

NORTHERN

INSIGHT

JUNE/JULY 2020



ITPS CELEBRATE 20TH ANNIVERSARY

ITPS

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issue 59

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FOREWORD

Welcome to the 5th birthday edition of Northern Insight.

Huge congratulations goes to our cover stars ITPS on reaching their 20th anniversary.

Due to the ongoing coronavirus crisis this issue has been compiled in extraordinary circumstances.

At the turn of the year, who would have thought working from home and zoom meetings would become commonplace and 'furlough' the new buzzword.

I feel privileged to showcase how North East business has responded to the pandemic, in this double issue, which I hope showcases the tremendous grit and resilience in our region.

May I make special mention to all NHS staff and keyworkers for everything you have done at this critical time and thank all of our wonderful clients, suppliers and contributors for your unyielding loyalty and support.

I look forward to supporting you all in the weeks and months ahead, via the magazine and our social media channels, and know that by working together we can emerge stronger from this challenging period as a business community.

M.J. Grahamslaw

Michael Grahamslaw, Publisher
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CONTENTS

JUNE/JULY 2020

Business News 8-9

Cover Story 10-11

ITPS Celebrate 20th Anniversary

Covid News Round-up 15-19

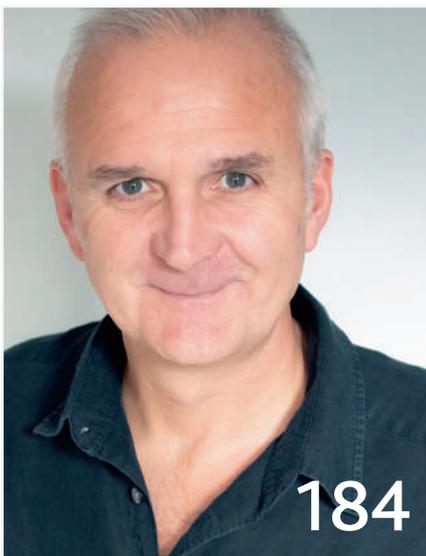
Legal News 56

Community News 84

Media News 138

Technology News 158

On the Tee Box 202



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FOOTY.COM SECURES INVESTMENT AND UNVEILS EXPANSION PLANS

The UK's leading price comparison website for football merchandise and sportswear has secured a £1.625m round of investment that will allow the company to roll out the first stage of its expansion strategy and global growth plans.

Based in Durham and backed by North East venture capital firm Northstar Ventures, FOOTY.COM will use the funding injection to increase brand awareness, bolster its workforce and invest in its online technology so its customers can find competitive deals on sportswear with ease.

Established in 2015, FOOTY.COM helps customers throughout the UK, Europe and the USA get the



best pricing for trainers, football boots, football kits and sports clothing, providing access to thousands of products.

The company will now move forward with its plans to relocate to a new office and is now actively searching for talent to bring into the organisation, including experienced marketers and a relationship manager.



DUAL APPOINTMENTS FOR CONSTRUCTION BODY

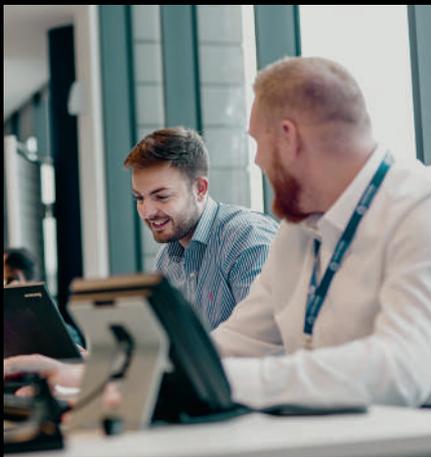
Construction Alliance Northeast (CAN), an organisation established to represent regional SMEs in construction and civil engineering, has welcomed a new Chair and Vice Chair.

Ken Parkin, who has spent 40 years in the industry with national and regional building contractors, takes over the two-year appointment of chair from Stuart Miller of CECA.

Ken is keen to build on the progress made by the organisation and is well equipped to comment on the industry which continues to face challenging times whilst playing a major role within the regional economy.

The vice chair role has been taken on by Caroline Meehan, Director of the Federation of Master Builders (FMB). CAN and FMB have worked closely together to protect the interests of regional SMEs and Caroline's new role supports Ken and the committee's goals to combat issues that members face, particularly in relation to public sector procurement and fairer payment terms.

NORTHERN GAS AND POWER PLACES SECOND FOR FASTEST PROFIT GROWTH



Northern Gas and Power has placed second in the prestigious Sunday Times' Profit Track 2020 league table, which records the fastest UK-business profit growth for private companies, with a sizeable 116.63% increase over three years.

Northern Gas and Power is also the top performing private business in the North East.

It's been a busy year for Northern Gas and Power, whose current priority is clear in the COVID-19 crisis: support employees, support the community and support businesses.

Fokhrul Islam, CEO of Northern Gas and Power, commented: "We are delighted to be recognised for our work but what matters now is looking after the health, wellbeing and livelihoods of all those who are adversely affected by the devastating consequences of coronavirus. We have already delivered critical services for care homes, hospices, schools, housing associations and doctors' surgeries, giving our support to those in need."

MINT BUSINESS CLUB SHOWS IMPERIAL GROWTH

A business club that started out to help solo business owners connect with others has used its skill set to provide a totally digital community platform to help people through the current COVID-19 crisis.

Nicola Jayne Little formed MINT Business Club just over two years ago and since then the network has doubled its turnover, won a prestigious business award and seen its membership grow exponentially.

Nicola realised that many people working by themselves had no one to share ideas with, help achieve their business targets or make sure that they managed their time correctly. She decided to form the MINT Business Club to look after micro businesses as well as lone workers.

Prior to the lockdown, MINT members met at

monthly training sessions in locations across the region. Now, businesses can join in live webinars in subjects ranging from content creation and branding finances.



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STRENGTH OF TEESIDE BUSINESS COLLABORATION DEMONSTRATED THROUGH NEW FILM

Three innovative Teesside firms have combined traditional manufacturing, film making and animation to create a digital showcase for an industry-first product.

Hartlepool-based expanded metal manufacturer The Expanded Metal Company has launched a new film to showcase its ExMesh Securilath product, which is now the only security mesh range to be certified by the Loss Prevention Certification Board when applied to metal stud, timber stud and block walls.

The film was produced by Middlesbrough-based Ithica Films, an independent, award-winning film company which The Expanded Metal Company has worked with previously.

The film is also supported by stunning animations from Middlesbrough headquartered Animmersion, a leading supplier in digital visualisation tools.

Highlighting Securilath's ability to resist determined attack and prevent forced entry into a building, the film illustrates the product's many benefits for the construction and security sectors.



GATESHEAD COLLEGE ACHIEVES TOP SPOT FOR EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

One of the North East's further education providers has been ranked the number one college in the country in the Education Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) league tables for the second year running.

The achievement, which has seen the college receive an overall 95% student success rate, comes at a time when it's providing a 100% remote learning environment during the current COVID-19 crisis.

Like all UK schools and colleges, Gateshead College is demonstrating its agility in meeting the education needs of students despite the social distancing challenges. The college has been educating and training its students and apprentices online and enrolling applicants for September via virtual enrolment events.

Chris Toon, Deputy Principal at Gateshead College, commented: "During this time of unprecedented change, it's great to hear such positive news that highlights our hard work and commitment to ensuring our students are equipped with the work ready skills they need to succeed."



NORTH EAST HOUSEBUILDER GRANTED PERMISSION FOR LATEST DEVELOPMENT

A growing North East housebuilder is set to add a further development to its award-winning portfolio after being granted permission to build 58 homes in Northumberland.

Tantallon Homes has secured planning approval to bring a new development to Longframlington, which will include affordable homes aimed at local first-time buyers alongside executive housing.

The landowner was originally given permission to develop 17 executive homes on the site known as Fairfields, but Tantallon Homes later revised the plans to include 34 two- and three-bedroom starter and family homes, alongside 24 luxury properties.

Although the COVID-19 lockdown means plans for a start-date on site remain unconfirmed, the developer hopes to begin work before the end of the year.

Tantallon is a fast-growing house builder which has won awards for previous developments, including its housing development in Dudley, North Tyneside.

The firm was supported with the site acquisition by law firm Sintons.

HL APPOINTED TO DESIGN NEW MO MOWLAM ACADEMY

Durham-based award-winning architects Howarth Litchfield have announced their latest multi-disciplinary commission in the specialist education sector, on a new multi-million project which is the first of its kind to be constructed in Redcar.

Working as part of Interserve Group Limited's team to build the new Mo Mowlam Academy, Howarth Litchfield will act as lead designer and provide a broad range of services on the scheme.

The project is being delivered as part of the Government's £4.4 billion Priority School Building Programme which is rebuilding and refurbishing school buildings in the very worst condition across the country.

Currently catering for up to 70 pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs, the Mo Mowlam Academy will increase its capacity creating space for 100 pupils.

Once complete, the school will feature several ICT-rich classrooms, a sensory room, soft play area and a food technology room as well as a library, science and art rooms.



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ITPS

20 YEARS LEADING THE WAY AS TECH STARS

Like all successful businesses, ITPS was born out of a simple mission to carve out a niche, deliver outstanding service, and out-perform anyone else in the market.

ITPS is still led by the original founders, managing director Garry Sheriff, finance director Michael Jopling, and operations director Paul Anderson. Its 135-strong team have been on the front line of the technological revolution for the last 20 years, helping organisations of all sizes and in all sectors take advantage of every possible technological advance. But only when it's right for them, as Garry explains. "While our reputation for technical excellence is pretty much unrivalled in the industry, we're not in the business of selling technology, we are solvers of business problems.

Our starting point is always to ask 'Don't tell us about your technology, tell us about your business objectives and what's stopping you achieving them.

That approach has underpinned client relationships that go back 20 years. Many of our clients have been with us since day one and we're very proud of that.

We're proud of their successes too. Respected organisations such as worldwide shipping and logistics experts GAC, industrial services specialists Altrad/Hertel, property professionals Dacre Son & Hartley, and the North East's Catalyst Centre have flourished, due in part to a constantly evolving IT infrastructure which balances availability with security, and which helps them to deliver great service to their own clients..

Our mission has always been to help them focus on what solution delivers long term best value for money."

ITPS itself is no stranger to wise investments, and the launch of its £4m high security data centre in 2014 saw the company accelerate its plans to create a second data hall on the site, just two years into the centre's five-year plan.

"We looked at why other data centres in the region were standing empty, and asked our clients what they wanted to see included," explains Garry.

The result was an enterprise-class Tier 3 ISO27001-certified centre with high speed, high bandwidth connections, a network operations centre, 20,000 sq ft of project, build and repair space, and a 250-seat workspace recovery facility.

Audited by bodies including the Financial Conduct Authority, the Ministry of Justice, and the NHS, the data centre will become the largest in the North East when plans for data hall three commence.

With two decades of success under the company's belt, Garry reflects on how the changing technology landscape has shaped our lives.

"In the year 2000 cloud computing was in its infancy, with a traditional capital spend model housed on the premises and requiring substantial resource to manage," he said.

"Thanks to the rise of cloud services, 'anytime, anywhere' communications are now an intrinsic part of modern life, and have proved invaluable in supporting home working on a massive scale, allowing organisations to function through these difficult times."

ITPS has been leading the way on cloud adoption for two decades. In 2017 it was one of only a handful of UK IT experts invited onto Microsoft's Azure Stack Early Adopters group, deploying the world's first available Microsoft Azure Stack at its own data centre. Highlighted as the biggest change in cloud services for a decade, Azure Stack is based on Microsoft's public cloud offering, Azure, but designed to run on a private cloud – or a hybrid of the two – customised and supported by an expert accredited local data centre partner.

In 2018 ITPS's reputation for technical expertise, track record for delivering complex ICT solutions, and £1.2m communications infrastructure saw it become the only North East supplier – and one of only 13 in the UK – to win the stamp of approval from NHS Digital to deliver services across its new Health and Social Care Network, connecting millions of NHS and health sector staff.

ITPS is never a business to stand still for long, so how does Garry see the future for ITPS and the wider IT industry?

"The last 20 years have been an interesting ride, and it's been a privilege to play our part in the evolution of flexible and cost effective ICT infrastructures and services that have transformed the world," he said.

"IT and its support is fast becoming a consumption model, with businesses turning to expert partners to manage some, or all of their needs on a flexible contract. They only pay for what they use, gaining reduced costs, faster speeds and greater capacity, with effective management and monitoring layered on as a value added service.

Our own core services remain around cloud, security, communications infrastructure and managed services, so we are well placed to meet the need for emerging new business models."

In the wider picture, disaster recovery and business continuity planning will become centre stage, and form the cornerstone of every business strategy, believes Garry.

"If there is one thing the current situation has taught every business it's the value of a well put together, regularly tested plan to support the business through extraordinary circumstances," he said.

"Our core aim has always been to help our clients get the most out of technology. It's a policy that has seen us through 20 successful years and it will continue to be our mission as we move into our third decade."

COMMENT WITH... Barry Speker

barryspeker@hotmail.com



“
**...welcome
back to
'normal
life'!...**
”



What a joy to have Northern Insight here again and the threatened resumption of commercial, social and civilised life. Those old enough to remember the old test card TV message 'Normal Service will be resumed as soon as possible' but not so likely or achievable after the pandemic.

In the very early days of shutdown I was prompted to put my own thoughts into verse, entitled 'Coping in Isolation'. I will not set out all ten verses but these were the last two:

*How did it happen? Were we prepared?
Why not predicted? Who really cared?
Was it a strategy? Who made the plan?
How will this stand in the history of man?*

*Will we recover? How will we show it?
Will there be normal life as we know it?
Some will be praying, some are just hoping
We will all search for our own way of coping.*

(If you would really like all 10 verses email me!)

I was the recipient of the NHS letter for the 'particularly vulnerable', sentencing me to be shielded for 12 weeks of isolation, ending by a Government announcement as I write this. But Deputy Chief Scientific Adviser Jonathan Van-Tam warns us "Don't tear the pants out of it and don't go further than the guidance says". I avoid the temptation of reference to Dom and the Castle, other than to regret the obsessive politicising of the issue and the bloodthirsty witch-hunt style of the media throughout the crisis. So many double standards, we may all need to have our eyes tested.

We can look for the good things which have emerged - the performance of our magnificent NHS and key workers, appreciated at last (will it continue?), numerous instances of altruism, generosity and good neighbourliness, admirable restraint and compliance by the majority of the population.

Like many of you I have filled my time with activities which we would not get round to. In my case the reading list included Daniel Deronda by George Eliot, The Hope by Herman Wouk and Love in the Blitz by Eileen Alexander; streaming guitar renditions such as Last Rose of Summer, Concerto de Aranjuez, Schindler's List and Mr Tambourine Man; countless meetings on Zoom, Teams, Starleaf; considering whether there is enough time to learn the words of Bob Dylan's newly issued epic, the 17 minute 'Murder Most Foul'.

Concert bookings gone, trips for holidays and business cancelled, court hearings conducted from home by telephone.

The picking up of the baton will not be easy for all and in many cases impossible with companies and businesses driven out of existence. Life will have changed as to what the public wants and needs.

Those who felt reluctant or unable to shop or order online have acquired the skill and the habit to do so.

How will this reduce the wish or tendency to make such regular use of retail? What will this do to the High Street? Rather than queuing in supermarkets to find ever relocated aisles, the experience of home delivery may now be the shopping of choice. What will continued distancing do to pubs, wine bars, restaurants and coffee shops? How will theatres, cinemas and concert halls function with less than half capacity? What of the cost of holidays with fewer seats available?

These and many more imponderables will gradually be revealed in the daily announcements by the PM and the new household names of Hancock, Sunak, Raab, Gove, Williamson and their flanking Scientific Advisers. To justify the opening of businesses, schools, universities, sports activities, leisure places and hairdressers will need logical links with graphs, testing, tracing, PPE provision and management precautions.

The prospect of football matches with canned crowd noise will be quite an innovation. There will be many available recordings of the Newcastle United fans so that editors can match up the play with encouragement, frustration, abuse, peroration and occasionally celebration. This will include derision at dubious refereeing decisions and obscene protests at goals by the opposition. Will crowds ever return in such numbers - leaving aside the marathon on-off sale of NUFC to Saudi Arabia?

One noticeable habit change is the impending cashless society. According to Link which runs the ATM network, the volume of cash withdrawals from cash machines has declined by 62%. Debit cards had already become the most popular form of payment by 2017. Paying by card or smartphone has accelerated during the pandemic, the upper limit on contactless rising to £45. The acceleration is partly due to online shopping and to hygiene rules. This is despite our cleaner, washable polymer banknotes. As health experts tell us the virus can stay on coins and notes as on other surfaces, some are refusing cash and insisting on card payment.

In Sweden 80% of transactions are cashless but they are slowing the move to a cashless society in consideration of poorer people without bank accounts and the elderly who may be disadvantaged.

Coincidentally, cash use is preferred by drug dealers and terrorists who wish to avoid traceability. We have already experienced theoretical protests from burglars who complained that the shutdown had ruined their 'business' as everyone stays at home. Rishi did not extend the furlough for them.

Another benefit is that cashless impedes the black economy as all transactions are recorded which prevents tax evasion. This will increase tax revenue for repayment of the eye-watering billions in loans and support for many struggling businesses. It will also reduce waiting times in supermarkets and in paying for your flat white.



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COVID-19: ANGELS OF THE NORTH RESPOND!

Steve Russell discovers a region packed with positivity, demonstrating that come what may, our indomitable Northern spirit will never be defeated.



Photo by Anthony Winter on Unsplash

These are strange and deeply troubling times. Heartbreaking images of patients on ventilators, the awful daily death toll, and crippling economic pressures are enough to induce despair. However, amidst the darkness, there is so much light. Our incredible NHS staff (and all the unsung heroes in care homes, schools, shops, takeaways, factories and delivery vans etc), the explosion in creativity, beautiful acts of kindness, and remarkable individual endeavours, such as that of Captain Tom Moore, remind us that the best of humanity often emerges from the most extreme adversity.

On a personal level, I've taken my fledgling ukulele career into ever more psychedelic territory, and recreated surrealist works of art for a hoot of a Facebook group! As a diversion from my slow descent into depravity, I thought I'd highlight some of the amazing things happening in our region, and how you can do your bit to ensure it remains a fabulous place to live when this finally ends. So here goes!

No sector has been hit harder than the arts, but as you would expect from those clever creative types, there's been a remarkable response. One of the best ways to support your favourite venues is to purchase tickets for events later in the year, or vouchers in lieu, available direct from venues or via appeals like Stockton's 'Help the Georgian Theatre' on Crowdfunder. Uncertainty and speculation continues around exactly when venues can reopen, but there are some fantastic autumnal treats on the horizon, including award-winning Kinks musical, Sunny Afternoon, at Sunderland Empire, the Horrible Histories tour, visiting Whitley Bay Playhouse, Darlington Hippodrome and Durham Gala Theatre, and the acclaimed Dad's Army Radio Show at Alnwick

Playhouse. You should check before booking, but refunds or credit are generally guaranteed, should social distancing be extended beyond the summer. One UK-wide initiative well worth a look is 'National Theatre at Home', where you can view some fantastic filmed stage productions for free, via their YouTube channel, with premieres airing on Thursday evenings.

Two iconic independent venues hit particularly hard, were The Tyneside Cinema and The Cluny in Newcastle. Both issued appeals for funding in the early days of the crisis and were overwhelmed by the generosity of the response. This has given them vital breathing space, but like hundreds of venues across the region, they will need more help the longer this lasts, so let's keep our future vibrant! Newcastle blues bar, Billy Bootleggers, has promised to double any donations to their Crowdfunder appeal in the form of drinks vouchers, so what better reward for charitable spirit than their delicious moonshine!?

One of the great innovations of this crisis has been the at-home concert. Barnard Castle Facebook collective, BC: Locked Down and Loaded, hosted an evening in April which raised over £12,000 for the NHS. Gareth Beddard, who set up Live Jam @ Lockdown on Facebook with other local musicians, tells us how it came about: "Myself, Mark Dickinson, Kirsty Jamieson and Chris Kinley set this up to combat the prospect of three months without work, and as a means of keeping the local scene together. We put together an initial line-up, which went down really well, and the group now has 28,000 members. We've been running 9 shows per night from Friday to Sunday, and we were inundated with requests from performers, which shows how much talent is out there! We've raised vital funds to get PPE equipment for front-line workers via the 'Masks For NHS Heroes' appeal, and although we've decided to scale back our shows to a monthly schedule in the wake of the government's decision to ease lockdown measures, we're exploring the possibility of a celebratory festival in 2021".

Another North East musician raising funds for the NHS, is pianist, Mark Deeks. Mark's Facebook concerts have included his brilliant interpretation of Mark Knopfler's classic (and NUFC anthem) 'Local Hero'. This has proved so popular, that Mr Knopfler himself has allowed Mark to release his version as a charity single, available for a minimum donation of £3 from markdeeksmusic.com.



A poster for musical collective Live Jam @ Lockdown



Members of Sunderland University's SAM Project

While they await the green light to reopen, many local pubs and restaurants are offering takeaway services, and ordering some of your favourite grub is a great way to keep their coffers flowing. Most are listed on delivery websites, with many also taking orders directly. Some vendors are also participating in vouchers schemes, such as the 'Street Food Vouchers' Crowdfunder initiative, set up by The Free Trade, The Cumberland Arms and Mean Eyed Cat in Newcastle, to support indie food traders like Scream for Pizza and Goodtimes Tacos. Wylam Brewery have joined forces with other independents across the UK, under the 'Buy the NHS a Pint' banner, where online donations will be used to create a tab for NHS staff to enjoy some richly-deserved tipples when this is over.

Most North East museums are charities, and as such have active online campaigns for financial support, but despite their difficulties, they're maintaining connection with their communities through voluntary work or via interactive online resources. The National Museum of the Royal Navy, Hartlepool has been supporting the community organisation, The Poolie Time Exchange, who are delivering care packages and hot meals to the elderly and vulnerable. Meanwhile, Newcastle Discovery Museum's website has got you covered if you've ever wanted to have a crack at building a balloon-powered car! Contemporary Visual Arts Network North East (CVAN NE) has created 30 Creative Space Residencies, as a means of supporting local artists during the crisis.

With so many of the region's businesses suffering, The North East England Chamber of Commerce has been actively fighting their cause, as Jonathan Walker, assistant director of policy, explains: "Through our partners the national British Chambers of Commerce, we have campaigned to change measures which were not helping businesses sufficiently and have successes including the announcement of the new easy access financial support for SMEs in particular. We have also initiated a hub to enable businesses to supply and manufacture PPE where front line services were in urgent need of help which has been really successful."

The North East COVID-19 Response Group has been launched, with the remit of providing maximum support for businesses in the immediate term and to plan for long-term economic recovery. The scheme is a joint venture between The North East Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), CBI, North of Tyne and North East Combined Authorities and alongside The North East Growth Hub, and is providing a vital resource for guidance and support.

Adrian Waddell, Chief Executive of NE1, describes their response to the crisis: "NE1 has worked hard during lockdown to help businesses navigate the

complexities of the Government's extensive business support packages. As we look forward to emerging from this crisis we know that things will be different and hope that many of the changes can be for the better.

One positive change we expect to prevail is the spirit of 'thinking local'. During the crisis, people have discovered the benefits of shopping closer to home and supporting local traders. This trend could crystallise to become a valuable point of difference for businesses as they develop their post-Covid offer.

We know the economy has suffered and it will take time to recover. It is, therefore, beholden on all of us to try to remain positive, continue to talk up Newcastle's many strengths and maintain enthusiasm for investment and on-going development in the city."

One organisation at the forefront of the region's drive to produce PPE equipment is Sunderland University, who have adapted their Sustainable Advanced Manufacturing (SAM) project, in response to the crisis. The ERDF funded project was initially founded to support the implementation of product and process development, and the introduction of technology to the North East SME manufacturing sector. Project Manager, Ken Tears, elaborates on how they've refocused their priorities, following the COVID-19 outbreak: "Essentially there are two strands to what we are doing. Firstly, SAM technical staff and the team at our Institute for Automotive and Manufacturing Advanced Practice (AMAP), have created and manufactured the 'Hulse Sunderland Face Shield', an ICU approved face shield, developed in consultation with clinicians at Newcastle's RVI Hospital. We've already distributed hundreds of these to front line healthcare staff, and we are finalising scalable solutions for a company to make potentially 25,000 per week. Secondly, we're supporting manufacturers to react to COVID-19 through two new grant funds; one for the manufacture of PPE and the other for capital investment to support manufacturing resilience and adaptability. SAM can provide financial support in the form of grants, and our technical team can advise on how technology and processes can be adapted to help sustainable manufacturing. Visit samprojectuos.co.uk for more details."

This sort of enterprise has been mirrored across the region, and Northumbria Health Care trust have recently established a new manufacturing and distribution hub in Cramlington. The new facility is on lease from Wingrove Motor Company and is producing 6,000 medical gowns per week, for use by frontline healthcare staff. Sarah Rose, MD at Lucas Jacob Ltd and volunteer Michael Rose, were instrumental in its creation, and the facility forms part of a wider network of businesses and volunteers manufacturing up to 71,000 gowns per week for the NHS in the North East.



Peaky Postman, Jon Matson

Innovation is everywhere, exemplified by barber and stylist to the stars, Sam Wall. Sam, who is based at Hidden Heights Creative Studio in Gateshead, launched his own grooming range last year, a range recently supplemented with his rather beautiful 'Squeaky Klean' Melon-fragranced hand sanitiser, which has become a global success. Who'd have thought that designer (yet reasonably priced) hand-sanitiser would become a thing!?

One of the most heart-warming stories to emerge during the crisis, is that of the fancy dress postman, Jon Matson, who's been spreading cheer across South Tyneside by wearing a different outfit every day on his round. Jon, 39, said: "I've gotten to know local people well through my round and I saw how their moods changed when the crisis started. I had a drawer full of outfits so I thought why not dress up and cheer them up!?"

The positive impact upon residents on his home patch of Boldon was instant, and his antics soon went viral, with the national press even picking up the story. Unfortunately, he soon realised that if he was going to keep his new fan club entertained, he would need some help! He began collecting outfits from family and friends and Menswear retailer, Master Debonair, (whose owners happen to be on his patch) even donated a free 3-piece suit with accessories, to turn him into a Peaky Blinder for the day!

The challenges facing high street retailers were well documented before this crisis emerged, and undoubtedly, the ongoing situation is perilous. However, hope remains. Government funding has started to make an impact, and enterprises like SaveTheHighStreet.org are a potential lifeline. Founding Partner and Sales Director, Alex Schlagman told us: "SaveTheHighStreet.org is working closely with local high street business owners, in the North East of England and across the UK, on a 12-week COVID-19 response programme; helping each to reduce their costs, sell through new channels, adapt their marketing, collaborate as a community, access funding and plan for the future. The future of the high street depends on how we all act now. Everyone on the high street needs to protect and adapt their business through the lockdown period to give themselves the best chance of success, both now and for the future."

At a local level, websites such as durhammarkets.co.uk which is advertising delivery services offered by the city's market traders, and TyneCollective.co.uk, which is a voucher scheme for local SMEs, have provided viable new trading platforms. The latter was developed by Newcastle-based Vida Creative, and so far, hosts The Stand Comedy Club, Iles Tours, The Fashion Lab, RPM Music, Thali Tray, Tynemouth Surf Co, Tilly & Blue Pet Portraits, Life Saving Training and The Beauty Room in Amble. Vida Co-Founder, Henry Coggin said: "We're delighted to be able to use our skills to contribute something valuable to the area during this crisis. We've been overwhelmed with the response we've had from North East Businesses, and we're working hard to help as many of them as we can"

With our new housebound routines, health, fitness and wellbeing are more important than ever, and our local experts have wasted no time in adapting. Chris Fairless, Co-Founder of Durham group, Unique Health Clubs, explains what's on offer for their 700 plus members: "Our Facebook group is delivering classes by our PTs, and Nutrition and Health seminars with live Q&As and our health food café is delivering amazing, balanced meals to our members. I'm so proud of the team and the positive impact they're having within the community."

Similarly, David Fairlamb Fitness in North Shields, has swapped his Saturday morning beach camps for zoom camps, which form part of the great online fitness package he's built. If you're looking for something different for the whole family, try Shieldfield's Circus Central. They are running free fun-packed 'Wake up and Warm Up' Zoom sessions Monday to Saturday, aimed at 4-8 year olds, while their full online timetable includes everything from juggling to aerial fitness! There's loads of great online fitness action, so get out there (virtually) and find something that works for you!

Beyond the virus itself, the impact of the crisis on mental health has emerged as a secondary emergency. In response, Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust have produced an excellent booklet full of tips, advice and guidance on how to maintain wellbeing in these extraordinary times. The booklet, which also contains a comprehensive, region-wide directory of support services, can be accessed at www.stopsuicidenenc.org. With family relationships being tested like never before, Relate.org.uk has a fantastic range of blogs, tips and advice on how to maintain healthy relationships in these unsettling times. They are also offering a range of remote services, including online chat, webcam counselling and telephone counselling, to ensure people can still access vitally needed support.

One of the most troubling aspects of the crisis, has been the disproportionate impact upon economically disadvantaged communities, with some areas of the North East suffering the worst infection and mortality rates in the whole of the UK. The reasons behind that may be complex, but it offers compelling evidence of a continuing North/South divide, something which must surely be addressed once and for all in the coming months and years.

BAME communities have also incurred higher-than-average rates of infection, with issues such as language difficulties, living conditions and cultural practices all thought to be contributory factors. Many local community groups and businesses have responded to this worrying trend, including, Wah Akram, owner of Bluebird Care Northumberland South. Wah teamed up with fellow franchisee, David Haswell, from Bluebird Care Newcastle and South Tyneside, to put together hygiene parcels for circulation within the refugee community in the west end of Newcastle. Wah explains: "Hearing about the high rates of infection within this community, we decided to put these parcels together to help improve hygiene practices and potentially save lives. We produced these in collaboration with Booker Wholesale, who kindly donated supplies."

While there will be many elements of this crisis which most of us would rather forget (cup of bleach anyone?), it's the genuine desire to support and care for each other, which may leave the most lasting legacy. The positive stories featured here are the tip of the iceberg, and I could've easily filled another ten pages. Our region is famous for its warmth and friendliness, something demonstrated in spades over the past few months. No one is in any doubt that the recovery process will be slow and painful, and undoubtedly, significant investment is required from central government. However, if we continue to support each other, whether that be buying local products or simply offering a helping hand to those who need it, there's every reason to believe that we can make our home an even more amazing place to live than it already was.



Wah Akram of Bluebird Care delivering hygiene parcels



Gateshead stylist, Sam Wall, and his 'Squeaky Klean' sanitiser



The Big Interview...

ANDREW MARSH, ENHANCING LIVES AND EXPERIENCES

“It’s lonely at the top” – an expression we have all heard. During the recent restrictions brought about because of the COVID-19 pandemic, that loneliness compounded for many CEO’s, MD’s and business owners across the UK.

Throughout the past months of uncertainty in business, one man unwilling to lie down and give up on success for his North East clients, many of which are at that lonely top place, is Andrew Marsh. By bringing together CEO’s, business leaders and business owners, Andrew has been changing attitude and mindset by maximising the power of peers.

Having led a number of multi-million pound businesses during his career, Andrew is now a renowned specialist in business with an impressive track record for repeatedly creating sustainable growth.

When asked about his career and what he now does, his response refreshingly direct - “I make people’s lives easier”.

Andrew’s philosophy is simple. And it is where his huge job satisfaction now comes from – every action he takes, every meeting he holds, all the advice he gives, he does with one main goal. To enhance people’s lives and experiences.

Boasting an impressive portfolio through Marsh Business Transformation, Andrew is also well positioned in the region as Vistage Chair. Vistage is proven to be high impact and effective in driving leadership development. Officially endorsed by the Scale Up Institute recently, the organisation boasts companies that join Vistage grow 2.2x faster than average SME’s.

Andrew explained the benefit of joining his Vistage group: “Success is about being human. Recognise what you are good at, learn what you don’t know and always make sure to listen to the advice of others who know things you don’t. Make mistakes, enjoy successes but most of all, don’t lose yourself in the process. Always pick yourself up and get on with it!

“Whilst many businesses have been procrastinating about our current challenges, I have been encouraging dynamic decisions and action. Through a series of online opportunities, I have ensured that my Vistage peer group and one to one members are informed, supported and most importantly, focused on tactical moves to be transition ready for the new business world we are facing post-pandemic.

“I also widened up the Vistage interventions to a wider audience, so more people felt supported. Many I met through this avenue felt the impact so are still engaging with me.”

Andrew facilitated the opportunity for everyone in an appropriate role to receive advice, checklists, views, reports and opinions. They were connected with peers so they could help each other, with Andrew offering advice and skills via a coaching group approach.

Alongside the peer groups and direct support given through Vistage, Andrew is building an impressive Non Executive portfolio. He mentors for the North East LEP and Durham Business School MBA, as well as advising the Experience Bank and being chair of a charity that focuses on the wellbeing of people in later life, Age UK Northumberland.

Due to the positive influence Andrew is having on business, he has been invited to judge the Great British Entrepreneur Awards 2020, which have been re-imagined as online regional finals due to COVID-19.

Andrew concluded: “More than ever, entrepreneurial businesses in the UK should be celebrated. We need to change mindsets, be tactical, use our guts to drive business and be dynamic. These awards are a way to celebrate that behaviour and I am delighted to be involved.”

TESTIMONIALS

“Working with Andrew unlocks ideas in my mind; he helps me to get the best out of me. Our group sessions are always productive and it’s incredibly useful to know what others are doing with their own businesses at any one time. Each session without fail has acted as a catalyst to a number of spin off ideas for Cascade, with actions that complement our own ideas and direction perfectly.”

**Dr Emma Black,
MD of Cascade Cash**

“Since working with Andrew I have been very impressed with his knowledge and expertise in all business matters. If business owners have the opportunity to work with Andrew, I would definitely recommend it.”

**Joanne Warren,
MD of Lumo Tax**

“After meeting Andrew I realised that I had found a seasoned business ally who could give me a focused response to the issues I was finding most difficult. He steered me in the right direction, giving me the right tips and tricks at the right time, without flooding me with high level business lingo.”

**Peter Lyons,
Director of NECIT Services Ltd**



Contact Andrew for more information in getting involved in a peer group or accessing his support in the following ways:
uk.linkedin.com/in/andrewmarsh58/en vistage.co.uk/Andrew-Marsh/ Andrew.Marsh@vistagechair.co.uk



Simon Williams

RIDING THE CREST OF A WAVE

After more than 19,000 shoots that have seen him travel the equivalent of 30 times around the world, Simon Williams celebrates 25 years in business this July.

The then 28-year-old Simon resigned from his job as senior photographer when he bravely stepped out on his own and set up Crest Photography in 1995. Fast forward a quarter of a century and Simon's portfolio of work includes HM The Queen, HRH The Prince of Wales and North East royalty such as Sting, Cheryl and Ant & Dec as well as prime ministers, sportsmen and women and just about every senior figure in the North East business community.

Simon also has special memories shooting for Sir Bobby Robson during his final public appearance.

Putting his camera down for a moment, Simon reflected on the first 24 years of Crest Photography: "It's been an adventure with so many highlights. When I left school I never thought I'd end up on stage with Sting or being given a free run of Sir Richard Branson's London office and boardroom, never mind doing a private shoot with Prince Charles in a field in Northumberland or being his mother's host camera."

If there is such a thing as a normal day in Simon's life? It can start with a shoot in Inverness, moving onto a London shoot

then back home to his base in Northumberland, ahead of another early start on Teesside before heading into Durham, Gateshead and Newcastle photographing accountants, lawyers, engineers, power stations, bakers or excavators the following day! With just the occasional weekend off, Simon sees his routine as being more of a lifestyle than a job.

In 2020, Simon had his busiest ever start to a year covering 8,000 miles across the UK with shoots from The Houses of Parliament in Westminster up to the Scottish Parliament. Simon's diary was already looking busy for the full year and then came lockdown and as for most in business, things changed overnight.

"Most people I spoke to in the business community were in a mild panic and there's no denying the first two weeks were tough and very frightening for both the business and health wise," explained Simon.

"And then completely out of the blue, in circumstances none of us would want, came a brief for a project I will never forget."

John McCabe, managing director of Fusion PR Creative takes up the story: "I've known Simon for even longer than his 25 years running Crest Photography and in all of this time, I've considered him a first choice, 'go-to' photographer. So in April, when Fusion was appointed to provide strategic communications support to the new Nightingale Hospital North East, I had no hesitation asking Simon to commit to a shoot on the site every other day over a five or six week period. We needed a comprehensive library of shots, not only for media purposes but to provide a historic record of this extraordinary project. Simon was there on day one when he photographed a shell of a building and he was there to cover the virtual opening when we unveiled a 460 bed hospital. His outstanding work will be looked at for years to come."

Simon had worked on many major infrastructure projects down the years but Nightingale Hospital North East it truly unique. "I've never seen anything like it," he said. "The teamwork and dedication shown by the NHS, Contractors and Army was truly inspirational and I'm really proud to have been involved."

"Life and work is now slowly returning to something like normal and clients have pointed out that socially distant photography has always been my thing as I never shoot people close together and have always spaced them out as part of my creative process."

"This isn't how I'd anticipated my 25th year in business but I wish all of my client and contacts, so many of whom are now good friends, all the very best and I'm looking forward to seeing them all through the lens again soon." From all of us at Northern Insight, congratulations to Simon on reaching such a fantastic milestone in business.

Here's to the next 25 years!



crest photography

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James Brown

BECOMING QRIOUS WITH JAMES BROWN

While we all #StayHome and #StayAlert, the impact Covid-19 virus has had - is still having - on our lives has not passed any of us by.

Against the rapidly shifting sands of the economy we are forced to venture into new ways of working and are faced with the trickier question; how do we change the way we work and the way we interact with our customers?

Smart businesses are looking how they can use this to accelerate their shift into providing more and better digital services.

James Brown heads up innovation and strategy at experience design studio Qrious. And he's no stranger to changes in the workplace. It's his job.

"Innovation is about imagining all the things you could do, and strategy is choosing between them."

Originally from York, James worked in London for 15 years, running strategy and consulting at the UK's largest independent digital agency, before moving back up north recently.

Having recently joined the team – almost entirely virtually – his expectations of a 'normal' induction were quickly derailed.

"I've been really looking forward to working with friends in a sociable office again, but then the lockdown happened! I'll have to wait a bit longer. But I'm really enjoying using my experience to help our clients adapt."

"It turns out that I've been doing either remote or distributed working all my life, from managing offshore digital teams across Europe to working from home in Durham."

Clearly remote working isn't the only adaptation that businesses across the country are having to make. The lockdown has forced a lot of firms to make changes in a very short space of time. Changes which may have previously taken several years to be formulated within a company, are now frantically being launched – to varying levels of success.

"There's a famous Lenin quote that has become a truism," says James, "There are decades where nothing happens, and there are weeks when decades happen."

"When it comes to thinking about digital, we often meet companies who have some kind of transformation or customer experience roadmap that they intend to roll out over the next three to five years. But the virus has put the pressure on leaders to immediately digitise their processes, launch new online products and services within days or weeks, and find ways to rapidly generate lost revenue."

James cites a recent survey that says fully 75 percent of us who have tried out digital services for the first time during the lockdown say they'll continue to do so once things return to normal.

Clearly businesses are having to rethink how they do things, but are they ready to make those changes? Can they use their current technology to do it? Can they do it without breaking the bank? And what new processes or training might be needed behind the scenes to deliver it well?

"We have our Q.Lab for just that reason," explains James. "You get access to our team of senior digital specialists who help your team rapidly think through exactly those kinds of issues – with the right people we can usually work out a simple roadmap together in just a few days."

It seems likely that those firms who figure out how to embrace digital technologies during the coming months are going to have a major advantage.

There's no doubting that more innovation will come out of the Covid-19 lockdown. Many firms have had their eyes opened to what really is possible. However, discovering and making use of innovation is where James and Qrious can help. It's what they do.

BOSSING IT: BUILDING SOCIAL CAPITAL IN A TIME OF CRISIS

Being a good boss is never harder than in a time of crisis when difficult decisions need to be taken quickly and circumstances may be out of your control.

How you behave now speaks volumes about your business ethics and can have a significant impact on your long-term reputation, says Management and PR Consultant Sarah Waddington from Astute.Work.

Ethics are for life, not just the good times

If I was to mention Wetherspoons right now, what would your response be? For many it would be to express disgust at a brand which was initially willing to withhold payment from staff and suppliers until a Government financial support scheme kicked in, only u-turning after a public outcry.

But what about Barbour? A fashion brand which has responded to the national shortage of Personal Protective Equipment by repurposing its manufacturing capabilities and using its supply chain to make gowns for front line staff. A very different story, right?

These are brands which will live in the memory long after the immediate aftermath of the Coronavirus pandemic has faded.

What you do now will impact your bottom line in the future. Now is a time that companies need to be building their credentials with their customer base. The latest Edelman Trust Barometer Special Report on Trust and the Coronavirus published in March surveyed 12,000 people across the world. A staggering 65% of respondents said that brands' response to the pandemic will influence their purchasing behaviour in future and 37% said it already was.

Ask the difficult questions

There are a number of questions any management team can ask itself as it faces the issues created by COVID-19 and as we head towards a global recession.



Sarah Waddington

A key one is whether your organisation lives accountable leadership or just talks about it. This can be demonstrated in many different ways:

- Do staff feel safe and valued? Are you treating them responsibly and communicating openly?
- Are you in regular contact with your supply chain and paying bills promptly?
- Are you accessing appropriate business support and financial interventions, rather than moving directly to a restructure?
- Are you considering new opportunities to pivot your business, in the way Barbour has? There are many products, services and skills that can be repurposed for sectors in short supply.
- What leadership position are you taking on health and social care, governance and fake news?

● How do you work with your communities? How can you earn social capital by working with stakeholders to build a better world?

Most businesses will be absorbing the initial shock from COVID-19 right now but come the recovery, purchase loyalty and advocacy will play a significant role in the bounce back.

According to the World Economic Forum Global Risk Report 2020, "collaboration between world leaders, businesses and policy-makers is needed more than ever to stop severe threats to our climate, environment, public health and technology systems."

We all have a personal responsibility to make a difference. What part are you going to play?

If you'd like help with any of the above, please contact Sarah Waddington at Astute.Work at sarah@astute.work or on 07702 162704.



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Shawn Bone

M&A IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

The start of 2020 saw an increase in M&A activity as most shareholders and management teams were bullish about the year, following the outcome of the General Election and clarity that emerged regarding Brexit. The worldwide pandemic brought about by Covid 19 now means the M&A landscape is expected to be somewhat more uncertain.

With the immediate emergence of COVID-19 and the widespread disruption reaching all parts of the economy and society, deal activity largely stalled as parties took stock of the business impact with many businesses having to close completely.

At the time of writing and with the Government's plan of easing lockdown restrictions now published, it is likely that many businesses will be planning how to safely return to workplaces in the short-term.

A restart-like scenario for businesses coupled with the tapering of government schemes such as the job retention scheme (the now extended furlough scheme) and ceasing of CBILS debt capital may lead to many businesses feeling cash flow strain in the next six to twelve months. Cash flow will also be impacted by changes in consumer demand, availability of critical supply chain, payment of deferred taxes and overhead bases returning to normality.

It is vital that businesses are well capitalised during this period to trade through it successfully. There are a range of capital options available to businesses during this period including; debt through mainstream banks but also debt capital provided by secondary and tertiary lenders and equity capital through venture capital, VCT funds and private equity.

In the next six to nine months, we would also expect there to be an increase in distressed M&A as some businesses will struggle to deal with balance sheet liquidity having failed to plan appropriately or where balance sheets are too weak to withstand the headwinds.

Management teams should therefore be focussed on short-term cashflow planning and medium-term re-forecasting to identify any funding gaps early.

Having said that, traditional M&A remains alive and is underpinned by interest in a range of sectors that are proving to be resilient during the current crisis. Whilst many sectors are closed for M&A some are not. These sectors include but are not limited to healthcare, technology-enabled businesses, software, parts of the digital segment, online retail, food services, financial services, communications and IT.

Many equity funders have recently raised new capital which means there is a large amount of capital looking for a home at the moment, making it an ideal time to consider equity funding given equity terms are highly competitive with fewer investable opportunities in the market.

With the availability of large pools of capital and equity funding, the interest in resilient sectors is accelerating during this period despite the economic unrest, largely due to these businesses proving to trade successfully during COVID-19. Funders are keen to support businesses with the need for working capital funding, development and growth capital, businesses wishing to pursue an M&A strategy and to a more limited extent shareholder liquidity.

Transactions that have concluded during the period of unrest include the investment in utility technology business One Utility Bill led to DSW Angels, LDC's investment in e-commerce fulfilment business James and James, BGF's investment in online recipe box business Gousto, Wavecrest and Beringea's investment in EDITED, a provider of real-time retail information and Mercia's follow-on investment in health and safety technology business Notify.

This has also been a busy period for Cavu CF, having recently advised HIG Capital on the acquisition of Vernacare, a manufacturer of healthcare hygiene products and supplier to the NHS from Palatine Private Equity, followed recently by advising a leading mid-market private equity fund on an investment.

Specialising in the equity and debt markets has been a key theme over the last 7 years at Cavu CF and we have worked with a number of quality management teams and dynamic businesses.

It is vital for businesses to continue granular planning during this period and to keep close to trusted advisors. As a leading corporate finance boutique, Cavu CF have unrivalled expertise in debt and equity markets and have successfully assisted many clients with planning and raising finance, including during COVID-19.

THE SELF-EMPLOYED INCOME SUPPORT SCHEME (SEISS)

Claiming the SEISS grant has been a relative easy process and, for many, a most welcome hand-out to the self-employed in these difficult times.

Claiming the available grant for most individuals has been relatively painless with minimum time taken to complete the on-line process. However, it is very easy to overlook the implications of some of the wording in the Declaration. By claiming the grant you are stating that:-

- The business had been adversely affected by the coronavirus.
- The claim is made in accordance with HMRC's published guidance.
- The claim is not based on inaccurate information.
- The claim is not fraudulent or abusive or made contrary to the purposes of the scheme.

