at all dealerships.

For more information about the range of products and services available at Jennings Kia, contact Stockton on 01642 632299, Washington on 0191 5525800, Sunderland on 0191 5623399, or visit www.jenningsmotorgroup.co.uk

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- Heated front seats & steering wheel
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New Kia Optima 2.0 GDi PHEV Automatic

- Metallic paint • 17" alloy wheels
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www.JenningsMotorGroup.co.uk

The official fuel consumption figures in mpg (l/100km) for the Kia range are Urban 28.2 (10.0) - 0, Extra Urban 45.6 (6.2) - 85.6 (3.3), Combined 37.2 (7.6) - 176.6 (1.6). CO₂ (g/km) 177 - 37. Standard EU test figures for comparative purposes and may not reflect real driving results.



Kia Contract hire is available to business users only. Guarantees/indemnities may be required. Rentals shown based on a 6-0-35 non-maintained agreement (6 initial rentals up front followed by 35 rentals +VAT) with a mileage of 10,000 miles per annum. Subject to availability. Rentals must be made monthly. Prices exclude VAT. When the vehicle is returned it must be in good condition and not have exceeded the agreed mileage, otherwise further charges will be incurred. Prices are correct at time of going to print and are subject to change without further notice. Terms and conditions apply. Kia Contract Hire is provided by ALD Automotive Ltd, Oakwood Drive, Emersons Green, Bristol, BS16 7LB. Prices applicable to cars registered in April 2018. Cars not necessarily as illustrated. Certain categories of business users may be excluded. Offers end 30th April 2018. E&OE.

SEEDS PLANTED FOR NORTHUMBERLAND LIVE AT BLYTH



It's going to be pure and simple musical entertainment at this year's Northumberland Live Festival at Blyth as indie band **The Lightning Seeds** have been announced as headliners.

The band achieved chart success in the 1990s with hits such as *Pure*, *The Life of Riley* and *Lucky You*. They also wrote and recorded the song *Three Lions '96*, which became a number one single on two occasions and sold over a million copies in the UK.

Last year, *The Undertones* paid their first ever visit to Blyth and wowed the crowd with their repertoire of power pop songs. Previously, *Scouting for Girls* also attracted a 15,000 strong crowd, and *The Lightning Seeds* are expected to do the same this year.

Other bands already lined up to entertain crowds on Saturday 23rd June include blues rock band *STAN*, rock and roll band *The Baldy Holly Band* and popular rock band *Edenthorn*. The festival's official media partner will be *BBC Newcastle*.

Blyth Town Council are hosting the festival. Councillor Kath Nisbet, Chair of the Town Council Events Committee, is looking forward to welcoming *The Lightning Seeds*. She said: "It's very appropriate that in the World Cup year we are bringing to Blyth the band who wrote the most successful football song ever. I'm sure that everyone will be singing along to *Three Lions* to show our support for the national football team."

The free family festival will also feature superb street theatre, a fun fair and wonderful food concessions.

THEATRE ROYAL ANNOUNCES AUTUMN 2018 SEASON

With hilarious six-foot ballerinas, romance in 17th century Paris and the goriest Scottish play of all time, *Newcastle Theatre Royal* has it all in its newly announced Autumn 2018 season.

The spectacular season opens with *Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo*, or "The Trocks" (2-3 Oct). Loved worldwide for their sassy spoofs and hilarious homages to classical ballet, the company features 18 super-athletic male dancers who make every performance froth frivolously with a unique concoction of tutus and testosterone.

Dance fans will also delight with *Northern Ballet's* multi award-winning production *The Three Musketeers* (17-20 Oct). As audiences are transported to 17th century Paris, they will witness the classic tale unfold in a whirlwind of adventure, romance and intrigue.

Also arriving is the joyous *The Merry Widow* (24 & 26 Oct). Telling the story of young, beautiful and wealthy widow Hanna, Parisian sensuality meets Viennese sophistication in a night of glorious music and dazzling choreography.

Referred to as "the Scottish play", *Macbeth* famously visited *Newcastle Theatre Royal* in 1899 and played on the night the theatre was gutted by fire. Over a century later, the Shakespeare tragedy returns in a brand-new production from *The National Theatre* (13-17 Nov).

A glorious show which pays homage to *Morecambe and Wise* will also arrive in *An Evening with Eric and Ern* (14 Oct). The show is full of famous comedy sketches, routines and music.



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NEWCASTLE CITY HALL WELCOMES THREE ICONIC ACTS TO ITS STAGE

Newcastle City Hall has announced three great artists to its Summer/Autumn 2018 season.

Shalamar will be returning to the North East on 12 May. Regarded as one of the most influential soul bands of their time, Shalamar will inject their unique style, energy and passion into sounds that have commanded dance floors from all over the world. The show will include classic songs such as There It Is, I Can Make You Feel Good and A Night To Remember.

Elvis Costello and the Imposters will be celebrating the 40th anniversary of Costello's first album My Aim Is True on 25 Jun. Costello will bring with him a wealth of hits enjoyed and cherished by many including Alison, Pump It Up and Everyday I Write The Book.

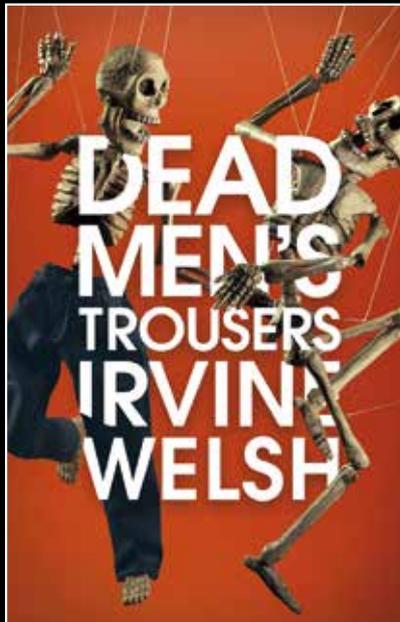
Travis will play their classic album The Man Who Live in full on 15 Dec. One of the most successful British albums of the last 20 years, The Man Who includes the timeless hits Writing To Reach You, Driftwood and Why Does It Always Rain On Me.

BOOK OF THE MONTH - "DEAD MEN'S TROUSERS" BY IRVINE WELSH

Renton, Begbie, Sick Boy and Spud all return in what has been billed as the final novel in the Trainspotting story.

Mark Renton is finally a success. An international jet-setter he now makes significant money managing DJs, but constant travel, airport lounges, soulless hotel rooms and broken relationships have left him dissatisfied with his life. He's then rocked by a chance encounter with Frank Begbie, from whom he'd been hiding for years after a terrible betrayal and the resulting debt. But the psychotic Begbie appears to have reinvented himself as a celebrated artist and – Much to Mark's astonishment – doesn't seem interested in revenge.