Having regard to the burden on the public purse, we can expect that HMRC will, in due course, subject the SEISS claims to significant scrutiny and therefore it is important at this stage to record appropriate evidence to substantiate any claim. Certain aspects may be perfectly clear but other aspects may be subjective and not so easy to demonstrate retrospectively without appropriate records.

The 2021 Self-Assessment Tax Return details will



David Hodgson

be the likely trigger information for any HMRC enquiries and the Inspector's expectation is that self-employed income declared will be less than that of the previous year. If the profits are higher or similar to the earlier year, then this alone may be the grounds for unwanted enquiry from the Revenue.

The 2021 SA Tax Return does not need to be filed with HMRC until 31st January 2022 so enquiries by the Revenue into SEISS claims are unlikely to start until many months ahead giving greater need to record facts now when specific events and dates are fresh in the mind. So:-

- Keep records demonstrating reduction in turnover showing variances with comparable

trading periods (daily, weekly or monthly figures, as appropriate)

- Retain confirmation of any coronavirus-related loans and details of any pressure on cashflow
- Keep specific dates of when the business had to close due to lockdown restrictions
- Keep specific dates of when the taxpayer or named members of staff were unable to work due to coronavirus symptoms, shielding or caring responsibilities due to school closures.

Hopefully, your business will survive any financial difficulties caused by the pandemic and will also avoid any later enquiry from HMRC, but being forewarned and prepared is being forearmed.



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Steve Healy

MOBILEAPPSNE PREFERS VIRTUAL IN ITS BID TO SUPPORT REGION'S SMALL BUSINESS

A new business launched by UK sales and marketing director, Steve Healy, will be supporting small businesses in the region keep up with the current trend of online ordering and online contact created by the COVID-19 situation.

The business, which specialises in online web based apps, has chosen a virtual tenancy agreement with one of the region's leading business communities as part of its launch. Commerce House is in the heart of Middlesbrough's TS1 postcode, and is perfectly placed to meet all of MobileAppsNE's needs.

Initially the creative company, which is offering free design and set up of all apps for the first three months of business, will only be charging for the app hosting; a mere £49 a month.

Steve, who has a plethora of experience in the industry, said: "MobileAppsNE has been in the pipeline for the last 6 months but with the current COVID-19 situation creating a digital boom, and so many small businesses in the region needing support to keep up, it seemed the perfect time to accelerate plans.

"As part of our launch, I have pulled together a very cost effect package designed to help small businesses

service their community. To ensure we get off to a professional start, we approached Commerce House for their help."

Commerce House is fast building a reputation of helping small, professional companies grow quickly. Having undergone a complete renovation, the property on Exchange Place, is home to over 15 businesses now. Steve continued: "We imagine the company will grow very quickly and so it was important to have a tenancy with flexibility. Commerce House offers just that. As well as being a beautiful building and a great postcode, it offers services we will access as soon as life returns to normal such as hotdesking and meeting space, to go alongside our virtual tenancy. The service during this busy first period is priceless. And as we grow, we aim to be moving into the building. We have our eye firmly one of the office spaces!"

The web based app offer from MobileAppsNE is ideal for small food retailers, delivery services, other retailers wishing to take online orders and

deliver, click and collect organisations, charities, care companies and anyone wanting to keep in touch with customers or staff. Some are even using it to keep in touch en mass with furloughed staff.

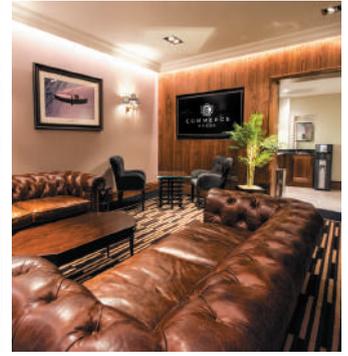
Christine Huntington, facilities manager of Commerce House, said: "It is fabulous to see that there is fighting spirit during the Covid-19 outbreak and that business people are keen to forge ahead. MobileAppsNE is a great idea, and the current offer will support many companies who couldn't afford a full digital investment at the moment. It will change they way they work.

"Our virtual tenancy is ideal for many scenarios, and once we start to return to normal, it will no doubt prove popular with one man bands who have discovered they can work from home successfully. We are delighted to see all of our current tenants following guidelines to stay safe, and those who have to work from the building, are doing so in a responsible manner."

More information on MobileAppsNE is available at www.mobileappsne.co.uk and more information on Commerce House can be found at www.commerce-house.co.uk

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Contact Christine Huntington on 01642 917 116 or Christine@commercechambers.co.uk**

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UNIQUE FINANCIAL PORTAL HITS £1BN LANDMARK ON ANNIVERSARY

A unique Fintech portal company, which is celebrating its fifth year as an independent organisation this month, has proven its worth by reaching a significant milestone.

Cascade Cash Management can proudly announce the administration of over £1bn of deposits since its inception in 2012, the majority of which has been administered in the last three years.

Breaking away from its founding company in 2015, the leading savings portal and cash management firm has over the last two financial years been getting results for its clients and partners that are 18% above the market average.

This equates to the team at Cascade Cash Management generating returns of an additional £1m+ than if that same £1bn cash had been deposited in other savings options.

MD of Cascade, Dr Emma Black, says that although these seem easy numbers to throw around, the scale of achievement should be given high accolade in the current market.

"£1bn seems an easy number to say, but to understand its scale is another thing.

"To put it into scale, the amount our small team has processed is the equivalent of 147,000 UK state pensions, which is no mean feat!

"Our enquiries and new customer sign ups since the outbreak of COVID-19 have increased and we have supported those looking for increased deposit protection on sums that outweigh the protection offered by the Financial Services Compensation

Scheme. Those with large chunks of cash are looking to spread it across different banking licences while also getting better returns and peace of mind."

The online Fintech 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.

The Cascade team administer accounts on behalf of clients and depositors can use the portal to view their own savings in one place. These clients include individuals, companies and charities. Partners including IFA's, solicitors, attorneys, accountants and many more can also self-brand the product for presentation to their own clients.

A number of charities successfully use the service and such clients have earned significantly greater returns through the Cascade service. Dr Emma Black, who launched the company alongside brother and business partner Stephen Black, continued: "A mental health charity using Cascade 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. Without our portal and excellent customer support, this charity could have missed out on what is to them a really good chunk of money."

In the last year, Cascade has won an accolade for customer service at the Financial Innovations Award and expanded its team to eleven. The team has also invested in the portal further, so there are more benefits, including increased depositor protection. On the back of this, the company is now ready for its next stage of growth. Dr Emma Black concluded:

"After a large initial financial investment, three years after launching our online portal in 2017, Cascade is now close to profitability, allowing for new investment to be attracted and for future growth to be planned.

"The real beauty is we can now demonstrate the need for our service and our success and capability in delivering brand new financial technology. We intend to build upon this with our selected business partners, passing on in-depth knowledge and superb customer support for those who deposit cash with us.

"We will always continuously strive to be ahead of the market, offer innovative technology growth and invest in steps that mitigate any risk for the customer!"

The company is also delighted to have received its Cyber Essential Plus accreditation from the National Cyber Security Centre, meaning that its internal and online IT systems are considered robust against any form of cyber attack.

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

WE'RE HERE TO HELP!

At the risk of Covid-19 overload, the team at Innovate wanted to reassure our clients, friends and colleagues that during these unprecedented and challenging times we are still available as normal (albeit face to face is via skype!) and here to help.

If you have any financial worries or concerns, we want to assure you that we are in regular contact with all of our regular partners, such as banks, building societies, specialist lenders and insurance companies so that we are abreast of any of the daily changes that they make that may affect our everyday lives.

Many of us may also now have some additional time on our hands (unless you are home schooling!!) and we can discuss anything that is on your mind relating to your current circumstances such as;

Insurances

- Mortgage protection including life assurance and critical illness to protect you and your family.
- Income protection to protect your earnings.

Mortgages

- Mortgage payment holidays.
- Planning for a residential or buy to let new purchase in the future.
- Remortgages for those reaching the end of a fixed/variable rate.
- Releasing equity for future home improvements or other purposes, eg purchasing a buy to let property.

Lenders and insurers are doing what they can to minimise the impact on their customers and are staying open to offer options to those that need them.



For our part, our goal is making you feel as comfortable as possible during these unprecedented times and when requested and where needed finding the best solution for your circumstances. Whilst it won't be possible to meet face to face for the time being, we can provide our usual levels of advice via telephone, skype etc.

It seems a very different world today than it was just a few weeks ago, but we look forward to hearing from you if there is anything financial that you would like to discuss.

Finding the best solution for your circumstances needs an experienced eye to ensure that you find the right balance between interest rate, fees, term and type of product and penalties. Local, face-to-face, independent mortgage advice can smooth the process - we are ready to take your call and offer assistance! If you would like to see what our clients have to say about us we have in excess of one hundred and thirty Google 5* reviews on-line and on our website from satisfied clients (www.innovatempl.co.uk)!

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@innovatempl.co.uk or tony@innovatempl.co.uk or call 0191 284 3723.

Your home is at risk if you do not keep up repayments on a mortgage or other loan secured on it.

RG & RTC NORTH COLLABORATION



RG CF and Business tax teams

Help is at hand for North East-based SME's, advice and guidance given should they require to safeguard jobs and drive their business forward during the COVID-19 crisis

Ryecroft Glenton (RG) has entered into a strategic collaboration with RTC North to help North East-based businesses access part-funded advice and support on matters such as the preparation of financial forecasts and securing funding, via the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBILS).

The collaboration is also designed to help businesses pivot and change strategy during this challenging time.

The Scaleup North East programme is delivered by RTC North as an integral part of the North East Growth Hub, and is part funded by the European Regional Development Fund. Businesses from the region can receive subsidised advisory services from RG to help secure the right strategic and funding advice, whilst easing the burden on cash flow during what is an unprecedented trading period.

The collaboration has been developed to help businesses negatively impacted by the economic

challenges of Coronavirus to trade through this difficult trading period, enabling them to be well-placed to scale up their operations and grow, as and when the crisis ends.

Access to government-backed financial support will be crucial to many businesses in this period and the collaboration will enable more businesses to obtain the advice they need, at a reduced cost, at a time when they need to control cash flow.

For example, the preparation of a Financial Forecast by RG, to aid with an application for a CBIL, which may cost £3,000, would attract a 40 percent subsidy from the Scaleup North East programme, reducing the cost to a business by £1,200.

Carl Swansbury, Partner and Head of Corporate Finance at Newcastle-based RG said: "As a region we need to keep great businesses in business. This new collaboration between RG and RTC North will help businesses in the North East obtain both the advice and funding they need to help trade

through this crisis, whilst being well-placed to scale-up once the pandemic has passed.

"In the current climate, funding and cash flow leads the agenda for many owner-managers as they try to secure the future of their businesses and the jobs of their workforces. Having to tightly manage cash flow can make procuring the professional advice needed prohibitive and applying for critical financial support more challenging. With the introduction of this subsidised service through Scaleup North East, hopefully that hurdle has been removed."

Sarah Pavlou, Programme Director at RTC North, said: "In unprecedented times like this, it is vital that as a business community, we come together, we think out of the box and we remain committed to ensuring the wheels of the regional economy keep turning. We are delighted to be able to pull together as organisations and as a region and deliver win-win solutions that are delivered efficiently, effectively and encourage our business community to remain focused on the future."

If you are a Scaling Business and have not worked with Scale Up North East before, here is your chance. For more details, please contact: jon.symonds@rtcnorth.co.uk or sarah.pavlou@rtcnorth.co.uk.

WHAT THE LOCKDOWN TAUGHT US

On Monday 23 March we packed up our office and began the transition to working from home, not knowing for how long that period would be.

As a business that already embraced 'remote working', we were confident that on closing the office, whilst face to face meetings were out of the question, everything else was still possible and, in essence, not a lot would change.

Our investment in technology proved invaluable. Our web-based telephone system ensured all calls could continue, conferencing facilities allowed all team meetings and client meetings to continue and all documents and reports were sent to clients via our own secure portal. Our discussions with fund managers continued as normal, our communications to clients increased and we have just hosted two interactive client webinars with guest speakers, with positive feedback.

So, what has the lockdown taught us? A lot. Technology is brilliant. It has held together our business, our working relationships and friendships at a time of huge uncertainty and worry. Zoom, Circuit, Microsoft Teams, WhatsApp, FaceTime...they've all played a part in our need to stay connected.

Remote, flexible working, can benefit our staff and business and we will be promoting this further as we now fully appreciate that we don't all need to work 9-5, in the office environment, to get the



best out of people. But it's not for everyone.

All in all, technology has excelled in allowing us to continue to communicate; to continue to build and develop those relationships that we rely on to function and flourish. It hasn't replaced that

need. We still need a face to face existence. It has taught us the importance our interactions have on our mental wellbeing, and for that reason, we return to our offices with a renewed positivity; appreciating the chats in the kitchen and welcoming clients once again.

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Q&A WITH PENSION AND RETIREMENT SPECIALISTS JOSLIN RHODES

on Financial Advice during the
Covid-19 Pandemic

In recent months we've all had to change the way we work, live and interact with each other, and we're no different at Joslin Rhodes.

However, we've had a number of clients and potential clients worrying about how these changes will affect them seeking and getting financial advice, and what can be done to protect their money.

So, to help anyone worried now, here's some of the most common questions we're getting asked and our answers to each.

Can I still afford to retire?

This question is about looking at what pensions, savings, and investments you have and seeing if they're enough to fund the lifestyle you want to lead. So, the first way to answer this question is to decide what lifestyle you want – once we're all out of lockdown and able to be much freer again.

We would look at your desires, what all of these cost and work out a plan to get you there. And any issues thrown up by the recent crisis are also considered, so you can get a realistic roadmap of what you need to fund your future.

How can I get advice during lockdown?

Well, being unable to meet and work in the office, has meant as a company we've had to re-examine and re-evaluate how we deliver our service to clients and potential clients. And to make things easier for everyone, we've taken our service online, meaning you can still get excellent financial advice and help with your pensions but without having to put yourself or your family at risk.

We can now deliver all financial meetings entirely online via a video call, so you can get your questions answered and make informed decisions from the comfort of your own sofa, making everything safer for everyone. However, if you're someone who



Luke Watkinson

would prefer an in-person meeting, we may be able to facilitate this in certain circumstances.

Will I still get a good service?

Of course. We've worked very hard to make sure our online service matches our in-house service. The only thing we can't replicate is the amazing coffees we make, but as far as meetings, interactions and being able to ask questions, we've made sure you can access everything you need easily.

How do I know I'm getting good advice from you?

You can check our credentials online. We're authorised and regulated by the financial conduct authority and have the pension transfer gold standard award for defined benefit transfers.

This means we're bound by the financial regulating body that serves the UK and everything we do must follow the rules set out to protect people like you. And the gold standard means we adhere to a higher standard of service for delivering advice for defined benefit pensions.

What about my investments?

When investing your money, investment portfolios include a range of assets in different types of investments depending on your risk profile and what your tolerance for loss is. So, if you're adverse to risk, your funds will be spread into more stable profiles, whereas if you're a risk taker your funds will be put in more higher risk profiles.

We only invest to your own tolerance levels and all our investment profiles are for regulated, UK investments.

What happens now?

To find out more about us you can visit our site, read some of the articles on the blog or check us out on the FCA register.

We have free no-obligation video call meetings available with a specialist financial planner, so you can get your questions answered and find out how we can help you.

So, let us help you decide what your future will be.

Please note – investments go up as well as down and investment growth is never guaranteed.

Luke Watkinson Financial Adviser at Joslin Rhodes Lifestyle Financial Planning.
Joslinrhodes.co.uk 01642 52 55 11 Hello@joslinrhodes.co.uk



A KEY LESSON

What has the Coronavirus Pandemic taught employers? This may seem like a strange question. Why am I picking on employers? Have we not all learned something about ourselves, our businesses, our jobs, family, friends etc.?

I am sure that we have all learned a lot but there is an area where financial advisers have struggled to make much inroad despite there being a clear need. That is the area of corporate protection.

Companies have always been aware of the need to insure their buildings and equipment but there generally has been a reluctance to insure the person behind the desk, even if the desk is insured. And yet the consequences of losing a key employee, through death or incapacity, are much greater.

If a business is deprived of knowledge or production ability the knock-on effect is loss of profit and viability. Contracts could be lost, and bank funding withdrawn. The potential consequences could be dire.

So why have employers been reluctant to engage in protecting their businesses?

I believe that there is the "It will never happen to me" syndrome in play. The key employee is often, but not always, the business owner or owners.

"Key-Man" insurance can cover death and or critical illness. The company takes out the insurance on the individual and receives the benefit if the insured event happens. For example, the key worker dies, and the company receives money which could bolster profits and fund finding a replacement employee or paying off a bank overdraft. We all know that banks love a reason to call in a loan and it usually comes at the worst possible time. This would be one of them so better to be prepared.

The premiums are generally tax allowable and great value, when you consider the nightmare consequences of losing a key worker.

I would put shareholder protection in the same class here too.

If you are a part owner of a SME and something happens to another shareholder, would you want to work with their spouse? Would you not prefer to have the money to buy them out and take control?

The widow or widower may not have any skills to bring to the table but would still be entitled to have

a seat at the board and receive dividends. Even if you think that is ok, I can manage that. What if they remarry? Who then is entitled to sit at the table?

Shareholder protection ensures that the right people get the right amount of money at the right time. When linked with a suitable agreement, the widow or widower must sell to the remaining shareholders, if asked. Similarly, the remaining shareholders have the money to do so, and must purchase if requested.

Hopefully, when we finally do get clear of this dreadful disease, businesses will know who are the vital members of staff that makes the enterprise work and will value them more highly.

Businesses and shareholders need to be protected and we are here to help.

If you would like more information, or would like to discuss your own position, then please do not hesitate to contact me or my colleagues, David Hughes and Denise Graham.

**Peter Rutherford is a director at Rutherford Hughes Ltd. He can be contacted on 0191 229 9600/07717205988
peter.rutherford@rutherfordhughes.com www.rutherfordhughes.com**

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MAVEN COMPLETES FURTHER FUNDING ROUND IN BOILER PLAN TO FUEL FUTURE GROWTH

Innovative online technology platform for sale and installation of boilers aims to create 40 new jobs over the next 12 months as part of long-term strategy.

Maven Capital Partners ("Maven"), one of the UK's most active private equity houses, has completed a £1 million investment in Boiler Plan (UK) Ltd ("Boiler Plan"), a market disruptive online platform that sells, installs and services boilers across the UK.

The transaction includes a £600,000 investment from the Maven VCTs and a further £400,000 investment from the North East Development Capital Fund, supported by the European Regional Development Fund and managed by Maven.

The new funding will support Boiler Plan's ambitious growth plans, allowing the business to execute its long term strategy to create 40 new jobs in the next 12 months and increase annual turnover to £30 million. It will also enable Boiler Plan to capitalise on the growing service demand from the insurance, private landlord and social housing sectors, which require an integrated platform to coordinate operations across multiple sites. Boiler Plan has started implementing the first part of its growth plan with two senior appointments: Chris Alete as Finance Director, and Paul Ben as Sales & Operations Director.

Boiler Plan's innovative online platform (boilerplanuk.com) supports the entire boiler sales process, handling everything from the choice of appliance, the initial home survey, finance payment options, installation by a qualified engineer, and



the ongoing maintenance and aftercare service. Its 'digital first' solution offers consumers a quick and convenient way to purchase a new boiler and have it installed by an expert engineer within 48 hours, removing any hassle or complications to the end buyer.

Gas-fuelled boilers remain the dominant source of domestic heating in the UK. Today there are 22 million households in the country that are heated by natural gas boilers compared to 17 million in

2000, and there is the potential for further growth as consumers increasingly opt for smart heating innovations to improve energy efficiency and control.

Michael Vassallo, Investment Director at Maven, said: "Having partnered with Boiler Plan since 2018, we are delighted to continue to support its expansion and the ongoing development of its market disruptive platform. Especially at this time, it is vital to support growth businesses not only in short-term stability but also long-term growth. This investment in is a great example of how funding from the North East Development Capital Fund can be used to help businesses in the region accelerate their growth strategy and capitalise on new market opportunities across the UK."

Ian Henderson, Managing Director and Founder of Boiler Plan, said: "Our innovative digital first platform continues to disrupt the industry, making the customer journey from quote to installation as smooth and efficient as possible. The additional funding from the North East Development Capital Fund will allow us to capitalise on our strategy and support our customers."

North East business looking for funding to grow? Speak to Maven's local team about your current and future needs, and our experienced investment professionals will be able to guide you on your funding requirements.

Contact our team today on 0191 731 8590.

NORTH EAST DEVELOPMENT CAPITAL FUND



The £27 million North East Development Capital Fund, supported by the European Regional Development Fund, backs high growth and established businesses via debt finance, mezzanine loans or equity investments from £400,000 up to £2 million.

If your business is in need of funding to help unlock its growth potential, please contact Maven's local investment team on:

E: enquiries-northeast@mavencp.com | T: 0191 731 8590

Earl Grey House, 75/85 Grey Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 6EF | Salvus House, Aykley Heads, Durham DH1 5TS



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Steve Deusch, GBB Chief Executive

A RETURN TO RELATIONSHIP BANKING

Bank branches have been disappearing from the high streets at an ever-increasing rate. Banks argue that fewer people visit physical branches as the use of online and mobile banking rises.

According to Which? banks and building societies closed or planned to shut 3,509 branches since January 2015.

A start-up bank based in Newcastle is set to reverse the trend of bank closures and promises a return to relationship banking where customers can speak to staff in their local branch. GBB aims to fill a gap in the market by targeting lending at small and medium-sized businesses. It will be a proactive lender where each customer can build a relationship with the local manager.

GBB has already promised to support experienced regional developers and construction companies across the North with loans of up to £5m. To help create opportunities for growth across the North, the bank was established to fund up to 25,000 homes over the next five years.

The government has identified a lack of development finance as a barrier preventing smaller builders from delivering more and a new bank, GBB, is aiming to bridge the gap for SME property developers and construction companies.

For savers, highly competitive fixed-rate deposit rates will ensure strong appeal and that customers achieve competitive returns.

The success of GBB will depend on its ability to attract new customers and build lasting relationships. Without the multi-million-pound advertising budgets of the high street banks, it will rely on word of mouth to build its brand and customer base.

Relationships sit at the heart of GBB. Led by an experienced management team and has formally applied to the Prudential Regulation Authority (PRA) for a licence to trade as a bank. It intends to provide tailored lending to regional SME property developers for both residential and commercial property development, and fixed-rate savings products to retail customers.

Relationship banking is proven to help build customer loyalty and provides a single point of contact for a range of different products and services. It offers products tailored to each customer to help them achieve their business goals.

Each branch of GBB will operate locally and understand the local market and community. Decisions will be made by the staff that customers meet every day, and this will allow for more proactive lending and broader support for business.

The property development fund GBB will launch is part of an overall lending plan of £2.9bn with around £2.6bn dedicated to supporting regional property developers and small construction companies. A total of £2bn will be lent across the North, Midlands and Scotland.

Chief Lending Officer for GBB Stephen Henman, said: "Our key differentiator is our relationship-centred approach, which is unlike anything else on the market. A regional and property development focus will be combined with specialist underwriting capabilities, local knowledge and market-leading, cloud-based technology to puts clear water between other providers and us."

Experienced Relationship Managers will be dedicated to understanding customers' finance requirements and supporting their ongoing needs.

Steve Deusch, GBB Chief Executive concluded: "We believe GBB can make a real difference to the local economies it operates in and bring back the close connection people used to have with their bank managers."

For more information visit www.thegbb.co.uk

BREWIN DOLPHIN. RESILIENCE IN TIMES OF UNCERTAINTY

Being able to forge strong relationships with people and partners, whatever their story, requires the kind of expertise gained only through experience – something we have been building since 1762. Our long history has helped us develop a long-term outlook. Having witnessed financial crises over two centuries, we have a composure that remains ever relevant in today's times of uncertainty.

Our commitment to this is unwavering, and throughout the present crisis, we have been keen to continue our support for the business and social communities in the region.

Through our support for our charity of the year 'Maggies', and with our membership of crucial networks such as the Entrepreneurs Forum, the North East England Chamber, North East Automotive Alliance, the Engineering and Manufacturing Network, Dynamo and others, we are working to maintain and strengthen these bonds.

We are grateful to these, and all our advocates and friends across the North East for their continued support, and we are sure that in the future, when we meet again, we will do so in a region that has demonstrated – as it always does – remarkable strength and resilience.



Photo by John McDonald on Unsplash



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Continuing our work to support communities throughout the North East

The value of investments can fall and you may get back less than you invested.

Brewin Dolphin Limited is a member of the London Stock Exchange, and is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority (Financial Services Register reference number: 124444).

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...

PETER RUTHERFORD & DAVID HUGHES

Rutherford Hughes, Independent Financial Advisers and Wealth Managers

Did you always envisage a career in the industry?

PR: Certainly not. Originally, I wanted to follow in the footsteps of my Uncle Stan who was a solicitor, senior partner in a Morpeth practice and Town Clerk until his death in 1964. I studied Law in Liverpool, and whilst I obtained an Honours degree, it did not fill me with enthusiasm to carry on with the Law. Upon my return to the North East, the Norwich Union were advertising for trainee "Life Inspectors" as they were called then. I applied and was offered the job.

DH: No, I came to Newcastle to study metallurgy. My vision was to travel the world and gain the necessary experience to become an international businessman. By way of interview experience I spoke to the Norwich Union, delighted to be offered a role but politely told them I would think about it. My father corrected my vision and I up took a career as a life inspector".

What is your favourite aspect of the job?

PR: I think that any financial adviser will tell you that it is dealing with people, your clients. There is a great deal of satisfaction to be had when you leave a client feeling happier and more content than they were. Giving them peace of mind in many scenarios is a great thing to be able to do.

The job is wide-ranging. It is not just financial issues but can include talking about family, the business and other personal factors. There is an element of counselling and life coaching.

DH: I am a big fan of good business process and enjoy the security it offers when advising our clients. There is nothing worse than having to revisit things that should have been done.

For all the right reasons I enjoy the friendship of the people we work with and for. Honesty and integrity are at the heart of everything we do. Without them, it would be a soulless job.

What has been your career defining moment?

PR: It was probably when I returned from working in the South East to set up my own firm in Morpeth, imaginatively titled "Peter Rutherford & Co." That was 1st April 1991. It grew to be one of the largest and most respected independent financial adviser firms in the region. I then sold it in 2008 and now have Rutherford Hughes Ltd, with my business partner, David. We met all those years ago at the Norwich Union.

DH: I am not sure there was any particular defining moment, as everything I have been involved with seems to have been an experience and in most ways incremental by luck or good management.

From the Norwich Union I joined the Lloyds Broker,

Furness Houlder becoming MD of their financial service company in my early 30's. I recall no formal training but after some 16 years, working towards a flotation that became a management buyout and a sale, I felt I could have taken on anything, and promptly did.

For some 14 years I took on what was a parochial mortgage broker and personal lines outfit riddled with professional indemnity claims with no management structure or process. The business finished up a credible regional player, highly profitable, with the right business ethics to provide holistic financial planning with a strong investment proposition.

It has been a delight linking up with Peter Rutherford again and I take great comfort from working with someone who shares the honesty and integrity necessary in our industry.

How do you measure success?

PR: We have to be sensible here and say that profitability is important. Without it you cannot employ staff, invest in systems, achieve higher standards and put food on the table! It is not the only measure as job satisfaction and a sense of achievement are also essential.

DH: We are required as a regulated professional advisory firm to be solvent and have a profitable business model to ensure the ongoing service to our clients. That done, if you can smile and laugh every day, you are successful.

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

PR: Where do you start! Originally, there was no real regulation but now we have the Financial Conduct Authority, arguably the most powerful regulator in the world. The weight of paper is formidable, and it is a challenge to ensure that the client clearly sees and understands the relevant information, the advice and how it achieves their objective.

DH: I was tutored, so many years ago in the Norwich Union by a gentleman called Derek Boothby, sadly no longer with us. Putting aside his great sense of humour, his defining words for me, on what it's all about was, "utmost good faith". It still is, but now you have to write it all down.

The industry is always changing in terms of regulations, products and tax treatment. However, a lesson learnt is stick with the transparent and straight forward, it will always see you right.

How has your skillset developed accordingly?

PR: You have to keep better records and write clear reports. Also, at Rutherford Hughes, we have created and continually monitor investment strategies to satisfy the objectives and risk appetites of our clients. Consequently,

our investment proposition is a market leader.

DH: Through the regulatory requirements and the necessary recording of conversations, advice and execution, I think a lot more about business process to ensure we have the time to spend with clients.

Are you a risk taker by nature or more conservative?

PR: That depends upon how you perceive risk. I have been self-employed since I left the Norwich Union in 1982. However, I did not see that as being riskier than working for someone else. If you do not meet their targets, you are sacked. When it comes to money, I believe in the equity markets, even now. Cash on deposit will never improve your standard of living.

DH: It all depends on who I am working with. I enjoy disruption and challenge. However, if I'm not comfortable, I am more than likely to moderate to ensure a good outcome.

To what would you attribute your success?

PR: I try and use my mouth and ears in proportion. I listen a lot. Then put the client's interests first.

DH: I think through problems before I have to face them and for those who understand, I offer a decisive and visionary approach.

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

PR: Over the years I have given away loads of valuable advice for free. I could have justifiably charged for passing on that knowledge. I still do it!

DH: Intolerance for the inept, misguided, dishonest and lazy. I defer to Peter who is much nicer than me.

How do you remain motivated?

PR: I just need to look at my three-year-old twins. They give me an incentive to work on several levels. I could argue that they have ruined my retirement planning. They are also an encouragement to get out of the house, especially when they are having an argument. But I am also strongly driven as a provider for them and their mother.

DH: I view our work as a way of life, I enjoy the people, the challenges and cannot think of better way to spend my time.

Would you prefer to be liked or respected?

PR: I do not think this is a choice. I would want both. I am not sure you can be truly liked but not respected.

DH: I find myself slightly ambivalent on this one. If you do not like me or respect what I do, we are not going to spend a lot of time together.



Peter Rutherford & David Hughes

MHA TAIT WALKER HELP NORTH EAST BUSINESS COMMUNITY WITH CONTINUITY SUPPORT GROUP

The UK has witnessed a wave of unprecedented change in light of coronavirus; school closures, self-isolation, work-from-home, businesses closing, supermarket stock-piling and increased pressure on hospitals.

On the flipside, among the uncertainty, fear and worry, the North East has also seen the business community come together to show solidarity like never before.

MHA Tait Walker is playing their part by helping business owners stay abreast of the latest Government news.

The leading accountancy firm has created:

- A dedicated business hub on its website to help thousands of SMEs across the region access critical advice and information at the time they need it most.
- A LinkedIn North East Business Continuity Group where business owners and employees can ask Lee Humble, associate partner in corporate finance, Paul Shields, associate partner and Alastair Wilson, tax partner, questions for free on how new measures might affect their businesses.



Andrew Moorby

MHA Tait Walker's managing partner, Andrew Moorby, also took part in a panel discussion on BBC Radio Newcastle recently where he answered calls on key issues affecting business owners.

Andrew said: "At MHA Tait Walker, it is business as usual. We are working hard as a team to answer everyone's questions in light of the coronavirus crisis.

"I am incredibly proud of our community spirit across the North East, and the power of technology to help people who need it most in these difficult times.

"I have been amazed at the lengths that businesses have gone to, from big manufacturers to small

independent bars and restaurants in volunteering their time for others.

"We hope the small part we are playing in offering support and advice not just to our clients but the North East business community, is also able to positively impact those who need it most, through our online resources."

For more information on the hub or the LinkedIn page, please go to www.linkedin.com/groups/13843451 where you can comment on posts to ask questions you may have.

Our dedicated #covid19 web page is also updated regularly, providing support and advice for businesses during this unprecedented time.

A graphic for MHA Tait Walker's COVID-19 support page. It features a dark background with a blurred image of two men in business attire looking at a laptop. The MHA Tait Walker logo is in the top right corner. The text is in white and green.

COVID-19
Support and advice for businesses

Our dedicated **COVID-19 web page** and **LinkedIn Support Group** provides information and advice on the steps businesses can take, and updates from the Government on funding, when they are announced.

www.taitwalker.co.uk/insight/covid-19

CASHFLOW, CASHFLOW, CASHFLOW

Since the outbreak of COVID - 19 and the resulting lockdown measures introduced by Governments around the world, businesses have had to urgently assess cashflow with a view to understanding the implications which a period of severely reduced or even completely frozen trading will have on their operations.

The difficulty with this is the uncertainty which surrounds each market. Key questions have largely been unanswerable, with business owners and finance departments needing to make a 'best guess' as to what they expect to happen based on daily Government briefings, press coverage and market rumour. These questions largely wrap around key themes such as:

- How long will lockdown last?
- How will lockdown be eased and lifted?
- Which of our customers will continue to show demand for our products and services?
- When and at what value will that demand arrive?
- Is our supply chain intact and what changes to our agreements may follow?
- When will we have a full compliment of labour and can we afford to retain the full labour population?

The assessment of cashflow has therefore been an ongoing struggle. Our clients have reacted favourably, with a lot of businesses benefitting from cashflow headroom and reserves which have assisted trading during lockdown, and we have seen a significant uptake via the Job Retention Scheme. A large portion of clients and SMEs generally have not been as fortunate, with earlier stage businesses or those recently trading



Lee Humble

through a difficult patch finding funding a real challenge.

It is therefore imperative to model your cashflow to an extent which many have not done, or had to do, historically. In doing so it is vital to keep your financial records up to date as the opening position unwind will have direct cashflow implications. The inevitable monitoring which the banks will introduce in the coming months will also increase focus on financial information and hence it is recommended that appropriate procedures and month end routines are devised and revised in accordance with this.

Risk monitoring on a regular basis should also continue, with risk reporting key to business viability and to allow timely and appropriate strategic decision making. Tracking customer payment profiles, credit ratings and market rumour will therefore be important, as well as the

use of similar strategies to manage supply chain risk.

Labour productivity will need a careful eye as this will be likely impaired via reduced working or any future outbreak on either an isolated or wider scale.

Legal frameworks should also be considered - with a watchful eye on contractual arrangements which may include service level agreements and penalty clauses. HR agreements are another area which may need a review should any further action be needed across your workforce.

2020 is unprecedented and we are trading through a market shock of magnitude which is hopefully one of a kind. During the year, and future years, cashflow will remain a key focus and indeed challenge. The longer-term impact will shape business for quite some time and hence a tight grip upon cash inflows and outflows will be essential.

MANAGING YOUR PEOPLE DURING CORONAVIRUS

The health and safety of your staff should be your primary concern amidst the coronavirus health crisis. Below is our practical advice on how to manage them through these uncertain times.

1. Ensure effective and frequent communication

Set expectations around communication frequency and the methods you will use to release business critical information. Transparency with your people will help manage expectations, reassure them that you are leading, planning and preparing sufficiently.

2. Facilitate being connected

Create regular informal methods of conversation to include homeworkers and those who are still out in the field or in the office. Encourage people to bring their whole self to work and recognise the many challenges your employees will be facing at this time.

3. Harness technology

Ensure your employees have the required technology to do their job as effectively as possible while working remotely. Make use of the innovative technology that's available to continue to connect, deliver and access real time information.

4. Encourage pro-active wellbeing

Managing our mental and physical health through these times is going to be critical. Finding new and innovative ways of encouraging wellbeing will help build team collaboration and resilience. Ensure your employees know where to go for advice, for both work and personal queries.

5. Prioritise supervision where needed most

Social distancing and self-isolation may mean that large sections of the workforce are now being forced to embrace new ways of working. Ensure your managers routinely check-in with staff and reassure employees of easy access to help.

6. Recognise creativity and innovation

Times of adversity and challenge can often uncover skills and qualities you didn't know existed. Embracing new ideas, workarounds and approaches will leave a positive legacy.

People and contingency planning

Workforce protection: Understand employee rights and entitlement

- Make sure you understand your legal and contractual obligations, and then think through the practical implications for your organisation.
- Stay informed of changing Government guidance and legislation. Seek specialist advice as needed to respond to the evolving global crisis.
- Keeping operations going, maintaining positive employee relations and protecting your long-term viability will be a careful balancing act for the foreseeable future.

Workforce planning: Conduct regular impact assessments of your people

- Gathering regularly essential data from across the workforce, including resource availability, utilisation levels, key skills, knowledge and experience, access to emergency reserve resources and critical incident leadership plans.



- Knowing this information and updating it continuously enables you to plan and respond to changing business needs.
- Be prepared to act quickly in mobilising resources to ensure business continuity.

Workforce restructuring: Hope for the best but plan for the worst

- Crisis and contingency planning should consider each step of the worst-case scenario and the key metrics i.e. staffing levels, customer demand, cashflow etc to help identify the next phase of action.
- Consider short-term interventions such as furlough of employees, reduced working hours, paying for those that need to keep working, or enforced annual leave.
- Stay informed of changing Government provision such as SSP, Job Retention Scheme and seek specialist advice as needed. Don't avoid difficult decisions, such as restructuring, and downsizing which may result in redundancies.
- Look at the options of business grants or loans, but in the event that the organisation is unable to sustain itself administration may become inevitable.

Workforce agility: Plan – Do – Review – Repeat

- The working environment is changing daily on a global level, what is right for today may not be appropriate tomorrow.
- Remaining agile is essential for survival, this requires continuous horizon scanning, responding to sudden external pressures and delivering creative plans.
- Leadership collaboration and visibility is key to navigating and unlocking a flexible and rapid response.
- Frequent reviews are vital as the environment changes.



For more information on how RSM can help your organisation through these challenging times, please contact Jude Lean at jude.lean@rsmuk.com or your usual RSM contact.



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Abu Ali and Phil Williams

BUYOUT SEES BOUTIQUE ADVISER MOVE ON TO NEXT PHASE

A Newcastle-based corporate finance specialist has announced a buyout deal which takes the business into its next phase of growth after a successful first year.

Founding partners Abu Ali and Phil Williams have exercised an option to complete the buy-out of Leathers Corporate Finance, which will include a full rebrand and relocation to new offices within the city.

The newly named Williams Ali Corporate Finance, led by the award-winning dealmakers, will continue to provide its unique brand of high-quality and insightful advice to business owners and entrepreneurs throughout the region.

The move has been some months in the planning and will reinforce the firm's status as one of the only independent, specialist M&A boutiques operating in the North East region.

The ambitious firm has received an overwhelmingly positive response from the marketplace since its original launch in January 2019 and highlights of its

first year include the PE-backed disposal of Smart Utility Management to Bionic.

The deal comes at a challenging and unpredictable time for the economy and the team's short-term priority is to support clients and regional businesses through the turbulent waters ahead.

Abu Ali said: "This is the next stage in our progression, and whilst it seems there are challenging times ahead for us all, we are looking forward to building Williams Ali Corporate Finance over the long term into a brand that is synonymous with quality, excellence and integrity."

Michael Leather will step down as Chairman as part of the move, allowing him to focus his full attention on the continued success and growth of the multi-award-winning Leathers LLP accountancy practice. He said: "I always knew that Phil and Abu would be

successful, and I have thoroughly enjoyed supporting them through their early growth phase.

"Whilst they will always be friends (we had intended to celebrate this deal together; clearly that won't be possible in the current environment), this is the logical next move for them, and I look forward to seeing them thrive under their own new brand and surroundings."

Abu added: "The support and encouragement that we have received from Michael to grow the business to this point has been superb and we will always be grateful."

The buyout was completed with support from Martin Glaholm at HSBC and from Anthony Evans and his team at law firm Muckle.

For more information contact a.ali@wacf.co.uk, 0191 249 1728 or p.williams@wacf.co.uk, 0191 249 1727.



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David Hicks in lockdown.

KEEPING MENTAL HEALTH IN MIND

Are you okay? A simple question can make a huge difference with one in six workers experiencing a mental health problem at any one time, and stress thought to be responsible for almost half of working days lost in Britain due to health issues, the relationship between mental health and the workplace is a complex one. Even more so with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and large proportions of workforces working from home.

According to a recent report published by Deloitte, poor mental health costs UK employers up to £45 billion each year. This is a rise of 16% since 2016 - an extra £6 billion a year. The total cost of poor mental health as a proportion of average earnings in the North East is the third highest in the regions at 6.1%. The highest is Yorkshire and the Humber at 6.3%. The lowest is in the North West at 5.55%. London is 6.1%.

The research also looks at how employers can tackle this problem, finding that it pays to support employees' mental health. On average, for every £1 spent on supporting their people's mental health, employers get £5 back on their investment in reduced presenteeism, absenteeism and staff turnover.

David Hicks, tax director and mental health champion at Deloitte in the North East, as well as husband and dad said: "As our ways of working evolve, so do expectations of employers about how we should support our people.

"This analysis shows very clearly that it pays for employers to provide mental health support at work and that early intervention is vital, for those experiencing poor mental health and employees alike.

In the North East, the total cost of poor mental health as a proportion of average earnings is likely to be the third highest in the regions as overall the salaries are lower. However, this makes hard reading for the region and shows there is work to be done by employers to support employees.

At Deloitte, we are running an internal 'Are You Okay?' campaign aimed at creating a more open culture and breaking down barriers to reaching out through helping staff to identify signs of poor mental health in others and offer support. The firm also became a signatory of the mental health at work commitment in October 2019 in addition to signing the Time to Change pledge in October 2013."

An essential focus when navigating the COVID-19 pandemic is to recognise the impact that uncertainty is having on the people that drive the organisation. At such times, emotional intelligence is critical. It's important for business leaders to express empathy and compassion for the human side of the upheaval—for example, acknowledging how radically their employees' personal priorities have shifted away from work to being concerned about family health, accommodating extended school closures, and absorbing the human angst of life-threatening uncertainty.

A DAY IN LOCKDOWN

It's hard to tell what day it is; in some respects life is much simpler; remote working is a great leveller; endless coffee and cake.

I've periodically worked from home for some time, generally when I need to focus and get something done without interruptions. So in that respect, I'm well used to it.

That said, doing it all the time has had its challenges, and hasn't all been plain sailing. I've found the two biggest challenges have been balancing work and the home schooling, and on some days trying to motivate myself with everything else that's going on in the world.

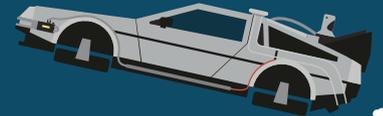
It's led to up and down days, but the other thing I've learned is that because we're all having up and down days, the team is more tuned in to the down days, and we're all trying to pick each other up when needed – that enhanced sense of community in lockdown is definitely a big positive, and something we should try and keep.

Lockdown has also had some tremendous highlights via Twitter for me. I like to tweet daily and as a Star Wars fan, I spotted an Imperial Cruiser cunningly disguised in a cloud above Gosforth and posted a photo on Twitter. To my surprise I got a reply from Luke Skywalker himself! It then got picked up by the BBC. A very surreal and hilarious day. And a bit more low-key, I've really enjoyed posting my #DailyReedPhoto too.

David Hicks, tax director and mental health champion at Deloitte in the North East

Now more than ever, it is important to be fully supportive of agile working and trust that our people are able to complete their work around any commitments they have. Although it is imperative to have the technology and capabilities in place to enable our people to work remotely and securely, it is also important to recognise that in these unprecedented times some of our people may need to work in an agile way to support their family and friends.

TAXES



ACCOUNTANT OF THE MONTH

In a new series of features we showcase some of the region's leading accountants. This month we kick off with Cyd Smith, owner of CS Accounting.



What is your name and what is your current role?

My name is Cyd Smith and my title is director of CS Accounting Limited, although, my role ranges from really clever accounting stuff to the washing up. We work with small businesses, so no two days are the same and the work is certainly varied.

Did you always envisage a career in the industry?

No, I didn't. It was the school careers advice who pointed me in this direction. I was always good at maths, so they suggested a career in either accountancy or banking. When I went for the interviews, accounting sounded much more

varied and I found a practice straight away that was looking for a trainee, so everything just fell into place in a short period of time. However, given free range, I would have liked to have done something in fashion. When I was not doing homework from school, I was sewing. I always had the latest copy of Vogue magazine and I would adapt patterns, so I always had the latest couturier look.

What has been your career path so far?

I started my training with a small practice in Sunderland, which meant I learnt all aspects of accounting. However, following a change of partner in the practice, I couldn't wait to leave and I went to work in industry, where I got



LIFE

CAREER

JOBS



continued...



involved in running the type of businesses I had previously been preparing accounts for. For some time, I worked as a temp, which saw me doing anything from auditing for one of the big four accountancy practices, to sorting out a purchase ledger for an international manufacturer. The thing about temping, is that you are invariably called in because there is a problem and I love sorting things out and putting them right. While the kids were young, I worked part time in industry, and in 1992, I got the chance to set up my own practice, which just grew gradually and mostly by recommendation.

How have you been helping clients throughout the coronavirus crisis?

The first two or three weeks was mostly just talking! There were almost daily announcements of various schemes but, understandably, very little detail and so many concerned clients. I don't think I got any 'normal' work done in this time, and without detailed clarification, it felt as though I couldn't really help all those businesses that had so much uncertainty about their future. That hasn't changed a great deal, as businesses prepare for possible re-opening, the conversations have just changed to working out a level where it is safe to open with relevant restrictions and yet still being viable.

Then there has been all the furlough pay claims, which were initially very time consuming, especially as HMRC kept moving the goalposts, so that work is ongoing. The Self Employment Income Support Scheme involved a little less work, on our part, as agents were not permitted to apply on behalf of their clients, so it was mostly just talking through the process and checking HMRC's calculations. A few of our clients initially applied for the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme and there was quite a bit of work involved, with very little return, but once the Bounce Back Loans became available that seems to have worked really well. We have tried to keep our clients updated as things have evolved and we are always here at the end of a phone, email, whatsapp...So, overall, it has been a hand holding exercise and I can see that it will continue for some time to come yet.

Who do you most respect in your industry?

I can't say that there is any one person who stands out. I will never forget my first boss who taught me that it's not just about getting the numbers to add up, but that talking to the clients, listening to their problems and ideas and helping them as much as possible, without dictating, was a much more valuable service. I will equally never forget my second boss, who had quite the opposite attitude and was only interested in the figures. But then he's the guy who said electronic calculators would never catch on...

Which fictional accountant would you most like to meet?

Accountants don't seem to have many starring fictional roles; they tend to be portrayed as boring grey suits, not realistic at all! In the 19th century, an accounting practice

was often referred to as a 'counting house', and one of the most famous counting houses has to be that owned by Ebenezer Scrooge, but ran so efficiently by Bob Cratchett. So, I would quite like to meet Bob just to see how things were done then especially if I was meeting him as his alter ego, Kermit the Frog (Muppets Christmas Carol for those who have missed this filmic extravaganza). The first book on double entry bookkeeping was written in 1494, by Friar Luca Pacioli, and it was based on a system used by merchants in Venice, so it would be very interesting to go right back to the beginning to compare how, if at all, the principles have changed.

What is your greatest strength?

I'm going to say lateral thinking. There is never a problem, only an answer! The process of arriving at that answer and considering something from different angles, to come up with that answer, is very interesting and rewarding

What is your biggest weakness?

Probably the OCD! Everything has to balance to the penny and presentation is so important.

What are your remaining career aspirations?

I think I am quite happy with where I am, in the type of work that we do, so if I was to progress in any way, it would be to help promote better awareness of financial matters. We come across so many incidents where people just don't understand something – payslips for instance – just because they have never been shown what they mean or how they work. I think it's important that children and young people are prepared for 'real life' from a financial perspective and it would be good to get involved in that. Helping charities is high on the list too. Funding is getting increasingly difficult to obtain and the after effects of the pandemic and already rumoured reductions in funding could be disastrous to a lot of small charities.

How do you see your industry evolving in the next 10 years?

When I first started my training, everything was done manually, and I can still remember a client who had perfectly balanced leather-bound ledgers, with copperplate writing (slightly old fashioned even then). There is now so much accounting software and so many apps, the actual recording process has been made very easy for anyone and this is evolving constantly. I have no doubt there will still be some clients who don't feel confident enough to use all of these products and there will still be the compliance work which will probably reduce as the technology progresses. But the main role is increasingly about the advisory services, helping the client to understand the figures, what to look for as signals for anything going well or not so well and how to present the business to their clients or to other parties to make the most of what they are doing. This recent situation has proved how important that can be and as businesses start to re-open and re-model to suit the conditions it will be extremely relevant.



SINTONS RECRUITS FURTHER INTO FAST-GROWING TEAM

The elderly and vulnerable client team at Sintons has expanded again with the appointment of another specialist.

Sophie Moore has moved from a leading London law firm to join Sintons. Sophie is a solicitor advocate meaning she can represent clients in higher courts.

A specialist in Court of Protection matters, Sophie supports professional deputies to manage compensation awards on behalf of individuals with life-changing injuries.

The appointment of Sophie is another significant move in the development of Sintons' specialist elderly and vulnerable client team which is currently experiencing a surge in demand for its services amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

Paul Nickalls, Head of the wills, trusts and estates team at Sintons, said: "Our elderly and vulnerable client team is growing very strongly with new instructions coming from across the UK on a regular basis. Sophie's arrival is very timely to help us build on our fast-growing reputation even further."



MHA TAIT WALKER HELP ART HEALTH SOLUTIONS LTD

Leading North East accountancy and advisory firm MHA Tait Walker has helped ART Health Solutions Ltd to secure a £200,000 loan extended via NatWest under the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme.

ART Health Solutions Ltd was set up by Paul Smith and Phill Bell in 2018. Both have backgrounds in Sports Science and vast experience of working with elite athletes and teams.

In the two years since it started, ART has established a profitable track record of delivering data-based insight to large employers, including the multinational facilities management group JLL.

Lee Humble, Associate Partner of Corporate Finance at MHA Tait Walker, said: "The outbreak of COVID-19 has disrupted ART's progress which has posed some cashflow concerns later this year. However, we have been able to introduce a range of measures which will ensure the business can continue to trade across the coming months and provide a springboard for future growth."



HAINES WATTS LAUNCHES NEW NORTH EAST VAT TEAM

The North East offices of accountancy firm Haines Watts have strengthened their offering to owner managed businesses by investing heavily in the VAT team.

Led by Partner Andrew Needham, the team's latest appointments include Manager Hannah Shaw and Assistant Manager Ross Ledden. The team all trained at a Big Four firm, are CTA qualified and collectively hold over 35 years' experience of indirect tax.

Andrew said: "I'm delighted to welcome Ross and Hannah to the team. I have known and worked with them both for a number of years and they bring a significant amount of VAT experience, enthusiasm and dedication in what is a highly specialist area.

"Despite the challenging and uncertain circumstances, we've welcomed Hannah to the team whilst working from home. We wanted to ensure that she received a warm welcome, so we've been hosting daily e-coffee catch-ups and group Zoom calls with other teams."

NHS DONATIONS FROM LEGAL FIRM

A North East solicitor working in isolation from his home in Whickham has reported an increase in the amount of wills being made and has pledged to help charities aiding our doctors and nurses raise much needed funds.

PMR Solicitors, normally based at Blackpool Airport's Enterprise Zone site, specialise in financial mis-selling, medical claims, dispute resolution and mediation.

Peter Maughan and his fellow directors have now pledged to donate funds to the Royal Medical Benevolent Fund and The Cavell Nurses Trust charities whenever a new will is made.

Peter said: "We recognise the fantastic work that the NHS are doing to help us all at the moment so we're donating funds to charities that look after our doctors and nurses and asking our clients to consider leaving a legacy to them too."



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IN CONVERSATION WITH...



DARREN WILLIAMS
Managing Director, Platinum Financial

Tell us about your current role and what services your company offers?

As the Managing Director of Platinum Financial my job is to develop the business and ensure we continue to offer the best proposition possible for our clients and team.

Our aim is to offer a truly bespoke financial service from mortgages, life insurance, income protection. We also cover key worker, business/shareholder protection and employee life insurance. Whatever our client's needs, we ensure they are fully protected should the worse happen.

What is your proudest business achievement?

This year our business was recognised as a leader in the field of financial services, picking up a network industry award that culminated in an award ceremony in Marrakech. It was a very proud moment to gain recognition from some of the best organisations in our industry, proving that hard work, dedication and always keeping the customer at the heart of your business pays off.

How has your industry changed in the last decade?

There has been a lot of technological advances within the finance industry. Ten years ago, we were still processing paper applications which were time consuming and productivity levels reflected this. By embracing technology, we can at times see a mortgage application to offer in one working day, ten years ago this would take 4-6 weeks!

What are you currently working on?

As a business we're in the final stages of eliminating all use of paper to work completely electronically. Therefore, streamlining the customer journey so we can spend less time on admin and more on getting the right cover in place for our clients that truly meets their needs

Tell us about the team you work with?

At Platinum Financial, we have a team of 15 advisers covering all of the UK who offer bespoke financial advice tailored to the client's or businesses individual needs. We also have a fantastic administration team working in the background to make sure our client's experience is as streamlined and efficient as possible. Working together we ensure you will not get a better service from anyone else.

What is the best piece of business advice you have been given?

Never standstill, always keep developing.

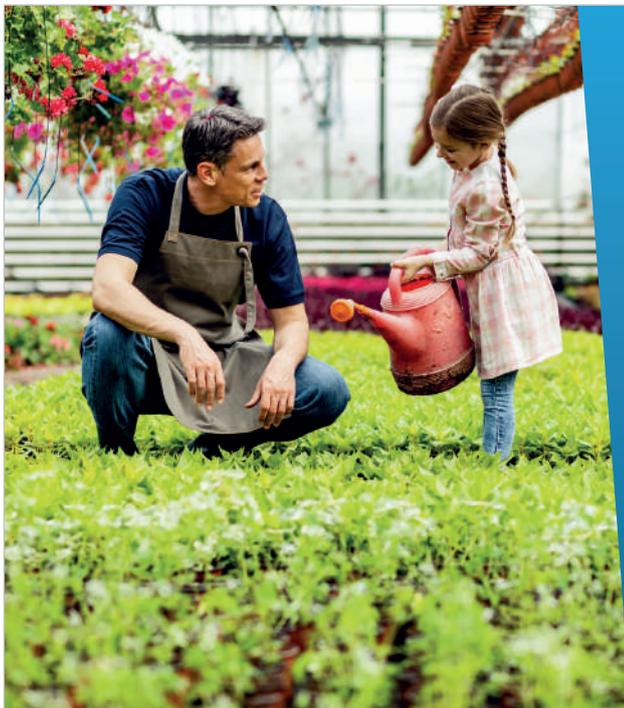
How have you adapted your business during the coronavirus?

Our clients are understandably very concerned at this worrying time and we've done our utmost to ease their concerns. We've done this by frequently updating information or changes which may affect them on our websites and social media but also sending out emails or giving them a call to check everything is okay.

Historically, we've always carried out financial appointments face to face with clients. In order to adapt to the current situation, we're now offering the same expert advice by video call with very positive feedback.

How do you unwind outside of work?

Trying to find the correct work life balance can be challenging however, at Platinum we strive to get this right. At weekends I love to spend time with my family, watching our teenage boys play football; we spend most of our weekends travelling the North East to games, at times freezing cold and soaking wet but I wouldn't have it any other way!



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ENTREPRENEURS' FORUM LAUNCHES FORWARD INITIATIVE TO SUPPORT LONG- TERM BUSINESS SUCCESS

The Entrepreneurs' Forum has launched its Forward initiative to encourage North East businesses to look towards the future with confidence.

The Forum has been carefully listening to the views of its members and partners over the past six weeks to understand how they will respond to what has been described as the 'new normal'.

As a result, the Forum is now embarking upon an ambitious programme of events to share the combined expertise and experience of its members and partners to focus firmly on the future.

Jonathan Lamb, the Forum's chief executive, believes this valuable resource – together with access to additional mentoring and professional advice – will allow its members across the North East to prepare for the opportunities that will arise as the country and the world begins to emerge from lockdown.

John Burns, owner of Gateshead-based Diamond Group, which provides copiers, telecoms and IT support, said: "Forward to me means rebuilding the parts of the business that have been affected, maintaining and improving our excellent service levels and making it safer for our clients and staff. The future is about developing much closer relationships with our clients."

Russell Croisdale Managing Director of Encore Envelopes, which operates sites at Washington and Peterlee, said it will continue to make a significant investment in additional equipment during the second half of the year to meet a growing demand from existing clients and potential new sales.

He added: "For our envelope business, after six months of significant research and development we have two new lines which we're launching onto the marketplace to generate additional volumes into the market."

Ian Gilthorpe, of Newcastle-based Square One Law, said: "Looking forward for me means working ever closer with our clients as we all look to understand the opportunities and challenges of a post-Covid-19 era."

Aman Chahal, of Stockton-based roofing design company TaperedPlus, said: "We aim to work smarter and utilise technology such as Microsoft Teams. We've



had internal and external use of Teams, and both have worked exceptionally well."

Paul Drake, operations director of Sapere Software, also based in Stockton, added: "We're quite positive about the future because the pandemic has helped speed up the adoption of digital transformation projects. In the North East we have the skills, knowledge and experience to help fellow business colleagues thrive and compete on the world stage."

Pete Lillie, co-founder of Middlesbrough-based Presca Teamwear said: "The future is about staying true to the 'why of the business' - remembering why we love what we do and why it's important to us.

"It's also about simplicity: giving a clear message to our clients about the benefits of our product set and making sure our staff have a clear message and focus over the next 12 months. We also want to ensure that, in the post-Covid world our products are still relevant and applicable to the people who use them."

Vikki Jackson-Smith, managing director of Hartlepool-based J&B Recycling, said: "For us, moving forward means delivering the highest standards through continuous development of both our staff and our processes, and our focus is to find innovative solutions to improve efficiency and to continue with our growth to provide sustainable employment in the North East."

Nicky Jolley, founder and managing director of Darlington-based HR specialists HR2day, said: "Our intention is to work even closer and be more transformational with the companies we work with rather than transactional. We look to get the best out of people to add the best value."

Colin Hewitt, head of the company commercial team

at Newcastle-based law firm Ward Hadaway, said: "Moving forward means understanding our clients' needs and objectives and making sure we are in the best position and have the right skills to help them to succeed. Our priority is to support our clients through these challenging times and being ready and able to help them take advantage of the opportunities that arise as the economy recovers."

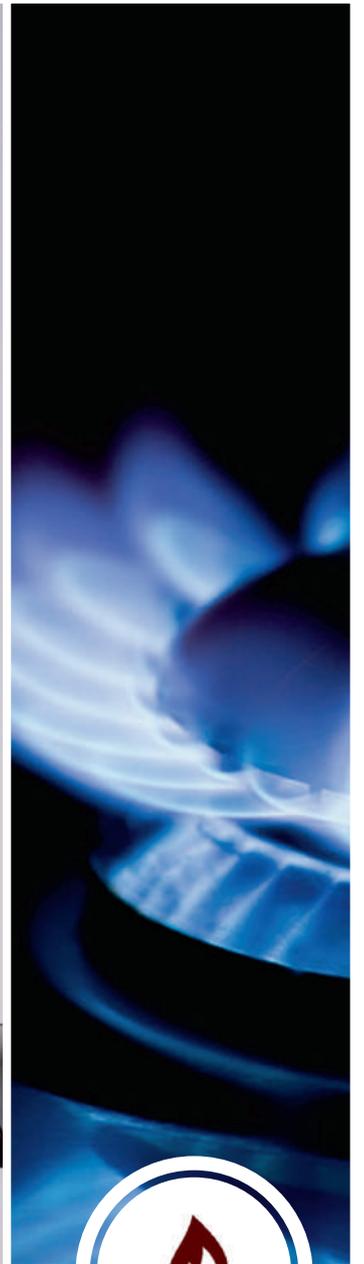
Dean Benson, founder and CEO of Stockton-based eCommerce specialists Visualsoft, said: "In general, the future is about innovation, buying online and supporting the business community."

The programme planned by the Forum will initially continue with online events which will evolve into physical events as restrictions are eased. They will focus on a range of subjects which will help its members lay the foundations now for sustained growth in the future.

Jonathan Lamb added: "For the past six weeks many businesses have been focused on dealing with the immediate challenges created by the lockdown, such as changing working practices, staffing and finance.

"However, now is the time to look to the future and the opportunities it will bring. While supporting our members to overcome the current challenges of COVID-19 is still our priority, our Forward programme shines a light on the optimism and positivity of our region's business owners who are already making long term plans for business growth and prosperity.

"Many entrepreneurs have had to reevaluate how their business works and we must now all work together, proactively, to develop successful long-term strategies and ensure entrepreneurs continue to drive the North East economy forward."



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An Entrepreneur Interview with...

NICKY JOLLEY

Founder and managing director, HR2day

Tell me about your background in business

Looking back, I didn't make an auspicious start, leaving school with less-than favourable exam grades before opting to take an apprenticeship in accountancy.

I soon realised that not only was I terrible with figures in those early days but my teenage self was bored to tears with the everyday reality of the profession – with one firm comparing favourably with the constrained and staid atmosphere of Gringotts Wizarding Bank of Harry Potter fame.

Both I and my then employer quickly realised I was unsuited, and we parted ways, which is how I found myself one morning signing on at Northallerton Jobcentre.

Shortly afterwards I received a call asking me to return that afternoon and duly attended, worried I'd failed to fill out the forms correctly. However, it turned out they wanted to interview me for a position at the job centre and became a claims advisor with general admin duties.

I spent almost five years at Northallerton Jobcentre, when a lovely lady who worked there asked if it was truly what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. I knew I really enjoyed working with people but realised she perhaps had a point.

I began applying for other jobs and found myself working for Orange, where I was promoted four times over a four-year period, eventually becoming corporate controller, overseeing the organisation's largest corporate mobile phone accounts across the UK.

My husband worked for a recruitment agency which was seeking to fill a sales adviser position with Middlesbrough-based Onyx Internet, the region's biggest provider of internet connections.

It was 1998 and at the time I was pretty clueless about the internet, but I applied and, despite my lack of knowledge, I got the job – but shortly afterwards I got my first big break which allowed me to pursue what has become a passion for Human Resources.

The MD, Alastair Waite, asked me to set up an HR function within the company, which then supported me to gain a Masters in Human Resources at Teesside University.

During my time at Onyx Internet, I implemented Investors in People, set up a successful telesales team, worked as part of the senior management team and guided the firm through two rounds of redundancy, which also included my own position.

However, this devastating news proved to be yet another opportunity. I went to work as a recruitment consultant and one of my early tasks was to find maternity cover for an HR Manager for Teesside's Petroplus refinery. Needless to say, I applied and was appointed!

I was with Petroplus for almost ten years and it was here that I gained an extensive and in-depth experience of HR, specialising in restructuring and strategic

planning. Whilst at Petroplus, I led all HR functions and was responsible for establishing policies and procedures to comply with all UK employment law, conducting salary arbitration and negotiations with two unions, managing employee benefits, and overseeing the company's pension schemes.

How was HR2day formed?

I genuinely loved my time at Swiss-owned Petroplus, which at the time was Europe's largest independent oil refiner, but in December of 2011, the oil price plummeted and the company was unable to agree new deadlines for loan repayments with its creditors. Once again, I found myself being made redundant.

A year earlier I had begun the process of setting up my own HR company, HR2day, but was unsure as to whether it would prove to be a success. With the impetus of redundancy, I was able to devote more time to developing the foundations of the business but at the same time continued to apply for jobs.

Eventually, I took the momentous decision to put all my effort into HR2day and that was the very day that I secured my first client.

In your own words, what is it that HR2day does?

We provide effective, personalised and tailor-made HR solutions that allows SME business owners and managers to remain compliant with HR law, offering a complete HR department solution from administration through to strategic HR.

This includes providing the tools that allows businesses and organisations to support their employees with engagement, retention, and mental health issues along with much more. This leads to an improved business culture, better productivity and happier employees meaning happier employers – by maximising potential.

We also deliver training and development, coaching, quality, and events.

What is your proudest moment with the company?

My proudest moment came five years ago when HR2day achieved a quarter of a million-pound turnover. Starting your own business often brings uncertainty and self-doubt. This was a real milestone that confirmed that it was financially sound, the demand was there for the service we provided, and that the business was going in the right direction. It was the moment that I was able to say to myself that HR2day was a success.

Is there a particular mistake you have made while in business? And how did you overcome/learn from it?

One of my early mistakes is a common one faced by many establishing a business, which was pricing the service I was offering. Being cheap often attracts clients but they are unlikely to remain long-term. I have since

learnt the art of offering a quality service at what I believe to be a reasonable cost.

I also tried outsourcing the sales function but quickly found none of the providers we tried could sell the business anywhere near as effectively as those who work directly for HR2day, who are invested in its values and ethos.

What is the USP of HR2Day?

We offer a bespoke and personable approach to HR, working in partnership with our clients which allows us to fully understand their history, culture, and future strategy.

We are transformational, rather than transactional and, to this end, each client has its own dedicated account manager so we always know what is going on within the business – allowing us to deliver the right advice first time, every time.

How has the firm grown and what do you attribute this to?

We have mainly grown through personal recommendation thanks to the team's hard work, dedication, and willingness to go above and beyond to deliver the best service. Our excellent reputation is our most credible form of advertising.

HR2day is based in Darlington and currently has a staff of six. Our clients range from businesses in manufacturing and retail to GP practices and charities – employing anything from five to 120 employees. We predominantly provide HR services for businesses in the North East but our client base stretches from Glasgow in the north to Kent and Surrey in the south.

Last year the company increased its attained income by 33 percent following a string of contract wins. Earlier this year it welcomed its 50th client to the business.

This growth allowed me to invest in expanding the team, hiring a new administrative assistant, promoting an existing team member, and recruiting a new HR advisor.

Do you live by/do business by a certain motto?

We treat everyone equally and fairly; every customer is important, and we have a right first-time approach.

What are the future plans of HR2day?

My aim is to achieve a £1m turnover within the next three to five years, which would allow us to expand the team to up to 12 people – but I want the business to grow organically so it remains a manageable size, allowing us to continue to deliver that personal service. During the COVID-19 pandemic we have been examining all the options available, offering additional free advice to clients and non-clients alike via Zoom and this is something we may well take forward into the future.



Nicky Jolley 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

REIMAGINING THE CLASSROOM AFTER CORONAVIRUS

As the lockdown measures put in place to protect us from coronavirus start to ease, hopeful individuals are starting to speculate about what the 'new normal' might look like on the other side of the pandemic.

COVID-19 has been an unprecedented shock, both to our lives and the world economy, and while some industries have boomed through the crisis, others have struggled for survival, leaving many people concerned for the security of their jobs.

Throughout our 170 year history, NCFE has played an instrumental role in supporting the economy through times of hardship. As an example, our reskilling programmes helped thousands of former colliery workers back into employment following the closure of the coal mines in the 1960s and more recently, our qualifications and educational services supported people at all stages of their career back into a changed labour market following the economic crisis of 2008.

Taking these basic principles and applying them to the present day, we're committed to supporting the education sector through this period of uncertainty to help people bounce back after COVID-19 and prepare for the future, in whatever form that may take.

One of the key challenges that Government faces in trying to get the economy back up and running is how they can safely do so while maintaining some social distancing measures. This same challenge applies to educational settings where in some instances, classrooms are built to accommodate groups of up to 30 learners at a time.

While early suggestions to address the problem included remodelling classrooms and workplaces to make social distancing possible, a more feasible solution and altogether more likely possibility, will be an increased reliance on digital delivery methods.

This is particularly relevant when it comes to adult learning, as demonstrated in the #EducateWhileYouIsolate campaign which we worked on with our premier partner, Learning Curve Group. Yielding over 20,000 enquiries from individuals across the country, people have been



David Gallagher, Chief Executive at NCFE.

choosing to spend their time in isolation gaining new skills and knowledge to support them when trying to find a new role, or simply when returning to work once they are safely able to do so.

As the ever-present threat of another outbreak of the virus continues to impact our day-to-day lives, this boom in digital services and solutions will continue across multiple sectors, and may very well alter how certain industries, including education, operate altogether.

As requirements and delivery methods for schools, colleges and training providers change to meet the new demand for remote learning, centres and Awarding and Assessment Organisations alike will need to provide a level of flexibility to support this unplanned-for version of the future and keep things moving forward.

NCFE recently published a discussion paper in partnership with Campaign for Learning which addressed the likely impact of COVID-19 on post-16 education, the economy and labour market. Warning of a 'very different' September, the paper makes a number of recommendations on how to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on jobs, apprenticeships, youth unemployment and adult retraining.

With subsequent reports from the Resolution Foundation and Education Policy Institute (EPI) reaching similar conclusions about the scale of the problem facing policy makers, the Department for Education and the Department for Work and Pensions will need to come up with a plan which

offers a "different mix of provision and financial support" to meet these challenges head-on and ensure that no learner gets left behind.

NCFE has always strived to be at the leading edge of technical and vocational education. By staying 'plugged in' to the needs of learners, the economy and the sector, we remain focused on the development of key qualifications, online resources and innovative digital applications to support teaching and learning in this new world and help the nation back into work.

Our primary responsibility, is and always will be, to our learners, helping them to achieve their goals and improve their life chances through education. By continuing to develop our digital offer, we're empowering individuals to take control of their own learning as a means of either upskilling to meet the renewed needs of their sector, or reskilling to help them find new employment in the post-COVID economy.

Another key factor in supporting the nation back into work will be through the development of meta skills, such as adaptability, resilience and problem solving. These transferrable skills are vital to each person's wellbeing, as much as they are to future work and career opportunities, particularly as many prepare to work in different sectors and in our 'new normal'.

Combining all of this together, we are doing all we can at NCFE to actively prepare learners for what lies ahead as the world we knew starts its long road to recovery.

To find out more about NCFE, visit www.ncfe.org.uk

MANAGING THE MINDS OF YOUR FURLOUGHED WORKERS

Lisa Vescio - Mind health and business strategy coach



How supportive are you as a business owner or director?

So, the tables have turned and most of you will now be in the process of resuming business as usual. But is it 'as usual?' And what are you doing to make sure your team are happy and supported on their return?

There have been a lot of assumptions roaming around regarding how fortunate people are, being sent home on what can be interpreted as an extended holiday and being paid 80% of their salary. One would naturally assume that they are the lucky ones. Well this isn't necessarily so. I have had several discussions with company owners who have spoken of the negative impact furloughing has had on their employees who were 'chosen' to be furloughed.

Employees have responded in different ways. It's true, some have welcomed the break from work as it has allowed them to spend time with their children. For many however, it has been a very difficult time with individuals struggling with different thoughts and emotions, including increased stress and uncertainty over the future, worries about their financial position and the longer-term stability of their employment. Some employers have realised they have been naive to the fact that some of their staff are feeling undervalued or that they have

a lack of importance to the company. This can impact an individual's feelings of self-worth and may lead to negative thoughts about their ability to do their job, thus creating a lack of confidence and a loss of sense of purpose and value. This can be compounded through a lack of structure day-to-day and having to spend most of the time at home. Increased feelings of loneliness and isolation through a lack of connection and communication with others, possible feelings of abandonment, especially where employers have not routinely kept in touch or included them in meetings.

An absence of work may mean existing mental health issues become worse, previous ones are triggered or new ones could start. If you have made sure you have engaged well with your employees over the lockdown period, it is likely that their return to work will be managed well.

If you have not had good communication with your staff during this time it is quite likely that there will be some discord to manage.

It is also important not to make any assumptions of how people are feeling on their return to work and to be as supportive as possible. Many people who have had negative experiences, whether this has been with their mental health, relationships,

finances, or children etc, may struggle to communicate their experience and find getting back into work extremely difficult. There will be others who have taken the decision to be furloughed personally and will need reassuring that it was not caused by mismanagement of the company or underperformance.

Tips: Manage returns to work in the same way you would with long term sickness. Use the templates you would normally use for return to work interviews. It doesn't need to be complicated. Be sure to treat everyone as individuals with their own unique experiences and work together to create a plan to ensure they feel supported.

Do some fun team building exercises but most of all just be there and be supportive in whatever way you can. There is no quick fix when it comes to managing a person's mind, thoughts and feelings. You need to be sensitive and available. Above all make sure you have support in place for yourself, because you can't support your staff in the best way when you have your own personal problems to deal with as well as all of the operational tasks of the business moving forward.



HELPING YOUNG PEOPLE TO NAVIGATE THE CHANGING WORLD OF WORK

Michelle Rainbow is the North East Local Enterprise Partnership's (LEP's) Skills Director, leading the team that works with schools and colleges to raise the standard of careers guidance for students, and to close the gap between the region's best and lowest performing schools.

Here, Michelle outlines how the North East LEP is helping to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on young people's transition to the workplace.

Like all of us, schools and colleges in our region have faced huge challenges over the last few weeks - not only in terms of putting in place remote teaching and supporting vulnerable children and families, but also in terms of providing guidance and support for those students who are on the verge of starting their careers, or entering higher or further education.

The Skills team at the North East LEP works closely with schools and colleges to make sure that all young people in our region have access to the best quality careers guidance, helping them to understand the options that are open to them and enabling them to gain experience of a variety of careers and workplaces.

During this pandemic, we've seen schools put in place a variety of new and innovative ways of introducing students to the workplace, including online careers fairs, Zoom chats with employers, and virtual tours of business premises. We've

changed how we deliver our own events for schools as well, with a great turn-out for our first two webinars for North East Careers Leaders.

A huge amount of work is going into adapting careers guidance to the current situation and maintaining support for young people, and we're capturing these new ways of working and looking at how they can be adopted by other schools.

As well as these immediate changes, it's important that we also look to the medium and longer term, so we're carrying out research to gauge the long term impact of COVID-19 on careers programmes. We'll use this data to co-ordinate the right support and to raise any emerging issues with government.

We also need to understand how this pandemic will change the labour market in the long term, and the types of careers that young people will be moving into over the next few years and beyond.

COVID-19 and the new ways of life it brings may change some of the career routes open to young people, closing some doors and opening others. We must make sure that young people, their parents, carers and educators all understand how the labour

market might change and how they can be ready to adapt.

My colleagues and I are also working with the North East COVID-19 Economic Response Group, which aims to support the local economy, build business resilience, and get the region ready for recovery. As part of this, we're looking at how we can keep people in employment, supporting people to retrain where necessary and helping both employers and employees find the information they need to keep people in work.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to bring change for all of us, it's more important than ever that we work together to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on young people, particularly those who are transitioning from education to the workplace, and those from our most disadvantaged communities. The North East LEP will continue to work together with businesses and our education sector to make sure we are supporting all young people and providing them with the best possible support as they make decisions about their future careers.

Visit NorthEastAmbition.co.uk to find out how the North East LEP works with employers and schools to help prepare young people for the world of work.

IN CONVERSATION WITH...



Colin Bell, Business Growth Director of the North East LEP and Ammar Mirza CBE, newly appointed Chair of the North East LEP's Business Growth Board, talk about their aspirations for the future.

Ammar, you are a North East LEP Board member and the newly appointed Chair of the Business Growth Board. What is your ambition for this role?

Being the Chair of the Business Growth Board is a privilege given the other members and enthusiasm of Colin and his team to bring our strategy to fruition. My ambition is for our work to help our communities realise their goals and raise aspirations, ultimately creating a sustainable, meaningful and measurable impact.

Colin - The Business Growth Board has had a bit of a shake up, with Ammar joining as Chair alongside five new people, and a number of long-standing board members supporting a strong executive team. How important it is to have a strong relationship between the board and executive?

Having a strong and active board who provide constructive challenge, are prepared to be active in supporting and promoting the North East's business community and who bring ideas to the table is what I look for.

It's therefore fantastic that Ammar is the new Chair as that's exactly what he brings. His approach is all about channelling energy, action and being a champion of the North East.

You're both at the forefront of the fight against COVID-19. How has this manifested into support for the North East business community?

Ammar: People are understandably confused, concerned and cynical of the future, which demands a response that is relevant, responsive and regionally focused. The support led by the LEP and supported by a whole host of partners means that SMEs can get the right support at the right time to survive.

Colin: We are speaking with businesses every day to understand the practical challenges that they are facing and feeding intelligence to Government to inform them about what's needed in terms of support.

At a regional level we are working closely with partners to introduce initiatives to

fill in the cracks, such as Crowdfunder North East and the enhanced grant funding for the supply of PPE via Supply Chain North East. We are increasingly looking to the future and are developing a plan of action for the restart phase so as many businesses as possible bounce back strongly.

The North East Growth Hub has seen a huge increase in businesses engaging with it and is becoming the go-to hub for information relating to not just COVID-19 but all business support and access to finance in the region. What impact is this having and why is it important?

Ammar: Having a single source of credible and up to date information is critical to help individuals access the support they need, especially in challenging times. The Growth Hub has always been a rich resource to help SMEs thrive.

Colin: Businesses want access to simple and impartial guidance. The Growth Hub brings all support into one place and does not have any vested interests or targets to refer businesses to particular schemes – we're 100% focused on what's right for the company.

Our Growth Hub Connectors are there to have open and honest discussions with business owners and engage them on support and funding options of which they were perhaps unaware.

What should businesses be thinking about now in terms of recovery and readying for a recession?

Ammar: The three biggest enablers to success for any organisation are digital transformation, innovation and new markets. This is where the Business Growth Board is focusing its attention and efforts.

Colin: Businesses need to consider what can give them an edge. This may be by honing into new market opportunities, developing new ways of working, harnessing technology and unearthing new team capabilities.

It's not going to be easy but it's our fighting spirit, grit and determination that will help the North East bounce back.

COURTESY AS A CREDO IN BUSINESS

Those who know me well know that courtesy is central to my personal credo. It's important as human beings we approach everyone with a little humility, as there are always greater and lesser amongst us. We vary in any given pecking order depending on our skills, attributes and the context in which we encounter people.

But away from the purely interpersonal, I want to talk about courtesy in the context of business here. It just makes good business sense. Courtesy and congruence go hand-in-hand. As I say to many of my clients, the way to be authentic is very much for your words and your deeds to match, simply coined, 'say what you do, do what you say'. Congruence finds expression in courtesy when if you value and highly regard the customer, you will observe their true needs, not simply what you have on offer.

So many in the entrepreneurial world want to develop a business model that will allow for scalability and therefore exponential growth. This approach can often wash out the very values, personal styles and individual attributes that give the company its initial character and identity. Larger companies often seek to define customer service and the courtesies therein in terms of what their delivery system can offer, rather than what the customer needs. Writ large, we have seen this disastrously visited through the internal market within the NHS and dare I mention the social care sector, when it comes to the procurement and distribution of PPE and the simple courtesy of getting back to smaller companies that could have filled the gap. The problem is when you think



Dr David Cliff

"macro" the micro gets lost and it is in microcosm that individuals exist, and courtesies become indispensable in that relational space.

Courtesy in a business context is not simply a matter of business etiquette, but sound business values. If somebody is approaching you offering you goods or services, you do them a great favour by telling them "no thank you" rather than not getting back. At least that person knows where they are rather than trying to see whether you've received the email in the first place. In this context "no" can be a courtesy to someone because it allows them to clarify the nature of the transaction between you and redirect their efforts productively elsewhere. It's amazing how even the most confident of people, feel unable to

do this as if it were some sort of projective social rejection, the sort of which they would never want for themselves.

Therefore, 'getting back' to someone, doing what you agreed to do, or simply just listening, is all part of the courtesy process. Courtesy is not an option in this context, it is an essential business discipline and needs to be thought through in the context of the services you offer, the goods you produce, the supply chains you utilise, the stakeholders enmeshed in your business practice and many more.

Anyway, why would you want to run an organisation that lost sight of decent human values? Of course, that's not your company, is it?



Save Our
SME



A Northern Insight
Special Feature...

Focusing on the Future



HOW DO WE GET BACK TO THE FUTURE?



Saveoursme.co.uk

Invention, innovation and industry were all globally led by our North East.

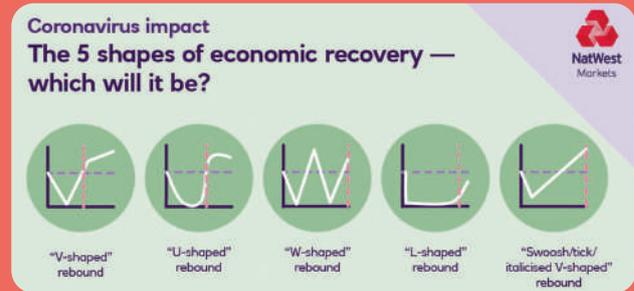
As we start to emerge from a global pandemic that has ravaged our economies disrupting our lives like never before, we should take stock of our past, but more importantly look to the future to work out what we should do now.

Opinions are like bum holes - everyone has one. But who's advice should you follow, why and how? How do you contend with the #lookatmetoo campaign that appears to have evolved? How do you cut through the noise and focus on what's right for you?

You can never become a great man or woman until you have overcome anxiety, worry, and fear.
Wallace Wattles

One thing is for sure, the one-size-fits all approach isn't one that is fit for purpose and certainly not fit for the future either. Of course, we are all experiencing significant pain and suffering, with imminent hardship on the horizon with a guaranteed recession. How long, what will it look like and when will we recover

is anybody's guess and you may as well look into a crystal ball to find out.



The suggestion that we are all in this together isn't accurate either, those that had **lea, but we most certainly aren't in the same boat.** Some of us are in super yachts whilst others are crammed into a dingy without a paddle.

That all said, the general media is primarily filled with doom and gloom, and this article isn't to share more negativity. **Our North East is a positive and people focused.** Our ambition is to promote the true community spirit that exists and share some of the green shoots that have already appeared, as with every challenge there is an opportunity to grow.

The rules of business and society have changed. 85% of jobs that will exist in 2030 haven't been invented yet. How will you embrace the opportunities?
Mischon de Reya, May 2020



Save Our SME

Saveoursme.co.uk



The Invincible Company - An organisation that constantly reinvents itself before it becomes obsolete. The Invincible Company explores the future, while excelling at exploiting the present. It cultivates an innovation and execution culture that lives in harmony under the same roof. It competes on superior business models and transcends traditional industry boundaries.

Strategyzer, May 2020

Disruption is the new normal and businesses need to be prepared.

Resilient digitally enabled businesses are the only ones that will survive. But how do you prepare?

Our recovery is by no means a short journey, but we definitely need to start somewhere. We cannot simply sit around, and actually lots of us aren't as demonstrated in this feature.

Motivation doesn't simply happen it comes with action, collective action that pulls everyone together, with a clear plan to get behind will help us accelerate our ambitions.

The Save our SMEs Campaign, that was started in early March before the lock down, has supported and signposted 1000's of individuals and businesses across the North East. Helping them innovate, hibernate or liquidate. The campaign is shifting its focus to Supporting Our SMEs and preparing for the future. With this in mind, working with over 300 specialist support providers

and various enterprise agencies, we have developed a framework that will help us start the recovery journey



We predict a future, one where we are all productive, positive and prosperous. A future that is shaped around each and every one of us. A future where we invent, innovate and become industry world leaders.

It is not a daily increase,
but a daily decrease.

Hack away at the inessentials

Bruce Lee

Now let's get back to the future.

This isn't just an article, this is a call to action, your region needs you now more than ever.

Let us show you the way to become invincible...



Save Our
SME

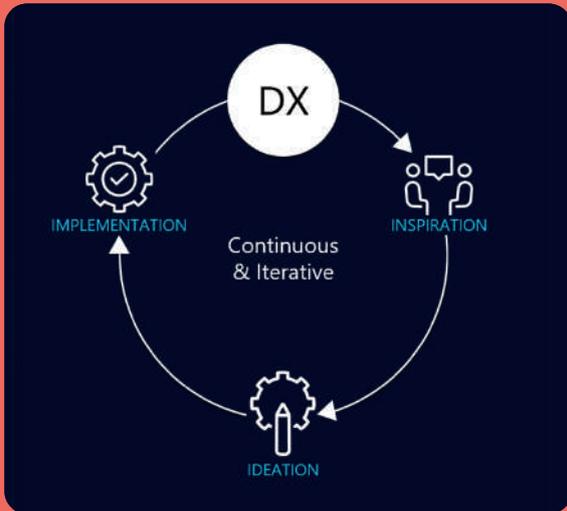
Saveoursme.co.uk



How do we do things faster? And better?

If you want to learn how to revolutionize your COMPANY, you need to step outside of it.

Learn from those who have embraced digital transformation and establish a revolutionary vision for your business and a plan for digital transformation:



Inspiration:

- Understand your customer
- Observe what's going well and what's not
- Define your vision, your journey and value proposition

Ideation:

- Brainstorm solutions
- Grab more inspiration from external sources
- Rapidly prototype and test solutions

Implementation:

- Establish a transformation roadmap to prioritise solutions to gain maximum benefit as soon as possible
- Transform your business through quick wins, targeted tasks and projects
- Take time to reflect and learn from your efforts

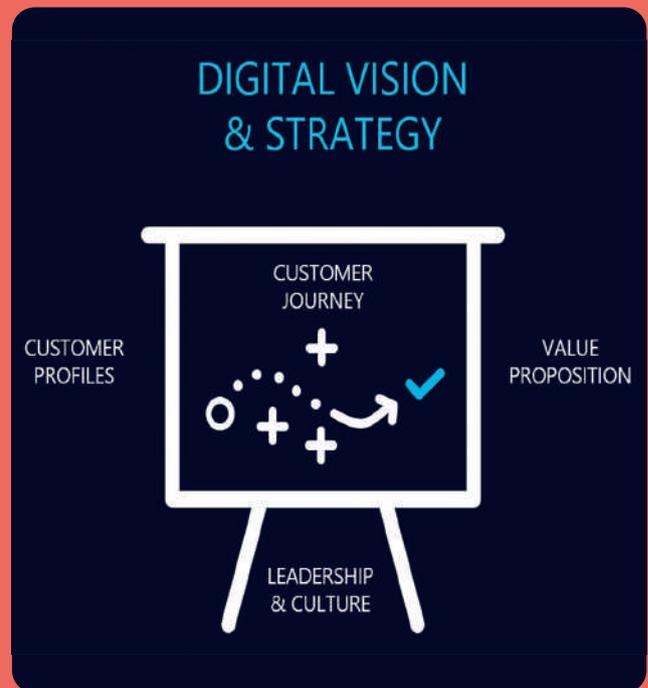
Digital Transformation (DX) is the use of new, fast and frequently changing digital technology to solve problems.

When digital transformation is done right, it's like a caterpillar turning into a butterfly. Done wrong, all you have is a really fast caterpillar.

The 3 phases of digital transformation design thinking (the 3 i's)

Design thinking involves a continuous and iterative cycle of:

- Inspiration
- Ideation
- Implementation



Save Our
SME

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The digital business model

A digital business model comprises 3 core elements:

- Digital ready workforce
- Smart experiences
- Digital technologies

Digital ready workforce (and workplace):

- Alignment and autonomy across the workforce, empower people at all levels of the organisation
- Transparency and inclusion
- An experience innovation centre for rapid testing, education and learning

My business involves face to face training and workshops which is now on hold.

Even though I understand the need to take my business online, I wouldn't know where to start.

I have reached out for some support through the Save Our SME platform and Matt took the time to explain at length what are the options and steps I need to take. He was very prompt in giving me support, explained everything patiently and gave me a few possible options to choose from. At the end of the meeting I felt more confident and the future looked brighter. The support and advice I received exceeded my expectations!

It's a nice feeling to know that there are people out there helping SME survive this crisis.

Thank you Matt!

Sam

Digitally connected smart experiences:

- Innovative business processes and customer experiences
- Staff and customer focus to adapt experiences to behaviours
- Capture, storage and utilisation of data, to analyse and learn from it

Digital technologies:

- Disruptive technologies
- Automated control systems to maximise the potential of human resources
- Robust security and connectivity



*Matt Atkinson,
Founder & CEO*



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Get in touch with Matt via email: Matt.Atkinson@radicalpanda.com
or visit the website: www.radicalpanda.com

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Preparing for the future - who's doing what and why?

Sally Smallwood is a fashion designer based in County Durham and through her brand WRECKREATION, recently secured a contract with Shelby, the makers of the world's most exclusive cars.



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A graduate of Northumbria University's fashion school travelled to the Shelby headquarters in Las Vegas and Los Angeles to show her innovative range of clothing, including her iconic Supercharger jeans.

And company bosses were blown away by her designs - describing them as "revolutionary" - so much so that she is licensed to manufacture a clothing range for Shelby through her own label, Wreckreation.

Neil Cummings, Shelby American Licensing, Inc CEO, said of Sally's designs: "The jeans are like nothing we have ever seen before."

"The workmanship and attention to detail has been synergistically aligned to the essence of a Shelby car; from the automotive fabrics used in the jeans, to the serial number that comes with each pair. Even the waistband bears Carroll Shelby's signature, just like the dashboard of a Shelby vehicle. As a Texan, Shelby always wore his blue jeans and these are like the performance version. These jeans are revolutionary."

Everything is created in-house and since the pandemic, this has created many challenges for the company. But since reaching out to the SME Centre of Excellence, Sally was put in touch with a service provider who specialises in digital transformation.

"We're now developing a new, disruptive, digital-driven fashion model where customisation and personalisation prevail."

One of the biggest challenges which has been

even more prevalent during recent times has been how to handle the individual measurements and sizing - particularly internationally - but they're now working on an app that will supplement their measuring guide videos to make that process as streamlined as possible.

This app will also allow for a much more sleek and easy process of customisation. The consumer will be able to choose not only their preferred colours, but also the print on the waistband, as well as input their measurements.

With a customer-centric experience at the forefront, they're now giving each garment its own unique identity using NFC tags, and the online presence that links to has more in the way of ongoing engagement: reading lists, lifestyle ideas and so on.

"I believe in order to grow in business and as people, we must continuously evolve, always moving forward, being open to new concepts and embracing change. Which is why I connected with a digital transformation specialist to discuss the possibilities around pioneering such technologies. Overall, these smart, innovative technologies will allow for sustainable growth and a significant commercial advantage by replacing what will soon be archaic, manual processes, into fully streamlined digital solutions."



My aspiration has always been to create something that would make a difference and have a positive, lasting impact. Now through the use of these trailblazing technologies, I believe this is possible. Suffice to say, I am very excited to what the next steps will bring and very grateful for the exceptional support and guidance I've received. It has been an invaluable, game-changing experience."



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ABC 2020 Annual Awards and Dinner Ceremony

Let's celebrate the significant contribution that the Asian community makes to the North East's health, economic and social wellbeing.

This year we have more of a reason to come together and demonstrate we are one community.

Nominate yourself or someone that you know who has made an impact by emailing awards@abconnexions.org or enter online at www.abconnexions.org

Confirmed speaker The Right Honourable Anne Marie Trevelyan Secretary of State for International Development

Our Awards Dinner will be held at Gosforth Park on the 1st October get your tickets early as spaces will now be limited.

Email: info@abconnexions.org | Web: www.abconnexions.org
The Beacon, Westgate Road, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE4 9PN
Tel: 01912424892 | Twitter: @abconnexions

Tune in to ABC Show Business each Friday morning between 9-11am www.spicefm.co.uk



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The Region's Got Talent - Food and Drink North East shares ambitions for future.

There is a huge amount of creativity and talent in the North East and between them the region's food and drink enterprises have won a multitude of awards. Now there is a passionate team in place to ensure that these businesses receive the support they deserve to survive and thrive in a much changed world.

I ordered the fish box for first time this week and I am going to have it as a regular thing. Zero emissions delivery to your door and clean fish ready to cook. Excellent quality. Thank you guys!

Lorena Garcia

Food and Drink North East (FaDNE) launched as a Community Interest Company on 6th February 2020. It's aim - to build a vibrant and engaged community that champions positive trade, promotes a sustainable, circular economy and acts as a collective and inclusive voice for the region's food and drink sector.



Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, FaDNE's directors had been busy planning a strategy to safeguard the future of the industry and its 800,000 employees. According to Chris Jewitt, founder of FaDNE, "Being involved in the development and management of community food markets across Newcastle, the variables were always putting traders at risk; poor weather, lack of staff and logistics issues. We launched Local Heroes Virtual Market to ensure these traders stay connected with their customers. Equally, it was launched so that we could build a powerful, visual showcase of the incredible and iconic produce on our doorstep."

To allow Local Heroes to become a reality, a Go Fund Me campaign was launched with a target of £5,000. This was surpassed within just four days reaching £6,675. The fund is still open and has enabled the creation of a digital platform, zero emissions logistics chain and cross promotion of partners and collaborators. Critically, it also allowed FaDNE to buy in stock and make upfront purchases to help producers and suppliers.