Sick Boy and Spud, who have agendas of their own, are intrigued to learn that their old friends are back in town, but when they enter the bleak world of organ-harvesting, things start to go badly wrong. Lurching from crisis to crisis, the four men circle each other, driven by personal histories and addictions, confused, angry – so desperate that even Hibs winning the Scottish Cup doesn't really help. One of the four will not survive the book, but who is wearing Dead Men's Trousers?



WHAT'S ON THIS APRIL?

The Last Ship

April 1

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

The Band

April 3 -14

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www.theatreroyal.co.uk

Jethro Tull

April 5

Newcastle City Hall T: (0844) 8112 121
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THE SPICE OF LIFE



This month, Josie's Dragonfly auction winners entered Bob Arora's kitchen for a little preview of Sachins life.

Our head chef and owner, as you all know, loves to get involved with charities and the local community to give something back. Sachins, one of Newcastle's favourite Punjabi and Indian restaurants donated a fabulous cookery class prize for the Josie Dragonfly Trust.

The Josie's Dragonfly Trust makes a very real and positive difference to the lives of young cancer patients with limited time. They passionately believe in the importance of happy memories, working tirelessly to make them happen for young people and their families.

Head chef of Sachins, Bob Arora, can often be found out and about demonstrating the traditional methods of cooking and running exciting cooking classes with the likes of Alan Shearer, Steven Taylor and local North East customers spicing up his kitchen.

This time, after bidding for and winning a prize at a charity event, Naveen Vadhera and Suresh Jerath received a spicy prize from the Josie Dragonfly Trust - a cookery class for two at Sachins. Firstly they were handed their CCS chef jackets (obviously they

www.josiesdragonfly.org www.sachins.co.uk

had to look the part), and then in the kitchen they prepped with our very own Bob by their side.

Cooking up a delicious chicken tikka starter, known as Vadrath Tikka, Bob showed the guys which particular fresh ingredients and spices go into making each dish.

For the main show, Naveen and Suresh gave it their all and even came up with their very own creation, the "can't cook won't cook" chicken curry. The final dish of the day was a Chicken Saag, which Naveen declared as his favourite.

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A HOME AWAY FROM HOME

By Anne Bromley – Joint Managing Director Travel Bureau

As the lines between business and leisure travel blur and business travellers increasingly look for accommodation that makes their trips more comfortable, flexible and convenient, serviced apartments and aparthotels are fast becoming the rising stars of the business travel world.

With demand growing, sector bodies like ASAP* (the Association of Serviced Apartment Providers) are extending their influence internationally to drive a rise in standards. All the major players are upping their game to offer quality accommodation and a wider range of facilities and services, all aimed at offering the traveller a home from home experience.

So, what can you expect from a serviced apartment and who do they benefit?

One size certainly doesn't fit all:

Serviced apartments – fully serviced with cleaning, food essentials, bath products and Wi-fi as given, they offer the independent-minded traveller a private living space ideal for short or mid-term stays.

Bespoke corporate housing – great for longer stretches or staff relocation, fully furnished residential properties with larger living space, often with entertainment packages and broadband included.

Aparthotels – smaller apartments with a kitchen and bathroom but with shared facilities including laundry/gym and public seating and dining areas, often with hosted evening activities.

Micro apartments – small sleeping spaces with bathroom but with a large communal kitchen/dining area offering light meals, focused on offering a 'hotel style' independent lifestyle for business travellers.



Home comforts:

A big plus of serviced apartments is that you can personalise and tailor your experience, be it during business hours or socially. Guests can bring their home comforts along with them, even their pets, and many properties have set up object libraries where you can borrow items such as a vase, a rice cooker or even a guitar! Some even supply weights and yoga mats in each apartment or offer use of local gyms for long-stay guests. Many providers see and treat their guests as one of the locals and want to connect them with the community they are living within.

Many aparthotels are focusing more on the modern social traveller who, after a hard day's work, wants to rub shoulders with fellow guests, joining a community whilst on the road. Evening activities, hosted by the general manager, can include wine tasting and jewellery making or even a Game of Thrones night!

Flexible friends:

As the sector continues to develop, the benefits to both individual and corporate travellers grow. Flexibility and personalisation means trips can be refined to suit individual requirements: asking business travellers to share with colleagues in multi-roomed apartments allows them to work and eat together whilst retaining their privacy with en-suite facilities; a wider choice in length of stay options including one night stays in some properties; a separate living space in which to unwind and relax with space to welcome family or friends at the weekends; and access to public/social areas for networking. These all allow businesses to better serve their travelling employees, whilst ensuring a cost-effective way to deliver on a project.

So how does the serviced apartment sector fit within a corporate travel policy?:

With duty of care high on the corporate travel agenda, it is essential the sector provides security and peace of mind. Look for the increasing number of providers with the ASAP marque confirming that they have been 'quality accredited', meeting core compliance of legal, health and safety requirements and good practice.

Many providers greet their guests personally, regardless of the time of arrival or provide time-limited key-code access, whilst offering around the clock guest services with a 24/7 mobile phone contact for emergencies.

Ultimately, satisfied employees result in increased productivity.

If you would like more information about the serviced apartment sector and how to incorporate within your travel policy, please contact Travel Bureau on 0191 285 0346 or send an email to consulting@travelb.co.uk to start a conversation. Visit www.travelbcorporate.com.

For further information on ASAP visit www.theasap.org.uk



BUSINESS LUNCH CLUB

...Inspiring conversation over a fine lunch...



With thanks to our February lunch speaker, Simon Green of Innovation Super Network, his interactive presentation generated some lively debate in the room.

Booking now for Monday 30th April

Speaker - Barry Speker OBE

Barry's career as a Solicitor in Newcastle upon Tyne spans more than 45 years. Recommended each year in Legal 500, Chambers Directories and Legal Experts. Barry is included in Newcastle Journal's list of the 500 most influential people in the North East, now a Senior Consultant at Sintons. Guests can look forward to an engaging account of Barry's career in law.

Venue - The Crowne Plaza, Stephenson Quarter, Newcastle upon Tyne

Date - Monday 30th April, 12 noon **Price** - £35pp + VAT to include a two-course lunch and coffee



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Diary Date: Monday 4th June - Speaker: Jonas Caino MBA Make it Rain

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SOUTH TYNESIDE RESTAURANT REELS IN TOP TEN FISH AND CHIP AWARD

A popular South Tyneside restaurant is celebrating after being recognised as one of the best fish and chip restaurants in the UK.