In its first three weeks of launch, 58 Discovery Boxes have been distributed with 296 items shipped from 54 suppliers, 70% of deliveries were made by zero emission transport provider, Z-Move.



It has been a steady start and expansion is well underway. Despite it still being early days, producers are already seeing benefits from the scheme. Jenny Connor from Dalton Moor Farm in Seaham, who supplies the boxes with fruit, shoots and vegetables, comments, "Any business is positive and Local Heroes Discovery Boxes have opened up a new customer base further north than I've delivered before."

In addition to supporting businesses, 10% is added to the purchase of each Discovery Box to contribute to a community fund and has so far raised £276 for Newcastle West End Foodbank.

Chris Jewitt continues, "The future is looking positive for Food and Drink North East. We have some exciting projects and collaborations in the pipeline - pragmatic and measurable opportunities to demonstrate ways to grow the food and drink footprint of the North East in an inclusive, sustainable and innovative way."



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How can you get back to the future?

As our feature has shown there are a whole host of individuals and organisations that are bucking the trend or have simply set-out on a mission to help others. One thing they all have in common is that they are resilient, agile and forward thinking with the customer at the heart of their operations. Each one of them is looking to the future and working backwards to define what they should be doing, so that they are relevant now, but are also responsive for the future.

The SME Centre of Excellence started on a journey over seven years ago to provide trusted advice, support and guidance at the right time and price - our brand promise - through a single point of contact. Working with credible partners to offer an unrivalled service, all underpinned by our ethical guarantee, the service has grown and in the last few months has become critical for so many fledgling companies that had nowhere else to turn.

Amid the fear and uncertainty, people are energised as companies make good on their purpose statements and find new ways to serve their customers and communities.

McKinsey

As people’s work habits and places of work inevitably change, the new world order will be more digitally demand led, **where every business should now be examining its business model.** Understandably costs will be at the forefront of every business consideration, yet more importantly, value will be the key driver.

Focusing on what you are good at, is the key to success, coupled with getting expert advice and guidance to help you sustain. Yet are both of these factors good enough to restart the economy?

Our top 3 tips

As businesses enter a new trying-to-get-back-to-work phase, alongside making sure employees are safe, each organisation should:

Restore - consumers confidence is at its lowest ever. Every customer is understandably more cautious than ever. Making sure you can clearly and confidently demonstrate that you have considered all aspects of health and safety by providing safety guarantees will be key. Define conditions for a safe experience and proactively communicate all of the safety measures that have been introduced to all stakeholders, especially customers.

Refresh - Demand for products and services has fallen off a cliff. There may be slightly less competition due to the number of businesses closing, however, it will be far fiercer now. The key to reviving demand is making sure that you have covered all basis. Focus on profitable products and services, that are value driven to solve consumer problems. Marketing activities will need to be digitally driven underpinned by tactical pricing policies. Go back to basics and reduce the amount of services and or products offered so that you can excel at one or two.

Reboot - Optimising the restart of your operations is key, go too slow and you will miss out on valuable opportunities. Too fast and you will simply waste critical resources and run out of cash. As part of reviewing your overall operations end-to-end, key areas to consider include supply chains, forecasting demand based on detailed market and customer engagement, together with developing a clear short, medium and long-term agile recovery plan that can flex.

The restore, refresh and reboot approach should not be taken lightly. The critical aim is resilience, which can only be guaranteed if you have secured the right advice at the right time. The SME Centre of Excellence has over 300 professional service providers and is able to **guarantee to provide the support you need** to be able to securely and successfully restart your operation.



Please do reach out and have a free discussion on how we can support you. Whether it is developing a digital transformation road map, a restructuring exercise, or simply need some tailored legal, financial or business advice we can help.

SME CofE your trusted support partner to help re-start, survive and thrive.

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Laura Gage

IN CONVERSATION WITH...

LAURA GAGE

Marketing & PR Manager, North East Automotive Alliance (NEAA)

What were your career ambitions growing up?

Growing up I wanted to be either a lawyer or an interior designer – two extremes, I guess. I remember spending an enjoyable week in industry in my final year at school at a local interior design company, visiting some wonderful houses with their team. Clearly, I didn't end up going down either of these career paths, but I still very much enjoy adding my interior design flair to my own home.

Tell us about your role at the NEAA

I am responsible for the marketing and promotion of the alliance itself, raising the profile of the region and its associated supply chain, as well as supporting our members with their own marketing and route to market strategies. My job can be very different from day-to-day. One day I am planning for the various networking and flagship events we run, the next I can be writing features for our NETwork magazine and interviewing members for various case studies. Over recent weeks we have had to adapt our membership offering to ensure we support members during this challenging period. A lot of my work has centred around the delivery of topical webinars which support members current needs, as well as profiling some of the excellent work which has taken place throughout the supply chain. We have had some great feedback from this virtual meeting approach, showcasing the strength and depth of our cluster.

What services does the company provide?

The NEAA was set up to support the sustainable economic growth and competitiveness of the North East of England automotive sector. Today, the NEAA is the largest industry-led automotive cluster in the UK and is widely recognised as the exemplar. The NEAA provides an unparalleled collaborative network where companies find benefit from leadership and co-ordination of activities of mutual benefit. Our membership benefits include strategic direction, route to market, capability improvement, knowledge transfer and sector engagement. Perhaps the single biggest impact has been simply bringing the sector together, to allow members and stakeholders to network, share ideas, information and best practice and to do business with one another.

What's your proudest business achievement?

It's hard to single out one achievement as I feel there have been several highlights which have been born out of some of the great teams I have been a part of. A few that come to mind include winning several industry and North East Business Awards during my subsea oil and gas days, as well as taking on the global rebrand for a previous employer. More recently, I am proud to have delivered year on year growth and success of several flagship automotive events in the region including the NEAA Expo and Annual Awards. I guess you could also combine some of these achievements alongside raising a young family, which is an achievement in itself!

What challenges have you encountered?

Having spent part of my career in the oil and gas sector, we faced several downturn periods which were difficult to manage and came with redundancies and reduced budgets. Working in a subsea cable installation and trenching business, the 2008 financial crisis and the recession that followed had a negative impact on the oil and gas sector, leading to a decline in oil and gas prices and as a result many of our projects were affected or put on hold. Working in a sector during a challenging period requires a strong team and I am grateful for having worked with many talented people who helped me navigate through this. I am sure the automotive sector, as well as many other industries, will face a challenging period post COVID-19, but as a region we have strong OEMs and supply chains which I am sure can weather the storm. Having also spent my career in male dominated industries I also feel this comes with its challenges. In my experience, women can be overlooked no matter what cogs they are turning in the background and you often need to make a greater impact to be recognised.

How has the industry changed since you arrived at the company?

Over the past five years the automotive sector has changed dramatically as we have gone through Brexit, changes in emissions legislation and now COVID-19. These have all impacted on the automotive sector together with the rapid changes in technology and how the automotive sector is adapting to this both in product and process. The North East continues to be a leading location for automotive manufacturing and the future of automotive, following this difficult period, remains exciting because of the adoption of technology and the move to electrification.

Who are your heroes in and out of business?

Without a shadow of a doubt I hold so much admiration for my eldest daughter Felicity who came into the world six years ago weighing only 1lb 5oz. She is a hero in my eyes as she battled to survive in the first few months of her life and her sheer strength and determination is something that I carry with me always. Those that cared for her and those who are now risking their own lives to help people battling coronavirus are also heroes and are only now being recognised for the amazing work they have always done.

Is there a mantra you always aspire to do business by?

Nothing will work unless you do. This mantra keeps me motivated and it's something I've always carried with me through my career to date. People don't earn my respect if they don't put in the work.

How do you like to unwind?

Since January I have been running regularly and although I'm not a born runner this has been a great way to unwind and clear my head, especially during lockdown. I have also developed a fondness of gardening and I enjoy spending quality time with my two young daughters and husband.

SK TO SUPPORT NE BUSINESS AWARDS

SK Click Events is delighted to have been chosen to support the NE Business Awards in 2020.



The leading events company that provides photo experiences like no other, through a range of high tech, quality photo booth, photo mirrors and hand held selfie devices, will be support two of the awards organised by Reach PLC.

Having been rearranged, the Teesside event, and the regional final will now both take place in September, all being well.

Kirsty Calvert, said: "It is an amazing opportunity to support the region in one of the first large events that will be held after the current COVID restrictions are lifted. The North East Business Awards are iconic in the region and we are delighted to be at Middlebrough College for the Teesside event and at the Grand Final at Hardwick Hall.

"We will have a selection of our photo mirrors

there for the shortlisted candidates and their guests to enjoy. We will also have some of our fun selfie products circulating the table, so there will no excuse to avoid having your photo taken!"

SK Click Events joins a number of sponsors all keen to make the rearranged awards as big a hit as possible

Dawn Owens, regional events manager for Reach Plc, said: "We are really pleased to have SK Click Events involved in the awards. To have an extra dimension of fun will add to our guests experience at the award dinners.

"We are looking forward to celebrating all the amazing North East companies involved in the awards. Now more than ever before, it's really important to Reach plc to showcase the drive, determination and successes of our local businesses, and we look forward to doing so in September.

"Anyone who wants to join in the celebrations should get in touch and keep an eye on our website nebusinessawards.co.uk"

SK Click Events boasts ten digital photo experiences and a range of props and backgrounds ideal for weddings, private parties and corporate events, awards or launches.

More information is available on www.skclick.co.uk

TIPS FOR WORKING REMOTELY

We can't escape the huge impact on our working, and social lives the coronavirus pandemic has had - including the increase in the amount of home working - but we can find ways to make the new way of working for some of us really valuable. We therefore wanted to share some top tips.

1. Be productive!

Have a plan detailing what you need to achieve that day/week and this will help you be less distracted by activity in your home – from children, pets or even day to day chores.

2. Communicate, communicate, communicate!

Contribute regularly to team chats/group emails and ask what colleagues are up to. Line managers should reach out to individuals who are on mute, or are quiet, in meetings. Overall, bear in mind, being physically separated doesn't mean you should miss out on checking in on each other. Make time for small talk. Discuss family life, hobbies and your shared beliefs – it really does make the difference!

3. Ask for support

Share openly what you're up to and don't toil away alone if you need help, further training or support. Your manager, colleagues and you are part of a team and should be supporting each other, especially remotely.



4. Focus on goals not activity

Traditional performance management methods are not always possible with a remote workforce. Instead of focusing on the number of hours or specific activities, pay more attention to the projects that are being accomplished. Take time to unpack project activity - discuss what is going well and work together to see what improvements could have been made.

5. Safe working

Working on the sofa might initially sound amazing; however, this can lead to numerous back problems further down the line. So wherever possible, try and create a work space. Equally, know when to step away from your desk to take breaks to avoid burnout.

Finally, remember to enjoy the perks – no commute and all your home comforts to name just two!

If you have any HR related questions we would be delighted to help so get in touch on 0191 236 1459 or info@holgatehr.co.uk

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CITY EMERGING FROM LOCKDOWN

FIGHT TO PROTECT BUSINESSES AND JOBS

Bank of England forecasts for the UK economy optimistically predict a bounce back in 2021, but before that the economy is expected to plunge to unprecedented depths in the 2nd and 3rd quarters of this year. If these predictions are correct, we are currently heading into the eye of the economic storm.

In the next few months as we slowly emerge from lockdown, we can expect to see rising job losses and business closures. How many largely depends on the Government's handling of the next phase of this crisis.

Taking the country into lockdown happened speedily and comprehensively, coming out of it is going to be a lot slower, more complex and a more fragmented process to navigate. The Treasury has already acknowledged this with the extension of the job retention scheme until October. But some industry sectors are already calling for extra help, knowing that they will be among the last to return to normal.

Timing and management of the return is crucial. There is a very fine balance to be struck between protecting the nation's health and protecting its jobs and long-term economic survival.

To date all the support measures have helped and have bought time for businesses but they have only pressed pause on the problems, delaying decisions and inevitable job losses, business closures and huge financial losses

What is needed now is clear and unequivocal guidance for businesses and continued support throughout the period while restrictions remain - no cliff edges, no removal of support, but a measured and gradual return.

From research NE1 carried out in Newcastle, the business community is in a fragile state. Over 54% of businesses warned that they will not survive if the lockdown lasts for six months, with the figure rising to 75% if it extends beyond 6 months.

Tens of thousands of people are employed in Newcastle city centre alone, 50-75% of these jobs are at risk if the delicate balance of safety and restarting the economy isn't handled properly.

NE1 has been working closely with its business community to gauge the state of the nation during the Covid Crisis and to put measures in place to support businesses as best we can. A survey of city



Stephen Patterson

centre businesses was conducted to understand how the city's business community was faring five weeks into lockdown.

The results echo the Bank of England predictions and paint a bleak picture of the economic fortunes facing businesses in the 2nd and 3rd quarters of the year, showing the devastating impact the virus has already had on Newcastle businesses.

The survey warned that 56% of businesses have essentially mothballed their operations and have temporarily closed and only 2% of businesses are operating as normal.

59% of respondents have seen a decrease of between 81-100% in turnover with only a small minority of 8% seeing a significant uplift of 81% or more in turnover since lockdown began.

Returning to work and 'normality' will be tricky for businesses struggling to apply new social distancing measures and introduce Covid-safe working practices to their business practices and premises. Protecting staff, customers and the wider public will be paramount but exceptionally difficult where premises and public spaces are not designed for social distancing.

NE1 has been working closely with Newcastle City Council, with businesses and other city partners to identify risks and measures to mitigate and support people as they return to the city.

Many businesses have started planning for how they will return and operate in the new norm. Those who cannot work at home and are now allowed

have started the gradual return to work – while the majority remain in full lockdown.

With no definitive guidelines, all businesses will have to find their own way seeing what works and adapting as they begin to reopen. Employees and the general public will all have their part to play in staying safe and making this work. To date, the collective response to the crisis has been phenomenal. Maintaining this sense of personal responsibility will be essential as restrictions begin to be lifted.

For Newcastle, like the rest of the country, one of the worst affected business sectors has been the licensed trade. Bars and restaurants are expected to be among the last to return and will struggle to get back to work and to full strength while social distancing rules apply. If venues are permitted to open with social distancing restrictions in place, they will be expected to reduce capacity, restrict numbers and covers by up to 90%. With the majority operating on an average margin of 3 -5%, these restrictions could be catastrophic. Many would be opening only to see their business close, permanently. For this reason on-going, sector-specific support will be required as the city and traders adjust.

Government support to date has been significant - 67% of businesses think the measures provided so far have been effective, or very effective. As the situation changes, Government support is changing too. The message from Newcastle's business community is clear; the support needs to continue and be flexible, targeted and adaptable as the city begins to reopen and get back on the path to profitability.



KOBE MEDIA

YOUR TECH EMPLOYER BRAND BLUEPRINT

By Ronald James Group

It's time to leave big recruitment costs **BEHIND!** Here's how...

Kobe-Media's signature service is a battle-proven method that has helped over 80 companies across the North. Tech companies such as Tesco Bank, Bede Gaming and Visualsoft are able to save time, money and turnover rates because candidates are targeted with inbound techniques.

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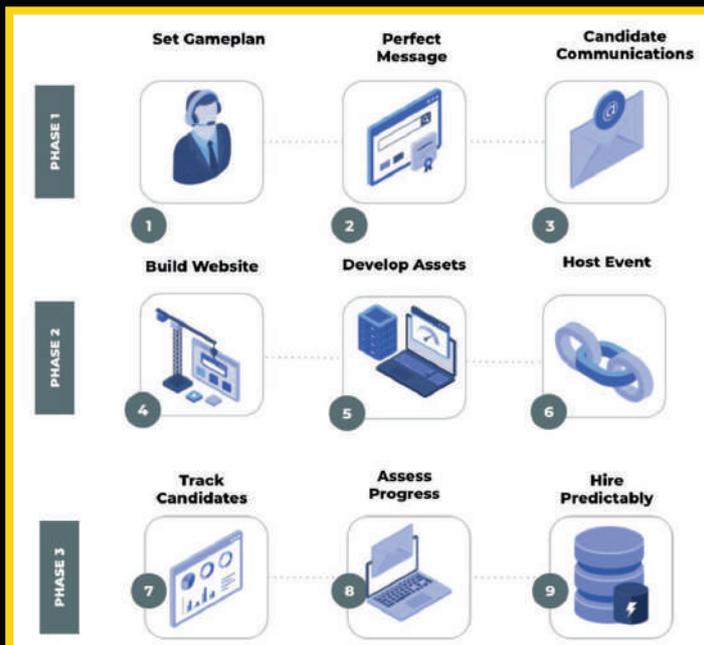
"Since working with Ronald James they have implemented a range of Inbound marketing strategies that has helped Tesco Bank build a brand new Tech Hub here in Newcastle. From their Dev Hub events to engaging Social Media marketing that helped raise our profile as a Tech employer of choice in the North East."

TRISTAN BROWN
- Head of Engineering at Tesco Bank

Andy Thompson
HR Manager Bede Gaming

"I would recommend Ronald James and their marketing package. They have assisted Bede Gaming in building our Tech teams and over the last 3 years have successfully found us over 70 hires! Which have included Software Engineers, Product Managers, Project Managers, Testers, Business Analysts and Marketing."

ANDY THOMPSON
- Head of HR at Bede Gaming



Of course with any partnership, we always want to be on the same page. The beauty of this signature service is that you will still have a hold of the reins. We're simply here to guide you - not coach your every move. As a 'Done With You' service, we only want to work with people who are willing to commit to the work themselves.

If that is you, then get in touch today for your bespoke strategy call!

patricia@ronaldjamesgroup.com

+447984200036



NEW MANAGER'S THANK YOU TO KEY WORKERS

Healthwatch Newcastle and Healthwatch Gateshead have appointed Cynthia Atkin as a new manager.

Cynthia's career spans a wide variety of roles including campaigning for equality with the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation and a six-year tenure as Chair of Healthwatch Northumberland.

Healthwatch are statutory organisations, known as the independent champion for people who use health and social care services.

Cynthia is now supporting her staff, who are working in isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic but continuing the valuable work of engaging with local people and communities.

To highlight the public's positive feedback for the NHS and social carers, Cynthia has commissioned a short video showing members of the public thanking key workers for their help.



PUPILS ENTER THE DRAGONS' DEN

Pupils at an independent school in Teesside recently enjoyed a visit from a well-known local Dragon to judge one of their projects.

Dragons' Den star Sara Davies MBE, founder of Newton Aycliffe-based Crafter's Companion, recently visited Norton's Red House School to judge the design ideas of a group of Year 7 pupils.

As part of an English module on science fiction, the children worked in pairs to invent a futuristic gadget, produce a design specification and present it to the class in a Dragons' Den style bid.

The TV star and entrepreneur visited the school to review the entries. All of the children involved received a certificate and some sweets, while the winning pair also received a £10 gift card each.



CHILDREN'S AUTHOR BARKS UP THE RIGHT TREE

Dr. Lesley Hunter from Washington has coupled her experience in education with her pedigree as an accomplished author to produce a series of books and learning materials for young children.

Each book features Lesley's German Shepherd dog Keeno as the central character and is designed to help with basic numeracy, literacy and curriculum topics for early years.

Due to the COVID-19 crisis, Lesley has decided to do what she can to help parents educate children at home in these testing times. She has made read-along animated versions of Keeno's first three books and also created a 10-day challenge for each book, including activities such as word searches, spot the difference, counting, drawing, writing and practical craft activities.



DIAMOND GROUP OFFERS SUPPORT TO AGE UK

A North East office solutions provider is showing true community spirit by helping vulnerable and high-risk individuals through the coronavirus pandemic.

The team at Diamond Group, which is based in Team Valley, are giving up their personal time to deliver care packages to residents in and around the region who are self-isolating or unable to leave their house during lockdown, to support Age UK Northumberland.

Over 300 packages, made up of food and other essentials, were filled and donated to the charity by local television personality Vicky Pattison.

The firm has worked with Age UK for over three years, providing IT and telecoms solutions as well as assisting its fundraising efforts.



PHOTOGRAPHER GIVES NEWBORNS A SPECIAL BIRTHDAY PRESENT

A North East photography studio has shared its anniversary with babies born during the coronavirus outbreak by offering a special gift.

The team at Darlington-based Camera A celebrated the firm's 38th anniversary by offering all babies born in May at the Memorial Hospital a complementary new-born photoshoot and framed print.

Jane Quaintrell, Co-owner of Camera A, said: "Coronavirus has massively impacted our business but we also know that there are happy events happening at Darlington Memorial Hospital that we wanted to add a little cheer to during this dark time."

The photographers launched the initiative by providing birthday cakes to the staff at the hospital's labour ward and are looking forward to meeting the new arrivals at their studio.



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Michael Grahamslaw talks to

JANE DENNISON

CEO, Dragonfly Cancer Trust



Jane Dennison

Why was the charity founded?

The charity was founded from an original idea from Josie Grove who herself sadly died of cancer in 2007, as part of her legacy her wish was to enable young cancer patients to create precious memories with their family and friends.

Which area do you cover?

Based in Newcastle upon Tyne, the Trust supports young people within all of the hospitals and young peoples cancer units across the U.K. We are a local charity with a national reach.

What type of fundraising events do you have?

Until the recent and very sad events unfolded, the Trust had a wide portfolio of community events arranged for the year. This included a trek to India, the Great North Run to name a few. Hopefully, our annual ball will still be able to go ahead on the 9th November at the Biscuit Factory as this is one of our signature events and really does help raise our levels of income.

What have been your proudest moments so far?

Our proudest moment so far is to be able to continue to offer support within these

unprecedented times. Many of the larger charities are looking towards the Trust for help as other organisations they collaborate with have simply stopped providing their services. The Trustees very quickly agreed to adapt the way that we can support young cancer patients and this plan has been implemented and is in full swing! It is wonderful to be able to provide comfort to young patients who are in lockdown.

Who are your main trustees and patrons?

Sanjeev Vadhera - Company Director,
Neil Sewell - Branch Service Manager,
Richard Shell - Managing Director
Ben Jones - National Sales Manager,
Cam Wood - Sales Manager,
David Goodwin - St James's Wealth Management,
Ben Dawson - Head of Coaching NUFU.

What are you currently working on?

A bounce-back plan, we have very few donations coming into the Trust and there is very little by way of funding to help us survive through these uncertain times.

What does the future hold?

Like many charities of our size, the future looks challenging, however, we have experienced difficult phases during our growth and expansion and managed to navigate many bumps in the road. What we do is incredible and my hope is that we can continue to support young cancer patients in their time of need.

For those people who have a young family member with cancer, being told they will die before them is unthinkable. The added complications of lockdown has introduced a whole new level of stress and anxiety, to be able to provide a small amount of comfort within these times is incredibly humbling.

For further information visit the website www.dragonflycancertrust.org



Nicola Cook

HOW DO YOU BUILD YOUR PIPELINE DURING COVID?

It's a question I've been asked a lot during the past couple of months, is it still ethical to sell and grow our pipeline during the pandemic?

Before I launch into my opinions on what business leaders should be doing to galvanise their sales efforts during these interesting times, I want to reiterate a soundbite that I'm well known for;

The only difference between a salesman and a conman - is their level of integrity,

Therefore, it won't come as a great surprise to discover I'm not advocating any business activities that profiteer excessively from people's weaknesses or fear during this world health crisis – yep, I'm looking at you Mr. ebay pirate, buying up handwash and selling it at a 5000% mark-up – but what I am advocating, in fact imploring is, for ALL entrepreneurs and investors to do our utmost to protect the growth and health of the economy as best we can during these economically uncertain times. We may not be Key Workers, working on the front line, but ensuring the wheels of the economy are still turning - THAT is our contribution to the collective pandemic response.

Warranted the OBR (Office of Budget Responsibility) is predicting the sharpest fall in GDP by June on record. 32% the last time I checked, but they are also predicting the economy to return to pre-lockdown growth levels by the end of the year. In part because the treasury is acting as a short-term shock absorber, maintaining money supply through the various furlough schemes and business loans, therefore money supply has only reduced by 5%, whereas money velocity, the second key requirement for a healthy economy, has reduced by 15%. Meaning, for the first time in our lifetimes, there is a build-up of unspent cash waiting to spent.

Now, all of this is speculation of course. Unemployment is up, certain sectors (travel, tourism, hospitality, to name a few) may not recover to pre-Covid levels for years, if ever – it probably hasn't escaped your notice that British Airways has announced it's pulling out of Gatwick, and Heathrow has mothballed Terminals 3 & 4, and some reports are suggesting we're sliding into the worst recession for a generation.

However, sales is all about 'adding value', and 'solving

people's problems', so despite the current situation if your business is fundamentally achieving this, then **it is your duty to keep selling.**

- **Your sales cycle will have been disrupted** - so how can you still connect with your customers and lead them through your customer journey?
- **Your sector may have changed irreversibly** - so now maybe the time to refine your value proposition to fit future market demand

Here's two examples from my own client list.

Safe Solvents, based in Maidenhead are disrupting the Parts Washing Industry with their ground-breaking aqueous de-greasing technology known as Ambimization, however a part of their sales journey requires an onsite visit to understand a customer's manufacturing process, clearly something not possible over Zoom. Therefore, they've created an Innovation Lab, where they video the technology working on a 'dirty part' supplied by the customer and they've re-badged a couple of vans previously used for trade shows as 'Mobile Innovation Labs' which they're able to leave on-site with potential customers, all allowing for social distancing.

Liftshare, based in Norwich solves parking problems through their technology which include a carsharing App for a customer's workforce, a god-send for clients like Heathrow Airport. However, it's anticipated that after Covid-19 there will be less pressure on parking than before. Part of Liftshare's proposition includes technology for a holistic review of a client's Commutology need (the study of commuting), and suggests all the ways people can get to work. Therefore, they are currently in the process of re-badging this service and placing it firmly front and centre of their offering going forward.

So, to answer the original question. **Is this a good time to be selling?** The answer is **'Hell Yeah!'**, there's never been a better time to sell - providing of course you are adding value and helping solve your client's problems.

Nicola Cook is the CEO of Company Shortcuts. The UK's leading Sales Acceleration agency helping scale-ups build a profitable Sales Engine for Growth. Her waitlist is open and is currently taking new applications. If you're interested in finding out how she could help your business, for an application form contact helen@companyshortcuts.com



CGI images of AirView Park next to Newcastle International Airport which offers unrivalled connectivity and up to 175,000 sq ft of prime, bespoke-build office space.

AIRVIEW PARK: LOOKING AHEAD BIGGER, BETTER AND STRONGER

Land, regeneration and property developer, Tynexe Commercial Ltd, is certain that entrepreneurs, business owners and leaders from all industries will pull together, collaborate and help investment in the North East come back bigger, better and stronger despite lockdown having an effect on companies across most sectors.

With work at AirView Park, its new, soon-to-be-launched business park next to Newcastle International Airport, restarting shortly, Tynexe Ltd is confident that businesses will look to get the local economy moving extremely quickly and encourage significant growth once the crisis has passed.

AirView Park has already attracted anchor tenant, Bellway plc. The home builder is close to completing its new, multi-million pound headquarters building for approximately 120 staff and chose the Park due to its unrivalled air, rail and road connectivity, Enterprise Zone status and bespoke build flexibility.

Furthermore, interest in AirView Park from organisations both in and outside of the region had, before lockdown, also been encouraging. Working closely with commercial agents, Naylor Gavin Black, as well as the North East LEP, Invest Newcastle and Invest North East, enquiries from companies looking for a North East presence or larger offices were active.

Management of Tynexe Commercial Ltd are remaining fully positive about the site, especially as the proposed buildings, yet to be constructed, can be adapted to different requirements, suiting alternative ways of working or including new features now deemed necessary.

Mike Clark, Development Director of Tynexe Commercial Ltd and Dysart Developments Ltd explained, "The North East has always had a 'can-do' attitude and despite the recovery which the country is now facing, I'm sure that we will, as a region, come back stronger and with greater determination. Business confidence will return and that will bring new investment, growth and opportunities for companies to plan, once again, for the future.

"As developers, we are in somewhat of a fortunate position as AirView Park offers benefits that no other site can here in the North East. Having Bellway plc already part-occupying the development demonstrates just how attractive it

is. Once Government restrictions are lifted further and business resumes, commercial activities should start to return very quickly, no more so than at the Airport, one of our key stakeholders only minutes away.

"So, for companies which had planned to look for new accommodation or an alternative North East base, or whose operational requirements may now have changed due to the pandemic, I'd encourage them to still get in touch as we are very much looking ahead and can easily adapt bespoke design requirements into one of the buildings not yet out of the ground."

AirView Park is a new 175,000 sq ft business park offering premium commercial space on the outskirts of Newcastle upon Tyne. It is only minutes' drive from Newcastle International Airport, next to Callerton Station Metro link and offers flexible accommodation to meet bespoke requirements.

For more details, please contact Angus White at Naylor Gavin Black on t: 0191 211 1551, e: angus@naylorsgavinblack.co.uk or go to www.airviewpark.co.uk

SEWING VOLUNTEERS BAG MORE THAN 10,000 FOR NHS

Kind hearted volunteers have made a staggering 10,298 uniform bags for NHS staff and care homes all across the region and not one penny has been spent in their production.

North Tyneside Business Forum have helped coordinate the volunteers from local businesses including Kim Suleman from Six Penny Memories and Christine Breen from Mendy's Clothing Alterations. With administration support from Katie Bilsland of Pink Spaghetti PA Services Newcastle and deliveries coordinated by Stephen Hull of Tynemouth Decorators, the bags have been sent to every NHS Northumbria Hospital from Wansbeck General Hospital in the North, Hexham in the West to the city centre including the RVI. Community liaison has been organised Sarah Sutton of Whitley Bay Big Local.

Karen Goldfinch, Chair of North Tyneside Business Forum was delighted with the dedication the volunteers have shown:

"This idea started off as a few people wanting to use their skills to make cloth bags for NHS staff to take their uniform home after every shift so they can wash their uniform daily. Now, it's turned into an excellent example of how the North Tyneside Business Forum is helping to support businesses and the community during these testing times.

"What is even more amazing is that every bag has been made from recycled material including shirts, pyjamas, bedding and so on. Not one penny has been spent making the bags and everyone has donated their time and services for free. I am so



Some of the team L to R Christine Breen, Sarah Sutton, Katie Bilsland, Karen Goldfinch and Kim Suleman.

proud of everyone who has contributed in any way."

The volunteers are still creating more bags and cloth comfort hearts to give to families split up in hospitals and care homes.

Anyone wanting to help can contact: Facebook page - Making for the NHS North of Tyne or email makingforthenhs@gmail.com

The North Tyneside Business Forum is run by a management group made up of members from various industry sectors in the Borough and gives support in the form of networking, events and signposting for growth and development. Membership is free and open to any business of any size trading within North Tyneside. The Business Forum is supported by North Tyneside Council.

The Forum is FREE to join and is for any business with a trading address in North Tyneside.

E: business.forum@northtyneside.gov.uk www.northtynesidebusinessforum.org.uk T:0191 643 6000



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Peter Moore, Richard Townsend

SECURITY IN SAFE HANDS

Seven years ago, Peter Moore and Richard Townsend took a major decision and decided to set up their own security firm. Both had worked for over 20 years in the security industry and had become close friends.

But to move away from a full time job and take the plunge of going it alone was a massive decision.

Thankfully, it has paid off so much so that their company T3 Security, based in Newcastle, is widely recognised as the North East's leading security firm.

Put it this way, when you end up with clients like KFC, Greggs, Malhotra Group, Aspers Casino, Fenwick, Co-op, Intu shopping centres, Leica Biosystems, Durham University and hotels such as the Crowne Plaza Group, plus numerous bars around the region including

those run by Wetherspoons, you know that this is a reputable company who can attract top clients.

They've got over 150 of them.

You are almost certain to have been in a building which is being protected in one way or another, by T3 Security.

However, they also have another important client who we're hearing a lot about at the moment, the NHS.

T3 Security are working closely with the Newcastle and Gateshead Hospital Trust. They're also to be found at the new Nightingale hospital in Washington.

"Just like almost every business in the region, we have been affected by the Coronavirus pandemic," said director Richard Townsend, "but we've managed to adapt to the latest demands and have retained the vast majority of our full time staff. Our skilled security men and women are experienced in dealing with lots of situations, so rather than keeping an eye on customers at bars and nightclubs or looking after security at student events, many are now ensuring that customers in shops maintain safe distancing or regulating the number of customers who can enter a supermarket.

"We're also working very closely with hospitals to either help staff look after some patients who are perhaps proving to be rather tricky and need a security person to be with them, as well as making sure that people who are arriving at the hospital



also follow the health guidelines. In other words.... different places, different types of people, but essentially it is still the same job."

Every member of the T3 Security team is SIA registered...Security Industry Authority. The company has also achieved ACS...Approved Contractor Status. In other words, the staff are experienced and the company is monitored to ensure that it follows the best practices. It's a stamp of approval and shows that T3 Security does things properly.

"Another area which has increased recently has been either remote monitoring or mobile security," added fellow director Peter Moore. "City and town centres are deserted at night so there is a temptation for criminals to assume they won't be disturbed and may try to break into premises where traditionally there would be cash and alcohol. We now help these firms by providing a mobile service whereby we continually monitor their buildings. The same applies

with building sites. We also have a key holding facility which means that if the alarm goes off in a building, we go to check it out rather than the building's owner."

T3 Security is moving with the times. They are adopting the latest technology with such things as CCTV, remote monitoring and infrared devices. More and more of their staff now routinely wear body cameras.

It's interesting when talking to Richard and Peter to hear that one of their main priorities is how they work closely with clients. They fully appreciate that for many firms, these are difficult times so T3 Security is doing its best to help those firms. While pubs and clubs are unable to trade, T3 Security is keeping an eye on the properties. They also have staff based in many hotels around the region, manning the building until guests can return.

"We, like a lot of firms, are in transition," adds Richard. "Our staff have had to adapt; we never envisaged being so heavily involved with the NHS; safe distancing control is now a major part of our business; technology is playing a bigger part in what we do. However, one important detail that won't change is our desire to be the best. It's why Peter and I first decided to set up T3 Security. We'd both worked for several security companies but knew that certain aspects of those firms could be improved. We knew what worked and what didn't and how clients like to be treated."

In other words, Richard and Peter know how to look after the security of your business....no matter what your business does.

If you'd like to find out what T3 Security could do for you and how to provide you with cost-effective, top class security, get in touch with Richard and Peter and they'll talk you through how they can help.

Give them a call on 0191 284 4730 or email info@t3security.co.uk

REVISITING RECRUITMENT TRENDS FOR 2020

Bryony Gibson, managing director of Bryony Gibson Consulting, explores the way recruitment is likely to be affected by the coronavirus.



Right now, January seems as though it was a lifetime ago. The major concern business had was Brexit, something now seemingly forgotten in the face of a bigger challenge; one reaching much further than the workplace.

The coronavirus pandemic has turned our lives upside down. For the last three months, the impact on people's health and wellbeing, and the country's healthcare services, has been devastating.

For the business community, it has been catastrophic in a host of industries who continue to run scenario planning, protect their cash flow, reduce costs, access tax reliefs and grants, battle cyber-security threats, assess supply chains, and make critical decisions about how this will affect their employees.

Amongst so much uncertainty, one clear thing is that an outbreak of this magnitude will leave a lasting impression on us all. For business, the question is, will it change the way we work for the better, or will we ultimately revert to the old status quo?

Back in January, I predicted five trends to shape recruitment in 2020. It's safe to say COVID-19 wasn't one of these but, given our new challenges, I wanted to revisit and explore how the changing circumstances will influence recruitment, staff retention and the job market.

1. Flexibility

This is going to be needed more than ever. Amid all the fear, isolation, and uncertainty, many businesses have been forced to adapt their model and we have seen how profound and positive change is possible. The trend for home-working and contracts allowing people to integrate their work and personal life will be in high-demand long after the end of the year.

2. Hiring for soft skills

Whilst still important to future proof your business, in the short-term, this may not be the main priority. More pressing issues around staff retention, improving internal communications, and making changes to technological capability will come to the fore.

3. Improving the candidate experience

The battle to attract skilled people with the right attitude will become fiercer in the face of this crisis, but the way this is done will be quite different. With an increase in remote interviews, less personal interaction with colleagues, infrequent visits to the office, and potentially starting a new job from home, the experience will extend past a personalised and engaging recruitment strategy and incorporate staff retention.

4. Employer branding

Simple and clearly defined goals will always be focal when selling your organisation but, even before this epidemic, employers that prioritise mental wellbeing, work-life balance and flexible working were the number one priority for 16-24-year-olds. Having lost count of the CEO emails declaring people's health and wellbeing as their number one priority, how you have behaved throughout

this period and whether you remain true to your word afterwards is how your employer brand will be defined.

5. Diversity

With changes in technology and the realisation that in certain professions people really can work from anywhere, the recruitment market could become a lot more open, making the long-term benefits of employing a diverse team even more attainable.

Things have undoubtedly changed and, while these trends remain important, perhaps the most vital is flexibility, from both businesses and employees.

For the foreseeable future, we need to concentrate on reopening businesses, supporting remote workers and helping people balance home-school and personal health challenges, as well as the influence anxiety, lockdown, and the furlough scheme will have on people's mental health.

It is said that "a journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step". If we have learned anything it must be that we are all in this together and I hope when businesses finally get to choose their path once again, they take that step in the direction of people.

It will certainly be interesting to see if that is the case, and how that impacts the way they recruit.

For public practice advice and expertise, get in touch:
bryony@bryonygibson.com | (0191) 375 9983.

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TECHNICAL AUDIT DIRECTOR

North East, £ competitive

An award-winning firm of Accountants is looking to strengthen their offering with the appointment of an Audit Director.

Based in one of their North East offices, you will work closely with the Partners, assuming responsibility for the entire audit and advisory service. Strong technical competency is essential, as we are seeking a specialist to oversee all aspects of the audit process, as well as to develop and lead the team.

This is a unique career opportunity for an experienced Senior Manager/Director with Big 4, national or mid-tier experience who is looking to further progress their career. Similarly, this will appeal to those who desire autonomy and a leadership role with the freedom to shape their own department.

Applicants must be ACA or ACCA qualified, with RI status being an advantage. Future progression to Partner is available for the right individual.

AUDIT & ACCOUNTS SENIOR

Durham or Newcastle, circa £35,000pa

With a clear progression path to Assistant Manager within the year, and the freedom to base yourself in either Tyneside or County Durham, this is an attractive opportunity to join a mid-tier accountancy firm.

Offering genuine flexibility if you are a part or fully qualified ACCA/ACA Auditor, the role encompasses both audit and accounts, with you taking the lead locally and nationally for a client base that extends to the charity, service, manufacturing and transport sectors.

Time away from home will be minimal, with very little need for long hours past 9-5.

Auditors will also be pleased to hear that there is the opportunity to gain accounting experience, as this is a split role with year-end statutory preparation forming part of your duties.

With study support and fee repayments covered if required, we are searching for an ambitious individual, either newly qualified or in the final stages of professional exams, with audit experience and a desire to develop their all-round general practice skills, as well as gain plenty of client exposure.

PRIVATE CLIENT TAX SENIOR MANAGER

Newcastle, £ competitive

A highly sought-after opportunity has arisen to join a team of corporate and private client specialists in a firm offering an array of services to clients across all areas of tax.

With an extensive benefits package, a long and rewarding career is on offer, with progression to Director that comes with fully supported flexible hours and some home working.

If you possess a high level of technical tax expertise, negotiation skills, and either ACA, CA, CTA, Tax Inspector qualifications, you have the opportunity to work with a wide range of clients; entrepreneurs, HNWI, CEO's, family offices, private equity and hedge fund principles, and even a few celebrities.

From tax return preparation to the optimisation of client wealth, we are looking to engage with an experienced senior tax professional with a strong brand in the local market, extensive network and a proven track record of winning new work.

The role enjoys a great mix of business development, technical and complex advisory projects, coaching and development, and strategic management planning. You will need to be client-focused with a planned and commercial approach to business.

TAX PARTNER

Leeds, £ competitive

A large accounting practice with a wealth of expertise is looking to expand their services with the addition of a Tax Partner.

In a rare opportunity to join at Partner level, this offers the successful individual a role encompassing both the delivery of bespoke tax consultancy advice and solutions, as well as strategic input and team leadership.

You will play a leading role in the delivery of tax advice across the region and client portfolio management within the team, ensuring effective workflow. In addition to the high service level deliverables, we are looking for an individual who excels in client interaction and business development and is a natural when it comes to engaging with and getting the best out of people.

We recognise most people will have a specific area of expertise but would love to hear from qualified tax professionals with a mixed background in tax consultancy or, as a minimum, some awareness of all areas.

Exposure to SME, OMB's and family groups will be of most benefit, and we expect applicants to be ACA, CTA (or equivalent) qualified, operating at a senior level within a tax position.

To express an interest in any of the above vacancies, or for a confidential discussion about your career in professional practice, please contact Bryony Gibson, Bryony Gibson Consulting, on 0191 375 9983 or bryony@bryonygibson.com



Griddles the bear and a laptop ready for delivery.

NORTH SEA LINK KEEPING STUDENTS CONNECTED WITH LAPTOP DONATION

The North Sea Link team behind the UK's longest subsea interconnector has donated 51 laptops worth over £10,000 to a Northumberland primary school, to help assist with home learning during the UK wide lockdown.

The move was part of a nationwide drive by National Grid, which has seen 1000 laptops, equipped with the latest software, donated to several schools across the country including Cambois Primary School.

Due to the current Covid-19 pandemic, children are now being home schooled with teachers delivering work online. Unfortunately, many pupils lack access to laptops and computers due to households having multiple children and shared technology.

Staff from North Sea Link, a joint venture between National Grid and Statnett Norway, which will allow active sharing of green energy, previously donated 30 laptops to assist with online work last year.

The existing 30 and additional 51 laptops, accompanied by 'Griddles' the teddy bear, have been safely delivered to pupils who need them and will be returned to the school for continued use once it reopens.

North Sea Link project director, Nigel Williams said: "This is such a challenging time for all households,



many parents are working from home whilst juggling home schooling.

"Having to share laptops, tablets and computers can really impact productivity and can be frustrating to all involved. We wanted to ensure that the pupils

who needed an additional laptop or access to the latest technology had this."

Headteacher Marianne Allan added: "We're very grateful to everyone from North Sea Link for their continued support and to National Grid for making this possible. Our teachers, pupils and their parents are working extremely hard to ensure minimal disruption to education.

"Cambois is a small community and North Sea Link has really helped us stay connected now more than ever and it's greatly appreciated. We look forward to welcoming our students back once the lockdown is relaxed."

The project team has also been busy reaching out to the wider community, providing several care homes with face masks and over 600 bottles of hand sanitizer.

The North Sea Link Interconnector will be operational in 2021, and the 1.4-gigawatt electricity interconnector will allow the UK to import enough clean energy to power up to 1.4 million homes.

To find out more about North Sea Link please visit www.northsealink.com

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CARELINE KEEPS ON CARING

Careline Lifestyles are an independent provider of high-quality nursing and residential care who operate nine homes spanning an area from Teesside to North Northumberland.

Here we look at some of the ways that the company has gone above and beyond to help its residents and the community in general.

Over a number of days, management at Lyons Court in Evenwood arranged for local entertainers to set up their instruments in the car park and perform for their residents.

The residents were visited by a local pianist, a teenage trumpet player and singer Paul Brown who set up his PA equipment outside and entertained with foot tapping blues, pop and rock and roll songs.

Deputy Manager of Lyons Court, Natalie Sommerville said: "Music can bring back happy memories for many people who have dementia. The reactions of our residents were lovely to see. Everyone enjoyed watching all of the entertainers from their windows. It certainly brightened up our lock down and I am so grateful for everyone who volunteered their time and talent to help us."

Deneside Court in Jarrow is not only caring for its residents but also for people in need in their local community. Staff were worried about the effect of COVID-19 on foodbanks in their area and decided to do what they could to help. Appealing to friends,

neighbours and shops, the food was collected under social distancing guidelines.

Dozens of tins, jars and packets later, the food was taken to nearby Murray's Social Club in Jarrow where regular foodbank collections are taking place and food parcels distributed to people in need.

Manager of Deneside Court, Michael Cave said: "I'm very proud of my staff here at Deneside Court. They are a very caring team and think of others all the time."

And there was good news for Careline Lifestyles. Following an unplanned inspection, the Care Quality Commission (CQC) ruled that St Stephen's Court in Scotswood was found to be rated as 'Good' in a number of categories regarding the effective leadership, caring and responsive operations of the home.

Manager of St Stephen's Court, Donna Niles was delighted with the rating.

"We've an excellent team here and the rating is something we are all very proud of. We are always looking to improve the quality of care for the people we support and it's good to have the positive endorsement of the CQC for the work we do."



Careline Lifestyles, One Central Parkway, off Neville Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 3BZ
0191 284 0231 www.carelinelifestyles.co.uk

EXCLUSIVE BUSINESS IS ZOOMING

When it comes to organising business networking events, Exclusive Business is a leader here in the North East. They specialise in bringing together businesses and individuals. Personal introductions are a key feature of what Exclusive Business does. Under normal circumstances, the events take place over lunch at venues on Tyneside and Teesside.

If you've been to a networking event where everyone is trying to sell each other a product or a service and you walk away with a pocket loaded full of business cards, then you'll be disappointed with Exclusive Business. Their meetings are not like that. The emphasis is on businesses getting together to discuss anything and everything but, most importantly, creating links, forming partnerships, building contacts. There is always a guest speaker...generally someone you'll instantly recognise.

The only snag is that you'll probably have spotted a few problems with all of this in the current economic and social climate.

You can't do meetings. You can't do lunches. You can't travel unless it's absolutely necessary.

So, it might be reasonable to assume that Exclusive Business is no longer doing business.

Wow....how wrong you are.

Exclusive Business is zooming or rather...Zooming.

They now have virtual meetings, still with guest speakers, but this time everything is done from the comfort of your own home (or office if you really do have to go there) via Zoom.

Have you used Zoom yet? It's a simple to use video and audio conferencing platform. If you use the free version, you can have up to 100 people taking part. If you pay for it, you can have up to 500. If you use a big screen, you can get a few dozen small screens of the other users scattered around your desktop.

"Like a lot of businesses, we've had to adapt," said Exclusive Business CEO, Linda Hitman. "We were aware that many of our members were hugely disappointed when we had to cancel all of the lunch meetings, so we took the step of finding out whether they'd like to have virtual meetings via Zoom.



Linda Hitman

And the response was overwhelmingly positive. We now have fortnightly 'virtual' meetings and, to be honest, apart from the lunch, everything has continued more or less as normal. We still have a guest speaker who starts the meeting and we still have a general chat about topics later on. It also remains as a really good way for businesses to interact with one another. It's amazing how one member will mention something and invariably there will be another member who's possibly having the same problem, while there is another member who's come up with a solution. Business can be a lonely place, but we've been delighted with the feedback. Everyone says how good it is to catch-up and keep the wheels of business turning."

Most of you reading this will have had to change your work patterns since the March lockdown. Many of you will have chosen or been forced to work from home...some of you will have been furloughed...a handful will be maintaining their normal work routine. At some stage in the future, we will all get back to what we do in business, but there is probably a really good chance that some of you will have discovered new ways of doing business.

And that is exactly what Linda has done with

Exclusive Business because the new 'normal' probably won't look like the 'normal' we currently recognise.

Will the Exclusive Business lunches return? Yes. Will Exclusive Business Zoom continue? Yes.

Over the next twelve months or so, Linda will monitor the state of play in the North East business community. She's been doing it for 30 years!!! At the moment, the Exclusive Business Zoom events are for members only, but it's likely that guests will be allowed to join in very shortly, giving them the opportunity to listen to key speakers and hear latest news from the networking group.

The best idea is to keep an eye on the Exclusive Business website...www.ExclusiveBusiness.net or follow their social media outlets such as twitter.com/Exclusive_BN. You can also contact Linda via email linda@exclusivebusiness.net or give her a call on 07813 533021.

Fancy taking part in an Exclusive Business Zoom meeting? Get in touch with Linda and she'll give you all of the log-in details.

Go on, Zoom along to an Exclusive Business networking meeting...virtually.

Fancy becoming a member? Prices are frozen at £240 for full yearly membership which includes three free lunch meetings. These will happen...eventually.



Patricia Alexander

AWARDS SHOW OUR UNWAVERING COMMITMENT TO CUSTOMERS

Newcastle social lender, Shared Interest Society, has been recognised with a Queen's Award for Enterprise in the Sustainable Development category for the third time, as it marks 30 years of financing a fairer world. Just weeks later, the organisation was named NatWest Impact Champion of 2020 and listed as one of the top 100 social enterprises in the UK.

The Society has 10,000 UK members with total investments of over £44m, and helps thousands of people in 55 countries around the world to trade and earn a living.

Although awarded to businesses with headquarters in the UK, the Queen's Award is world renowned, and in Shared Interest's case, given because of its work and presence in other countries. The NatWest SE100 celebrates the growth, impact and resilience of social ventures in the UK – by naming the most impressive 100 social enterprises of the year in a top 100 Index, and giving eight SE100 Social Business Awards for the most outstanding achievers.

With headquarters in Newcastle city centre, Shared Interest also has representatives working in Costa Rica, Kenya, Ghana, and Peru, to help reach fair trade farmers and handcraft organisations in disadvantaged and rural communities. The organisation opened its first overseas office in Nairobi in 2006, and its Lima office followed not long before the organisation was recognised with a Queen's Award in 2008. Shared Interest opened its latest office in Accra a year before being given the Queen's seal of approval for the second time in 2013.

Shared Interest's regional manager for Latin America, Paul Sablich, has been helping customers in his region for over a decade, and so has seen the organisation recognised in the Sustainable Development category three times.

Paul said: "For me, this award represents how we are achieving our mission to reach those most in need. The fact that we have received it three times also means that we are doing it consistently despite the various challenges we have faced over time.

"We are currently unable to visit our customers due to impact of coronavirus across the world, but it does not prevent us being close to them through alternative means, and finding ways to continue supporting them. This award is also an indication of the commitment of everyone involved in Shared Interest Society."

Karolina Jimenez, customer representative for Central America, Mexico and Caribbean said: "I am grateful and proud for this award. It is great that Shared Interest's work is recognised, and it shows that our customers are making good use of our funds and therefore farmers are making progress."

Marco Garcia, lending manager for Central America, Mexico and Caribbean said: "Amidst these complicated times, this award confirms the need to continue our solidarity efforts towards those in need around the world."

Shared Interest managing director, Patricia Alexander said: "Establishing regional offices has been critical to the growth of our direct producer lending. In addition to the geographical advantages, we value the linguistic and cultural connection with our customers. This presence means that we have the local knowledge needed to help producers in rural or marginalised communities."

Research shows that there is an estimated annual lending gap of 100 billion US

Dollars to the agricultural sector in Africa. Shared Interest lends to smallholder farmers and artisans in this region, providing them with the opportunity to grow their businesses and improve their income.

John Dossou, lending manager for West Africa said: "Covid-19 is a major threat to livelihood of small producers in Africa. Winning the Queen's Award at this time shows how vital our work is, and we must celebrate our services being recognised in this way. Now, more than ever, we need to offer producers finance with a human face."

Megan Peat, CEO of NatWest Social & Community Capital, said: "Congratulations to all the social enterprises who have made it onto this year's SE100 list. In such incredibly tough times, when we know many will be facing some significant challenges, it's important to recognise the incredible dedication and effort that the UK's social enterprises have shown in building business solutions to deliver a positive future for some of our most vulnerable and disadvantaged communities."

Simone van Klaveren, project lead for the NatWest SE100 said: "Our expert judges were blown away by the impactful work being done by the final ten winners of this year's SE100 Social Business Awards run by NatWest in partnership with Pioneers Post.

"The final ten were selected from nearly 300 applicants – in eight different categories including Growth, Leadership and Impact Management.

"Although our awards evening couldn't take place as usual this year, we hope that the recognition will bring them all some positive news to be proud of."

Patricia Alexander, managing director at Shared Interest, said: "These awards are a symbol of the hard work and dedication of every single person involved in the organisation.

"Being approved for a Queen's Award in our 30th year, and so close to our anniversary on the 25th April, makes this a very special honour. For Shared Interest to be named as impact champion just weeks later means a great deal to everyone involved – especially at this time, when our social impact is even more significant.

"Our investors are incredibly loyal, and stay with Shared Interest for an average of 14 years. Their commitment made it possible for our financial services to impact almost 400,000 people last year alone.

"Shared Interest focuses on trade rather than aid with the aim of empowering disadvantaged communities. For every farmer or handcraft maker we are able to help, there are dozens in great need of finance. Our lending is in high demand, as producers do not have the security or assets to secure funds elsewhere.

"As the world enters an extremely challenging time, we will continue to carry out our mission of reaching those smaller vulnerable groups who are otherwise unable to access finance. Now more than ever, we need to help people provide for themselves and their families.



Esmiker de la Peña Huanuire gathers Brazil nuts from the rainforest in Peru.

IF YOU'RE PLANNING A DEVELOPMENT PROJECT – 'GET CARTER'

Carter Smith provides a one-stop shop for all aspects of planning, from small-scale householder extensions to complex planning applications and appeals. Here, Tony Carter tells us about his business and how, even though the nation is in lockdown, the planning process can still continue.

Tell us about Carter Smith Planning Consultants

As a former principal planning officer for Northumberland County Council, I worked on many major development projects over my 15 years in their employment. I decided to use my experience and knowledge to set up my own independent firm to help my clients with all aspects of town planning.

We provide town planning support from conception to conclusion, taking our clients aspirations and shaping them into a workable solution that the planners will accept and support.

Who are your customers?

We work with landowners and developers, charitable organisations, government bodies, local authorities, parish councils, businesses, farms and private individuals. Basically, if anyone has a need for sound, impartial planning advice then we can help them.

What sort of work do you do?

We help with new domestic and commercial buildings, changes of use, lawful development certificates, planning appeals, and domestic projects such as new extensions, garages, outbuildings etc.

Has the "Lockdown" affected your business?

99% of planning is carried out via the internet and email, therefore as we have effectively 'de-camped' from the business premises into our home offices, we are still working for our existing clients as normal.

As 'face to face' meetings are not possible at present, we have set up various applications including Zoom, Facetime, and WhatsApp which allow virtual meetings to take place and these have proven to be very useful. We had a conference recently with six participants discussing one of our planning applications. The 'lock-down' rules still allow building work to carry on provided social distancing is adhered to, therefore clients with permission can still implement their schemes.

How can people get in touch with you?

In normal circumstances our office is at Hepscott House, Coopie's Lane, Morpeth NE61 6JT but at the moment we are working from home. Our email is tony@cartersmithplanning.com or I can be contacted on 07718 967722.

Is now a good time to submit planning documents?

Now is a great time to submit pre-application enquiries as it gives us a chance to work on any projects and get them to submission stage without the normal day to day interruptions an office brings.

It's also a great time to submit 'lawful development certificate' applications as these don't require a policy/planning judgement assessment as they are either compliant with the permitted development legislation or not or they meet the four or 10-year exemption rules or they don't.

What can people do to help the planners at this time?

A number of Councils are keen to receive a portfolio of photographs of the application/pre-application sites to support any planning applications. This assists them in determining applications without the need to carry out a site visit. I can offer advice on what to photograph and how to maximise your chances of making any application more successful.

What makes you different from other planning consultants?

I think my experience goes a long way to making us stand out from the crowd. Our client testimonials back this up and I am especially proud of our open, honest and transparent approach. If a proposal has no realistic chance of success, we'll say so as soon as possible preventing wasted expenditure and time for our clients.

What do you like to do out of work?

I love my fishing and when the lock down ends, I'll once again enjoy travelling around the UK and France in our caravan. When I'm fishing I can 'switch off' so to speak, and refresh/recharge my brain. Being away in the caravan allows us the freedom to visit so much more of our beautiful country and explore the delights of rural France.



Tony Carter





THE NEW NORMAL

By Danny Mitchell, Founder of Change Fundraising Ltd

I don't think any of us could quite have expected to be living how we are right now this time last year.

I work in the Charity sector and particularly in fundraising, with a speciality on events which under normal circumstances is a very busy and exciting thing to do with my clients.

I have organised and hosted previous events such as the "66 Dinner" at Baltic, the World Record Firewalk attempt at Newcastle Falcons and the Northern Children of Courage Awards to name a few highlights from previous years.

When lockdown happened each and every charity event got postponed one by one as venues closed and initially it was looking at October time to potentially host them but the reality now is that we are looking more like 2021 to be safe.

Sitting back and looking at it once the initial dust had settled it became clear that due to the lockdown there was now the biggest audience online ever, which in turn meant more potential for raising awareness and promotion to a HUGE social media audience.

The fear of the unknown was clear with my charity clients and it would have been easy for them to have almost gone into panic mode but we sat and looked at the situation and assessed what was now lost for at least this financial year and looked at how that could be replaced.

It would have been a mistake to instantly throw out a Justgiving appeal page in my opinion because almost every other charity went for that step one in the panic handbook.

Why not do that? Well, there's a few reasons some of which are, you are putting an appeal out along with so many other causes it becomes an extremely diluted marketplace.

You are also asking for money when a HUGE amount of people are unsure if they will have a job or not.

It is a time to utilise social media to get your message

out there and tell people what you do and how you are evolving to try to support your clients under crazy circumstances and all help is welcome.

Use your staff to research all of the Covid 19 emergency funds available to charities as there are several, look to your major donors historically and also do a treasure mapping exercise with the Board and Trustees etc, you'd be surprised how many people want to help if asked directly and in the right way, take your fundraising online and think about how everyone is feeling stuck at home, many trying to look after children and stressed to bits, can you create something that engages with the kids to take a bit of pressure of the parents.

Get some recorded camera phone clips from your staff members or service users telling their stories about what they do and why along with what difference it makes, this can only get more support and the bigger awareness that you were crying out for when you were too busy to think before this.

Are there individuals and companies out there who could donate services / items rather than funds to help support you through this? I have found that the community spirit has been amazing since the start.

Have you asked those who support you before this how they are coping?

Try to position your charity as one of the few who evolved quickly in this crisis and became a stronger charity for it to give sustainability for many years to come from what you have learnt. I think that if you can do that you have a great chance of gaining corporate support during and after this because you can walk the walk not just talk the talk.

I understand that it is extremely tough times and I understand the knee jerk panic, but if you can use the down time to utilise the vast skills and creativity at your fingertips along with your relationships you will survive this and potentially thrive.

RISING STAR...

KELLY LANGHAM

Market development analyst at washing machine, dehumidifier and water cooler manufacturer, Ebac. Great British manufacturing since 1972.

What were your career ambitions growing up?

I wasn't really sure what I wanted to be when I grew up, but once I completed my Business and Management degree at the University of Sunderland, this is when I discovered that marketing was definitely the avenue I would like to go down.

Tell us about your current role?

My current role within Ebac is marketing data analyst, but I also work on a lot of the marketing projects within the company as well.

What is the most challenging aspect of your job?

The most challenging part of my job is probably the frequency of change - things change quite regularly so I need to be extremely flexible and able to adapt to new plans quickly and effectively.

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

I would say my biggest weakness is my lack of confidence, but as I have developed my skill set and gained more experience, I have learned how to believe in myself and therefore be more confident.

What are you currently working on?

Alongside the data analysis, I am also currently working on a variety of exciting projects within Ebac, including developments on our new website, how we extend our offer to new markets, increase sales and get the brand name known.

Tell us about your team?

The team is small, but this has allowed us all to become more knowledgeable and also identify our



Kelly Langham

individual strengths and weaknesses to understand how we can best work together. We're increasingly efficient - Ebac is a nice place to work as there is plenty of support.

What is the best piece of business advice you have been given?

The best piece of business advice I have been given is "always do what you say you are going to do, reputation is key."

Who are your heroes inside and outside of business?

My hero inside the business would have to be my Mam who has worked at Ebac for 40 years! I know how valuable my Mam's job is within the factory and have the upmost respect for her. Outside of the business this would have to be the key workers who are doing such an amazing job during such a scary and uncertain time.

Where do you see yourself in five years' time?

In five years' time, I would love to have my own business. It has always been a dream of mine to have a company of my own and although it's quite an ambitious target this is something I would love to achieve. I'm therefore learning everything I can right now from the great people around me.

How do you like to unwind outside of work?

Outside of work, my main passion is to travel. I love visiting new places and I have recently started my own travel blog. You can check this out here: www.blackbeaches.wordpress.com.

Favourite Book/CD/DVD?

My favourite books would have to be the Harry Potter series. I remember the final book came out and I managed to read it in one whole day, which is no mean feat.

For more information, visit www.ebac.com

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Client Director Lauren Hindhaugh, MD Col Robertson, Creative Director Adam Robertson

CYCLING FOR GB OR SET UP BLUMILK WITH YOUR BROTHER?

A pretty big ask and the ultimate test of trust for North East brothers Col and Adam Robertson.

Fast forward 20 years and the founders of Blumilk have grown their North East agency; powering their way through their sector strength of utilities, and fast proving that they are the agency to keep clients ahead of the pack. Of course they also have the Blumilk Cycling Team too

"It's about incrementally growing with a client. From a financial stance as well as a behavioural aspect. The importance of loving your staff and beating your competitors. It works because we become an integral part of our client's team and put simply, we understand the sector. Our targets

will always be the MD, Brand or Marketing Director" quotes Managing Director Col Robertson.

Describing their business model as "glocal" with offices in London and Glasgow; it's plainly obvious that their heart belongs firmly in the North East. Born and raised in the region, HQ Blumilk is located in the hip and upcoming area of Ouseburn on the Ouseburn River and close to the entrance of Victoria Tunnel. Think Vivienne Westwood wallpaper, vast windows with enticing views across the river and city and a team of 21...who will celebrate 21 years this September with their very clever founders.



“

Our heart will always be in the North East

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Engage your customers, love your staff, beat your competitors

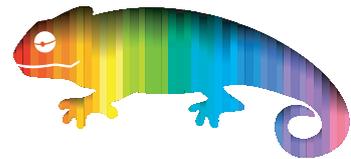
Fiercely targeting the utilities sector

”



To book a meeting or have a chat with Client Director Lauren, MD Col or Creative Director Adam, we highly recommend you head straight to www.blumilk.com

“It is not the most intellectual of the species that survives; it is not the strongest that survives; but the species that survives is the one that is able best to adapt and adjust to the changing environment in which it finds itself.”



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CAN I PURSUE A BUSINESS INTERRUPTION INSURANCE CLAIM FOR ISSUES CAUSED BY COVID-19?

By Tom Whitfield, partner in our
Dispute Resolution Team at Hay &
Kilner Law Firm in Newcastle

Can I claim under my business interruption insurance policy for coronavirus-related costs?

With so many companies being severely affected by the pandemic, the monies they can claim under their business interruption insurance policy has become a key consideration for their owners and directors, and could even be an essential part of the business's future viability.

Unfortunately, it has quickly become clear to many potential claimants that their basic Business Interruption Insurance does not cover closure due to Covid-19.

But my business has clearly been interrupted - why is this the case?

There are different types of business interruption insurance clauses, but in the main, a standard clause will cover 'business closure due to a Notifiable Disease' and then will list those diseases which are covered.

Covid-19 only became a Notifiable Disease on 5 March 2020, so in the great majority of cases, it is unlikely to be listed in any insurance policy as a disease that is covered by the clause.

Is any business interruption insurance paying out?

Some businesses may have more generous clauses in their policies, which for example list those diseases not covered rather than those that are, or have purchased an extension which covers any unspecified Notifiable Disease (though policies always need to read in the round).

This type of insurance may respond to claims arising from Covid-19, but we're already unfortunately already seeing some (though not all) insurers trying to avoid providing cover under such a clause.

The most common argument we have seen so far is that it wasn't Covid-19 that forced businesses to



Tom Whitfield

close, but the Government's lockdown order on 23 March, which is outside the terms of insurance.

This seems unfair – is there anything that can be done?

The Financial Conduct Authority (FCA), which regulates the insurance industry, has already written to insurance company CEOs to state that for "policies where it is clear that the firm has an obligation to pay out on a policy...it is important these claims are assessed and settled quickly" and that "financial pressures on policyholders are not exacerbated by slow payment...rather, such claims should be paid as soon as is possible."

Insurers which disagree have been told to contact the FCA with the grounds for their decision not to pay out and their reasons why this represents a fair outcome for customers.

Some insurers' decisions to try and avoid cover may well go against their own regulator's guidance and there will therefore undoubtedly be grounds for challenging such refusal to meet payment.

I think my claim is valid – what should I do?

Having had many years' experience of dealing with insurance companies and helping businesses challenge insurance cover decisions, my initial

recommendation would be to carefully review your policy and to get advice on whether you could reasonably expect it to provide cover for Covid-19.

If so, a challenge can be made to your insurer's decision either through the Court, or for smaller businesses, through the Financial Ombudsman Service (FOS), which deals specifically with claims made by smaller businesses up to the value of £355,000 and can often provide a quicker decision than the Courts.

As more and more claims are made to the FOS, we would expect it to be established relatively quickly which way decisions on cover are going, so hopefully insurers will see which way the wind is blowing.

Further to this, the FCA stated on 1 May that it was looking to commence a court action "designed to resolve a selected number of key issues causing uncertainty as promptly as possible and to provide greater clarity for all parties, both insured and insurers." Therefore, the position on such claims continues to change rapidly.

Hay & Kilner offers a fixed-fee policy review service which will tell you if we feel you have a reasonable case for cover and which includes a first letter to send to the Financial Ombudsman Service which sets out your case.

For further information and a free initial discussion of your situation, please contact Tom Whitfield via tom.whitfield@hay-kilner.co.uk



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WHAT COMES AFTER FURLOUGH LEAVE?

Alexandra Besnard, Senior Associate at Newcastle-based specialist employment firm Collingwood Legal, comments on key issues for employers managing a return to the workplace amidst the Coronavirus crisis.



Alexandra Besnard

The last few months have been a bit of a whirlwind. In 15 years practising as an employment lawyer, I have never seen so much activity in the employment law field in such a short period of time. The ongoing pandemic will have had a significant impact on everyone. Employers have had to grapple with keeping their employees safe, organising home working at short notice, keeping abreast with a fast-changing environment and ensuring that their business remains as healthy as possible in these difficult times. Employees will have had significant worries about juggling childcare and home schooling as well as continuing to work from home, isolation from family or dealing with potential financial worries.

Although employers may now have had the opportunity to take stock of the new concept of 'furlough leave', before long they hopefully will be able to start increasing their activities again and "unfurlough" staff. This may however open an entirely new set of questions and difficulties. Whilst at the time of writing the Furlough Scheme will be available until October, changes to the scheme are expected from August 2020. Further updated guidance may also be available, but here are some broad recommendations to help you with the "unfurloughing" process.

How should an employer decide who is unfurloughed?

Employers will have to decide on what basis they select employees to be unfurloughed, just in the same way as they selected employees to be furloughed initially. Equality law in this area remains applicable and therefore employers should ensure that any selection is fair.

Clear communication between the employer and their employees will be key to this.

What about employees who don't want to return to work?

Where an employer requires an employee to return from a period of furlough leave and the employee refuses, an employer must act carefully. Whilst employers may pursue a disciplinary process for any refusal to return to work, caution is necessary before proceeding. It will be important, in the first instance, to address the employee's reasons for refusing to return to work: the employee may be shielding as a result of a pre-existing medical condition or someone they live with is shielding, they may have childcare issues if they return to work, they may have developed mental health issues or they may be concerned about their health and safety.

In the context of health and safety, sharing with all employees the Risk Assessments carried out to organise a safe return to work and inviting comments and suggestions will ensure employees feel invested and reassured that their health and safety remains at the forefront of your mind. The government has published sector specific guidance which, if implemented, will be indicative of good practice and the guidance notes are a good starting point for your risk assessments.

It is important to highlight that in these uncertain times, consulting with employees and seeking their

agreement, offering support and reassurance is likely to be key to a successful return to work.

Return to normal?

It will be important to communicate the return of previously furloughed employees to staff, clients and customers wherever appropriate. There may also need to be a period of adjustment for any employee who has recently returned to work in order to give them the necessary time to readjust. It may be appropriate during this transition period to allow flexibility, for example in relation to performance and targets.

Being unfurloughed may be a somewhat return to normal for many employees, however clearly things will not be as they were prior to the UK lockdown and both employers and employees will need to adapt to the new ways of working in the post-coronavirus world. Importantly, where possible, employers should do, not only what is necessary, but listen to their employees and take the appropriate steps to instil confidence. By demonstrating a willingness to implement safe working practices and listen to employees' concerns, be that in a health and safety context or in relation to the workplace in general, employees will gain the confidence needed in order to return to some form of normality and efficient working.

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SOLICITOR OF THE MONTH...

JONATHAN WATERS

What is your name and in which areas of the law do you work?

I'm Jonathan Waters, managing partner at Hay & Kilner Law Firm in Newcastle. My specialism is corporate and commercial law, but as managing partner, I am involved with all aspects of the comprehensive range of legal services we offer.

Did you always envisage a legal career?

It was always on the cards, especially after studying law at university, but I've harboured a dream of being a garden designer— hard to know if I'd have been good at it, but it would have been fun!

What has been your career path so far?

It's been a pretty straightforward one! I joined Hay & Kilner after completing my studies at the College of Law in York, qualified with the firm and gradually worked my way up through the ranks before becoming managing partner in 2016.

Who do you most respect in your industry?

I was lucky to work with a whole raft of very talented and dedicated senior practitioners when I joined Hay & Kilner, who not only helped me learn about the law, but also about the best ways of looking after clients and working with colleagues.

What have been the biggest challenges you have faced before this year?

When the financial crash hit in 2008, it had a huge impact on the corporate and commercial market, with many of the traditional funding streams that business had got used to accessing disappearing almost overnight. We had to be innovative in the ways we worked to help clients achieve their goals in what quickly became an entirely different environment.



Jonathan Waters

How have you been supporting your clients manage the pandemic's impact on their business operations?

We managed to migrate quickly from office to home working thanks to the robust IT systems we have in place, so operationally, it's been business as usual for us. Many of our clients have had some pretty urgent issues to deal with, especially around employment law and private client matters, but we've been able to both meet their needs and also look at new ways of addressing emerging needs and interpreting new regulations. We've been putting comprehensive information out on our website and via our social media feeds, while the free 15-minute phone consultations we've introduced for any legal matter have been well received.

What do you see as the key factors in the North East economy's recovery from covid-19?

The North East has always been a very resilient region and has dealt with a huge amount of change over recent decades. That in-built resilience is going

to be essential as we move forward into what's going to be a challenging new era, but by being flexible, adaptable and pragmatic, there's no reason why good ideas, creative people and innovative businesses won't still be able to succeed.

What contribution can the legal profession make to this recovery?

Much of the work done by the legal profession, whether for businesses or individuals, goes unseen and offering this sort of advice and guidance will remain crucial as we move forward. The North East has an extremely strong and entrepreneurial legal community which understands what businesses need to achieve their potential and how to make this happen.

What are your future career aspirations?

Continuing to enhance our role as a trusted advisor, introducing new service lines which meet changing client needs and making best use of our expert teams' collective insight will be central to Hay & Kilner's future development.

Established in 1946, Hay & Kilner is one of North East England's leading independent law firms and provides a full range of legal services to businesses and individuals from both within and outside the region – for further information, please contact Jonathan on 0191 232 8345 or visit www.hay-kilner.co.uk



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HOW CAN YOU CHASE DEBTS AT A TIME LIKE THIS?

Calling in outstanding B2B invoices can be troublesome at the best of times, but Beverley Oliver, debt recovery manager at Muckle LLP, shares her newly adapted approach.

Every organisation has been affected by coronavirus and getting paid has never been so important. There's also never been a more difficult time to collect outstanding invoices – so how do you collect your B2B debts at a time like this?

COVID-19 has hit business hard and its full impact has yet to be seen. Maintaining cashflow is key for all organisations in the fight to keep our heads above water, and that might mean having some difficult conversations along the way.

Developing a debt recovery strategy

While your cashflow is important, your business customers' cashflow is too, so the tone and the timing of collecting debts might be different for every outstanding invoice you have.

The more you know about their current position the better. How are they coping since the outbreak? What percentage of staff have they furloughed? What is their current credit status? How are they trading?

All these elements need to be considered before you can put a successful debt recovery strategy together, and that can take time, especially if the

means to run these checks aren't readily available.

You could instead park debt recovery for now, but it looks like the virus will be here for a while.

Alternatively you could try a simple blanket debt recovery approach, but how much revenue will that really return and how might it impact customers that are really struggling? Perhaps more importantly, how will that reflect on your company's reputation and commercial relationships?

No recovery, no fee, no hassle

It might be better, and certainly easier, to get some professional help. Our debt recovery team recovers 92% of B2B debts. We're also real people who understand business and have adapted our approach to collect debts in an ethical way at a difficult time for all organisations.

Best of all, we work on a 'no recovery, no fee' basis. If we recover payment for you, we charge just 5%. If we don't recover anything, we won't charge you a penny.

How will it work?

1. We'll help you decide if it's the right time to chase for payment, by checking your debtor's current credit and trading status.

2. We'll send out our branded letter which will acknowledge the current climate and ask for payment with five working days or, if you want to start the legal process, our letter before action asks for payment within 14 days.

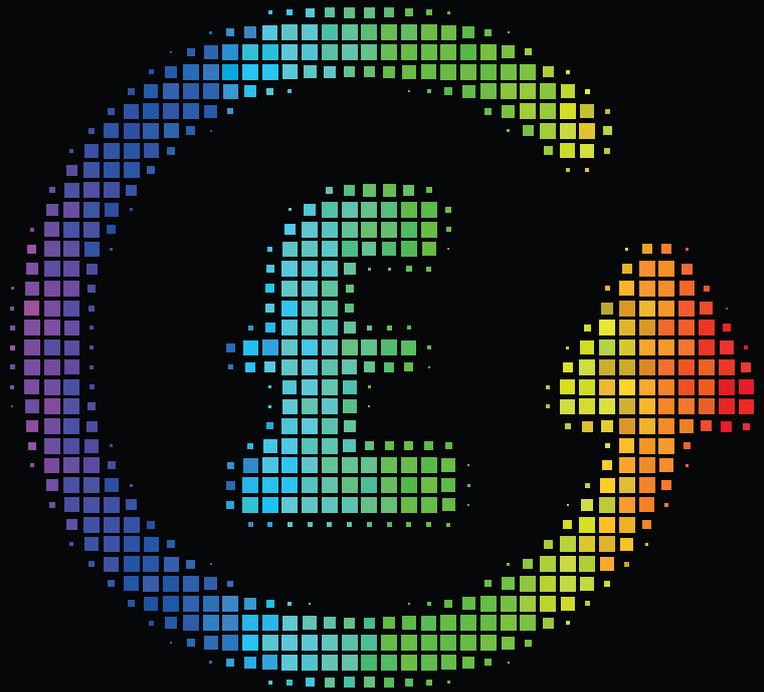
3. If we don't receive payment, we'll personally call your customer and together work out a repayment plan.

Why Muckle debt recovery?

- **It works** – our branded letters and personal touch get 86% of invoices paid immediately.
- **It's professional** - we always work within our brand values of trust, teamwork, responsibility and care.
- **It's easy** - we handle everything and can take all card payments for you.
- **It's quick** – thanks to our award winning, debt recovery technology.
- **It saves you time** – to focus on running your business.
- **It costs you nothing if we don't get payment** – with our no recovery, no fee approach.

Please call Beverley Oliver, debt recovery manager, on 0191 211 7953 to find out more or simply email beverley.oliver@muckle-llp.com with chasing invoices attached and we'll contact you to confirm next steps.

time to recover



Make things easier on your business and recover your B2B debts through our professional and effective debt recovery team.

No recovery. No fee. No hassle.

Call **0191 211 7777** email **advice@muckle-llp.com** to learn more

muckle^{LLP}
—————

OPTION AGREEMENTS

What is an Option Agreement?

An Option is a contract between a landowner and a potential developer where the developer has the opportunity (but not an obligation) to purchase the property from the landowner at an agreed price within a certain period of time.

An Option Agreement is a legally enforceable, binding document entered into between the parties and this is often used by developers to secure the property whilst they are exploring the planning potential of the land.

The purchase price for the property may be agreed between the parties at the outset of the Option. Alternatively, a mechanism for calculating the final price may be inserted into the document and this may be by reference to a formula (such as by reference to the market value of each plot developed on the land).

Protection for the developer

The Option Agreement blocks the landowner from selling the property to a third party during the Option period whilst the developer is exploring the viability of the project, thereby reducing the risk and potential cost to the developer. Once the developer has satisfied himself as to the feasibility of the proposed development, he can trigger the purchase of the property by 'exercising' the option. Once the Option has been exercised, it becomes an agreement to purchase making it obligatory for the landowner to sell and the developer to purchase on the terms set out in the Agreement.

On the other hand, if it turns out that the project is not suitable, then the developer can simply walk away and let the Option lapse without any penalties or legal repercussions.

Are there any advantages for the landowner?

An Option is an 'option' to purchase the land and not an 'obligation'. Therefore, by its very nature, it is designed to be more useful to the developer than the landowner. On entering into an Option Agreement, certain restrictions would be entered on the landowner's title to secure the Option in favour of the developer and the landowner will not be able to do sell or dispose the land to a third party for the period of time agreed in the option. The downside for the seller is that the developer may decide, well into the Option period, that the proposed development is not viable and pull out of the option. Therefore, there is no certainty for a landowner that the property will in fact be sold. However, if used correctly, the Option can also be a valuable tool which could allow a Seller to profit-share and maximise the return from the land without having to take on any of the risks and investment associated with a large-scale development.



Surbhi Vedhara

Are there other kinds of arrangements that may be more suitable?

Although an Option is one of the most common methods used to structure and secure a potential development, there may be other types of arrangements that may be more suited to give effect to the intentions of the parties, such as:

- **Conditional Contracts** – This is a contract for sale where completion is contingent upon the occurrence of a certain event (such as the grant of planning permission). This grants certainty to the landowners that if certain trigger events are met, then the developer will in fact proceed with the purchase. There may also be certain positive obligations inserted within the contract to use its best endeavours to achieve the trigger event within a certain period of time and penalties for non-compliance.
- **Promotion Agreements** – A Promotion Agreement may contain similar obligations (such as to pursue planning permission), but does not give the developer the right to buy the land. Instead, the developer would be entitled to a percentage of the sale proceeds as and when the land is sold.
- **Pre-emption Agreements** – This is also known as a 'right of first refusal' and can be secured by the developer against the land, should the landowner decide to sell in the future.

Every situation requires careful thought and professional advice to ensure that the documentation is suitable for the intended purpose. As with any other legal documents, it is extremely important that you obtain professional legal and protection advice to give effect to your specific requirements and to ensure that that you and your business are fully protected.

sweeney
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Sweeney Miller Law's Commercial Team headed by Surbhi Vedhara can assist with such matters. For a no obligation chat, contact our Newcastle office on 0345 900 5401 or email Newcastle@sweeneymiller.co.uk



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STUNNING INTERIORS REACH NEW HEIGHTS FOR ICONIC DEVELOPMENT

Set over 12 floors with exclusive views over the city of Newcastle, the £15million Regents Plaza development boasts stylish interior design.

Regents Plaza, Gosforth, Newcastle, is a 45,000sq ft development of 1, 2 and 3 bedroom apartments which is part of the extensive regeneration of a once exclusively commercial area.

Located just steps away from the Regent Centre Metro and close to the heart of Gosforth high street with its superb offering of entertainment, fine dining and café culture, Regents Plaza is the epitome of sophisticated living.

Four show apartments have now opened, featuring interiors by Karen Nairstone of Studio KIND. The talented interior designer was founder of the Northern Design Festival her flair is evident in these showhomes, which feature a wealth of artwork and objects by Northern designers adorning each apartment providing authenticity and a true sense of place.

The 70 individual apartments range in size from spacious one bedroom, luxurious two bedrooms-two bathrooms homes, or two and three bed duplex penthouses.

Beautifully finished and with stunning public areas, Regents Plaza Apartments are the desirable address of the moment. With such little residential development in Gosforth, these stylish apartments are already in high demand.

Each of the apartments in Regents Plaza has been designed to maximise space and style by award winning practice Xsite Architecture and built by The Morton Group's highly experienced construction team from sister company Kapex Construction.

A series of apartments featuring considered design for contemporary living. Each apartment has been thoughtfully laid out to incorporate cooking, entertaining, and relaxing, with large windows and in some, balconies allowing each to bathe in natural light.

Communal corridors feature bespoke bronze door numbers designed by Studio KIND, with oversized architraves and in laid door mats adding to the sense of arrival at each apartment.

Each apartment features Italian mat black contemporary door handles and oak effect flooring with floors nine and above featuring herringbone floors.

Contemporary streamlined handle-less kitchens come in a choice of three styles - white high gloss with Carara marble effect worktop and splashback; warm matt grey with black marble effect 12mm worktops and splashbacks and black undermount sink; and dramatic matt charcoal with bronze marble effect worktop and splashback, black undermount sink and feature brushed brass tap by Northern brand Dowsing and Reynolds.

Bathrooms and en-suites also come with a choice of three: cool geometric tiles with black round feature mirror and towel rail; concrete effect tiles giving an urban textured feel; and Carara marble style provides cool elegance and a sense of luxury. En-suites feature a dramatic black tiled shower and feature towel rail or feature brick tiles providing contrast and modern luxury.

Each of the themed show apartments is designed with a northern story in mind, and is reflected through the furniture, artwork and accessories.

Artwork hung at the show apartments feature seascape photography by Caroline Briggs and Jack Lowe as a nod to the proximity to the coast.

Likewise, a print of the Sage and the Tyne bridge by Anja Percival highlights the proximity to the city centre and its wealth of culture. Prints by Jo Bourne of Northern Print, Wonderstuff Studio, Dawn G, Dorothy and Ink and Drop add personality to the interior design, together with beautiful textiles by Laura Slater for Soho Home.

Feature furniture in the show apartments is provided by Galvin Brothers, ceramics by Kiln and accessories by Nick James - all adding to the tactility and the northern story of each apartment.

These show apartments are open for viewings from 10am to 5pm on Thursdays to Mondays.

Prices range from £195,000 to £199,000 for a 1-2 bedroom apartment on floors 0-10. The 2-3 bedroom duplex penthouses, situated on floors 11 and 12 and boasting outstanding views of the city start at £395,000.

To find out more, download a brochure, view floor plans or to reserve your apartment please visit:
regentsgatehomes.co.uk/developments/regents-plaza

You can arrange a visit to view the show homes by calling 0191 691 or via email info@regentsplaza.co.uk



A NEW KIND OF RELATIONSHIP

By Patrick Matheson and Ian Tew, partners at the Newcastle office of global property consultancy Knight Frank

Could all this working-from-home spark a healthier relationship between us and the office?

A survey by the Institute of Employment Studies (IES) has revealed that people working from home are drinking more alcohol, eating more unhealthy food and having trouble sleeping. More than half of those polled revealed a significant increase in new aches and pains in the neck, shoulder and back.

Half of those surveyed said they were working longer hours and were not happy with their life-work balance. One in three said they felt isolated. In a nutshell, working from home isn't all plain sailing. Many of us are pining for office life again, at least to some degree.

So, has the demise of the office been greatly exaggerated?

In an era of Zoom, video calling, team messaging and cloud document sharing, it was widely thought that colleagues didn't need to be in the same country, let alone county. No more overheads, no more commutes. Your dead time in the office becomes your productive domestic time at home.

But hang on. Home working has some drawbacks: no team building, no brain-storming get-togethers, no freedom, albeit temporary, from the pressures of home and family life. It is both intriguing and significant that the trend from those firms best able to run virtual offices in the United States has been to invest in exemplary state-of-the-art offices for their employees. This trend is now spreading to the UK.

It is tremendous that we are now prioritising the creation of wonderful offices, inspiring creativity,

collaboration and hard work, which - crucially - are key to attracting and retaining talent. Even the most passionate advocates of working from home can't pretend to be consistently inspired in isolation.

Managing remote teams is do-able, but company culture dwindles when technology consistently replaces face-to-face interaction. We are inherently social and we thrive on feeling connected to those we have relationships with, colleagues and clients alike.

Working from home does not allow for those "water-cooler" moments. The shared office ensures we don't miss out on micro-interactions with people. Tone of voice, facial expressions and importantly, context, can get lost in translation when working from home.

The boundaries between work and personal life are much harder to maintain when work ends in the same place personal life begins. Your remote workers are already juggling more, whether it's childcare or figuring out how to co-work with their spouses - and in the younger generations - spending a lot more time with flatmates.

Five-day home working is not for everyone and actually it's not for most - the need to collaborate and socialise are too strong a pull. However, the five-day office day work, sitting at a desk, being 'present' but not productive, is also not the answer. It is about agile working. The office is a tool to enable collaboration - but it sits alongside digital tools that can be very effective too. It is about picking the right tool for the right job and the right individual.

There needs to be more of a focus on output and not just time. Managers will need to adjust to managing their agile workforce through the office and through remote working effectively. You shouldn't need to see someone face-to-face to know and trust that they are working - output and results show you that. This current crisis will reveal how we can become more effective as well as more resilient. It will challenge behaviour.

What is clear is that the average office is neither a compelling place to work nor that productive. This is much more than adding some bean bags, slides or beer taps, it is about creating the right type of environment that fosters effective working - great offices and great environments will rise to the fore.

There are already a few trailblazers of the 21st century office in the north east and more to come. Once the lockdown eases, don't be surprised to see the myth of the joy of working from home well and truly shattered.

Patrick Matheson and Ian Tew are currently working with a wide range of office occupiers to support them in making a safe and effective return to the workplace. As well as all the environmental and behavioural changes that will be required, it is critical to build trust and confidence with your team to ensure that they feel safe to return. Communication will be key.

If you need strategic and/or practical support on providing safe office environments, get in touch patrick.matheson@knightfrank.com ian.tew@knightfrank.com



DACRE CROFT, KINGS AVENUE, MORPETH



PRICE GUIDE: OFFERS OVER £995,000

This substantial, detached period home is ideally located on sought after Kings Avenue in the heart of Morpeth. With an abundance of period charm and impressive south facing gardens, Dacre Croft boasts almost 3,700 sq ft of accommodation including four bedrooms, three en suites as well as a family bathroom, a generous reception hall, dual aspect lounge, dining room with window seat and a kitchen/dining/family area with Aga and French doors leading to the gardens. Externally, the property benefits from a delightful front garden with mature borders and a large driveway offering off street parking for multiple vehicles; the wonderful, south facing private gardens are laid mainly to lawn with well stocked borders and paved patio seating area. Dacre Croft is excellently placed to provide easy access to everything that this delightful market town has to offer including excellent transport links and a mainline railway station.



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

ABUNDANT SALES DESPITE COVID-19

The residential housing market, like all industries, has been dramatically affected by the arrival of the Coronavirus into the United Kingdom and like everyone else, we have had to follow government advice to stay at home, stay safe, and protect the NHS.

Even allowing for these conditions, and the massive reduction in buyers able to view properties, we have been delighted to sell all of the homes on this double page feature in the last 3-4 months. Some of these sales were transacted on a low profile basis when the exact matching of quality buyer was placed with the right home seller and we were delighted to see sales being agreed so promptly.

Six of these sales took place 'off the market' and increasing numbers of buyers registered with us discreetly are receiving very good advice as to where and when they should view. If it is practical to view a house, and safe to do so, then we can carry out viewings now, with the government's blessing and full PPE safety support. Those who have to move, want to move and clearly need to move, can be helped by us during these difficult times.

With so many good quality sales taking place, and many more in the pipeline for the near future, we have never had such a time when a good estate agent moves away from the others and distinguishes themselves by the quality of what they do and the high standards they set in matching the right people.

If you want the personal level of service found in a committed and experienced estate agent, please speak to me direct and I would be delighted to help you move as smoothly as possible, efficiently as possible and at the best price possible, sometime in 2020.

I look forward to hearing from you: duncan.young@sandersonyoung.co.uk

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SOLD STC

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CARLTON TERRACE JESMOND



SOLD STC

PRICE GUIDE: £800,000

BLOOMSBURY COURT GOSFORTH



SOLD STC

PRICE GUIDE: £650,000

RECTORY TERRACE GOSFORTH



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THE IMPACT OF THE CORONAVIRUS ON THE HOUSING MARKET

By Duncan Young

The very unwelcome arrival of the Coronavirus into the United Kingdom turned the housing market and many other industries upside down. With the lockdown announced on the 23rd March 2020, we instantly took action to ensure the health and safety of our colleagues, clients and those that are hoping to move home.

Through the initial stages of the lockdown we still achieved, by telephone and email, a number of successful negotiations which concluded the rewarding purchase of houses that people had previously viewed, and I was delighted to see these take place. In addition to that, there were a number of sales that we achieved on new instructions where people were happy to rely on a video link, virtual viewing, and in some cases a historic viewing of the house that had taken place over 6 months ago. In all of these cases we agreed sales and a number of those have now exchanged and completed.

There are many essential reasons for people having to move home, and not just to purchase but also to rent, and we are trying our very hardest to ensure that we make this transition for people as seamless and smooth as possible within the limitations of what we are allowed to do.

The whole world of buying and selling has changed and many of us now are living with the improved efficiencies of virtual viewings, video conferencing and facetime phone viewings, which are equally capable of allowing people to understand what your home may offer to a prospective buyer or tenant.

The quality of the viewings, and the way that we use our virtual support, is, of course, essential and I am delighted that Sanderson Young have so many professional services at our disposal including drone photography, mast photography, 360 degree tours and Matterport style walk throughs, which give a very good impression of all areas of a house.

All of my team are available via telephone and email and we are very happy to have Zoom or conference style meetings to ensure that we can help negotiate a possible move for you through this difficult time.

With the opening of the offices announced by the government we are slowly returning to some sort of normality, but we all know that the normality of the future will not be the same as that of the past.

The general confidence levels for everybody to protect themselves and protect the NHS is of course paramount.

I think it is essential when considering a possible home move that we continue to focus on the many features and benefits that a house has to offer, for sale or to let, and to ensure that we are maximising the viewing of those by good photographic work, and on the day that we can carry out a viewing in person, with the greatest of protection and health and safety in mind.

Due to the very high levels of demand we were experiencing for houses in the early part of 2020, our sales figures were nearly 30% up year on year.

While a number of prospective buyers are now reticent to be active within the housing market, we are still experiencing a greater demand than we have supply for a number of house styles and price ranges.

The suburban semi detached and family terrace remains very popular, with more buyers than sellers, and prices will then hold up very well for these properties. The family detached house on the outskirts of Newcastle, especially in Ponteland and Darras Hall, has equally become very popular and we are seeing good levels of interest in those house styles.

Our new homes stock continues to be of very high importance and viewing levels are very good. In Hexham we have a magnificent new development called Coach House, where there are six stone modern homes, from £449,000, providing excellent value for money for brand new properties.

We have many equally exciting new schemes launching in Newcastle, particularly Sycamore Square, the much awaited development by The Morton Group, on the former Sanderson Hospital set back from Salters Road in Gosforth, and in Eskdale Terrace in Jesmond, Pegasus Life have one of their most revolutionary schemes of luxury living for the '70 years of age plus' target market, which really will provide some of the best residential apartment living in Newcastle. This will launch in the late Summer.

There are a number of schemes throughout the region where people can buy brand new homes which are of course, by their own indication, completely free of previous occupants. The viewings on these properties are available regularly at Belsay, with CountyLife's amazing residential scheme of beautiful stone houses.

New schemes are commencing construction in Blaydon with a fabulous development of conversion and new build, which will be available in the latter part of 2020, providing ideal starter homes and young family houses.

The coastal market has seen tremendous interest and demand for houses from Amble up to Holy Island and Bamburgh. Our forecast for the future will be that the coastal market will become increasingly popular with more buyers looking to have 'staycations' in the UK and therefore increased demand for holiday homes.

We also see the country market generally becoming more popular with people looking for larger gardens, and 'work from home' spaces including pods, studios and offices, which have always been popular but I think demand will increase for that style of living.

The virus has had a huge impact on everybody's lives and living conditions, and now of course their working conditions, but we always remain positive and very keen to see a brighter way forward. We hope that as we fight this virus then we can continue to allow people to move home, whether they are buying or renting, and we are certainly available to help all our clients.