Colmans Seafood Temple has been named one of the top ten fish and chip restaurants in the UK by Fry Magazine. The awards, which are now in their sixth year of running, were made after months of secret dining across hundreds of restaurants and takeaways across the UK.

Reflecting on the accolade, Owner Richard Ord said: "Being named one of the top ten fish and chip restaurants in the UK is a fantastic achievement, especially since we have been open for less than 12 months. I am very proud of Colmans Seafood Temple. Being recognised in these awards is a testament to the hard work put in by both our chefs and front of house staff."

The Fry Magazine award is the latest in a string of accolades for Colmans, who have also previously

been awarded the Times newspaper's 30 Best Fish and Chip Shops in the UK. The eatery has also won best UK Fish and Chip Shop in BBC's Countryfile magazine and is included in the prestigious Good Food Guide.

Colmans Seafood Temple offers fine quality coastal cuisine, beautiful panoramic views of the seafront and a stylish cocktail and oyster bar which serves an array of drinks.

NEWCASTLE AIRPORT NAMED BEST IN EUROPE FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE

Newcastle International Airport has recently been unveiled as the only UK airport to win an award at Airports Council International's Airport Service Quality Awards. The airport was named best airport in its category for customer service in Europe.

Nick Jones, Chief Executive Officer at Newcastle International Airport, said: "I'm absolutely delighted that Newcastle Airport has won this award. Everyone here at Newcastle goes above and beyond to offer an excellent experience for our passengers and it's great to see that that's been recognised."

The ASQ awards recognise the world's best airports for the quality of their customer service experience. 16 UK airports are part of the ASQ network which delivers 600,000 individual surveys per year.

Newcastle International Airport was also recently voted Britain's best airport for a second successive year, as well as 'Airport of the Year' at the North of England Transport Awards.

TRAVEL BUREAU AWARDED FEEFO GOLD SERVICE AWARD

Local Gosforth-based business Travel Bureau has won the Feefo Gold Trusted Service award, an independent seal of excellence that recognises businesses which deliver exceptional services.

Created by Feefo, Trusted Service is awarded to businesses which use Feefo to collect customers' ratings and reviews. The award goes to those who meet the highest standard, based on the number of reviews they have collected and their average rating. As all reviews are verified as genuine, the accreditation is a true reflection of a business' commitment to outstanding service.

Travel Bureau met the criteria of collecting at least 50 reviews in 2017 with a Feefo service rating of between 4.5 and 5.0.



Jeanne Lally, Travel Bureau's Managing Director, commented: "To receive this award from Feefo recognising our exceptional service and first-class holiday experience is a great achievement. We're now looking forward to another successful year ahead."



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RECIPE OF THE MONTH

with Dave Coulson, Chef Patron, Peace and Loaf Jesmond.



HALIBUT CHICKEN PIE

with Creamed Potato & Mushroom

INGREDIENTS

4 x 200g Halibut fillets
2 chicken legs
500g button mushrooms
2 carrots
2 sticks of celery
1 leek
1 shallot
½ bottle white wine
1ltr chicken stock
100ml double cream
500g potato
2 sheets of ready made puff pastry
(or ideally make some bric pastry)

METHOD

Braise the chicken legs in the chicken stock until very tender, pick the meat carefully and reserve the stock.

Finely dice the carrot, shallot, leek and celery and sweat off in a pan. Once softened add the white wine and cook until nearly dry and add the chicken stock.

Reduce by half and add the cream- cook on a medium heat until the sauce thickens slightly and add your picked chicken legs. Keep warm.

Next, boil the potatoes until soft and push through a ricer. Add as much butter as you dare (remember the calories though) and season with salt and pepper to taste.

Season the halibut and pan-fry for 2 minutes each side on a medium to high heat.

Cook the pastry sheets as directed and assemble the dish as shown.



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RDA CREATE CONTEMPORARY CAFE FOR FAMILY RUN GARDEN NURSERY



RDA was recently appointed by Whitegates Nursery in North Yorkshire to transform its existing tea room into a contemporary country kitchen style cafe.

A family business, Whitegates was established over 50 years ago and takes great pride in the quality of the plants that it grows across its 15 acre site, the excellent customer service it offers and its individuality.

It is this uniqueness that led owners Claire and John Grainge to approach RDA when they were looking to renovate the existing catering facilities as part of the ongoing improvements and expansions at Whitegates.

Claire said: "I wanted something different to the traditional bland look and feel of many garden centre cafes. I was immediately attracted to what RDA could offer and liked that they were a like-minded family business. I really felt they understood the brief and was confident that they would create something special whilst retaining the individuality and family atmosphere which has become synonymous to Whitegates."

Our team of design experts worked with Claire to bring her vision to life creating a warm and welcoming country kitchen restaurant environment with a contemporary twist. To create this look, our



team used a combination of lounge and dining furniture, warm ambient lighting and a mis-match of colours and materials.

To represent the botanical surroundings, green was the predominant colour, but with olive tones and more delicate shades. To express the individuality of the project, this was contrasted with bold

coloured furniture such as dark teal, violet blue and blush pink chairs against statement floral fabrics and raw wooden panelling to the walls, which was painted green.

Continuing with the contemporary farmhouse aesthetic, the counter features artisan tiling and was clad with natural wood ready to perfectly display the tempting selection of locally sourced, homemade and home grown hot and cold food, cakes and infusion teas.

In addition, our team designed and installed a newly built kitchen which included a four-door refrigerated counter, cooking suite with extraction canopy, microwave, Baine Marie, Merrychef, high speed oven, soup kettle and wash station.

Claire added: "We wanted to create an area within the garden centre for our customers where they could gather and chat about gardening. A cosy yet luxurious and welcoming space where our customers could stay and relax, perhaps read a magazine, or a book whilst enjoying our home-made goods. I feel RDA has encapsulated that perfectly, and I couldn't be happier with the result."