Stay safe, take care and we look forward to helping you move in the near future.

The whole team at Sanderson Young are looking forward to working with our clients and if we can help in any way, please do not hesitate to contact us via email contact@sandersonyoung.co.uk or ring 0191 2130033.





Damiano Rea, Director, Heaton Property

SUNSHINE AND FINE MEAT

The past few months have been about trying to find little rays of sunshine amid the doom and chaos. Captain (now Sir) Tom Moore raising £32m by walking his garden. More time with the family. My brother Zeno and his astonishing artisan bread making skills. The fact that I am of Italian heritage.

Yes, I have been known to bore people silly about the wonders of Italian descent. Producers of the world's finest food. Inventors of the Ferrari. Effortlessly stylish. Unless you ask my wife. To this list I can now add saving our landlords and tenants more heartache during lockdown.

Italy was the first European epicentre of Covid-19 and while the news reports were dreadful, they did not convey the full horror of what was happening in Northern Italy. Conversations with family and friends did. I realised very early on that this nightmare was heading our way and took action accordingly.

Our small team immediately started upgrading our tenancies to include a rent guarantee. This task involved many hundreds of properties and it saw us working long into the night. Within days of completing the final transaction the products began to be withdrawn as underwriters realised what was coming. Information from my extended

family in Northern Italy had allowed our team to take swift action, protecting both tenants and landlords well into next year.

Then, far from resting on their laurels, our team quickly adapted to working from home, calling both tenants and landlords with advice and reassurance while developing 'virtual viewings' enabling us to provide much needed homes for our tenants.

Hopefully now we are looking to the end of this nightmare, so what does the future hold? Again, some sunshine amid the gloom. As a small, reactive agency we have fared far better than the big corporate outfits, many of whom simply furloughed all their staff and took the phone off the hook. Some even took down their online property listings leaving landlords and tenants anxious and in the dark.

Some of the innovations forced upon us by lockdown are set to become permanent features

of our offering. For example, we have invested in a 360-degree camera which allows us to create high definition 'virtual viewings'.

My final ray of sunshine comes back to my Italian heritage. Fine food and beer. We have new neighbours who have been quietly working away on their new shop. The Block and Bottle is a free-range butcher, charcuterie and craft beer shop that has made a big impact since launching in 2017. One year in and they won runner-up in the Observer Food Monthly awards against stiff competition from firms with decades of experience.

Block and Bottle represent everything that makes Heaton such a great place to live and work. Passion, commitment and service to our community. Between them and my brother's artisan bread I intend to emerge from this dreadful time a contented fat man. Because to quote the writer Walt Whitman, "I find no sweeter fat than sticks to my own bones."

Heaton Property was setup in 2005 and specialises in providing rental property for professionals in Newcastle upon Tyne and the surrounding areas.

In June 2014 the company won gold in the Times/Sunday Times Letting Agency of the Year Awards.

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Neil Turner

TIME TO KEEP CALM AND BUILD FOR THE FUTURE

A lot has happened in a single month. I had intended to write about the confidence of the North East and the talent available in the region within the construction sector – and I still intend to.

Just like the stock markets; it's easy to say now it's not the time to invest as the markets have dipped and panicked, yet the savvy investor is now looking at the bargains and the good value to be had. That wise investor will purchase now in the hope of securing profits down the line when the markets inevitably recover as the world gets going again.

These may seem strange words from an architect, but like everyone else, I am affected by the impact of CV19 and the monumental effect it is having on our business and personal lives.

I have likened the economic state to the equivalent of putting petrol in a diesel car and the immediate impact that has on the engine. Careful repair and it can all be made good again. I have lived through recessions before (and recoveries) and this is so different but there are significant parallels to be drawn. Here are my tips:

Talk to people - So I am talking to my clients and sympathising with their issues but also looking for

the opportunities that can come. We have several clients who are pressing on with projects as they recognise that the initial requirement for the new building or refurbishment hasn't changed, indeed for some its need is even greater.

Business as normal - Local authority planners are emphasising that applications are still welcome and have applied some common sense to issues of specific surveys and timelines on decision to help applicants, which all keeps the world moving along.

Hold your nerve - I would encourage all clients to hold their nerve and indeed, if they can, to proceed. Not only does this aid the overall economy in keeping people working, but also puts them in a terrific position to be able to take advantage of the building markets when work resumes. When this all ends (and it will), those clients with projects ready to go to site will be well placed to speak to contractors who will be keen for serious clients to engage with. Contractors will also appreciate these clients more, which inevitably leads to better results.

Good Contractors - We have some tremendous building contractors in the region - small and large -and they have had to make difficult decisions on halting works on sites. Some have managed to keep going and they have had to keep within social distancing rules, deal with supply chain concerns from sub-contractors and find ways to obtain materials.

These are unique and difficult decisions to juggle and speaking with directors of these firms, have not been undertaken lightly.

I have a few sites where progress starts can be made, but the issues are getting materials ordered and delivered. The work force also needs the confidence to know it's safe.

I hope that within a few weeks a new kind of 'normal' can resume, maybe limited at first but one which allows our contractors to get back to doing what they do best – driving and building the region's economy forward with skill, care and hard work.



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WEEK 2 WEEK

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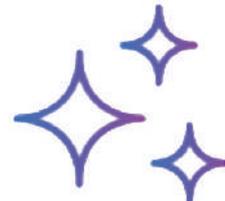
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TEAM DEDICATION

Suzanne Blair, associate director at GT3 Architects in Newcastle, is heading up a team dedicated to the education sector.

Suzanne joined the company three years ago and is one of four associate directors. She heads up a studio team of architects, technologists and graduates and has recently taken on the role of education lead to help the practice's expansion in the education sector.

"GT3 is known for its outstanding work in leisure, workplace and property and we now have our sights set on showcasing our abilities in the education sector. My extensive experience in this area, having worked in both primary and secondary through into further education, coupled with GT3's well-established design methodology, based around engagement and strategic briefing with key stakeholders and users, means I am well-equipped to lead my team and leave a stamp on the sector.

"My experience spans from the days of Building Schools for the Future (BSF) with Denton Community College, Manchester, through the academies framework with North Shore Academy, Stockton and onto the Priority Schools Building Programme (PSPB) with Midlands Private Finance Initiative (PFI) and includes more bespoke one-off projects, such as Thomas Deacon Junior Academy in Peterborough.

"I'm not alone, we also have Paul Reed, associate director and Simon Robertson and Jonny Flavin both senior architects, who, between them, have worked on projects including Sunderland Beacon of Light, Redcar and Cleveland 14-19 Centres and Newcastle Futures UTC. On the technical side, we have Neil Hardy, associate, who has decades of experience in the technical delivery of education projects including Ercall Wood Technology College, Telford and projects for Newcastle University.

"Our expansive leisure and community experience equips us well as we venture in this new direction as we are seeing more and stronger links between education, leisure and community offerings. In the leisure world we have worked with both private and local authority clients all over the UK and we worked extremely closely with each of them to deliver a people-focused result. It starts with tailored engagement to understand the unique vision for the project - the 'why are we here'. This



Suzanne Blair

gives us a solid foundation on which to develop a detailed brief and, ultimately, the design response. The same approach fits seamlessly into educational design where there are multiple stakeholders and users with very different needs and ideas.

"GT3's approach is 'People Architecture', a concept that positions people, not buildings, at the heart of our projects. A huge asset to the team is environmental psychologist, Carys Thomas-Osborne, who is an expert at observing spaces and understanding how their design can affect how people behave. She is integrated into our project teams to ensure this knowledge and understanding is used to inform the design from an early stage. Wellbeing is fundamental to education, as not everyone learns in the same way and therefore people react in varying ways to building design and layout. For example, the scale of spaces, how open or enclosed they feel, lighting and even colour all influence our reactions, mood and behaviour. This all needs to be taken into consideration as it ultimately has an impact on how individuals learn.

By working closely with our clients, we will help them to deliver an exceptional education to their students.

"What makes us different is that we appreciate that a building is only as good as the space it creates to inspire the people inside of it. We have developed Performance+, a strategic briefing and engagement service that enables clients to understand, articulate and optimise the relationship between their people, processes and property, in this case their staff and students, operations and the buildings themselves. With an emphasis on listening, learning, leading and sharing, Performance+ helps to deliver sustainable value through a transformation in the way students learn and how space can be used. This allows us to deliver a space that motivates and stimulates the teachers and students by focusing on engagement and understanding that they are the experts in teaching and learning and our role is to interpret their requirements."

h2o OWNER LAUNCHES NEW COMPANY

A new online business that specialises in exceptional heating products has been launched this week, giving a proud nod to the North East.

The Radiator Shed is the latest business for Martin Kelly, who is known in the industry and region for his Gateshead and Whitley Bay based bathroom design, supply and retail company, h2o bathrooms.

The new company has been launched as a gap in the market was spotted for quality, stylish heating products at reasonable prices, offering value for money.

To ensure The Radiator Shed, which sells nationally to both trade and residential customers, maintains its roots in the North East, many of the products are named after towns, places and landmarks special to the region.

Radiators and towel rails are found in ranges named Jesmond, Whickham, Durham, Eldon, Castle, Lumley, Ponte, Alnwick, Darras, Hadrian, Rothbury and Bensham – all of which are already available on the website www.theradiatorshed.co.uk

Martin, who is excited about the timing of the launch which will make life easier for plumbing and heating technicians, said: "The Radiator Shed has been in planning and development for a while. We have accelerated its launch, as now the government has said the tradesmen can go back to work and social observe distance, we offer them a solution.

"Tradesmen no longer want to stand at trade counters in merchants, so they can order all their heating products from radiators, towel rails, trench heaters, valves and other accessories on our website. We will deliver them to the address of their work, minimise any contact with people.

"Lots of people have also decided to spend their time and disposable income on their houses, as our social lives are on hold. Again with the same seamless service we can deliver our high end, attractive products quickly and safely. There's a beautiful range online that will transform every room in the house."



Martin Kelly

More information and the online shop can be found at www.theradiatorshed.co.uk. Tradesmen can contact the company to arrange their online discount.

THE REAL LIVING WAGE AND EOTHEN HOMES

Why do we pay the living wage?



The real living wage is set by an independent organisation which bases its hourly rate on the actual cost of living – in the North East this is currently £9.30 per hour.

As a registered charity, committing to the real living wage was a significant business decision but one we were keen to make so we could invest in our staff and give them the financial reward they deserve.

Care workers are often portrayed as low skilled, which determines the pay across the sector. We can't change this as it is set by the government. But we can ensure we show how much we value our staff's skills and commitment by paying them this real living wage.

Due to an ageing population, residents come to us later in life or stay with us for longer, and their health often deteriorates physically and mentally. This means our staff have to be fully trained and competent to deal with individual needs right through to end of life, and this brings with it a series of physical and emotional challenges.

Our amazing staff tackle these challenges head-on, and show an incredible amount of passion for their job. They care for our residents like they were their own family. Their work deserves to be rewarded with a decent rate of pay.

Being a real living wage employer has given us a platform to stand out in the health & social care sector, and has helped us to attract and retain a wonderful workforce, making Eothen Homes an employer of choice.

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What his clients say...

“

A great asset to any business.
Surinder Chawla, Commercial Property Landlord

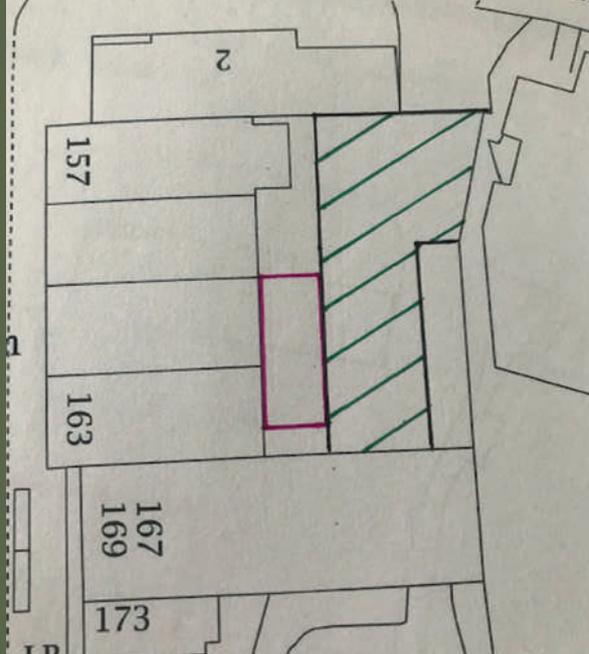
One of the North East's colourful characters.
John Harvey, Protector Group

He understands our business from an operators viewpoint and that sets him apart.
Barry Ladhar, Ladhar Group

Very knowledgeable and extremely helpful.
Kirk Spencer, Ye Olde Fleece

A very knowledgeable guy who may talk too much but is worth it!
Sonny Gill

”





CELEBRATING 40 YEARS IN THE WORLD OF COMMERCIAL PROPERTY

PHILIP M. BOWE

Principal, BIV Bowes

Did you always envisage a career in the commercial property sector?

I didn't, but there is a thread going back to a little boy who wanted to be a car designer, then an architect (there was a fuel crisis in the mid 70s and people thought cars were finished), then a friend talked to me about surveying. My very first job was measuring commercial sandpits! I worked in industrial property after that, then sold houses, got trained as an auctioneer, and back into commercial property in 1986. I almost 'fell' into leisure property in 1989 and have made it a specialty ever since. I have of course also dabbled in pub and restaurant operation (as well as dry cleaning, builders merchants' and buses) myself, which I think has given me a unique insight into my clients' thought processes and needs.

What is your favourite aspect of the job?

I meet a whole variety of people, and I'm very much a people person. Sometimes I'm dealing with very intelligent and clever professional people as clients and as their fellow professional advisers, sometimes I'm dealing with publicans and restaurant owners who want to unload their problems - and the same with other business people. Sometimes I'm having to fend off a nosey drunk in a pub who wants to know what the bloke in the suit is doing.

What is the most challenging aspect of your job?

Dealing with said drunk? No, seriously, it's a toss up - some cases, especially in licensed property appraisal (for rents and rates) can be quite complex; equally sometimes it's trying to convince a client that they aren't going to get what they want. Contrary to what some think, I don't have a magic wand.

What has been your most memorable career moment?

There's been a few! I was headhunted in 1989 for a job that more than doubled my salary package.

Losing that job (when my employer company went into receivership) in 1991 was quite memorable - I couldn't get another job; there weren't many and I was told by three people that I was over qualified, which is why I started my own firm in August that year. In 2000 I developed epilepsy and got banned from driving. Whereas by then I had other surveyors working for me, it was still debilitating. I got a driver, and we made serious money because as he drove I could work.

How do you measure success?

Having the ability to turn a negative into a positive - see above for what I've done - and looking for personal growth that gives a good work/life balance.

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

Scary amount of things! When I started, it was the start of the Thatcherite economics. Development Land Tax was still being charged, stifling growth. Houses paid the equivalent of Council Tax on Rateable Values assessed in 1973 (before a boom), and commercial rates were based on the same year. There was a lot more social interaction and more deals were done in pubs than in offices (some of us still do a lot of our work in pubs and coffee shops!). Of course, there wasn't the IT there is now and one of the skills of a young trainee surveyor was drawing scale plans without the benefit of CAD, and we went from Telex to Fax to Email for urgent communication, to the present day email for almost everything!

How has your skillset developed accordingly?

I've had to become a lot more IT savvy (though my younger staff and clients may laugh at the thought I once knew even less than now). Keeping up to date with ever faster changes in the legal framework has impacted on me as well as most professions and trades I think.

Are you a risk taker by nature or more conservative?

I tend to be conservative, though I suppose setting up my own business at the time I did was a pretty big risk.

To what would you attribute your success?

Honesty! I have been told that I can be blunt but one of my clients told me "You tell us what we need to hear, not what we want to hear". I also respect people, not just the financially successful, but everyone who is contributing to society, including of course all the NHS workers at this time, but also the postmen, the roadsweepers and people who are doing jobs "we" wouldn't do.

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

I talk a lot! And I'm not sure if I do manage that... but hopefully a lot of what I say is useful or valuable to someone.

How do you remain motivated?

I like a mix of some work that I find easy but punctuating this with "the clever stuff" - getting involved with the nitty gritty of my clients' businesses keeps me interested and motivated. And when people say nice things like they kindly have done here.

Would you prefer to be liked or respected?

I like to be liked but I think it's more important to be respected. I hope most people respect me as I do them.

I'll retire when...

We do another Q&A for my fifty years? Seriously, I don't know. I can fill in plenty of spare time (I'm church warden at St. Hildas Jesmond and President of Ponteland Lions Club) but I need activity to keep my mind going and neither of those roles are that onerous.



Joel Dickinson

SHOP WITH CONFIDENCE AT KARPET MILLS

The coronavirus crisis has had an enormous impact on retail businesses, but Karpet Mills is thrilled to announce that they are fully back open for business and there to help anyone who requires carpets and flooring.

How have you adapted your business during the coronavirus crisis?

It goes without saying that the entire world has (almost without exception) had to adjust to the impact that COVID-19. However, our company has been established for over 140 years and although this is the biggest crisis we have had to face in our families living memory previous generations in our company have overcome enormous obstacles including two world wars. It is in our DNA as a company to be resilient and are able to adapt even the most difficult of challenges. We have made significant and broad changes to ensure that all of our staff and premises are 'COVID SECURE' with measures including sanitiser stations, perspex screens, staff PPE, maximum customer numbers in store and social distancing markers. Our customers can shop with total confidence and know that we are fully geared up to maintain the safety of our customers and staff which is absolutely paramount to Karpet Mills.

With holidays and travel greatly restricted do you think people are looking to invest more into their homes?

The early signs and feedback we have been receiving are very positive indeed. There is certainly some pent up demand across the market that has built up during the restrictions of lockdown. People seem to have been focusing their energy (and money!) towards improving their homes and finishing DIY projects that have been put off up until now. From a standing start, we have been shocked at the level of enquiries we have received since re-opening.

Have peoples buying habits changed?

I think that there is definitely a new natural cautious approach to shopping but essentially, the northern grit and determination is still evident. Shoppers are acting appropriately given the circumstances but don't appear to be letting the new measures prevent them from placing orders. We are able to offer 'no-contact' estimating and fitting services as well as offering in-home consultations to avoid customers from having to visit stores if they don't want to. We are here to help and have

managed to adapt our procedures to maintain safety whilst still offering our customers the top level of service and choice.

Do you have any new product lines available?

We have worked tirelessly during the lockdown period to re-negotiate with our key suppliers in order to be able to launch several new product lines as well as reducing the pricing of the existing products across all stores. We have all of the key names in carpets, vinyl, LVT, laminate and solid wood. We have absolutely unbeatable pricing on all of our products and are proud to be the biggest supplier of quality carpets in the North East.

What are you currently working on?

Our main focus at the moment is to uphold all of the safety measures we have in place and bring the business back up to full pace again. I want to ensure that we are totally back up to speed with all of our systems and whilst fully maintaining the safety of our customers and staff. This year has always been about ensuring that we fine-tune the systems we have spent the last few years building; as the 6th generation we have learned that it is vital to refine the model and avoid growing too quickly.

What is your company's USP?

We sell quality products at the guaranteed lowest prices backed up by world class service. It sounds simple to describe but we work very hard to ensure that we have the right products for each specific job; at the right price. In the flooring trade it is all too easy to make a quick buck on the wrong product. We really focus on recommending the correct product for a specific project and satisfy the customers' needs. This tends to ensure the customer is happy in the long term, something that has helped build our solid reputation since 1878.

What's next for you and your team?

We have had a busy few years with the launch of our Hexham branch (2018), Benton branch (2019) and Designer Flooring department at Kingston Park (2020). We have also finished our purpose built head office relocation and grown our commercial and contract divisions. Next year we aim to add more breadth to our contract division and hopefully see a return of the normal business levels of our retail core.



HUGH MACKAY
carpets

HUGH MACKAY
carpets

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IT'S AS EASY AS 1, 2, 3

Creative Floorcoverings & Rugs by
CRUCIAL TRADING

Creative Floorcoverings & Rugs by
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Reaching out to support a local charity

We don't want to make a big song and dance about our 20th anniversary during a national crisis.



We'd like to mark the milestone by doing something meaningful for the community in which we work. If you're an independent, North East based charity struggling during this coronavirus crisis, we'd be keen to hear from you.

We want to provide up to **3 months FREE PR support** to a great local cause - ideally one that supports vulnerable people or animal welfare.

Please make a submission to me, explaining in no more than 200 words your problem and how we might be able to help. **Email: wayne@mhwpr.co.uk**

We will select the cause we feel we can add most value to.

M:07809 565 397
mhwpr.co.uk



“WHAT IS THE POINT OF MARKETING DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS?”

It's a fair question – most businesses are, at time of writing, on their knees struggling to survive with furloughed staff – the phrase comes from the Dutch 'verlof' or leave of absence, and was used in the military to describe personnel on leave – cancelled orders and cash flow problems. The economy is shattered and the Government has just added fuel to the fire by refusing to remove the uncertainty of an impending Brexit.

On the plus side, it isn't going to last for ever, better times will come and those companies that have exhibited humanity and shown themselves to be robust and resilient enough to work through the crisis, will be the ones that regain and even increase market share in their particular sector when some kind of normality returns.

But, and I never forget this, I'm a marketer – I've no special medical knowledge apart from Basic First Aid, I'm not an expert epidemiologist, sociologist or economist and in truth, over the past month, like many other people, I've felt fairly worthless in comparison to not only the fantastic medical staff in hospitals and care homes, but also the unsung heroes of the retail, logistics, charity, utility, sanitation and the many other sectors that keep our society running. But, what myself and colleagues can do is help organisations to not only recover but also to prosper during the period that will follow the lockdown.

So, there is indeed a point to marketing during the

crisis and it doesn't have to cost much more than time (and most of us have plenty of that...) if cash is limited – if there are resources for marketing collateral such as advertising, so much the better but the lack of them shouldn't stop organisations from doing something.

The first priority, I would suggest, is communicating to your own staff who will be looking for leadership and humanity at this difficult time. Showing empathy and honesty with their concerns will reap long term dividends in loyalty and productivity, so don't just limit it to an initial letter informing them of the furlough process, keep in touch, give advice and help when you can, let them know your plans and hopes for the future and make them feel part of those plans. Ask their opinions and begin a regular dialogue that you just may not have had time for before.

The same principle of communicating applies to your existing clients and customers – let them know you're still there even if you can't actually produce the goods or services you used to. Look at what you can do remotely and digitally for them – there's companies who are now showing brilliant innovation with remote working, virtual trade shows, on-line physical workouts, markets and charity challenges, home delivery of all sorts of consumer goods and reorganising essential work places to enable staff to socially distance themselves from colleagues – are there any lessons

to be learnt that can be applied to your own organisation?

Use social media to communicate your message to your existing and potential clients. Used effectively it can be an incredibly powerful medium to get your message over and establish your brand. Use PR to get out positive stories whether these be about your own organisation and staff or about your plans for the future. Think about how you can help others – the NHS, Social Care and Charity sectors need all the help they can get so is there anything you can supply them ranging from food and drink, delivery services to the all important PPE – give a little to gain a lot.

One of the very few upsides to the crisis is that you now have time to step out of the trenches and see the battle as a whole, looking at your business objectively and reflecting on those issues which may have troubled you for years but you never had time to address? It could be branding, R&D or reorganisation – you have the time now so use it productively if possible.

Finally, as Lance Corporal Jones so famously put it, "Don't Panic", you're in this for the long term so use data and competitor analysis to formulate your plans, think about the long term in addition to short term strategies to survive the current crisis, and remember, everything can be replaced or rebuilt apart from people, so stay safe and look after as many as you can.

Do you need some assistance with your marketing, PR or design? Do you need to review your strategy or do you want to know how we can help your business? Talk to us. Email your questions anonymously to us today hello@silverbulletmarketing.co.uk or Tweet us (not so anonymously) @SilverBulletPR.

FUSION SUPPORT FOR NIGHTINGALE NORTH EAST

In April Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust appointed Fusion PR Creative to provide extensive strategic communications and creative design expertise to support the construction and opening of the new Nightingale Hospital North East.

The brief included all aspects of PR including media relations, employee engagement and stakeholder communications as well as integrated creative design, social media graphics, print materials and branding.

Working in close partnership with associates including Brian Aitken, Simon Williams and Sparq, Fusion also project-managed the opening ceremony conducted by HRH The Countess of Wessex including live digital streaming to national broadcasters and social media channels, media management and the creation of rich video content to deliver the remarkable story of the NHS Nightingale Hospital North East from construction to completion.

Trust assistant chief executive Caroline Docking said: "Fusion has given us so much help over the past few weeks from a communications perspective and on handling challenging media narratives. The team helped us define and deliver our key messages to the public, staff and other stakeholders along with creative and design work too. We're incredibly grateful for all of their help throughout the planning, building and launch of the Nightingale Hospital North East."

John McCabe, managing director of Fusion PR



L-R: Trust Assistant Chief Executive, Caroline Docking, Fusion PR's John McCabe and Brian Aitken.

Creative, added: "We were honoured to assist in the development and launch of the Nightingale. The way in which the North East came together to work on this huge project in such a short space of time

was truly inspiring. We've really enjoyed working with Caroline and the team at The Newcastle upon Tyne NHS Trust Foundation and we're all looking forward to our future work together."

To find out more about Fusion PR, The Nightingale North East project and other client case studies visit: www.fusionprcreative.com

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Pretty much the story now, thanks to Covid.

You're probably sick and tired of what's going on
and figuring out what will happen.

Your sales curve is not going anywhere but down
and honestly you're not cuckoo if you want to feed it Viagra!

Getting back the momentum you lost is going to be a task.
But if your brand advertising has an idea powering it forward,
you'll make it.

Else, you'll get lost in the chaos.

You decide.



WE'RE NOT MIRACLE WORKERS.
WE'RE ADMEN WHO BELIEVE IN THE
POWER OF AN IDEA AND FRESH THINKING.
WE'RE WILLING TO TAKE ON THE CHALLENGE
OF GETTING YOU BACK ON TRACK.
DROP US A LINE.
COWELLGEORGE.CO.UK

(AND WE SUGGEST YOU KEEP THAT PILL MEANT
FOR THE SALES CURVE SAVED FOR A RAINY DAY.)



BRAVE CLIENTS, WELCOME.

Media Matters

In a new series of features Northern Insight talks to leading figures in the region's media industry. This month we meet **Antonia Brindle**, Founder of PR, social media, marketing and crisis management agency, Get Brindled.

Did you always envisage a career in the Media industry?

When I was younger, I did the usual little girl thing, swinging from wanting to be a vet to a hairdresser to a police woman. As I moved through school, I realised I had a love for writing. A family influence swayed me away from journalism and throughout university I enjoyed a number of work placements at agencies. At the time I worked for a building society, and sat in the department next to the marketing team. Watching them work gave me my interest in PR which developed into my current offering of PR, social media, digital marketing, websites, creative design, marketing and crisis management. I do still wonder if I would have been a good police woman though!

What has been your career path so far?

I started my career repossessing houses whilst I studied. Lots of fun changing in the car in the Uni car park from my work clothes to my jeans! I then followed a path through a number of local agencies and in house positions including PR manager for Whitbread. 15 years ago I set up my own successful agency with a business partner, and five years ago I became a consultant when I set up Get Brindled. This is still going very strong, and I feel blessed to have a fantastic portfolio.

I have recently also branched out into co-owning City Ladies, which is a women's networking and support organisation. I set this up with two other amazing women, Natalie Turner and Sophie Milliken.

I am also the Vice-Chair of the Board and head of the charitable sub committee for Age UK Northumberland.

What have been the biggest challenges you have faced so far?

Being self-employed (or a director of a owner managed SME) is hard as your annual salary is essentially what you invoice less costs to run the business, so it is a great challenge to make sure you work with people that value you, your service and respect payment agreements. It's important to build reserves in the business and luckily I am quite focused in that way!

Another challenge is that the industry has moved on massively in my 27 year career and I have had to make sure I undertake lots of development and learn digital skills such as building and populating websites, blogs and social media. I actually really love it!

Working alone can be a challenge too, but I have a great group of business friends, that we call the BB's, and their love and support get me through many barriers.

Who do you most respect in your industry ?

I respect every single peer in the same industry who are doing what I do and doing it well.

Juggling the work that we do, the changing landscape, client expectations and being driven by ROI means that we have to work incredibly hard to thrive. There's some awesome small agencies and freelance consultants out there at the moment, and I'd like to give them some kudos for that.

I also respect my client base who are weathering the covid-19 storm – I am so lucky that I get to work with some really outstanding business people, who are also fabulous people.

Which fictional media character can you most relate to?

I have no idea. Media characters in the movies and films generally don't come out of it very well. Edina from Ab Fab, Jerry McGuire, Samantha from Sex in the City...I'm much more grounded, family orientated and although I love to celebrate with a glass of fizz, I certainly couldn't sustain any of their lifestyles!

How have you adapted your business during the coronavirus crisis and supported clients?

This whole experience has very much been a two way street with my clients.

I have a great portfolio of driven, dynamic clients who have seen the bigger picture and really value their marketing to sustain their own business future. 95% of my



Antonia Brindle

client base has been determined to carry on, look to the future and they have been very reassuring that I am very much on that journey as part of their team.

We have worked closely together to look for the right positioning, opportunities, and of course increased activity to drive their digital and social media presence and offerings.

A number of new clients have joined my portfolio in the last month too, focussed on launching new companies that are much needed in the current environment. It's great to feel the resilience of the SME market in the North East and work with these exciting entrepreneurs!

City Ladies had to stop all face to face meetings after our February meetings, of course, but we decided very early to take it online and for nine weeks in a row we held a zoom with a guest speaker. Again, it is heartening to see women working through everything and being resilient – we have members from all across the UK and I'm so proud of every one of them.

What is your greatest strength?

Loving what I do and being dedicated. My passion comes through to my clients and they know that I care about their results, their businesses and what I do for them.

It's not just a job to me. Luckily my family, my fiancé and my daughter are so supportive, it allows me to focus and deliver to my clients.

What is your biggest weakness?

Saying yes. And caring too much. It means I allow things to hurt, and it makes it hard to switch off.

What has been your proudest achievement ?

Being a mum. Whatever I achieve in business is all to provide for and to set an example to my daughter - I want her to believe that she can do and be anything.

What are your remaining career aspirations?

I tend to base my career aspirations on what my clients want to achieve. If I do my job well as part of their team that achieves what they are aiming for, then it's rewarding.

For my own portfolio, I would like to expand my Non Exec Director clients within companies needing guidance on growth and next steps, as I do love that strategic part of my working day.

How do you see your industry evolving in the next 10 years?

If I look back 10 years, the progress in marketing, digital capacity and publications has drastically changed. I see more of the same, meaning we have to stay on our toes, learn more, and adapt to even more advanced digital options.

Conversely, I also see the glossy magazine growing in popularity again and being very much in vogue – so many people say they miss the feel of a high end magazine in their hands.

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MARKETING THROUGH COVID-19: NAVIGATING THE NEW WORLD

As the impact of the global pandemic continues to unfold, Lisa Eaton Managing Director of integrated communications agency Unwritten Group, explains why maintaining marketing efforts can help businesses navigate this difficult time.

The impact of Covid-19 has prompted business leaders everywhere to re-evaluate their business strategies and to adapt. Many businesses have been forced to cut their marketing budget, in order to focus on protecting jobs and other essentials, but there are many positives to maintaining marketing activity during the pandemic.

Staying connected

Balancing financial decisions with the need to stay connected with your consumers, ensuring they're informed and adding real value is tough. Entrepreneurs and business leaders are being forced to think smarter than ever before and to act quickly. If your business has invested in strategic marketing in order to gain traction with audiences and build meaningful relationships, keep communicating with your audience on a scale that is suitable for your team and resources.

Whilst the tone of marketing campaigns should be reviewed and adapted to be sensitive to current events, there are huge opportunities lying within this time to transform your business, re-positioning your product or service and find creative ways to engage with your audience.

Learning from the data

Relevant data and accurate insights have never been more important in making key decision and reacting to these changes in a way that helps survival and growth. Focus on the behaviours that you know are changing and will therefore have an impact on your business and decide how to act on these.



Lisa Eaton

Using insights from your marketing data will allow your business to analyse trends and consumer behaviours to support reactive decision making.

A new direction

The current climate is making business leaders everywhere consider, 'what type of business do we want to be, what can we do to help, does our purpose come through and are we living by our values?'. These questions might prompt you to rethink how you communicate with audiences.

History has shown that as a result of crises, within some industries, consumer behaviour will eventually bounce back to normal, however, others will be changed forever. Consumers are changing buying habits, routines and behaviours. We're all trying new products, services and brands.

Every organisation has the ability to contribute and make a positive change. Elevate your brand by talking about the good you're doing right now, but be true to your values, and remain authentic. Challenges and obstacles present an opportunity to

demonstrate how dedicated your company is to its values. Tough times are the most difficult to face with positivity and perseverance, but these are the qualities that are needed in leadership now more than ever.

Although these times are certainly challenging, they're also a catalyst for hope, creativity and innovation. There is excitement around the possibilities of ways to diversify, establish new revenue streams, move businesses on-line, expand audiences and build new areas of your business to emerge stronger than before.

However your business adapts during this time - be it growth, innovation or simply survival - be proud of it. We're living in unprecedented times and facing the biggest business challenge we've ever likely to experience. Staying afloat through this crisis will be lasting legacy. We're part of an incredible community within the North East, and I'm confident that the businesses that have always thrived here will continue to do so.

For more information about Unwritten Group and their services, head to unwrittengroup.com

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Are you ready for Business as *unusual*?

'You can guide your business out of COVID19 with the support of quality social media and digital marketing, ensuring you are prepared to fight for your previous customers, maximise new opportunities and pivoting where necessary.'

- Life is going to be different for a while, those business who adapt and enhance their product, service and marketing will enjoy the most success.
- March, April and May were unprecedented and tough. June is likely to be no different, but it will be the time to start looking at ramping up activity as lockdown eases and businesses attempt to get ahead of the competition.
- It needs to be accepted that business will not go back to 'normal', there will be a New Normal - Business as *unusual*.
- Traditional revenue streams will potentially be hard fought for. Customers will expect new and adjusted services and standards. This will create opportunity for new revenue streams and markets.
- Social media and digital marketing will be the most cost-effective way of targeting new audiences and achieving success for new and existing business development opportunities.
- The COVID19 lockdown has presented this opportunity with a shift in consumer paradigm. Increased value has been placed on local community and acts of generosity and charity, along with services to support this or living in the new normal.
- Those sitting within the heart of their community and audience, providing essential products/ services and operationally accommodating a desire for increased standards of sanitization and social distancing will prevail. A trusted brand well established in the market and community at the forefront of customers minds will only maximise this success.
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ARE YOU PREPARED FOR BUSINESS AS UNUSUAL?

North East based Social, Digital and Design agency Curtis Gabriel work with over 200 clients across the globe. We are proud to share how some of our fantastic clients have adapted to the unprecedented challenges of Covid-19, and how social media sits at the heart of their marketing strategies.



TASTE OF HILTON

Taste of Hilton is Hilton's official food and beverage social media channel, which profiles the very best culinary and mixology talent that Hilton has to offer across Europe, Middle East and Africa.

How have they been impacted by Covid-19:

With the majority of hotels in Europe, Middle East and Africa being forced to close temporarily, this has naturally resulted in food and beverage operations coming to a halt.

How have they adapted their social media during lockdown?

We have liaised with Hilton's top food and beverage talent from across Europe, Middle East and Africa, to share exceptional recipes and creations that followers can experiment with at home.

This strategy has included the launch of the Taste of Hilton Takeover series, whereby guest chefs and mixologists host an Instagram live session, answering followers' questions, providing hints and tips for at-home drinking and dining and inspiring followers to recreate their favourite Hilton dishes at home.

How are CG supporting their re-opening strategy across Hilton Europe, Middle-East & Africa?

We are supporting their reopening strategy, by assisting with an EMEA-wide campaign to ensure food and beverage operations spearhead the reopening of hotels, allowing properties to reconnect with their audience. Emma Banks Vice-President F&B Strategy and Development for Hilton EMEA said "We aim to retain the magic of F&B in a safe and clean environment but one that is not sterile of "the light and warmth of hospitality".



HAMPTON BY HILTON STOCKTON-ON-TEES

The stylish Hampton by Hilton Stockton-on-Tees opened in February 2019 and enjoyed a fantastic first year, welcoming over 48,000 guests through the doors. Part of the Hilton portfolio, Hampton by Hilton is rapidly building a reputation as a global leader in the focused service hotel category. Through its 100% Hampton Guarantee, the brand promises guests a great experience and value for money every time.

How were they impacted by Covid-19 and how have they adapted?

As with all businesses in the hospitality sector, Hampton-by-Hilton Stockton-on-Tees has felt the full impact of Covid-19 and the unprecedented restrictions on travel introduced across the UK. However, the property managed by Interstate Hotels and Resorts - global leaders in hotel management, has remained open to provide essential accommodation to key-workers.

The hotel's dedicated team has adopted enhanced social distancing and sanitisation policies to ensure rooms and public areas are kept as safe as possible for guests who have needed to travel during lockdown.

How have CG supported their social strategy during Covid-19?

Curtis Gabriel have continued to support the hotel's social channels 24/7 throughout Covid-19 and managed a spike in customer service enquiries. Community is at the heart of every Hampton by Hilton, and the hotel have used their social channels to communicate key business updates during the Covid-19 pandemic and have also taken their audience behind the scenes to keep them up to date with changes at the hotel. The team at Hampton by Hilton have also continued to profile the fantastic work being actioned to support key workers and the wider local community.



UK TAXI & TRANSPORTATION

Curtis Gabriel support over 75 taxi and transportation businesses across the UK and North America, and social media forms an essential marketing and communication tool for all of our clients.

How have Curtis Gabriel Support our clients?

Many of our clients have been among the most agile in the industry, adapting quickly to the changing demands of communities impacted by Covid-19. Local taxi firms are intrinsically linked to their local communities and have done so much to show their support.

Nottingham Cars worked in partnership with a local charity and local restaurants to deliver food parcels to the city's hospitals, police and fire stations to support key workers.

Royal Cars in Oxford raised over £2,500 through a GoFundMe campaign to support free taxi journeys for NHS staff across Oxfordshire.

While throughout these challenging times, Wirral Council has teamed up with local community food suppliers to provide emergency support to those who need it most in the community. Argyle Satellite drivers are taking immense pride in helping with the distribution of these essential food supplies.

Danny McLeod, Argyle's Business Development Manager said: "In a time where more and more people, including our major stakeholders; drivers and customers, were spending more and more time online, we needed the strength and support offered by the Curtis Gabriel team to help deliver our message."

What next for the Taxi Industry?

As social distancing measures and advice to avoid public transport appears to be here to stay, for the short-term at least, Taxi and transportation businesses across the UK offer a less risky form of transport for those unable to work from home.

With general public expectations around sanitisation set to increase, social media offers the perfect platform to reassure customers of the steps been taken to keep everyone safe.

While the long-term impacts on consumer behaviours remain unclear, we expect the focus on the local community and businesses to remain with consumers gravitating to where they trust and feel safe. Taxi can position themselves at the centre of this, which social media can facilitate.



T3 SECURITY

T3 Security are the leading security agency operating in North East England. They cover a wide range of industries, from hospitality and retail to mobile and site security.

How have they been impacted by Covid-19 and how have they adapted?

T3 Security provide a large percentage of door supervision in the region. With this vanishing almost overnight; they were able to offer more services and support to organisations and trusts who would see an increase in customers using their services. T3 Security teams have been able to support businesses including supermarkets when implementing social distancing measures and crowd control.

How have Curtis Gabriel supported their Social Media during Covid-19?

Curtis Gabriel have continued to promote T3 Security services across social media, celebrating team members and showcasing their ability to implement new health and safety measures for their clients. By promoting T3 Security's presence online, we profiled that they are industry professionals who are fully able to adapt and support their fellow local businesses.

PREPARING FOR A NEW REALITY.

One thing we can say for certain is that we can't expect life to revert to business as usual.

It will be #BusinessAsUNusual, something CG is embracing with a campaign and strategy to support new and existing clients during their COVID-19 exit strategy.

We accept it will be tough, but we are well equipped to roll our sleeves up and work tirelessly with you to maximise every opportunity out there. Whether that's a pivot or diversification into new markets, community engagement or ensuring customers saturated for choice choose you, we are committed to using the full might of our agency to ensure as successful a start as possible for your business in the post lockdown world.

To find out more visit www.curtisgabriel.com



DEVELOPING YOUR PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS WITHOUT TAKING AN EXAM

By Veronica Swindale, FCIM, MCIPR, Managing Director of nesma

nesma’s learning sessions went online this term to support our existing students and potential clients. We are running all our CIM and CIPR qualifications via interactive, live webinars to replicate our popular classroom experiences, these will be followed by a number of immersive skill sessions.

At the end of last term, Veronica spoke to Karl Hansell, Communications executive at BIGGA Ltd and editor of Greenkeeper International is a recent Professional PR Diploma Level 7.

What was the turning point that made you decide to study this PR qualification?

After achieving my senior journalism qualifications (NQJ), I distinctly remember someone saying to me, “congratulations, you’ve just finished the last exam you’ll ever need to complete.” After years of school, college, university and then journalism training, it came as something of a relief.

However, turn the clock forwards a few years, and I’ve now made the move from news reporter to communications professional. Now my primary responsibility is the production of a monthly magazine, Greenkeeper International. My additional duties centre around building campaigns for initiatives we host and the promotion of the greenkeeping profession, and I realised this where there was a gap in my knowledge.

The membership association I work for is rightly proud of the education provision it offers members, and I figured that I should take that on board. So I began to investigate ways in which I could push myself to the next level, which is when I came across

the PR Diploma and nesma.

What did you enjoy most about this course?

It’s something of a cliché, but I didn’t know what I didn’t know. I came to the course, not knowing what to expect, but after each lesson, I would go back to work wholly reinvigorated and excited to put into practice what I had learned.

What’s more, although I engage with PR agencies and staff at other associations daily, I’m the only communications professional at the association. I hadn’t ever sat in a room with a team of people with the same experience as me and discussed ways we could improve. The sharing of knowledge around the nesma table was something I really appreciated, and I hope to be able to continue this through my membership of the CIPR.

What do you think you will do differently now?

In the past year, I have changed significantly in both a professional and a personal sense. I know that I’m ready to take the next step in my career, to work with a team under me that I can develop and share ideas with. The expert knowledge that I’ve gained through studying towards this qualification, I’ve put into practice and had success with, not least because it’s impressed management and other members of

staff. My confidence has grown with each nod of approval. I’m now acting at a higher level – planning ahead and shaping the direction of the association rather than just responding to an instruction from management.

What words of advice would you give anyone considering a career in PR?

Tough one this, because the media industry moves so quickly that I wouldn’t want to give anyone any bad advice! Ever since I acknowledged the fact that I wasn’t going to be a Top Gun pilot, I’d wanted to be a journalist, and I found I had a knack for telling stories. I guess my advice would be that you have to show to any prospective employer that you are continually developing and improving. The way to do that is by taking responsibility for your professional development. Take every opportunity you can to learn something new and don’t be afraid to say “I don’t know” as I’ve found they’re among the most important words you can ever use. You don’t know everything, they know you don’t know everything, so put pride aside and start learning.

Whether you’re starting out in your PR career, want to move up a level, or need to grow your knowledge in specialist areas, a CIPR qualification will take you further, faster.



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Karl Hansell

BIGGA Ltd and editor of Greenkeeper International
CIPR Professional PR Diploma (Level 7)

“The team at nesma has a vast amount of experience due to the high levels they have operated at throughout their careers. You can’t help but sit and listen, open-mouthed usually, to what they have to say. I thought the whole experience was brilliant and I’d do the whole thing again in a heartbeat.”

Alice Fairweather

Digital Allies
CIM Certificate in Professional Marketing (Level 4)

“I was given a promotion after completing this qualification as my employer saw the value of the CIM course and appreciated my attitude to working on my professional development. I feel so much more confident when advising clients on best practice now.”

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Christian Cerisola

LOCKDOWN PROVES A UK LEVELLER WHEN IT COMES TO TALENT

While lockdown has denied us those face to face business relationships we cherish even more than ever, has anyone else noticed the fresh alternative its given us on how we develop those relationships while the physical drawbridge has been raised?

Regardless of your chosen weapon, Teams, Zoom, Skype or any other, video conferencing has felt like it has opened a small window into the private lives of those we do business with during the nine to six.

A busy kitchen set up with occasional (and always endearing) child interruptions, or a hastily arranged spare bedroom reconfigured as a makeshift office. The artwork hanging on a lounge wall, or the eclectic book collection in the dining room have all accidentally given us a fresh dimension and the tiniest peek into the private lives of the people we normally work with day in, day out. It's the stuff we wouldn't normally see, and as we're naturally curious characters, its been fascinating viewing.

But the one thing we have lost with this new method of staying up to date with your team, your customers or clients is your location. Whatever the working from home backdrop to the calls, its impossible to decipher exactly where in the world they're sat. This has presented clients with a view of our agency shorn of consistent identity other than one thing: its people.

Now is the time that true brand and culture has

shone through. Ideas, successful problem-solving and smart thinking are never more apparent and under the spotlight. Lockdown has proved that culture isn't about how fancy the croissants are on the breakfast bar each morning, the dancing logo or the flamboyant grass-covered breakout pods.

Lockdown has handed us an agency version of The Voice. Unable to see the full package – the shiny reception, the award-laden boardroom, the swish bank of TV news and social screens - the focus has been drawn solely towards creative problem-solving.

At W North, we're part of a wider agency, which is headquartered in the heart of London. But as we speak, W's agency is currently located in all parts of the UK. We're in Scotland, across the North East, in North Yorkshire and the North West. They're on the South coast and they're in the West country. Of course, there's many in parts of London too.

The desire for young creatives to gravitate towards London is unlikely to diminish in a dramatic fashion, but diminish it will. This period has proved that talent doesn't actually have

an address. We're delivering the expectant W1 standards from all four corners of the UK.