To find out how RDA can help you with your next catering project call 0844 873 4993 or visit www.rdalimited.co.uk

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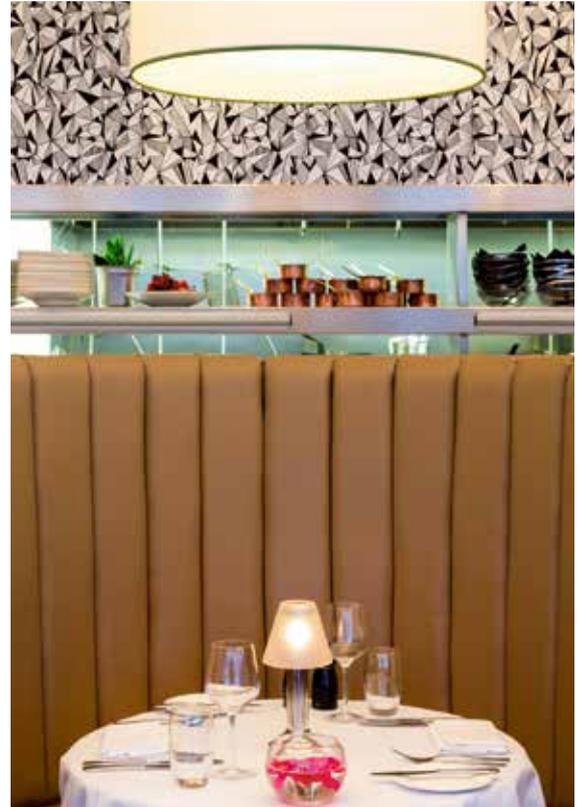
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MACDONALD
LINDEN HALL
GOLF & COUNTRY CLUB

IN THE HEART OF THE CITY

By Michael Grahamslaw



As a belated Christmas gift from my two kids, my wife Lisa and I recently checked into Hotel Indigo Newcastle. As we knew from experience, Hotel Indigo is a hotel which ticks all the boxes for both business and leisure travellers and this occasion proved no different.

The hotel boasts that enviable NE1 postcode and is perfectly placed to explore all of which the city has to offer. Newcastle Central Station is a mere two minutes away with all other restaurants, shops, bars and attractions all within walking distance.

Business facilities include complimentary WiFi and a modern business centre, whilst there's also a fitness suite and cocktail lounge. Food & drink is a big consideration here and the jewel in the crown is unquestionably the sleek, celebrity Marco Pierre White Steakhouse Bar & Grill - more on which later!

Another thing which really stands out is the team's commitment to customer service. On arrival, we were greeted warmly and checked-in by some of the friendliest reception staff we've encountered.

The design of the hotel is very much in-keeping with the area it occupies. Newcastle's historic Grainger Town has long been renowned as a hub for architecture and innovation and little nods to the city's bridges, arches and monuments can be found in the hotel's wall art and bedroom design. For a large-scale, 148 bedroom hotel, Hotel Indigo possesses all the charm of a boutique property with stylish splashes of colour and geometric patterns.

The hotel's guest rooms range from Executive King

rooms to Superior rooms with feature balconies. Ours was the latter (thanks kids!) and featured all requisite mod cons, including LCD TV's, tea & coffee making facilities and a swish rain shower. Lisa took in the city from new heights on the balcony whilst I kicked back and grew acquainted with a locally-produced tippie 'Grainger Ale' which is provided complimentary in many of the rooms. A lovely touch indeed!

After changing for dinner, we headed down for what would be a superb dining experience. The hotel's MPW Steakhouse is one of the city's top destination restaurants and remains a firm favourite for special occasions, business lunches and afternoon teas.

The celebrity-endorsed eatery aspires to "take gastronomy to a new level" and its exciting menu reflects these intentions with a parade of tastes, textures and flavours to choose from. The dining area has a convivial buzz about it, whilst a monochrome-cast Marco broods quietly over proceedings. Perhaps that's why the service is so snappy?

Starters soon arrived and tasted very good. Lisa enjoyed the tartare of fresh salmon with Melba toast whilst I tucked into the tempura-coated calamari & shrimp with a fresh lemon accompaniment.

Cautioned by Lisa not to have ANOTHER peppered steak, I tried "The Governor's Steak & Ale Pie" with buttered peas. A hearty dish, this packed loads of flavour and really hit the mark. Now who says pie & peas can't be sexy?

For her main, Lisa sampled Chicken a la Forestiere, a tender fillet of chicken served in Madera pan juices with a fricassee of wild mushrooms.

Naturally, expert cooking such as this demands a fine wine to accompany and our Waiter was happy to recommend an excellent bottle of Merlot from the restaurant's extensive wine selection. Purely for medicinal purposes though, you must understand.

The following morning, Lisa enjoyed a pamper in our suite's marbled bathroom whilst I headed for the hotel's fitness suite to sweat out some of the party pounds. Whilst compact in size, the gym features all of the latest cardio & resistance equipment and is perfect for any traveller looking to stay in shape.

A freshly-prepared breakfast rounded off what had been a memorable stay. At least one year on from our last visit, we both agreed that Hotel Indigo offers much appeal whether you're away on business or enjoying a leisure break. Well-appointed rooms, friendly service, classy dining – and all from its prime city centre location.

More information on the hotel can be found on their website www.hinnewcastle.co.uk

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sachins 

main **bob's dad's secret lamb curry**

ingredients :

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2 mild green chillies
3 medium chicken breasts
tin chopped tomatoes
2 large potatoes
tub natural yogurt
coriander stalks
vegetable oil
fresh ginger
salt
haldi
chilli powder
garam masala
dry fenugreek
tomato puree

cooking method :

warm 2 table spoons of oil
once hot add chopped onions
keep stirring until onions become translucent
add finely green chillies, finely chopped ginger and salt
add a tea spoon of haldi, keep stirring
add half a tea spoon of chilli powder and garam masala
once all spices have been stirred add chopped tomatoes
add diced potatoes, once 50% cooked add diced chicken
add some crushed dry fenugreek
once chicken is cooked add a table spoon of tomato puree
add half of yoghurt
garnish with some fresh chopped coriander and ginger

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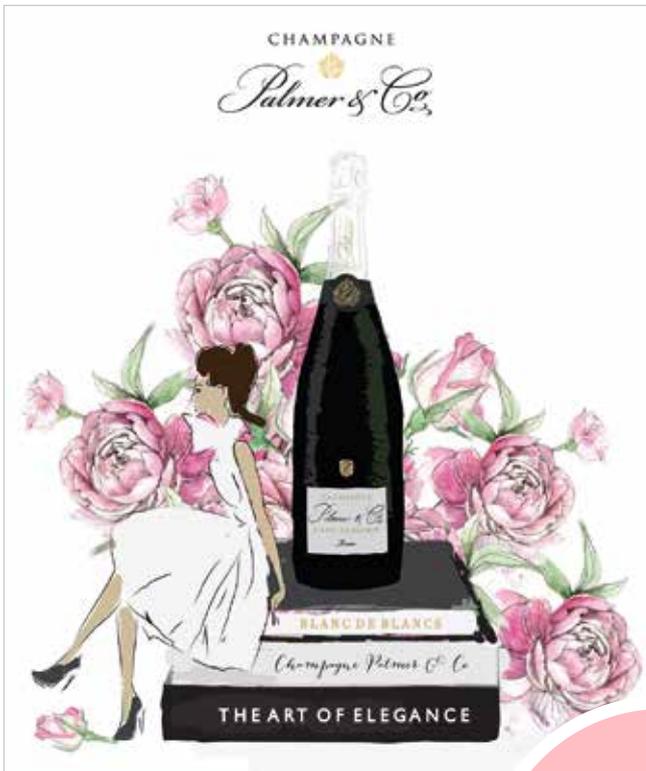


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CATCH OF THE DAY

By Michael Grahamslaw



With the magazine attracting a lot of attention in the South Tyneside area, we thought we'd review one of the area's top new eateries.