If you're like us and deliver work on behalf of London-based clients, this lockdown has proved a great leveller. As a region, we have to take all the opportunity we can to prove that great talent doesn't have to come with a postcode inside the M25. We've had the opportunity to prove it and now it's no fault but our own if we let our business relationships slip back into hackneyed perceptions and lazy stereotypes.

Social mobility is a societal issue that can't be solved by one PR agency, but with W North and latterly with WX, we've long understood the need and benefit in diversifying our hunt for talent and the need to pick from a pool that doesn't begin and end with well-to-do parents from the Home Counties.

There's nothing wrong with wanting to live in the middle of London, but understanding and accepting also that not wanting to do that shows no lesser ambition or hunger has helped us realise individuals' ambitious and encourage a talent base far wider than we could have ever imagined.

Christian Cerisola is head of W North wwwcommunications.co.uk @wcommnorth

STAY VISIBLE - PROTECT YOUR REPUTATION - SAVE YOUR BUSINESS WITH HIGHLIGHTS PR

COVID-19 has stopped many businesses in their tracks but now is a great time for businesses and organisations to engage with their clients so that they can reach out to offer their services NOW and gain new potential customers when we come out of this situation.

Over the past few months, I've been working hard helping my clients to gain maximum media coverage and I've also used some of my time to help publicise good deeds that members of the public have done to help the NHS.

I've had great coverage for Unique Magazines who have seen a dramatic increase in the number of lifestyle and TV listings magazines that they are sending to people's homes while solicitor Peter Maughan of PMR Solicitors explained on BBC radio why now is an important time to make a will and how his profits are going to medical charities.

Likewise, Helen Ross from Bright & Beautiful North Tyneside appeared on BBC Newcastle to talk about her eco-friendly housekeeping services and the importance of deep cleaning for health and hygiene reasons.

No one can dispute the important work that care homes are doing and Careline Lifestyles are no exception. We've gained media exposure for their home in Newcastle that received a Good report from the CQC and their home in South Tyneside that donated food to a local food bank. In their Bishop Auckland home, local entertainers serenaded while practising social distancing and this story featured heavily in the local press too.

These are just some of the stories I've had featured in the media but my clients have been busy too...

Neil Fraser from Northumberland Wills and Probate said: "Zoom - it's made me and my clients, get into the 21st century. I plan to use this after lockdown as it reduces my carbon footprint and reduces the physical time I need to be with my clients - I often meet them in the evenings so they will be able to get their tea sooner!"



Helen Ross



Dan Wilkinson from DW Media in Blyth has seen massive support from his clients and the local community. He has also been working on the ground with the Bedlington Network who have been assisting those in need by delivering food parcels and building the systems used by the volunteers.



Author Eleanor Baggaley was asked to write a children's story, "Ava the Mermaid goes to Hospital", for the #rethinktherainbow project, highlighting children's mental health during the pandemic. The book helps young people to understand and cope with their emotions when they or a loved one is hospitalised.



Keith Newman

So, the world may be a different place but businesses are adapting and the media is looking for new and different stories. Let Highlights PR get you where your business needs to be.

Stay Visible - Protect Your Reputation - Save Your Business with Highlights PR

For PR support contact Keith Newman keith@highlightspr.co.uk 07814 397951 highlightspr.co.uk



Debbie Foster

MUSIC TO OUR EARS!

The team at Instore Radio, Debbie Foster and Lee Finan, tell us about Stay At Home FM, one viral phenomenon you can get close to in these strange, unnerving times!

North East company, Instore Radio Ltd, have been trading since 1999, supplying the retail, leisure and hospitality sectors with bespoke background music. Recently, they have decided to use their talents to serve the community far and wide, with their free online radio station, www.stay-at-home.fm

Like many other businesses in the North East, Covid-19 brought Instore Radio's services to a sudden halt, but it did inspire them to reach out to the community and do what they do best, to connect and entertain people over the airwaves. When the Coronavirus hit hard and people found themselves isolating and told to stay home and save lives, stay at home radio evolved to reach out and connect with people, especially those isolating on their own. The radio station is accessed through Instore Radio's website, there are no adverts, no news bulletins, just good music and shout outs to the community both local, and across the globe.

Debbie and Lee launched Stay at Home FM radio on various social media platforms and the North East Chamber of Commerce promoted it out to their members too. Lee expands on how it has gained momentum: "Very quickly people from near and far contacted us requesting mentions and shout outs to their families and friends from Gosforth, Gateshead, Ponteland, to Perth in Australia, Mallorca and China!

The feedback has been amazing and like many businesses in these challenging times, who have ceased operating, we decided to join the army of volunteers and do some good for the community, so stay at home radio was created."

Both Lee and Debbie are operating Stay at Home FM radio from their respective homes, using pop-up recording studios, as well as receiving extra assistance from voice over volunteers who are contributing to the station.

"Having the IT and streaming infrastructure in place for our Instore Radio services has meant that adding Stay at Home FM radio was a no-brainer", says Lee. "It's our way of turning a negative into a positive and with our experience working in commercial radio it was something we both wanted to do. I have to be honest and tell you that it keeps our mental health stable too, as these are very challenging times for us all".

Debbie explains how a desire to contribute to community wellbeing was a major motivating factor: "We are very familiar with how our mental health can spiral out of control, so we wanted to connect with people and let them know that their loved ones are thinking of them. We also feel that many business owners out there who have ceased trading also need a lift and something to keep them connected. When people hear a mention from their loved ones on the

radio, as well as listening to good music, we know that it lifts their spirits and has a positive impact".

Lee and Debbie met many years ago when they both worked at Metro Radio, Lee as a presenter with Ingrid on "Hits not Homework" a popular programme running for seven years, and Debbie as anchor news reader with Gabby Logan and the team on the breakfast show.

Forming a strong friendship and saying goodbye to commercial radio, they became business partners and created Instore Radio in 1999. Over the years they've successfully secured contracts to supply bespoke streamed music and customer adverts to many outlets including, Lookers, Fenwick, Slaters, Benetton, Bargain Booze, Franks the Flooring store, Raithwaites Hotel & Spa, Ramside Hall, Hardwick Hall, Bowburn Hall, Imperial Cars, Stollers furniture, Dalton Park, Crown Leisure, Funzy Fun Park, Calendar Club, TJ Hughes as well as recently acquired the Fat Hippo group, a North East gourmet burger chain. Due to Covid-19 all but one of their clients have had to close their doors, but Debbie and Lee are staying positive that their clients will come back stronger than ever once their doors re-open.

In the meantime, if you're looking for some uplifting tunes and a sense of togetherness in the midst of the maelstrom (and let's face it, who isn't right now!?) you know where to go!

www.stay-at-home.fm

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BUSINESS BOOMING FOR NORTH EAST IT COMPANY

Technology business experts at TruStack are celebrating a milestone moment after taking on their 50th employee.

TruStack was formed when three businesses, SITS Group, PCI Services and Pivotal Networks, joined forces in September 2019, creating a joint portfolio of more than 250 clients and turnover of £10m.

Services include cloud computing, infrastructure design and implementation, data centre services and Cybersecurity solutions, which are delivered to clients across the North East and beyond.

TruStack has increased its staff numbers by 25% to 50 in less than a year, much to the delight of its directors.

Commercial Director Phil Cambers commented: "Being able to reach this landmark moment is testament to the hard work of everyone in the business. It makes me very proud that we have built a successful business that can sustain this number of people and has the portfolio of clients that we do."

Despite the economic uncertainty with Covid-19, the TruStack team is working from home to continue providing customers with the services and support they are used to in normal times.



KEY APPOINTMENTS AT CLOUD EXPERTS SYNERGI

Gateshead-based cloud and digital business specialist Synergi has announced a series of key appointments as it continues its growth trajectory.

Sarah Cooper joins as operations director, bringing with her a 15-year background in service and operational excellence roles in the IT industry. Sarah will play a lead role in driving continuous improvement of operational processes.

New marketing manager Nikki Peacock is a specialist business-to-business and retail marketer. Nikki joins Synergi providing enterprise decision software and complex analytics, modelling and optimisation services.

Dominic Falconer takes up the role of business intelligence consultant. His role is designed to support Synergi's aim to grow its already healthy market share in this area.

Business intelligence consultant and developer Emma Pardines also joins the business. She brings with her a degree in Computer Science and a 12-year career as a software developer with wide-ranging experience of various software platforms.

Synergi's CEO Peter Joynson commented: "We look forward to all of our new recruits becoming real assets to the business and playing a key part in our continuing growth."



MILESTONE ANNIVERSARY FOR IT PROVIDER

A County Durham IT service provider is celebrating its 15th anniversary this year after supporting more than 400 North East businesses.

Concept IT, which is based in Tanfield Lea Business Centre, was set up in 2005 by Kevin Embleton, and has since grown from three members of staff to 12.

Kevin said: "I created Concept as, at the time, there were big IT companies offering support to the big firms, and everything else was quite basic and reactive. I wanted to fill that gap in the market, to bring enterprise-level support and corporate facilities to smaller companies."

As a mark of its growing success, the firm, which has consistently recorded a customer satisfaction rate of 96 per cent, has also this year been shortlisted for the European IT & Software Excellence Awards, IT Support & Service Awards and North East Business Awards.

Kevin continued: "Our growth and success is all down to our awesome team and wonderful client base. Many of our customers have been with us from the beginning, which shows we're doing something right."



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WHERE DOES THE TIME GO?

As the region's leading managed IT solutions and services expert ITPS celebrates its 20th anniversary, we take a nostalgic look at just a few of the business, charity and fun highlights of two decades.

For more information on how ITPS can help your IT deliver better value, visit www.itps.co.uk



FROM MONDAY NIGHT QUIZZES TO MANAGED SERVICES



Justin Short

These are truly unprecedented times, your dog is howling at your feet during your Teams call, whilst you try to ensure your children aren't about to break a bone from the corner of your eye. Maybe you're even working in the bathroom with an ironing board for a desk!

This has truly showcased the innovation that we are capable of. But most notably this shift to working from home has served to both promote the importance of cloud computing and highlight organisation's clunky or inefficient processes. We see not only how digital operations can help organisations function remotely but also how processes are slowed when there are ineffective solutions in place. Whilst we do not know when or how exactly lockdown will end, we

suspect it will mark the beginning of a new normal for businesses and their operations with a grounding in cloud-based solutions. So how do you ensure that you are prepared?

Many will understand cloud computing as the utilisation of Office 365 technology. Whilst this is an excellent foundation, there are often hidden capabilities within this platform that go unused, as well as integrated tools and solutions that serve to boost efficiency and productivity. However, understanding, managing and securing digital solutions let alone your entire technology environment can seem overwhelming. This is where a flexible managed service offering comes in.

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Available as part of a fully managed or co-managed solution, Synergi's managed service is an offering that delivers complete flexibility, allowing customised services based on a client's specific needs. This solution offers the monitoring of servers and applications with clear service schedules and reporting, promoting continuous optimisation through consistent analysis and review. Enhanced security monitoring and disaster recovery offerings provide peace of mind and all of the licenses and infrastructure management can be provided, allowing you to access everything you need from one provider. On top of all this you have access to a team of highly skilled solution experts across all fields from applications, platforms, and security to provide guidance at the level appropriate to support

the needs of your in-house team and users.

Why should North East businesses be excited?

So now you understand the what behind managed services, why should it matter to you? With a managed or co-managed solution, delivering a customised service utilising one set of shared tools reduces costs and provides consistency and efficiency. Service teams will work with you from the first day of the design phase, through the entire process and then onto supporting your services long term. This offers high quality support as well as clear accountability and none of the typical handover issues! Built from a service template, there are a set of flexible options including wrapping your licensing, service visits and even hardware refresh elements into your monthly Managed Service Agreement, so you can access a unique service that is tailored for your needs.

Want to know more?

Synergi is a next generation managed technology partner, dedicated to providing the best in independent digital solutions & flexible Managed Services. With an ever-expanding team of specialists working to offer cloud business application deployment, workflow and process automation, business insights, security, and managed services. To find out more about Synergi's managed services get in touch by emailing enquiries@teamsynergi.co.uk or check out our website, www.teamsynergi.co.uk/managed-services.

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NORTH EAST FIRM AT THE FOREFRONT OF DELIVERING COVID-19 WORKPLACE TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS

Advantex Network Solutions, the North East's leading and award-winning technology firm, is on a mission to help get the UK's businesses back up and running throughout the coronavirus pandemic.

Last week, the government announced its proposed plans and staged exit strategy from the COVID-19 lockdown, and one of the key pointers was getting the UK working again.

Advantex, who are headquartered in Gateshead, are like many of the regions businesses with majority of their workforce either furloughed or working from home, however, a recent spike in the demand for thermal imaging and social distancing camera solutions has enabled the business to create a COVID-19 task force in order to deal with the demand for the technology.

Following the likes of Amazon and Heathrow Airport, who have just placed orders for thermal imaging cameras, many of the region's businesses are looking at similar solutions to help detect if an employee is showing a fever, a key symptom of the coronavirus.

Thermal imaging cameras can detect a rise in temperature, that common with the fever of COVID-19, and with such technology in place,

employers can monitor in real-time who is entering a building or workplace, allowing them to mitigate risk and take appropriate measures to help prevent further infection.

For over a decade, the Gateshead-based IT firm has been supplying and delivering such technology to some of the UK's biggest firms to detect anomalies in production and manufacturing equipment, so the technology on offer isn't new, it's just being used in a way that enables a business to provide a safer working environment throughout these difficult and unprecedented times.

Advantex Sales & Marketing Director, Steve O'Connell added: "As an employer myself, I know how challenging these times are, and we are in no way out of the woods yet, but we feel we have a responsibility to help the region take the right steps and precautions for when the time does come to finally return to work.

We're by no means saying this technology will detect COVID-19 and is safe passage to start work

tomorrow, but the solutions we provide can offer an element of monitoring and detection, providing peace-of-mind and a clear message to employees and clients that you're doing everything you can to provide a safe working environment."

In addition to the popular fever detection cameras, Advantex have also seen a sharp rise in the demand for social distancing, crowd control and PPE detection cameras – a clear indicator to show that the regions businesses have the welfare and wellbeing of staff as a number one priority.

The demand for these cameras has been high, with possible funding also now being available, subject to eligibility, for specific companies and sectors.

Advantex works with some of the UK's biggest and best-known brands, boasting a client list that includes Hitachi Rail, Rockliffe Hall Hotel, Newcastle International Airport, McDonald's, Caterpillar trucks, GE Oil & Gas and End Clothing.

For more information on the solutions mentioned above, please visit: www.advantex.uk.com/service/covid-19

DESIGN IN A POST-COVID FUTURE

By Dan Carey, Qrious

While the long-term effects of the Covid-19 lockdown remain unclear, it seems inevitable that it is an epochal marker in our lifetimes.

It has exposed the fragility of our existing economic structures, but small-scale individual interventions and acts of kindness have blossomed in the exposed cracks.

As "key" and "essential" work becomes part of our everyday vocabulary, this calls into question the role that designers should be playing in the new economy.

In this post, we discuss some of the ideas currently occupying designers across the world.

The topics presented here are subject to the following caveats:

- We have generally framed the Covid pandemic as an opportunity for designers to be part of building a better future. It is important to acknowledge at the outset that there is a significant degree of privilege underpinning these thoughts. There are millions of people around the world for whom the "post-COVID" experience will likely be characterised by immense grief and uncertainty.
- The ideas presented here reflect an evolving understanding of the roles design might play in the future. They are not immutable - indeed, a critical element of post-Covid design is likely to be the need to build greater flexibility and responsiveness into the services we use every day.

This article is not an argument from a fixed perspective, but simply an attempt to express ideas as individual strands rather than a cohesive argument.

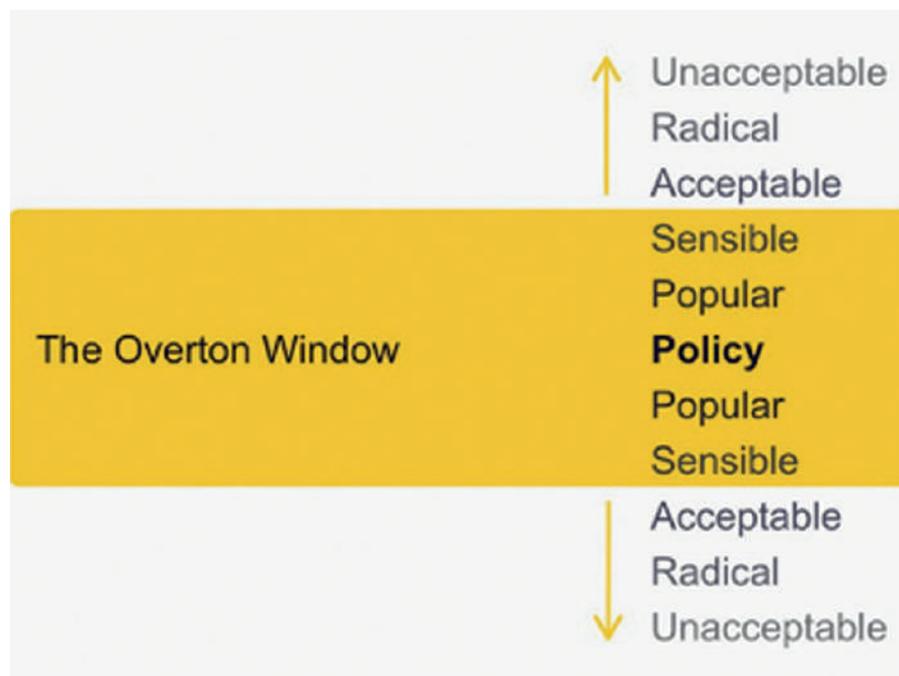
What roles might designers need to play?

The COVID-19 pandemic is the first time in history that the entire human race is facing the same challenge. It will not be the last. In many ways, it can be seen as a rehearsal for the kinds of challenges we will face when the effects of climate change accelerate beyond our abilities to mitigate them.

In the absence of any clear plan, systems previously unquestioned are now up for grabs.

Universal Basic Income, for example, was a marginal political issue in 2019 but is now the subject of mainstream political and economic discourse. The Overton Window has shifted to accommodate new ideas as existing ones have failed to cope with the stress of the pandemic.

The window will continue to shift as the world changes around us. New ideas will be confusing and designers are in an immensely powerful position to explain these ideas clearly and objectively wherever possible.



Accessible language and structural clarity in content design will help people to understand and choose between different possible futures.

Service designers have a responsibility to act with precision and advocate not just for human-centred approaches, but for community-centred and environment-centred perspectives as well.

Designers of all disciplines need to understand the wider implications of their actions - we do not work in isolation.

"Design is happening without designers."
Cat Drew, CDO of the Design Council.

That is to say, decisions are being made about the future of our economy, how we might live our lives, our health care systems and other support networks.

Designers have a crucial role to play in shaping these changes from the perspective of the end users and their communities.

Design ethics.

A great deal of discussion is ongoing about the ethics of design as a discipline. We're all currently very aware of the impact of our (good and bad) behaviours at individual and collective scales. Should a designer work with a company that exposes their employees to unnecessary risks? Or one that causes environmental devastation? Given the complexity of global economics and supply structures, is it even possible for a designer to step outside this system? Should we have a code of ethics and, if so, what would it look like?

Designing for rapidly changing needs.

As the Covid-19 pandemic began to accelerate, we saw manufacturers shift resources and production into developing respirators and Personal Protective Equipment. It is likely that this kind of rapid repurposing will need to happen again and again in response to different crises.

Can we pre-emptively design flexibility and resilience into the products and services we rely on? How do we embed this kind of open-ended, improvisational, problem-solving mindset into services that have been built in a completely different way? Is our existing toolkit of innovation labs and workshops going to be enough to rebuild them from the inside out?

The value of speculative design.

To some extent, all design is speculative. Part of the appeal of new technology is in allowing ourselves to imagine a future where the latency between idea and outcome is minimised through responsive, beautiful, and intuitive interfaces.

But design isn't just about imagining wonderful futures, it's also about predicting ways in which things can go wrong. Good ideas might be misappropriated, disinformation might thrive on social platforms, and even the most well-intentioned innovations are likely to have a negative impact somewhere out of sight.

"The essence of an object has something to do with the way it turns into trash."

Roland Barthes

That is to say, when the initial novelty wears off, when it fails a stress test, when it ends up in a landfill.

If we can predict these potential bad outcomes, we can understand how they might be mitigated or avoided entirely. It is vital that we don't fall into the trap of believing that good intentions alone will save the world. Avoiding this trap requires us to be critical at every stage, to always look for something better, and not to dismiss real-life experiences as mere "outliers".

Final thoughts.

Here at Qrious, we're particularly concerned that once the lockdown is over - once the curves flatten and COVID-19 fades into the background - we may forget this experience.

We may feel under great pressure to forget it and go back to how things used to be. But doing this would miss an immense opportunity.

We need to start designing for the future now. Not just the immediate future but for the next 5, 10, and 20 years.

It is entirely possible that the rest of our lives will be dominated by similar global challenges and uncertainty - climate change, resource scarcity, economic upheaval due to automation.

We are in a position to make things better for as many people as possible - but the magnitude of this task cannot be overestimated.

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UNITE FOR A JOINED-UP TECHNOLOGY STRATEGY?

Gone are the days when computers, IT support, web sites, social media and PC software could be seen as totally separate entities.

Everything now works hand in hand.

If your IT kit isn't working to its top capability, you are being hampered.

If your website isn't intuitive and easy to follow, customers will move on.

If your social media isn't correctly targeted it'll...well... miss the target.

When Paul Sykes and Callum McDougall set up Unite, it was (and still is) a full service communications company.

"We started off by helping small businesses sort out their telephone systems, getting the best deals on mobiles, and organising their broadband," said Paul, "however, the more we got involved in the communications business, the more we realised that customers were looking for a company to also look after their other technical equipment, put cabling into buildings, source software and, most recently, help them with social media. It was time to expand."

Paul and Callum decided to merge the business with a local IT provider SMT technologies, there are now two additional directors Dean Dixon and Michael Tennant and Unite now have a team of 13 who support all of the above.

They've fully integrated IT and social media into the original communications business.

Yep, you've guessed it...they've decided to unite three businesses into one.

Please welcome, The Unite Group.

"We now have a team of experts who can cover anything within the world of IT. We tailor everything to the customer.... we don't have an 'off the shelf' package. We speak to the client, find out what they need, and then put together a one-off solution.

It's also important to note that we support the client and don't keep on adding bits and pieces. We are there to provide a service to the client and all prices are agreed up front and in advance. Client satisfaction is our number one priority....we aim to build long-term relationships built on trust. We have several clients who've been with Unite since day one."

So, what can new Unite Group do for you and your business?

Communications

This was the area where it all started for Paul and Callum with what was a small team of what he agrees was a set of techy fanatics. One thing was certain...they knew their stuff and, several years down the line, they're now some of the region's top experts. If you need someone to sort out your Call Centre, make sure your broadband is running at the speed which was

originally advertised when you signed-up, confirm that you are getting the very best deals on your comms systems and helping you to host any of your web activities, give them a call. They won't bamboozle you with techy speak... just good honest advice.

Technologies

Dean Dixon and Michael Tennant have both worked in IT support for all of their working lives so they head up the team dedicated to supporting a variety of clients around the UK.

It's good to know that when you have a problem with an IT system that someone can get things sorted quickly. The guys at Unite Group have got all of the latest diagnostic tools. In fact, they'll probably tell you that there's a problem before you spot it. They can solve problems remotely. You won't even know they're working on your systems.

Is your on-line security up to date and up to the job? Cyber security is an increasing threat; you need to take precautions.

And what about your software? Are you running the latest Office 365 for example? Don't worry, Unite Group can ensure that you are fully up to date.

Social +

Depending on your age you will either see social media as a necessity to your business or it's something you can't quite grasp. You may know that you should have some sort of social media presence but haven't got the faintest idea how to do it. Alternatively, you probably know your way around Instagram, Snapchat, Tumblr, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Twitter and Facebook.

Unite Group now offer a variety of services. You can go the whole hog and let them run your social media presence for you. Another option is to let their team of experts guide you through the minefield and show you how to do it. They offer social media training and networking. You can attend a series of workshops to either start from scratch or keep up to date with latest trends.

One thing is certain; if you think you can manage without social media...you're wrong.

So, do any of the above ring any alarm bells? Are you really sure that you're on the ball with everything to do with IT?

The best idea is to get in touch with the team at The Unite Group. Tell them what you are concerned about. If you are unsure about what you need, that's not a problem because the team will give you a full update on what is available and how Unite Group can help your business move forward....or drag it into the 21st Century!!!

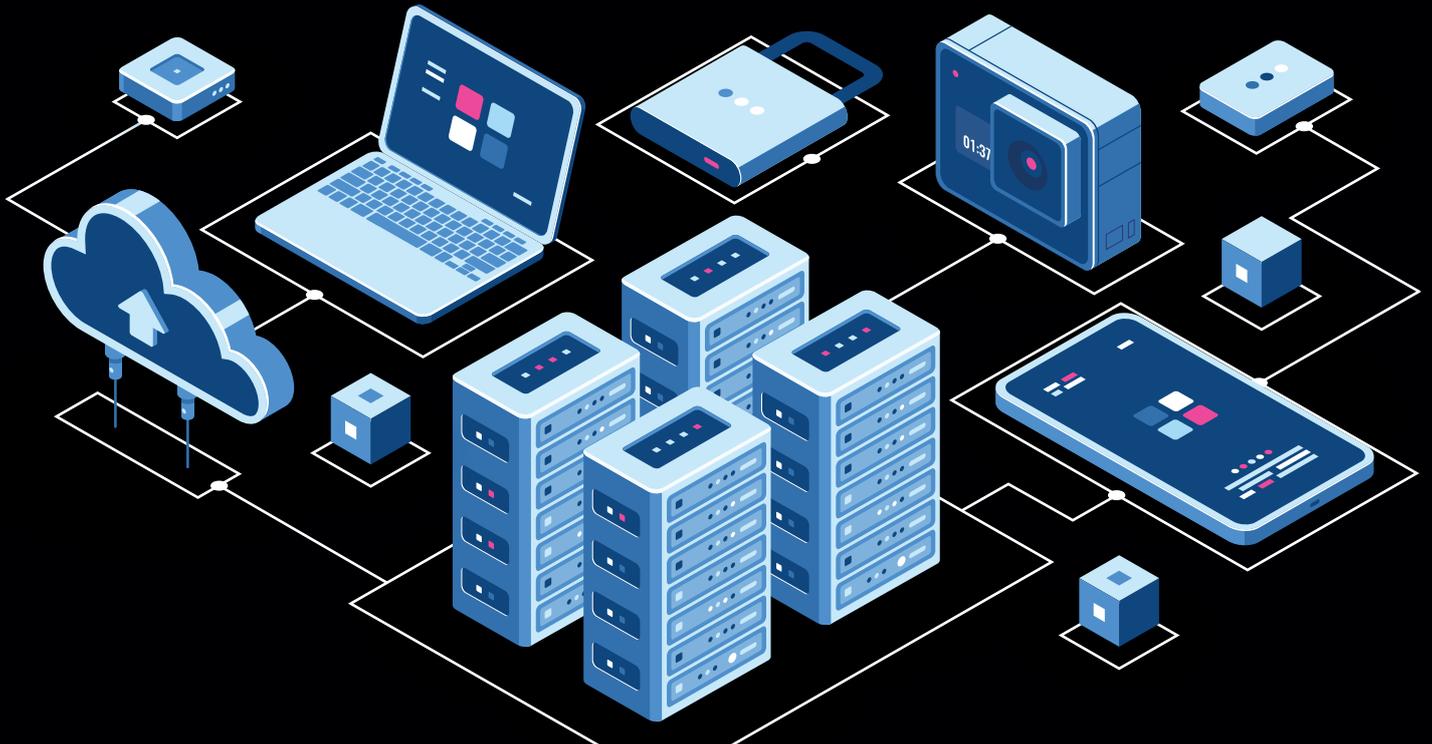
Unite Group are based in Newcastle, but they work across the UK.

Get in touch with the team at Unite on 0191 466 1050 or info@theunitegroup.co.uk





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matters



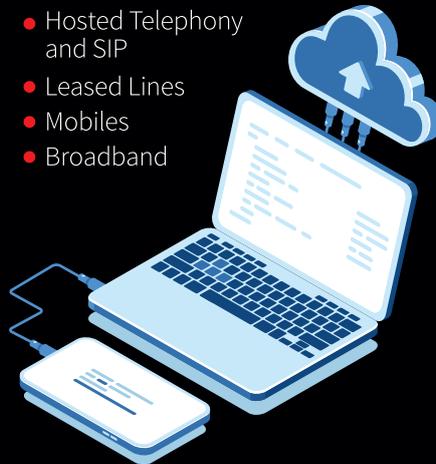
IT Services

- Office 365
- Cloud Services
- Cyber Security
- IT Support



Communications

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- Leased Lines
- Mobiles
- Broadband

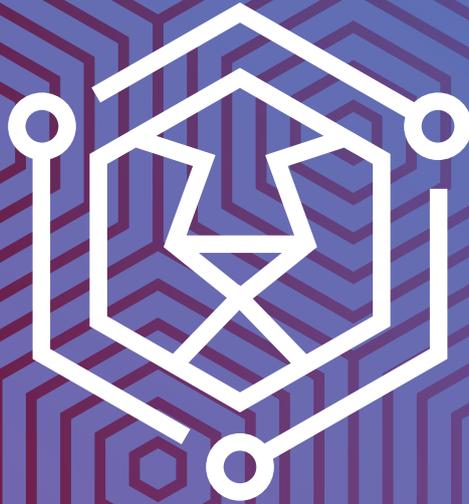


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LESSONS BEING LEARNED IN LOCKDOWN

By David Tickner, Headmaster at
Newcastle School for Boys

I am writing this nearly two months after schools were required to close due to the coronavirus pandemic.

In that time, Newcastle School for Boys has continued to fulfil its aims by delivering education remotely. The learning curve has been a steep one - for everyone. For public health and a whole host of other reasons, we'd all rather not be facing the current situation. But amidst the challenges that the virus has brought schools, there has been a great deal of learning and there are opportunities.

Our staff have been nothing short of fantastic. Teachers are professionally trained to deliver learning in classrooms. To redirect these sophisticated skills to be used remotely has required considerable effort, adaptability and retraining - much of it on the job. Teachers have been learners alongside their pupils.

Newcastle School for Boys' approach to the need to shift to remote teaching and learning has been guided by two principles: sustainability and adaptability.

At the time schools were being required to close their doors, levels of uncertainty and anxiety were high amongst everyone. Reassurance and calm if it lay anywhere was in the familiar. As part of our initial response, we chose to deploy online platforms already in use in the School and that were already in use by boys, parents and staff. This wasn't the time to launch new, untested technologies and approaches and to risk losing people.

I was attentive to developments in the Far East where the coronavirus was more advanced. If this taught us anything it was that we were facing a marathon not a sprint. Sustainability and stamina were going to be key. Some schools sought to replicate online their entire timetable. We always felt this would be unsustainable and unhealthy for boys and staff.



David Tickner

But we also knew that we would need to be responsive to the emerging needs of boys and families as lockdown persisted. Two things emerged quickly. There was a considerable range of needs and expectations amongst boys, families and staff. Secondly, the value and benefit of live interaction amongst teachers and boys.

The Easter holidays gave us a period to take stock: to reflect on the first two weeks of remote teaching and to seek feedback from pupils, parents and staff so that we could plan the next stages of our provision.

When we returned to school for the start of the summer term, we were able to incorporate this into a new daily structure but one that crucially had enough flexibility to accommodate boys' differing needs and rates of working.

We were also able to adopt video conferencing technology to allow face-to-face contact for teachers and pupils to support their learning and well-being in a way that was safe and secure.

Coronavirus and lockdown are bringing about the long awaited edtech revolution. Several years'

worth of teachers' professional development on how to use technology has been achieved in the past couple of months.

During this period, the School has also remained open to the boys of key workers, many of whom are employed by the NHS. This has been another call on our staff that they have risen to magnificently. We have been proud to serve the wider local community in this way.

As I write this, we are preparing for the next challenge: to welcome back key year groups - mostly younger children - identified by the Government. Our initial priority here is safety and reassurance as well as, of course, ensuring that the boys have the best possible experience that they can in the circumstances.

Much is made of the 'new normal' whenever and whatever that is. I doubt if schools will ever be the same again. They shouldn't be. We must take the lessons learnt and the new skills acquired by pupils and staff in lockdown. We must combine what we have learnt about the use and application of technology in learning with what we already knew about the traditional classroom.

For further information, please visit newcastleschool.co.uk or contact admissions@newcastleschool.co.uk

EVERYTHING CHANGES

By Kieran McLaughlin,
Headmaster at Durham School

It was Lenin who famously said: "There are decades where nothing happens; and there are weeks where decades happen." 2020 is certainly proving his point.

Lockdown has simultaneously engendered a sense of suspended animation, with shops, restaurants and schools closing, together with an almost ceaseless turbulence of news and information about the coronavirus. It is a weird kind of hybrid existence with education now involving a combination of Zoom, Microsoft Teams and good old-fashioned pen and paper. Teachers have proved remarkably adept making the switch to this new online environment, but schools are about a lot more than academic work. Those of you who have been attempting to home school children over the past few weeks will have realised just how schools are in looking after children while their parents work. Some worry that the lofty aspirations of education should not be sullied by admitting such a practical consideration, but it is true.

However, in addition, children need to mix with those outside the family. It is an important part of understanding how other people tick and forming ways of working with them. The importance of sharing, the understanding of other pupils' different backgrounds and experiences, and the working together for common goals as part of a school team or play are all part of preparing youngsters for future life. It is very difficult to replicate that online.

For all these reasons, the government is keen to reopen schools as quickly as possible. Of course, they have not really been closed; like most schools, ours has remained open for the sons and daughters of key workers for the last few weeks. However, what the government is keen to do is to get as many youngsters as they can back into school and not just for the reasons mentioned above. The evidence is unequivocal that the longer time spent out of full-time education, the greater the impact on educational outcomes. This is particularly true for pupils coming from a more disadvantaged background. All of that hard work from teachers



Kieran McLaughlin

to provide an online environment goes to waste if pupils cannot find a quiet space to work in or do not have a suitable device to access the material. We are storing up huge problems down the line for these pupils if they are left behind and reintegrating them back into school grows more difficult by the day.

Competing against these pressures of course is the great unknown that is the risk to the safety of not only pupils and staff in school but the families of both. This is the conundrum that the government, schools, unions and all who have a stake in schools have to wrestle with. Open schools too early and lives will be lost; keep them closed too long and lives will be ruined. It's a Hobson's choice. However, with the resourcefulness, dedication and determination

that have characterised how schools have approached this crisis, those problems are being addressed. No one likes the thought of socially distanced pupils, taught by teachers in masks, confined to demarcated squares in classrooms. No one likes the idea of one-way systems and taped floor ways guiding pupils around their school corridors. No one likes the idea of pupils being told not to get too close to teachers and other adults that they trust so much. However, the legacy of the coronavirus will be a much-changed world and, certainly for the next few weeks and months, those changes will be seen in schools too. Slowly but surely, life will return to the new normal. Reopening schools is just one small step along the road to a strange and difficult future.

For further information about Durham School, or to arrange a visit, call 0191 731 9270, email admissions@durhamschool.co.uk or visit www.durhamschool.co.uk

THIS TOO SHALL PASS

By Simone Niblock, Headteacher, Durham High School for Girls



Simone Niblock

Since the last edition, the world as we know it has been turned topsy-turvy. With the nation under lockdown, schools shut for the foreseeable future and shops and restaurants lying dormant, we are encountering a situation that we may have only read of in dystopian novels or binge-watched on Netflix.

Therefore, amidst all this worry, and the potential loss of loved ones during this time, we need to think squarely about the best way to get through this period and to consider things that act as a salve to our psyches. The amazing consolation of nature must be stressed: one work colleague described to me how she sat in her garden and watched a mother rabbit feeding her kittens and then burrow them back in the ground for safety. Others have said that, in the absence of noise pollution, the chirping of birdsong has provided temporary peace of mind against the turmoil and the incessant media reporting.

Although my plans to finish *The Mirror and the Light* have not yet been realised, literature has provided me with much-needed solace, with one particular work being paramount. Dame Julian of Norwich's *Revelation of Divine Love*, the first book by a woman writer in English, was written in the late 14th century. Dame Julian was an anchoress - a religious hermit - in Norwich Cathedral, and during her early life encountered the ravages of the Black Death and other trials and tribulations to which Middle Ages England was subject. Her work is a series of 'shewings', depicting her religious experiences she encountered when she was seriously ill. The whole book is a feast for the senses and the intellect; it is a literary critic's dream. However, at this time, it is the spiritual consolation, not the intellectual engagement that is important. In particular, her famous assertion that - 'All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well' - resonates strongly for me. Therefore, as I sit anxiously in my home office, away from my beloved school, I sincerely hope that this is true.

Every day is an Open Day at Durham High School. Call 0191 384 3226 or email enquiries@dhsfg.org.uk to find out more or arrange a visit.

VIRTUAL LIVE WORKOUT HELD ON DAY OF POSTPONED CHILDREN'S CANCER RUN

A local charity held a live virtual workout on the day the postponed 2020 Children's Cancer Run would have been held hosted by award winning fitness instructor David Fairlamb.

The much loved family fun run has become a North East institution, normally attracting 10,000 runners and raising over £280,000 for research into children's cancer at the world class North of England Childrens Cancer Run (NECCR) laboratories in Newcastle.

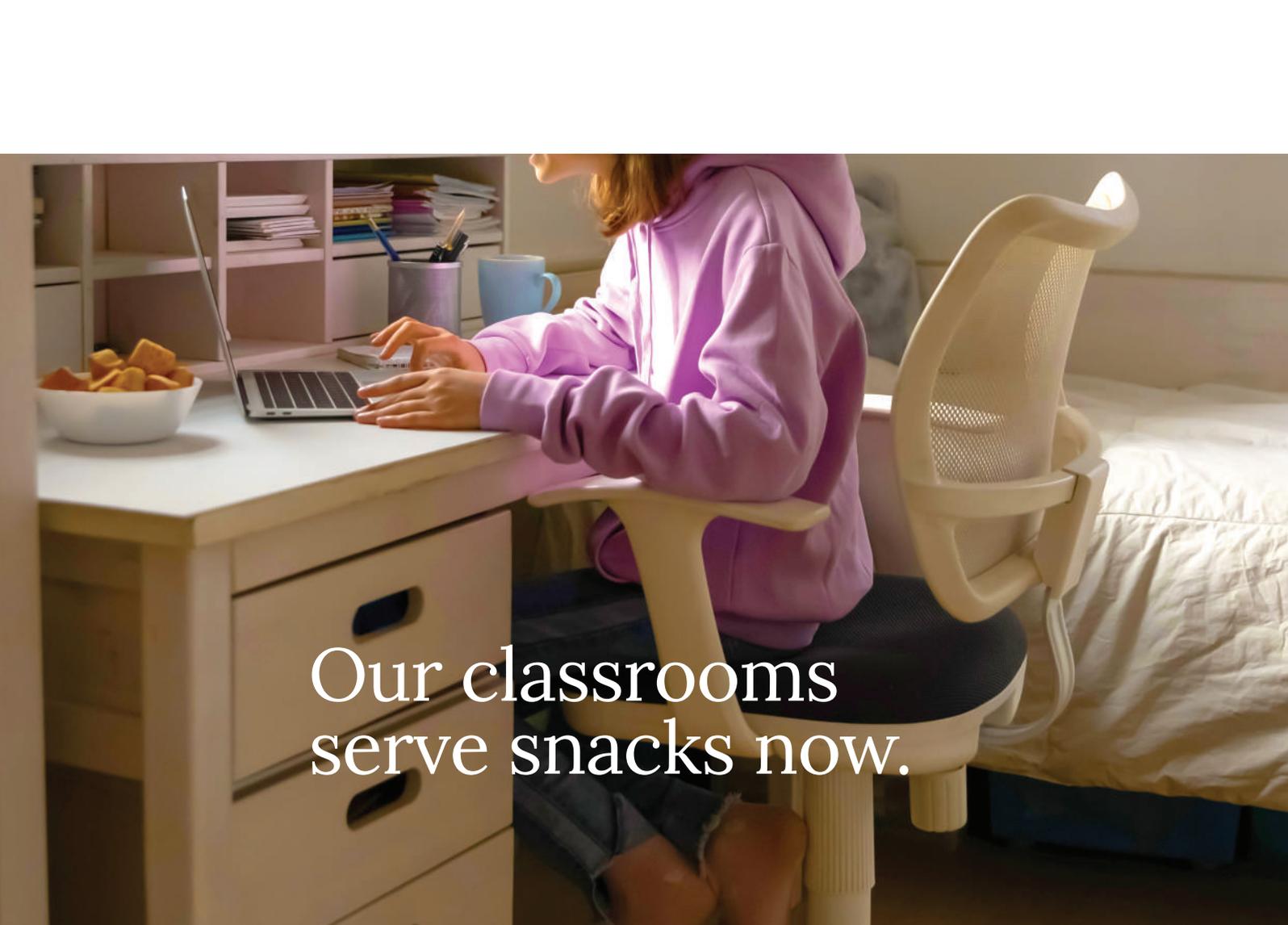
With the event provisionally rescheduled to later in the year due to COVID-19 the organisers decided to still mark the occasion with a free family friendly live Facebook workout with David Fairlamb hosting from his own living room to help support the charity. In a remarkable twist to the story, David actually ran the original first ever Children's Cancer Run 38 years ago as a boy to raise money for a fellow school friend suffering from cancer.

The charity was formed 40 years ago by a group of parents whose lives had changed forever by childhood cancer. Kings School in Tynemouth decided to raise money for NECCR, as at the time, pupil Chris Peacock was suffering from cancer of the kidney. Chris inspired pupils and staff to raise money in the first "sponsored" run and is now Chairman of the charity today.

David Fairlamb said "I was very honoured to host this live workout and congratulations to everyone who took part."

www.davidfairlambfitness.co.uk





Our classrooms serve snacks now.

Adapting to conditions created by the pandemic, since the start of the Summer Term, our children have been enjoying online lessons.

Our teachers are in constant touch with parents updating them on progress and ensuring a child's academic growth remains unaffected through these unpredictable times. A family takes care of one another and as a school with deep rooted family values, we've made sure our children are supported well in dealing with the disruption that has cascaded through their lives and they continue to receive quality education and pastoral care.

Yes, we've missed the camaraderie of children in the hallways and the sounds of laughter coming from the playgrounds but we look forward to our school family being back together again.

Till then, our children can enjoy raiding fridges before and after class.

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ICON GETS BETTER AND BETTER

In 1990, a revolution got underway that hasn't skipped a beat since. It was when Mazda unveiled their MX-5. Granted, it was hardly a monumental leap forward in terms of design or engineering because it largely mimicked cars like the MG Midget and Triumph Spitfire. The recipe was simple and, it has to be said, typically British. Take a light, open-top body, stick a perky engine up front which powers the rear wheels, make sure that the driver was sat as close to the road as possible and factor-in a load of fun.

Since those humble beginnings, the Mazda MX-5 has gone from strength to strength and keeps on getting better.

The latest model is absolutely brilliant. Not only does it look fantastic, it drives better than ever. The car is slightly shorter; the driver sits a shade lower in the centre of the car; the front and rear overhangs have been reduced and it's lighter, all of which means that the MX-5 continues to be one of the sharpest handling, nimble sports cars on sale anywhere.

Of course, wind in the hair, flies in the teeth motoring is what the MX-5 is all about. The canvas roof is a doddle to operate. Flick a lever and basically just throw the roof back over your head. If you prefer the 'luxury' of a powered hardtop, you can opt for the RF (Retractable Fastback) model. Okay, it makes the interior more secure and it does reduce the wind noise, but we think the soft top version still looks better and, to be honest, we reckon it stays much more honest to the original design ethos.

In terms of engine options you can choose from either a 130bhp 1.5 litre or 181 bhp 2.0 litre petrol engine. Prices for the 1.5 start at £23,800 while the 2.0 litre kicks off at £28,995. All come with rear wheel drive and a 6-speed gearbox.

As for performance, the 1.5 hits 60 mph in 8.3 seconds while the 2.0 litre, no surprise, is quicker with 60 mph coming up in 6.5 seconds. Needless to say that the 1.5 offers the best economy with a combined return of around 45mpg. The 2.0 litre will struggle to crack low 40s.

So, which one do you go for? We'd recommend the bigger engine model. It provides more of the sort of sparkle you'd expect in an MX-5. You also get bigger wheels which gives the car a more purposeful appearance. However, the bottom line is that either model is utterly gorgeous.

The 1.5 litre model comes in SE-L and Sport trim, while the 2.0-litre Skyactiv engine is matched to Sport Tech and the new range-topping GT Sport Tech trim. Levels of standard kit are good with such things as sat nav, heated seats, DAB radio, air conditioning, powered windows and mirrors, cruise control and smart alloys all included. If you move up to the 2.0 litre engine you'll also get leather upholstery, reversing camera, rear parking sensors and additional safety kit.

If you are thinking about buying a drop-top car to enjoy some fresh air and sunshine, use the Mazda MX-5 as a benchmark. It really is that good. Over a million Mazda MX-5s have been sold. This latest generation model will simply add to that total by the bucket load.





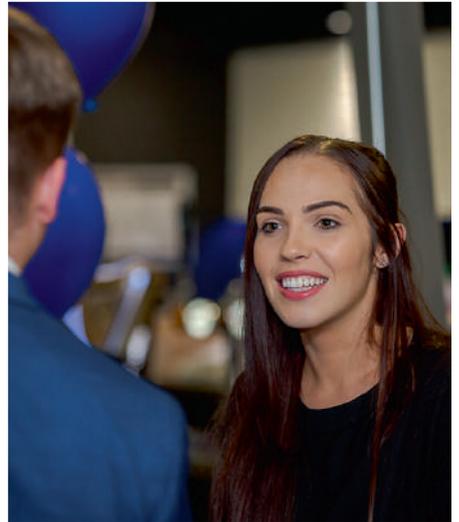
NEW IDENTITY FOR SINTONS LAW FIRM

Law firm Sintons unveiled its new brand identity at an event attended by over 200 people.

The launch, held at St James' Park, saw Sintons reveal its new branding, which centres around the firm's 124-year heritage of legal excellence and the trust it has built during that time.