Anyone familiar with South Shields will be aware of Colmans on Ocean Road – a family-run institution serving fish & chips since 1926. Now, they've extended their offering with latest venture, Colman's Seafood Temple. Now that is a chippy with lofty aspirations! We soon realised though that this isn't your standard fish & chip shop fayre but an upmarket, seafood bistro with panoramic, coastal views and a lively ambience.

The "Temple" is situated bang on the seafront and makes use of the former band stand affectionately known locally as "Ghandi's Temple". The site has retained its (almost) Parthenon-esque pillars and from a distance, looks very striking.

The restaurant does a fine line in coastal cuisine and offers something for everyone, from fish & chip lovers to discerning seafood aficionados. Blackboards are chalked with the latest specials and also offer much interest for returning diners at market prices.

Inside, the angled windows showcase the stunning setting whilst the neutral décor further complements the by-the-sea vibe.

On hand to meet us was the restaurant's manager, Richard Ord – a friendly, hospitable host who suggested a swift eye-opener in the stylish oyster

bar. Well, it would have been churlish not to so we took up a pew and were soon sipping on a fine bottle of New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc.

The restaurant has a lively vibe about it, largely due to a rollicking, classic rock/pop playlist cherry-picked by Richard himself.

First up were a selection of Lindisfarne Oysters. These featured a range of different flavours including traditional red wine & shallot vinegar and the Peruvian-inspired chilli & lime dressing. Colmans even do a "beginner", tempura-coated oyster with tartare sauce which boasted all of the taste, but none of that polarising texture! These were a great way to begin and really got the digestive juices flowing.

"Can we have a nicer table please?" – we quipped whilst taking a seat directly overlooking the bay. Needless to say there isn't a bad seat in the house.

To start, my son Jack chose the steamed mussels. An old favourite of his, these were served by the panful with a hunk of bread on hand to mop up a lovely, garlic & herb sauce.

I tucked into the Colman's crab cakes, tasty golden-brown nuggets artfully embellished with a few blobs of curried mayo. Whilst both dishes were smartly

presented, we were pleased to find the portions wholesome and hearty. Clearly at Colman's there's a commitment to good, honest cooking.

Luckily, our visit coincided with an updated menu and I was eager to try one of their new options. A fillet of salmon was lightly dusted with sesame seeds and served in a teriyaki sauce –loaded with flavour – alongside stir fried Asian greens and sticky jasmine rice.

Jack's seafood mixed grill was another dish worth shelling out for (every pun intended) and featured all of his 'fruits de la mer' favourites. Lobster, langoustines, scallops, sea bass, salmon, calamari and more mussels made up a delicious plateful of locally-sourced produce which offered a true taste of the sea. Subtly flavoured with olive oil, fresh chilli and garlic, this was a great choice for those simply looking for a choice of everything.

Feeling replete – but not totally stodged as per – we swerved desserts in favour of coffees and were left to reflect on what a gem of a place Colman's is. For a brand with a nine-decade legacy, this is an exciting new venture which I'm sure will continue to go from strength to strength. All kneel for the seafood temple!



Further information can be found on their website www.colmansseafoodtemple.co.uk



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SUNDAY SHELTER FROM THE SNOW

The Beast from the East 2.0 can't stop the Grahamslaw Clan from procuring their Sunday Lunch fix.

To paraphrase Michael Corleone, "Just when we thought we were out, it pulls us back in!" – such could be said about the recent "Beast from the East" and some of the most stubborn snow & ice conditions in recent memory. Having been confined to barracks for much of March, we decided that enough was enough, so we headed out for a slap-up Sunday Lunch at the Holiday Inn Washington.

The hotel boasts a bright and airy in-house eatery named "Traders" and whilst this isn't perhaps your immediate choice for a Sunday Lunch, it is immensely popular with those locals "in the know" – even on a particularly treacherous afternoon.

On arrival, we were greeted warmly and shown to our cosy corner spot. The restaurant's large windows afford some lovely views over the hotel's grounds – much of which were blanketed in snow.

Casting an eye over their Sunday offering, what struck us was that all dishes were of the plated not carvery variety which ensures for a higher quality, more personalised experience.

We kicked off with the classic prawn cocktail with marie rose sauce & brown bread fingers and the winter-warming tomato soup served with crusty bread. Delicious!

For mains, Traders offer up roasts of Chicken,



Pork and Beef alongside other main plates such as Chicken & Mushroom Pie, Fish & Chips and the Halloumi & Mushroom burger for veggies. I chose the non-vegetarian Chicken Breast whilst

Jack and the Girls tucked into the topside of beef. Portions are to be applauded here with our plates arriving piled high with meat, mash, roast potato and Yorkshire pudding. The meat was tasty and succulent whilst the sides of fresh vegetables were a crunchy Al Dente.

If you're anything like me, "The Beast.." will have played havoc with your new year diet plans, so I rounded off in a similar vein with a bowl of homemade trifle.

With our bellies filled, we left in warm spirits – this was a Sunday Lunch well worth braving the conditions for.

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A RELAXING BREAK FOR BODY AND MIND

By Michael Grahamslaw

Following a strong start to the year, I thought some good old R&R might be in order.

Both my wife Lisa & I fancied somewhere we could really unwind, yet also somewhere in close proximity to Durham where our daughter attends university. Ramside Hall seemingly ticked all the boxes. A sprawling resort with an array of facilities on-site, it's also a stone's throw away from the A1 which makes it the perfect base camp from which to explore all that County Durham has to offer.

The hotel's winding driveway really builds a real sense of anticipation on arrival, while the site boasts all the hallmarks of a top class destination retreat. In addition to 127 guest rooms, there's two championship golf courses, three restaurants and a state-of-the-art spa.

Already hugely impressed, we were warmly received and soon reclining in our deluxe bedroom. Rooms at Ramside range from classic doubles to the suitably opulent Celebration Suite which features a private, 'Juliet' balcony and a free-standing copper bath. Ours was decked out immaculately in subtle shades of grey with plush bedding and a marbled bathroom. It even overlooked the 18th green of the Prince Bishop's course, much to my amusement – and Lisa's dismay!