Mark Quigley, managing partner of Sintons, gave a speech, ahead of a light show from the law firm's head office The Cube, on Barrack Road, which can be seen from St James' Park.

The event was held in early March, prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in the UK and the enforcement of social distancing rules.







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Ted and Steve in their natural habitat!

SUPER TED

By Steve Russell

Inspired by Colonel Tom Moore and the unifying spirit of the recent VE celebrations, Steve Russell tells the remarkable story of Tyneside centenarian, Edward Somme Ramshaw (aka Ted), whose bravery and fortitude played an extraordinary role in the WWII Allied victory.

As many good stories are, this one was inspired by a visit to the pub! Aged 101 at the time, my mate Ted cheerfully supped his way through numerous pints, cackled his crazy laugh, and chatted up the ladies with some seriously smooth lines! Simply witnessing this incredible human being's undiminished lust for life, was a joy to behold. However, knowing of the unbelievable events those 101 years had seen, convinced me that one day, I'd simply have to tell his story.

I visited him a week later, and over a few cups of tea and lots of laughter, we talked of his adventures. He showed me treasures from his box of memories, most collected during the brutal war which has come to define his life. These artefacts included a thank-you letter from a Hollywood starlet he'd chauffeured around Cairo, and a dagger bearing the ominous Nazi eagle, and the inscription "Alles Für Deutschland" on the blade. The latter, he told me matter-of-factly, was "taken from Gerry when I killed him". His outdated vernacular brought a wry smile to my face, but I guess it's easy to be judgemental when you haven't lived through the horror of war.

I left his humble little Byker home that day determined to tell the world about the unassuming hero living among us. Unfortunately, the clutter of life got in the way, and two years have gone by since. I guess having the time to finally do the things you've been postponing, is one of the unexpected bonuses of a pandemic.

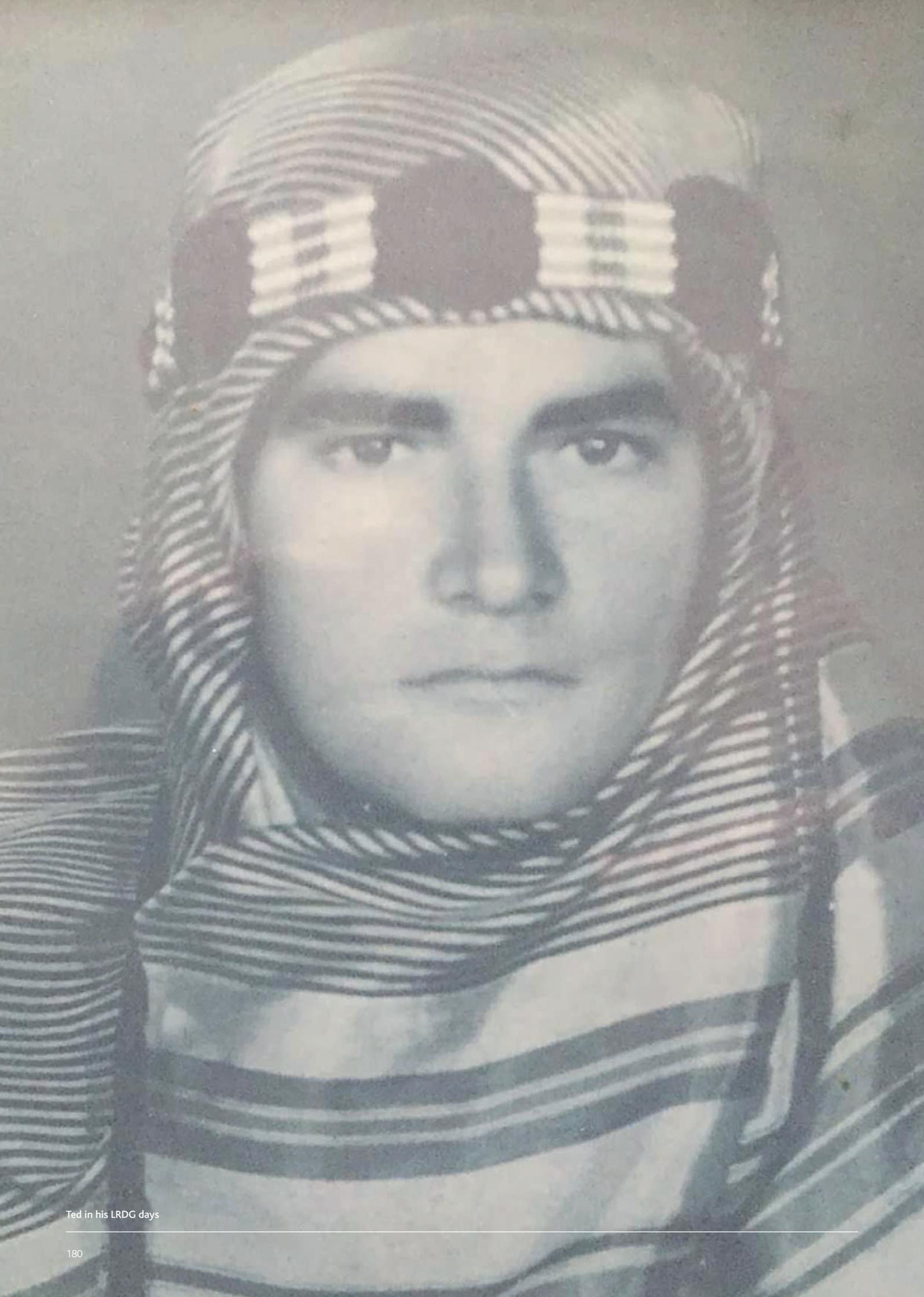
Ted's life began in 1916 in Lumley Village in County Durham, in the grim shadow of The Great War. He never knew his father, whose life was lost in the horror of The Somme. In a tragic echo of current events, his mother succumbed to the Spanish Flu pandemic in 1919, and Ted was orphaned at just three years old.

The early 20th century was no time to be an orphan, and Ted's childhood was not a happy one. He was raised in ghastly children's homes across the North East, where punishments were usually physical. His daughter, Mary, recalls how one particularly vindictive matron had it in for her dad: "When people would come in looking for children to adopt, she would put a sign around dad's neck which read 'naughty boy', to make sure no-one would want to take him"

Unsurprisingly, Ted escaped this hellish existence as soon as he could, and having lied about his age, joined the Royal Signals at the age of fifteen. He was sent to Catterick for training with the cavalry, and immediately fell in love with army life. Having no family to visit, Ted spent his leave on the barracks, caring for his beloved horses, and he soon became an accomplished horseman.

His first overseas post was Egypt in the mid-1930s, but it wasn't long before his tough upbringing landed him in hot water. A bar fight earned him a spell in military prison, but the army eventually found a way to channel his toughness to their advantage. After the outbreak of WWII, Ted was recruited into the Long Range Desert Group; an elite unit formed in 1940 by Major Ralph Bagnold and General Archibald Wavell. Their remit was to penetrate Italian lines in the Egyptian desert, and Ted spent prolonged periods in enemy territory on reconnaissance and intelligence missions. On one occasion he sustained serious injuries when a jeep he was travelling in was blown up. In typically bullish fashion, he shrugged that off and went on to fight alongside the Eighth Army in Operation Crusader, the Allied bid to relieve the besieged city of Tobruk in 1941. This battle raged for some time, and Ted was still fighting when the front line moved on to El Alamein, where he fought under the legendary Lieutenant-General Montgomery.

continued...



Ted in his LRDC days

continued from previous...



One of Ted's masterpieces!

After his desert service, it was on to the Persian Gulf, where he fought alongside Russian forces, disrupting Nazi oil-plundering operations.

Via further spells in Cairo and Italy, Ted eventually returned to British soil after seven years away, and was sent on to Troon in Scotland for invasion training. It was then down to Portsmouth and the perilous journey across to Normandy for the D Day landings. Ted landed on Sword Beach, and incredibly, he would go on to fight through France, Belgium and all the way into Germany. Fittingly, Ted was in Berlin when the war finally ended, facing down the dwindling forces of the Nazi empire to the very last day. Ted is not a man known for hyperbole, and his daughter Mary recalls an episode which typifies his legendary deadpan attitude towards his own endeavours:

"I once asked dad how he felt at the end of 'The Longest Day' in Normandy. His answer was 'hungry!'"

Ted's regiment was among those to liberate Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in April 1945, something which he has never been able to talk about. After so many years of combat, one can only imagine the toll which that terrible sight must have taken on those brave souls who finally brought an end to Hitler's horrifying tyranny.

With the war finally over, Ted remained in the army, serving with the Allied Control Council in Germany. He married his sweetheart, Doris in 1947, and the couple would go on to have three children, Mary, John and Stephen, who was sadly killed in a car accident in 1979. They enjoyed a long and happy marriage, until Doris passed away in 2003.

Ted's post-army career included spells as an ambulance driver, a long-distance lorry driver and he was even involved in the construction of the Tyne Tunnel. However, it was with a paint brush where this remarkable man would once again confound and delight. Ted had trained as a painter and decorator in his youth, but when he took



A rare moment of calm in WWII

up oil painting as a hobby in his late 60s, it was soon evident that his talents were better suited to canvases than walls. He began knocking out mini-masterpieces at a prodigious rate, with many depicting historical Naval vessels on the high seas. Having seen many of them first hand, I can attest to them being worthy of any fine art gallery you care to mention! Offering further evidence that he is in fact a bionic man, Ted suffered a heart attack at 87, which far from knocking him back, inspired him to become a fitness freak, and he continued to pound the treadmills into his late 90s!

Ted's proudest moment came when he reached 100. No, not a telegram from the Queen (although he was grateful to receive one of those), but a Legion of Honour Medal from the French government. This is the highest French military honour, and was bestowed upon Ted for his role in the D Day landings. Ted had previously received a number of WWII medals, including the Africa Star, the Italy Star and the France and Germany Star.

Considering his background, it's perhaps unsurprising that his civvy life was occasionally 'spirited'. Son John, a retired Northumbria Police

Inspector, and now proprietor of Clennell Hall Hotel in Northumberland, describes this side of Ted's character: "Growing up like he did, dad had to be a fighter, and alongside his best pal Benny Sharkey [a legendary Tyneside boxer, who won 127 of an incredible 196 fights] he was prize fighting around Newcastle from the age of 14, to make ends meet. Unfortunately, old habits die hard and he was still getting into the odd scrape in his 80s!"

Feisty one is Ted, although that was usually a prerequisite of entry into the somewhat lively taverns of Shields Road, especially so in his heyday! Ted's wild days are just about behind him now, and these days he enjoys spending time with his ever-growing family (which now includes five grandchildren, five great grandchildren and six step great grandchildren) as well as the odd cheeky pint when he can. Sure, he can be cantankerous on occasion, but I think he's probably earned that right. He's currently isolating with his daughter Mary at her home in Leeds, and hasn't been feeling too well, so I'm sure I speak for the whole nation when I say get well soon Ted, you are a hero to us all.

P.S. Hopefully see you for a pint soon my friend!

MEET THE GM...



MARGARET LIVINGSTONE-EVANS

General Manager, Langley Castle Hotel

Michael Grahamslaw talks to Margaret Livingstone Evans, to look at her career so far and how the Hotel is adapting to coronavirus.

Did you always envisage a career in the Hotel industry and describe your career path so far?

No it is fair to say I didn't have a clue what I wanted to do.

I started working with Swallow Hotels in my late teens and have been hooked ever since! I worked for Trusthouse Forte in London for five years from the age of 19 which was a tremendous grounding. This was a 900 bedroom hotel and a fantastic environment to learn and work in with great camaraderie amongst the staff.

After returning to the North East and rejoining Swallow Hotels, I met my husband Michael - a fellow hotelier - and decided to get married after knowing each other for three weeks. Along the way I have enjoyed spells with British Transport Hotels, Scottish and Newcastle Hotels and The Robert Parker Collection before arriving here at Langley 18 months ago.

Tell us about your team?

We have a long established friendly team and I am very well supported by my deputy Bob Rutherford who has been at the Hotel for 25 years.

What is Langley Castle's greatest asset?

Apart from our beautiful castle itself, our amazing grounds, enviable location and the fact that we are the only 4 star castle hotel in Northumberland.

As a venue how have you faced up to the challenge of coronavirus ?

We had our best year in six years last year with 25% increase in accommodation and 23% increase in overall sales, our aim was to continue that growth which has naturally proved difficult because of our current situation. However I am by nature a very positive person and it is important to focus on what we can do.

We have developed a "Bubble with Bubbles" wedding package which is a beautiful concept allowing couples to take their vows with the people closest to them and having all nine of the amazing bedrooms in the castle available for their bubble's overnight accommodation.

This is available for the incredible price of £4500. (exclusive use)

Again working within the boundaries of what we can do in a compliant way we have also created a Key to the Castle wedding package for just £6500 which again gives the wedding party the freedom to enjoy Langley to themselves but for a group of 18 people. (Exclusive use)

Myself and Bob are available to give completely private wedding show rounds to enable couples to appreciate the fairytale setting.

We are also developing afternoon teas in a box to enjoy on a picnic rug in the grounds.

What is the best piece of advice you have been given?

Do not procrastinate and put off to tomorrow what you can do today.

Is there a mantra you aspire to do business by?

Lead by example and also 'If you always do what you always did, you always get what you always got'.

If you were hosting a dinner party at Langley who would be your ideal guests?

My husband because he is funny and humour is very important to me, Gordon Ramsay, Gino D'Acampo and Fred Sirieix because when you have worked in the hotel industry for as long as we have only hoteliers/chefs would believe our stories, laughter is important to me.

How do you like to unwind?

Very simple...time with the family!

To find out more about Langley Castle, visit: www.langleycastle.co.uk or call 01434 688888 or email: manager@langleycastle.com
Langley Castle Hotel has been a national "Best Hotel for Romance" winner and was North East Hotel of the Year in 2018.



FLASH BANG, WHAT A PICTURE, WHAT A PHOTOGRAPH!

Laurence Sweeney Photography has been photographing weddings for almost 10 years and consists of Laurence and his daughter, Stacey. Laurence provides an insight to the industry and gives some useful tips.

How has COVID-19 affected Wedding Photography?

The Rubik's Cube of re-scheduling has been interesting, however from a photographer's perspective it has been relatively straight-forward. We are either already booked or we are available. I really feel for couples who have been looking forward to their big day and are now having to re-arrange everything.

Why should couples use a Professional Photographer?

A Flower Girl's smile, a Mother's tear, a Proud Father and a Grandma's laugh, who will capture those moments? The number one regret for most couples is not having a professional wedding photographer. Your guests may take fabulous photos, but can they anticipate those special moments before they happen, because if the moment has already arrived then it could be too late. Pro Photographers may be able to offer bespoke packages to cover a much or as little time as you wish them to be there. Good Professional Photographers can create a story of those special moments, which you can look back on in ten year's time and bring back memories of a fabulous occasion, the stunning bride, the detail in her dress, the colours of her flowers and the love in her husband's eyes. These candid shots are where a Professional Photographer can really stand out. Have no regrets, just wonderful memories.

Is Wedding Photography costly?

Photos will be there long after the cake has been eaten, after the flowers have died, after the favours have gone and after the dancing has stopped. I always say to my couples that every year on your anniversary, set aside an hour or two and look through your wedding photos, remember the smiles and laughter, remember the dancing, remember your friends and family. A Professional will be skilled in their profession, they will have back up equipment, and most importantly they will deliver what you want.

Is it worth booking a company who have two photographers?

We can cover both sets of preparations and getting ready, the wide vistas and the close ups. Most

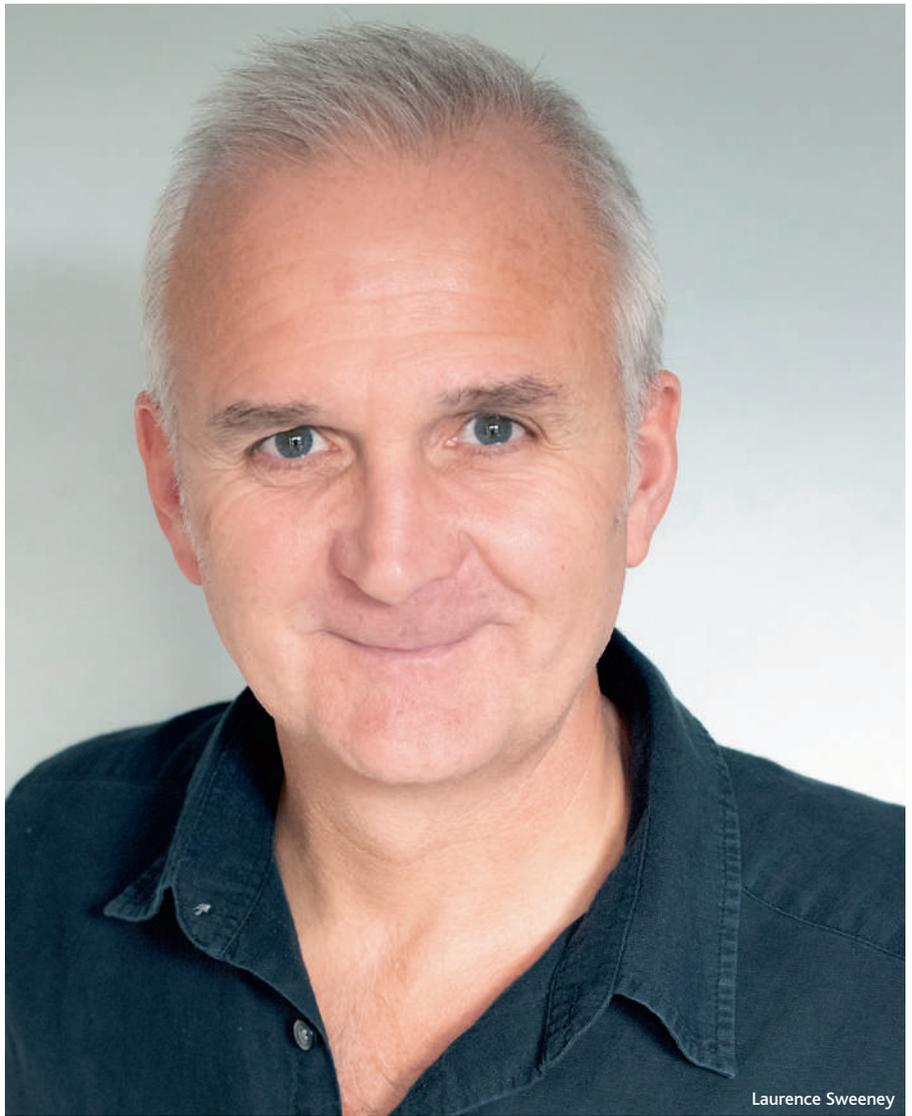
importantly the higher chance of capturing those quality candid moments.

What is the benefit of a Pre-Wedding Shoot?

A Pre-Wedding shoot is about the photos, but it is more about getting to know each other better and an opportunity for a chat about your big day, the family dynamics and recommendations. Feedback that we receive is that the pre-wedding shoot meant that our couples were a lot more relaxed in front of the camera on their big day.

How far in advance should I book my chosen photographer?

We received an enquiry for 2023 recently! 2021 is going to be very busy. My recommendation is to book at least 12 months prior to your big day otherwise you may be disappointed.



Laurence Sweeney

www.laurencesweeneyphotography.com



Something for

Everyone

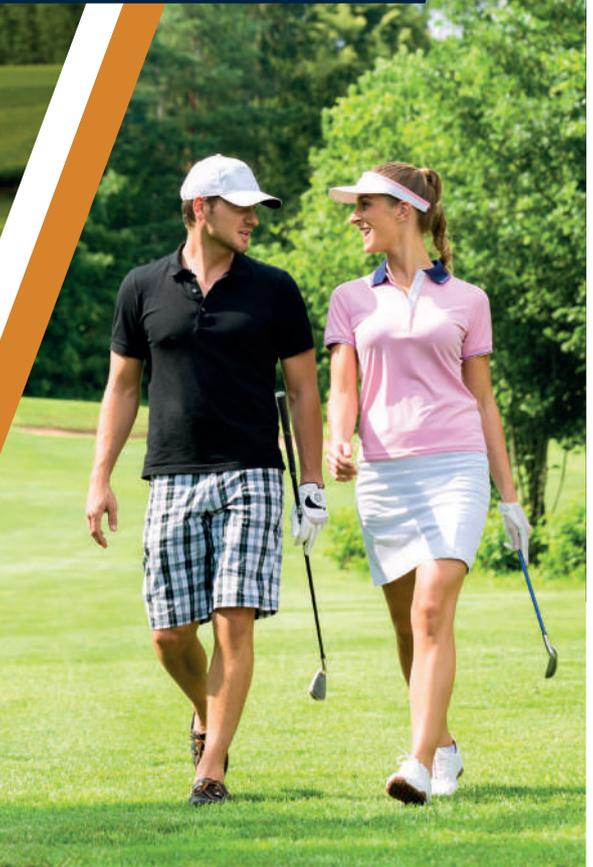
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embrace change'*



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Contact General Manager, Peter Smith

For more information

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peter.smith@tynesidegolfclub.co.uk



Michelle Jones

YOU HAVE A CHOICE

How we have chosen to deal with this crisis as business owners, employers, directors and leaders will define our brand and affect our businesses in the future.

As I write this today, the industry I am incredibly passionate about, is under investigation due to a small pocket of businesses that have forgotten, what we do.

A Wedding Day

- We are born into love.
- At the age of two we develop empathy.
- At the age of four/five we tend to get married to our best friend and/or develop a crush.
- Around the age of 12 we will have a boy/girlfriend.
- From the age of 15 we are emotionally mature to enable us to fall in love.
- One in 10,000 chance of finding your soulmate.
- 26 is the average age we meet our soulmate.
- We grow together for 4.9 years on average before deciding to get married.
- 365 days on average to plan a wedding.
- £30k on average is spent on a wedding.
- 80 loved ones typically celebrate and support a couple on their special day.
- One dream, one cherished moment in time, one opportunity to get it right.
- One of the most special days out of 26,280 days we are alive (on average).
- A day filled with a million hopes, dreams and love.
- One first day of married life.
- A marriage that produces on average 1.7 new humans.
- A union that on average lasts for 30 years,
- most ending with the death of a partner (UK).
- We die surrounded by that love and all those magical memories.

It has been beautiful to work with many small independent creative businesses that fully understand the very real human element to the work we do, understanding what our work actually means and have shown much empathy.

But it has also been incredibly disappointing to witness a section of the industry show their true colours and the pain this has created.

England's exit strategy will have an incredible impact on the world of weddings, it's important we don't lose sight of what a wedding day symbolises. Empathy is a powerful resource for your brand and your business.

You have a choice.

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Renowned for their effortlessly stylish tailoring, Master Debonair are confident they are more than just suits.

After expanding their East Boldon flagship store back in June last year, the award-winning menswear company launched its casual collection.

The collection showcases everything you need to loosen up without styling down; classic shirts, overcoats, woollen sweaters and a vast variety of chino and jeans.

Off the back of the casual line success, the brand expanded the collection even more at the start of the year, collaborating with North East neighbours, Barbour, to release a line of casual staples.

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Exclusive Business and Northern Insight have had the pleasure of hosting some exceptional speakers at our lunch events over the years. Innovative and entrepreneurial minds, honest and warm personal stories and inspiring individuals. We look forward to delivering another great series of speakers when we are able to meet again.

Linda Hitman and Michael Grahamslaw



EXCLUSIVE

BUSINESS

VIRTUALLY EXCLUSIVE

To help us navigate the coming weeks we have drawn on the support of our Exclusive community to set up a series of virtual meetings. Each event will be subject led covering the key areas that are posing so many questions for us all.

Our schedule for these virtual events is as below:

JUNE 11TH 12 NOON - NEVIL TYNEMOUTH - FOUNDING DIRECTOR NEW RESULTS LTD
Sales and Marketing post Covid

JUNE 25TH 12 NOON - ANDY DAVIES MSC., CSYP, FSYI, CPP - TRIDENT MANOR LTD Chair CSSC North East - Yorkshire Regions
Crisis recovery - planning for business resumption

JULY 9TH - EMMA BARUGH, MANAGING DIRECTOR - MB HUMAN RESOURCES CONSULTING LTD
Companies and their HR Strategy - Post Covid

JULY 23RD - PHILIP NEEVES, DIRECTOR - FELSHAM PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT LTD
Sustainability the Environment / Green Economy - Sector Challenges and Strategies

AUGUST 6TH - ANDREW MEARS, COO - TALENT 84
Talent Agenda in the New Normal

AUGUST 20TH - ANDREW MARSH, MANAGING DIRECTOR - MARSH BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION LTD
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CHEF TERRY LAYBOURNE BREAKS OUT OF LOCKDOWN

North East chef and restaurateur Terry Laybourne has broken his own lockdown to launch a new click and collect food and drink service.

Terry has left his partial self-isolation at his Corbridge home to join some of his chefs working out of the kitchen at his flagship 21 restaurant on Newcastle's Quayside.

It's a welcome relief for the multi-award-winning chef who saw his 21 Hospitality Group of six Newcastle restaurants close for business when the lockdown was first introduced in March.

Like many across the hospitality sector and wider population, he'd hoped the coronavirus lockdown might have been shorter and a return to normality a bit quicker. It now seems that Café 21, Saltwater Fish Co, Porterhouse, 21, the Broad Chare and St Vincent will not be able to open until July at the earliest, but that will depend on social distancing restrictions.

Terry explained: "Not many of us envisioned that we would still be living under such challenging conditions. The fine weather and the many messages of goodwill from customers have made things a little more bearable – but it's been tough. We all miss the work, cooking, serving and looking after our diners.

"Last weekend brought an about-turn in my



thinking on all things takeaway. I was adamant I didn't want to do it, but here we are a week or so later launching 21 at Home. We hope we can all

have a bit of fun with it; keep ourselves stimulated, our minds active and customers well fed."

Initially, Terry and his team are offering a collection service Thursday to Saturday 4pm-7pm, starting with a choice of 21 crowd pleasers. Ordering is simple – visit www.21athome.co.uk – click on the calendar to select a date, choose a collection slot, choose your favourite menu items, then check out and follow the payment instructions.

Terry said: "We're offering some of our best loved dishes along with detailed cooking instructions allowing people to re-create their own 21 experience with ease.

"We're already expanding our initial limited menu, offering people some comfort food, celebration cakes and a bit of luxury too, which I'm sure many will be missing."

He added that as a cook, this is the most exciting time of the year as new fruit and vegetables come into season. "Out in the field we've had an abundance of wild garlic and woodruff and as the seasons alter, we're anticipating the first elderflowers and early English strawberries," said Terry.

www.21athome.co.uk

VOCAL COACH HITS HIGH NOTE DURING LOCKDOWN

A North East-based vocal coach has been making records of her own during the UK lockdown, reporting record numbers of students.



Julie Miles, who runs Vocal Ovation from private studios in Northumberland, feared the worst when a host of students cancelled their one-to-one sessions at the start of lockdown in late March.

But since then, Julie, who counts a raft of TV talent show finalists among her stable of performers, has been inundated with requests for virtual coaching from across the UK and further afield, thanks to the boom in popularity of video conferencing facilities such as Skype and Zoom.

She's reporting a 25% growth in the numbers of students she's been able to work with in the last two months, including those based in cities such as Edinburgh and Birmingham across the UK and even US state Michigan.

In the last three years alone, Julie's students have appeared on the likes of The Voice, Britain's Got Talent and even America's Got Talent, when County Durham's Courtney Hadwin secured a moving golden-buzzer moment from judge Howie Mandel. Courtney made it all the way to the final of the hit show in 2018.

Julie said: "During this rather trying time, it's been important for me to continue working and be available to my dedicated students – whether that's working on technical ability, which needs constant attention, or preparing for the current surge in online shows and performances later in the year.

"Nothing beats the opportunity to work one to one in the studio with my students and I think we all want to return to normality in a safe and healthy manner, but it's been a huge boost to know that no matter how long lockdown lasts, I can keep on helping them to improve."

Julie, who this year celebrates the tenth anniversary of Vocal Ovation, has even been able to put on online showcases for producers of The Voice and auditions for the upcoming Teen Star and Open Mic UK competitions where she'll also be one of the leading judges while in lockdown.

Julie's students are also finding new ways to perform and stage their talents, with Ty Lewis, who featured on the latest series of The Voice, taking part in a charity recording for the NHS alongside his fellow contestants, and Voice Kids 2018 finalist 11-year-old Brooke Burke who recently donated her \$500 winnings of an international online singing competition "Frankie's Idols" to the NHS also.

As UK mentor for international teaching organisation, Modern Vocal Training, Julie continues to complete her current years personal online training plus support new and existing teachers in the UK.

www.vocalovation.co.uk



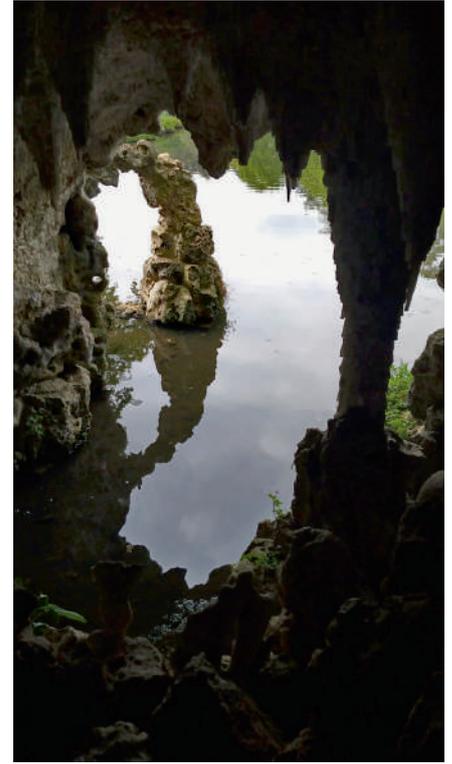
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OUT & ABOUT - COBHAM AND STOKE D'ABERNON FOR PAINSHILL



In the Second World War, the Railway Executive Committee issued a poster which became famous, asking "Is Your Journey Really Necessary?" The existing pandemic led to an even starker message: "If you are not a key worker, leave the station immediately."

Traffic is down 95%, and may never fully recover, as we reach towards a "new normal". So I have no regrets about writing on a destination you would probably never go to anyway, but if you do, you are in for a treat.

Painshill Park, eighteenth century pleasure grounds, in Cobham, is where the London suburbs give way to the green belt and rural Surrey. Trains run here from London Waterloo on the Southwestern Railway, and although the links to London are good for the regular commuter flow, bus routes crossing between the various radial rail lines are often thin or non-existent. So I was pleased to discover the Chatterbus, a community bus with volunteer drivers, which links the 1.9 miles between Cobham station and Painshill on the way to the local Sainsbury's store. It runs to a timetable meeting various trains and the route number is the C1.

As the visitor team told me "Painshill 18th century landscape garden was created between 1738 and 1773, by the Hon. Charles Hamilton. Born in Dublin in 1704, Hamilton, the ninth son and 14th child of the Sixth Earl of Abercorn, embarked on two Grand Tours across Europe before acquiring the land at Painshill. With ancient artefacts in his luggage and Italian romance and natural beauty in his head – along with exotic plants seen on his tours – his vision was to create 'living paintings' in a new style of magical garden."



Hamilton's gardens on the north bank of the River Mole contains rolling parkland with many fine vistas. There's a Gothic Temple, a ruined Abbey, and above all the fantastic (in its original meaning) Crystal Grotto. The Grotto is a magical, naturalistic cave with shimmering, bubbling water, rough rock and stalactites covered in sparkling crystals.

Many young men of the age of Charles Hamilton completed their education on the Grand Tour. But it was not just about seeing ancient ruins and classical

architecture, they also developed an eye for beauty. It led to an appreciation and understanding of the beauty of the landscape, through views, vistas and the play of sunlight and shadow, which underlie many of the English Landscape Gardens. They are 3D works of art.

In the last few months Painshill has faced myriad of challenges. It has been hit by storms resulting in the River Mole flooding, causing damage, closures and event cancellations. All of this had a severe impact on income to fund their work. Now Painshill is shut to stop the spread of Coronavirus, meaning all income from visitor admissions, tea room sales, weddings and events will be lost. 80% of staff are furloughed, and the battle is on to save the charity. Painshill's future is extremely fragile, and to survive it will need help.

It has never been clearer that nature and open spaces are incredibly important for people's well-being and mental health. Painshill is a vital resource for the community.

It is a place where people can enjoy the benefits of exercise and being in nature, amongst trees and landscape and seeing birds. A moment of calm in everyday life. Having enjoyed a visit during 2019, I hope this special place is saved to be enjoyed today and for many generations to come. If you do ever get there, please let me know.

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claire barber

PR

THIS SPORTING LIFE

In a new series of features we interview leading North East business personalities and talk about their alternate sporting careers and remaining aspirations away from the office.

This month we meet...

MICHAEL RICHARDSON

CEO of South Northumberland Cricket Club.

What inspired you to start participating/playing cricket?

My dad was a professional cricketer so from a young age my family would go and watch his matches, I was in awe of the great players he played with and I would mimic their styles. Later, the runs at school and university gave me the confidence that I had some ability and I was desperate to pursue a career in sport.

Who were your childhood sporting heroes?

From cricket it would be Sachin Tendulkar, Brian Lara and Neil McKenzie but I had many heroes from the sporting world. I watched and played a lot of sport growing up.

What do you most enjoy about your sport?

The changing room, the lifestyle, the experiences and the people you meet, as well as practicing and batting.

What has been your most memorable sporting moment?

I would say winning the County Championship in 2013 with Durham. It was great to see the pride for their team the region had. It was a good experience to be a part of a team that was full of local talent whom had grown up in the North East. We were invited to show the trophy at a Sunderland v Liverpool game and it was a fun time and a fun few weeks. Participating at the t20 finals day was also up there, it was the best theatre I have been involved in on a cricket pitch, in front of a packed Edgbaston.

Who has been the greatest influence on your sporting career?

Besides my family, there have been many at key stages in my career. I have moved around often so it would be unfair to pinpoint one. I had good coaches growing up in South Africa and at school at Stonyhurst College in Lancashire. There have

been people who have backed and supported me at crucial times at university, the MCC YCs and in county cricket. Jon Lewis and Geoff Cook gave me my first county contract. Overseas professionals and senior players in county cricket are also so influential on a dressing room.

If you could be one sportsman who would it be and why?

AB de Villiers or Virat Kohli.

They have mastered the mindset of being a cricketer which is a sport with such ups and downs and of course both are freakishly good players.

Separately those group of golfers coming through like Rickie Fowler, McIlroy and Justin Thomas are incredibly refreshing how they are right at the pinnacle of their sport and are having fun whilst there.

What are your remaining sporting aspirations?

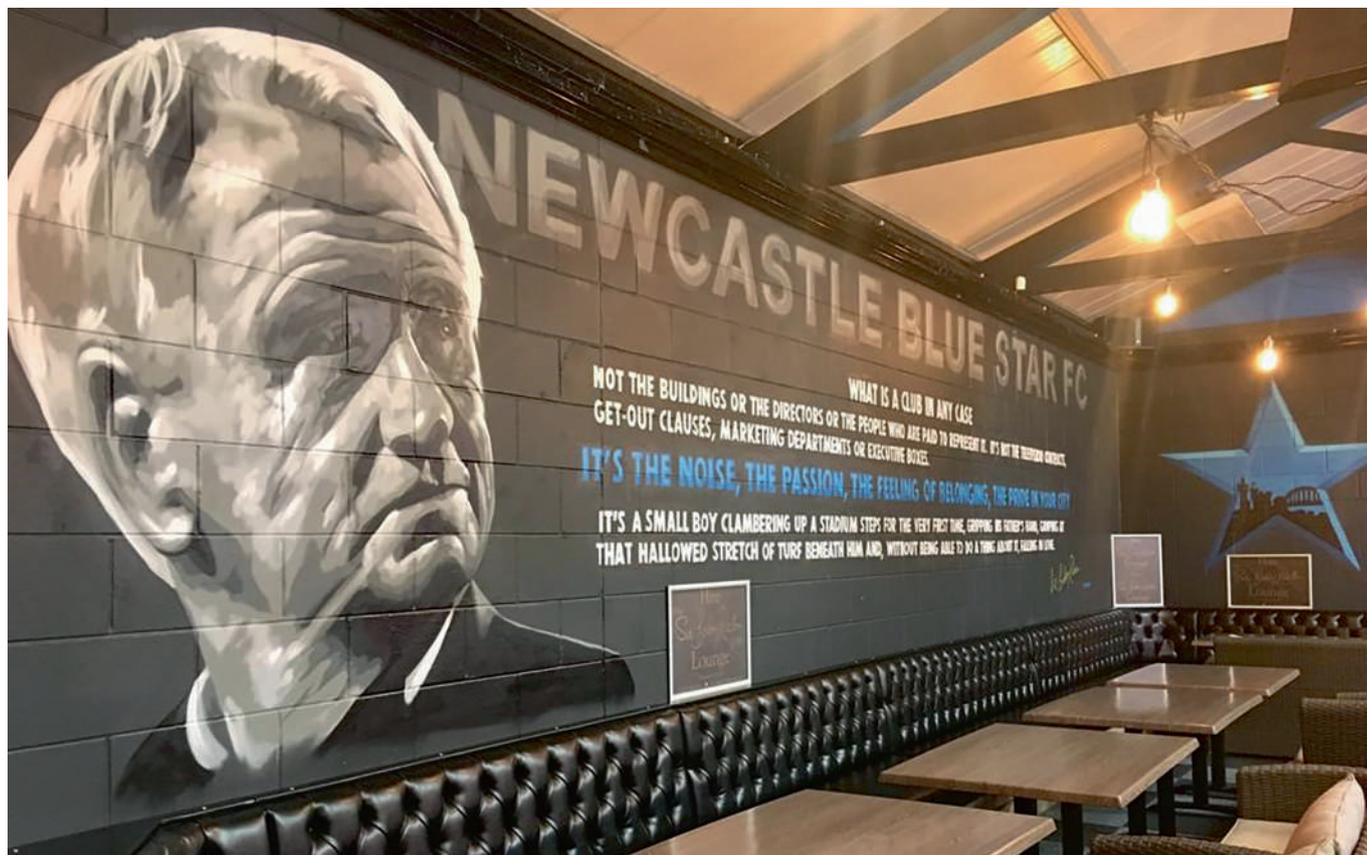
I am thoroughly enjoying representing Germany and playing local cricket. The German experience has been great and it's story as a cricketing nation is just beginning.

I would really like to go into sports administration or a role slightly closer to a team as I am fascinated by man management and how the best create appropriate environments and cultures.





Michael Richardson



A STAR IS REBORN

Steve Russell talks to the team behind the resurrection of an iconic Tyneside football club, Newcastle Blue Star, whose ambitious recent development has established a vital community hub in the west end of the city.

When Lady Elsie Robson performed ceremonial duties at the opening of Newcastle Blue Star's new Scotswood clubhouse in 2018, she did so in the knowledge that the values of her legendary husband would continue to guide and inspire the youth of his beloved city. The Sir Bobby Robson Lounge represents the heart of the club, and a huge mural of the man himself, accompanied by words typifying his unconquerable spirit, dominates the room. This was installed as a permanent reminder of the positive impact which sport, and the values it instils within young people, can have on a community.

Scotswood has always had a tough reputation, and the effects of austerity in recent years have exacerbated issues like crime and anti-social behaviour. Local businessman and club chairman, Steve Best, originates from the area, and explains the motivation behind the project:

"I grew up here and I've attended far too many funerals of lads I grew up with. I want the kids in the area to have the opportunity to take a different path and Sir Bobby's values of decency and respect, represent everything I believe in, which is why we named our lounge after him".

Blue Star, which took over the Scotswood Sports Centre site from Grainger Park Football Club, was originally established in 1930, and its successes include winning the FA Vase in 1978. They won

promotion to the Northern Premier League Premier Division in 2008/2009 (whilst ground-sharing with Newcastle Falcons), but off-field issues led to the club winding up shortly afterwards. It was this rich history, which inspired Steve and his team to relaunch the club in 2018, but the vision was to make it something more than it had ever been before.

On the football side, the club now has multiple junior teams, ranging from under 6's all the way through to the seniors, who are currently playing in the Northern Alliance Premier. That is the seventh tier of non-league football, but if the team's success matches the ambition of those in the boardroom, they'll rapidly climb the football ladder. Senior matches have recently attracted crowds of up to five hundred, and work is underway to capitalise on that popularity by building two new stands, with a combined seating capacity of 480. Crucially, this redevelopment will bring the club into compliance with FA legislation, paving the way for the club to bring FA Vase and even FA Cup football to Scotswood. The scheme includes the opportunity to purchase a personalised stadium brick, and at £24.99 a pop, who wouldn't want to achieve immortality by etching their name into local history?!

With coaching staff including ex-NUFC players such as Kenny Wharton, the footballing part of the operation is flying, but that only tells part of the

story. The club has forged strong links with Grainger Park Boxing Club, who share the site, and they also host regular social events for the community. Events Manager & Junior Coach, Mark Lane, expands on the community aspects of the club:

"We really want to become a social hub for the whole community, whether you like football or not, and we are definitely moving in the right direction. We're always looking to put on great entertainment, and we recently had a fundraiser with the excellent local comedian, Gavin Webster. We've also had an evening with Micky Quinn, and a similar event with Lee Clark and Rob Lee. Kevin Keegan has also shown his support for the club"

Next on the slate is tribute act, Garry Cinnamon in June, but as with the rest of us, their plans for a foot-stomping night of fun have been thrown into chaos by the ongoing COVID-19 crisis. No doubt the real Mr Cinnamon could eloquently describe this virus in his inimitable Glaswegian style, but in spite of it all, the club are determined that they will prevail and thrive when life eventually returns to something resembling normality.

In these worrying and unprecedented times, when we are all going to need the power of community more than we ever have before, Newcastle Blue Star stands as a shining example of the amazing things which can be achieved when people power is harnessed to its full potential.

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LOOK TO THE FUTURE

Seeing and feeling the effects of the pandemic over the past few months has affected us all, in some way and form. For many it has had a profound effect on their mental health, therefore its important to naturally boost your serotonin levels.

What is serotonin?

Serotonin is a chemical messenger in your brain that scientists attribute to feelings of happiness and wellbeing.

How to boost serotonin levels naturally

Sunlight

Exposure to sunlight increases the brain's release of serotonin, a few minutes of bright natural sunlight each morning can help elevate mood and re-energize you to face the day.

B-Vitamins

Getting B vitamins from your diet helps maintain healthy serotonin levels.

A well-balanced diet made up of healthy foods usually provides enough to support serotonin production, everyday foods containing B vitamins include:

- Whole grains (brown rice, barley, millet)
- Meat (red meat, poultry, fish)
- Eggs and dairy products (milk, cheese)
- Legumes (beans, lentils)
- Seeds and nuts (sunflower seeds, almonds)
- Dark, leafy vegetables (broccoli, spinach, kale)
- Fruits (citrus fruits, avocados, bananas)

Reducing refined sugar

Consuming a large amount of processed sugar, after the initial high your mood can suddenly drop and trigger feelings of worry, irritability, and sadness. This can be a double whammy if you are also dealing with depression or anxiety. Sugar will also make you crave food which can then leave you tired and lethargic. The ingestion of a sugar rich diet is linked to decreased serotonin metabolism.



David Fairlamb

Exercise

Exercise is proven to increase both serotonin production and release. Aerobic exercise such as running, cycling and bootcamps are the most likely to boost serotonin. Also training in groups has a real positive effect, unfortunately we have to rule groups out for now, but training with other members of your household will give you a positive boost together.

Positive Thinking

The way we think and act to situations is key to ours moods. Try to take stock of the huge loss of

life and knock on effects of the current pandemic in this country and around the world, the smaller day to day things that we used to get frustrated over, should pale into insignificance. Teach yourself to stay positive and upbeat, learn to laugh at situations rather than get angry. These calmer more level headed reactions and thoughts will make you feel better and more positive everyday.

When positive thoughts are generated, the stress hormone cortisol decreases and the brain produces serotonin, creating a feeling of well-being, calmness and emotional stability.

DAVID'S SUMMING UP

As lockdown starts to ease, its hugely important to keep yourself mentally as well as physically strong. Keep thinking positive and look to the future.

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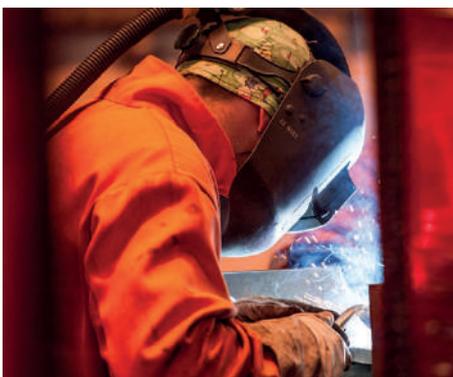


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ON THE TEE BOX - NORTHUMBERLAND GOLF CLUB

Location -

Situated within High Gosforth Park, Gosforth only minutes from the main A1.

Setting -

Uniquely runs inside and around Newcastle Racecourse.

Length of course -

White Tees 6687yds, Yellow 6325yds.

Course Type -

Heathland, designed by world-renowned golf course architects Harry Colt and James Braid between 1898 and the 1920s, it offers the very best in British heritage course design. With its firm, fast greens and strategic bunkering, we describe the course as a classic challenge requiring tactical play to succeed.

Facilities -

Clubhouse Lounge, Spike Bar and Dining Room. Extensive Practice Area with ball dispenser, chipping and putting green. Buggies and Trolleys for hire.

Longest Drive -

4th Hole, 507 yards Par 5, running just inside the racecourse, with a large gully in front of the green.

Toughest Hole -

13th Hole, 470 yards Par 4, playing to the furthest point from the clubhouse, easily the stroke 1 hole, good drive needed to be able to reach the green in two, a par feels like a birdie!

Signature Hole -

18th Hole, a great finishing hole with an uphill second shot to the green right in front of the clubhouse.

Course Record -

By a member, Paul Caldicott 66.

Competitions -

The course regularly hosts national and regional championships and qualifiers, including for the British Open. Northumberland Golf Club hold a series of Open Competitions throughout the season.

Prices -

£60 per round, £30 Twilight Rate.
Memberships available, Full over age 37 £1525,
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