Nicely settled in, we set off to meet Holly in Durham city centre. Just a 10 minute drive away, we elected to take the car yet later learned that the hotel operates a chauffeur service. We thought this was a novel idea and can be booked for shopping excursions, day-drinking trips or adventures to local tourist attractions. Those looking for a real touch of class can even ride in the back of a Bentley Mulsanne – a four door luxury sedan. Now that is what I call VIP treatment.

Buoyed by the fact Holly appears to be acclimatising well to university life, we returned to the hotel in fine spirits and looking forward to our evening meal. Sadly, Lisa couldn't be coaxed into a meal at the Golf Course clubhouse (the cheek!!) so we were pleased to find a host of other options on site.

First up, there's Pemberton's Carvery, a family-friendly, "help yourself" affair which features fresh roasts, a salad bar and a decadent desserts counter. The dining area has a lovely, casual ambience and often plays hosts to a variety of live entertainment.

In addition, there's Fusion – an award-winning, Pan-Asian eatery. Housed within the spa itself, Fusion has amassed a fine reputation for crafting colourful, nutritious dishes aimed at replenishing body and mind.

For Lisa & I though there was only ever going to be one destination. The Rib Room is another local favourite and a real must for any steak aficionado.

The dining area boasts a warm, brasserie-style atmosphere with arty wall imagery and empty wine bottles lending added charm. Here we dined regally, kicking off with the pan-fried North Sea scallops with black pudding bhaji and cauliflower puree and the Shetland steamed mussels in a rich garlic & herb sauce.

As the name of the restaurant suggests, steaks are the house speciality, courtesy of some choice cuts of fine Durham beef which have been matured for 28-32 days. This is proven to produce a tender and succulent steak – especially true of my 8oz fillet with all the trimmings.

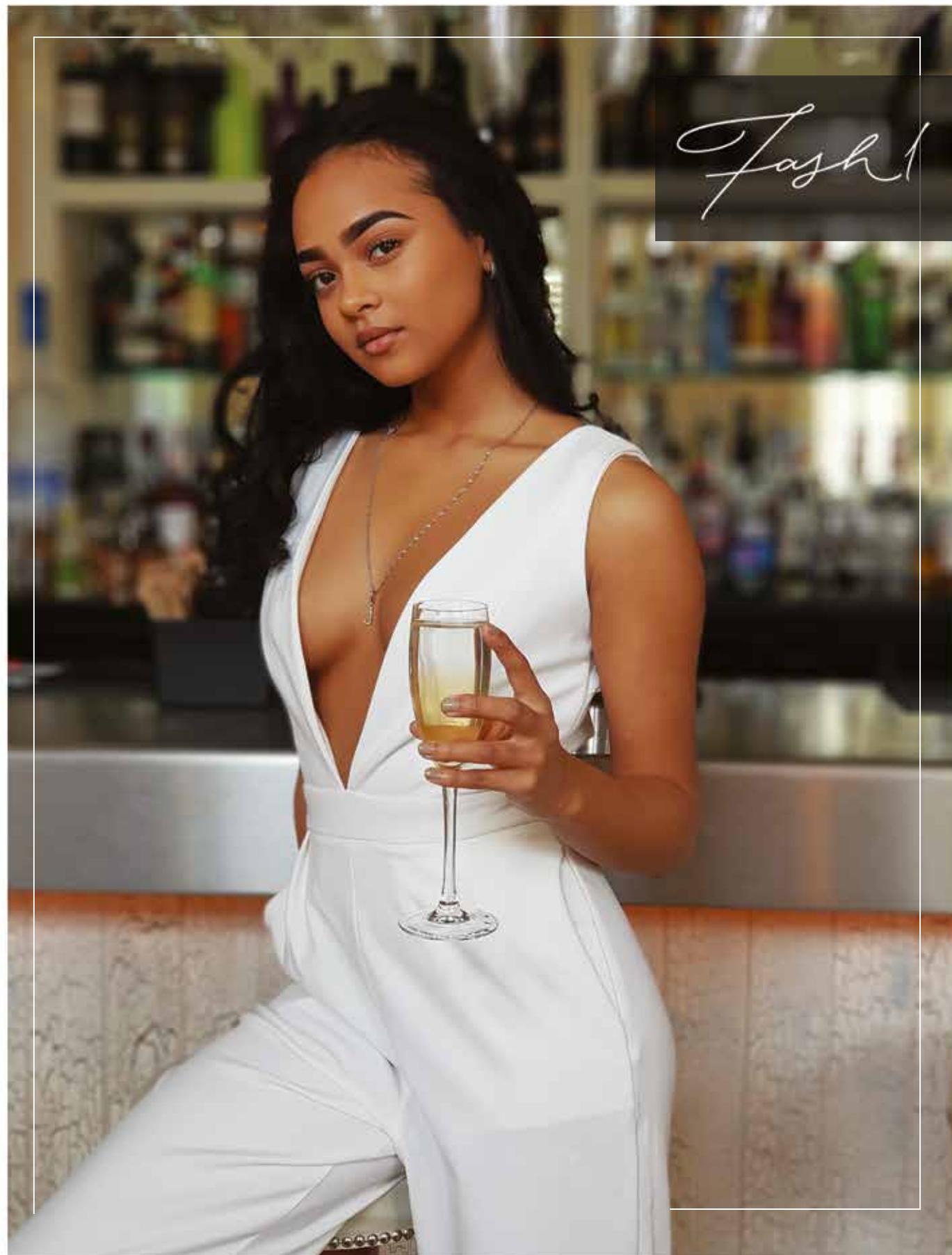
Although steaks obviously assume centre stage, fish, poultry and pasta dishes are also available for an all-round dining experience. Lisa opted for a delicious chicken supreme with smoked mash and asparagus in a wild mushroom sauce.

Following dinner, we lingered into the night over an excellent bottle of Cabernet, before collapsing into bed for a full 8 hours sleep. The following morning, Lisa headed for a dip in the pool (this place has five!) which allowed me to sneak off to the driving range and hit a few balls. Reconvening over a light breakfast, we both agreed that this mini-break had done us both the power of good.

Whether you're looking for a spa retreat, golf break or simply after a change of scene; Ramside Hall is a classy outfit with all the bases covered.



Further information can be found on their website www.ramsidehallhotel.co.uk



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(L to R): Amy Maughan, Stacey Brunton, Ruth Mickle and Leanne Tonks at Nuffield Health Newcastle Hospital.

NORTHUMBERLAND PR AND CREATIVE AGENCY IS APPOINTED BY NUFFIELD HEALTH

Northumberland-based PR and creative agency Fusion has been appointed by Nuffield Health to provide strategic communications support to the group's Newcastle and Tees Hospitals.

The award-winning agency will provide media relations and stakeholder engagement support to the not-for-profit private healthcare firm as it aims to consolidate its market position as the leading provider of expert medical care in the North of England.

Nuffield Health, which operates a network of hospitals, medical clinics, fitness and wellbeing clubs and diagnostic units across the UK approached Fusion for communications and marketing support following a recommendation from another of the firm's clients operating in the same sector.

"We are delighted to be working with the team at Fusion PR," said Lesley Lock, hospital director at Nuffield Health Tees Hospital.

"Through various marketing campaigns operating across the Group, we are keen to highlight the incredible range of services that Nuffield Health provides, for both self-pay and NHS referred patients.

"Our work with Fusion PR will give these campaigns a uniquely local focus and help to solidify Nuffield Health's position as a leading provider of quality healthcare in the North East."

Stacey Brunton, sales and services manager at Nuffield Health Newcastle, added: "It's an incredibly exciting time for Nuffield Health. Fusion PR will be providing vital support to the Newcastle and Tees Hospitals as we launch our #BuiltAroundYou 2018 campaign.

"Through proactive PR and engagement with the local community, we hope to raise the profile of our Hospitals and showcase some of the amazing work of our staff."

Amy Maughan, senior account director at Fusion, said: "We pride ourselves on our ability to provide innovative communications solutions which meet our clients' needs and add genuine value to their businesses.

"Working alongside Nuffield Health's in-house

team we will be promoting the extensive range of wellbeing and healthcare services provided by the Newcastle and Tees Hospitals.

"We're thrilled to add Nuffield Health's prestigious name to our growing client list and we're looking forward to a long and successful partnership with the organisation."

From its base in Blyth, Fusion provides a range of marketing and creative services to clients, from traditional media relations through to branding, web design, social media support and content management. The agency operates across multiple markets, including manufacturing and engineering, education, healthcare, leisure and tourism, professional services and the third sector.

The Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) named Fusion the Outstanding Small PR Consultancy of the Year at the 2017 North East PR Pride Awards. The company was also recently awarded Small Business of the Year at the 10th annual Northumberland Business Awards.

To find out more, visit www.fusionprcreative.com



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The bride and groom-to-be take the lead when planning their wedding at the hotel, and it's delivered to perfection by the experienced team. Coupled with tailored catering by the dedicated kitchen team and attentive hosting from the front of house team, brides and grooms can expect a day personalised to them.

Exclusively Yours

The Coquetvale Hotel offers couples exclusive use of the venue, which includes the bridal suite and all the guest bedrooms.

Perfect Packages

The Platinum Package starts at £4,500 and is suitable for 50 day guests and 60 evening guests. The day will kick-start with a red carpet arrival, fizz and a wedding breakfast chosen by the bride and groom, followed by live entertainment, an evening buffet, accommodation and more.

Marry Midweek

The Coquetvale Hotel is not just for weekends, as couples can consider a midweek wedding too. Ask the dedicated wedding planner about the venue's Monday and Friday packages from £3,999.



ESCAPE TO CITY RETREAT

By Holly Grahamslaw



Having recently returned from a busy term at university, I decided it was time to treat myself to a much-needed destress at City Retreat.

An award-winning beauty salon and day spa on Jesmond's Osborne Road, City Retreat is situated in an easily accessible location surrounded by an array of delightful cafes and restaurants, making it ideal for those who fancy a coffee or bite after their treatment.

Upon arrival, I was greeted by the welcoming staff who kindly took my coat and offered me a drink and chocolates whilst I perused the spa's insightful brochure. Providing a range of treatments for both young and old skin, including massages, facials, pedicures, makeup and hair removal, I quickly realised that City Retreat really does have an option for everyone. Offering unique experiences, such as the Mother to Be and Bespoke Bridal packages, and even specialist treatments for men, City Retreat provides for all ages and occasions. Weary after weeks of partying (and sometimes working!), I opted for the Elemis Superfood Pro-Radiance facial, in hope of putting a bit of radiance back into my weathered skin.

I was soon invited downstairs to one of the salon's relaxation suites. Taken to a room with comfortable beds, a candlelit atmosphere and calming music, the place really did promote feelings of relaxation and sanctuary.

My therapist then gave me an in-depth consultation on what my treatment would entail as well as its many benefits. Explaining that the Superfood facial



was perfect for those who burn the candle at both ends, by providing brightness to visibly tired skin, I thought it would be ideal to help me recover from all the late nights at uni!

The hour long treatment then began. Starting with a double cleanse and exfoliate, my skin was then

toned using the refreshing Elemis Rehydrating Ginseng Toner. Two masks were then applied to illuminate the skin. This is when I realised City Retreat's unique selling point, which is first class service and the attention to detail they put into their outstanding treatments.

I then enjoyed the soothing Elemis Superfood facial oil, as I was given a relaxing massage to the face, neck, arms, hands and even scalp. Now feeling completely calm, my therapist worked her magic in brightening the eye area with the Elemis Pro-Collagen Hydra-Gel Eye Masks and the Pro-Collagen Eye Renewal – say goodbye to those eye bags! The tranquil experience was all topped off with the hydrating Superfood Day Cream, which I noticed visibly replenished and moisturised the skin. The stresses of the term were definitely now behind me.

After a follow-up consultation, in which I was provided with a thorough examination of my skin and some potential products which would benefit, I now left City Retreat feeling informed and extremely relaxed. Whether you're a stressed-out student like myself, a busy working person looking for a pamper, or perhaps wanting to treat a loved-one, City Retreat really does offer an escape from the worries of daily life. It's safe to say that I'll be returning in the run-up to my exams!

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City Retreat can be found at 48 Osborne Road, Jesmond, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE2 2AL. For more information on their various treatment packages visit their website www.city-retreat.com, or to book a consultation call 0191 281 9222.



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CHINESE MEDICINE AND ACUPUNCTURE CURING NORTH EAST FERTILITY

The North East region has seen somewhat of a boom in recent years in people overcoming fertility issues thanks to a traditional and natural remedy.

Chinese medicine, acupuncture and cupping are becoming the go-to method for improving the chances of having a baby!

Dr Xiao Xi Yu, of Sun Hie Acupuncture in Whitley Bay, is delighted by the number of people she has been able to help in reaching this dream.

Dr Yu has over 30 years experience in the profession, ten of which she has delivered from the Sun Hie Acupuncture's clinic. Over the years she has helped many women with infertility. She said: "Whilst modern medicine has advanced massively in the last few years to help couples struggling with infertility, there are still many cases where the couple doesn't qualify for NHS help, because they can't afford the treatment or it simply doesn't/won't work in their case."

"With Acupuncture, it is about finding where the issues lie within each person's individual system. The treatments and medicine stimulate the body, remove blockages and reduce tension and stress. This then improves the kidney function, which makes the body stronger and allows it to do the job it is supposed to do."

One such lady that benefited from such treatment is Michelle Jones, who now has two amazing children, the arrival of which she puts down to acupuncture, Chinese cupping and Chinese herbal medicine.

Michelle is 38 and ever since meeting her husband Steven at the age of 18 has had four long-term chronic health conditions. Her symptoms started at age 14.

Struggling with Scoliosis, Colitis and Proctitis along with Fibromyalgia, Michelle developed agoraphobia whilst at University and her treatment of that through hypnotherapy helped her grasp that there were natural ways to look after herself.



However, Michelle's infertility seemed sealed when at 22 she was also diagnosed with Endometriosis. The couple chose to stay together despite the chances of having a family being slim and now have two beautiful children, Dylan aged 10 and Isla aged seven.

The couple married in 2005 having moved back to the North East, still hoping one day a child would be possible. Michelle had started with Acupuncture in 2004, mainly to alleviate the overall symptoms, but with the long-term goal being pregnancy.

Michelle, who now runs her own successful business Michelle Jones Wedding Planner, said: "I needed to take control of my illnesses, accept I was poorly and find a way to live whilst managing my health. I came off the treatment that the doctors had me on which was putting me into false menopause. Three years after enjoying Chinese medicine, hot cupping and acupuncture I was feeling stronger and my miracle occurred – I fell pregnant! Three years later, the same again!"

Michelle, who is originally from Hartlepool and lives in Newcastle, has since having her children used acupuncture to help with back issues and when her stomach muscles separated after childbirth. It

keeps her fibromyalgia at bay too.

She concluded: "The beauty of acupuncture is that you are treated as a person – not just symptoms and a condition or disease. It removes toxins and creates well being all round, so whatever your fertility situation it is really worth trying. Steven and I attribute our success in falling pregnant 100 percent down to Chinese medicine!"

Dr Yu, who treats people suffering from a range of other conditions including menopause, back and neck pain, eczema, fibromyalgia, tinnitus and mental health issues such as stress and anxiety, concluded: "The female system can get choked up, so I concentrate on relieving that, which creates regular periods and ovulation. It also has been proven to improve the quality of eggs produced as it balances the body out making everything perform well. Chinese medicine is also effective in reducing the chance of miscarriage, and I create bespoke medicines to meet the needs of each woman I treat.

"Stories like Michelle's are happening more and more everyday thanks to Chinese medicine and acupuncture – more people need to turn to it to find their solution and relief."



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COMMENT WITH... Barry Speker

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“

Although it was sad that two National Treasures, Stephen Hawking and Sir Ken Dodd, should die within a day of each other, their passing caused not only mourning but quite a few smiles.

”

Both were known for their sense of humour, though more incidental in the case of Hawking. Naturally he will be remembered as the nation's favourite scientist, theoretical physicist and prolific author. Despite living for 54 of his 76 years with motor neurone disease he displayed incredible humour. This was not only shown by his cameo appearances on his favourite TV shows including Monty Python and The Simpsons, or his part in Star Trek: The Next Generation, where he was seen playing poker with Albert Einstein and Sir Isaac Newton.

How ironic that Stephen Hawking died on 14th March, the anniversary of Einstein's birth in 1879 and was born on the 300th anniversary of the death of Galileo. March 14th was also Pi Day, a celebration of the mathematical constant - 22/7- the ratio of the circumference of a circle to its diameter (Pi has been calculated to a trillion digits beyond its decimal point - Stephen Hawking may have remembered them all?) Hawking joked that his book A Brief History of Time (1988) was the best selling and least read of all books. Perhaps it is worth a second look.

As for Sir Ken Dodd, his death managed to create a few smiles but not at the Inland Revenue. By marrying his fiancée of 40 years just before he died, he not only conferred the title of Lady Dodd but also ensured that his entire estate passing to her would be free of Inheritance Tax, depriving the Tax Man of over £5million. Bearing in mind Ken's long battle with the Revenue over alleged underpayment of tax (which he eventually won), it really must have 'tickled' him that the marriage could achieve such a successful and legal tax saving. When asked in Court why he did not pay enough to the Inland Revenue, he replied 'But I live by the seaside'.

Still working at the age of 89 and playing shows going on until well after midnight, he managed to be funny without anger, smut or alternative attitude. Saucy perhaps and from a more gentle and subtle age "How do you get a fat girl into bed?" he asked....."A piece of cake". No doubt the politically correct brigade would be appalled.

I was pleased to attend the annual Goldman Sachs Investment Update at the Crowne Plaza, arranged by Wealth Management Company

Scholes and Brown. James Ashley, Head of International Market Strategy at GS gave an insightful overview which emphasised that we may all be too parochial and reserved by investing so extensively in British stocks when these are significantly and consistently outperformed by the Emerging Markets especially India and China (and Mexico).

Next morning I noted that Goldman Sachs has promised to work harder to rectify their pay gap. It had been announced that GS is paying women who work for them in Britain 55% less on average than men. Maybe they have identified women as an emerging market!

Congratulations to Winton Keenan, recently appointed as the new Chief Constable of Northumbria. He will be a great asset and has already impressed by his openness and enthusiasm to engage with all communities and sectors. I was very pleased to share a stage with him on community policing - and to help him enjoy the Chinese New Year Celebrations.

The recent cloning of the speech which John F. Kennedy was due to deliver at the Dallas Trade Mart on November 22 1963 was made possible by new digital technology. Americans reacted to the sound of President Kennedy addressing them from the grave and found it to be disturbing and emotional. It was notable that the speech contained warnings about Russian expansion in South East Asia.

The speech was recreated by sound engineers at the Scottish speech technology company CereProc using a programme working on 831 voice recordings. It took two months of painstaking work to disassemble these into nearly a quarter of a million segments which were then matched to the text of the written speech.

However a new Chinese AI algorithm may be able to produce such results within a few hours - with thoroughly convincing imitation speeches of Boris Johnson, Donald Trump or Theresa May.

Should there be an outcry at the attack upon the time honoured and respectable occupations of the likes of Alistair McGowan, Rory Bremner, Jon Culshaw and Ronni Ancona. Are they the latest humans to be replaced by robots? A great opportunity for fake news and fake views.





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