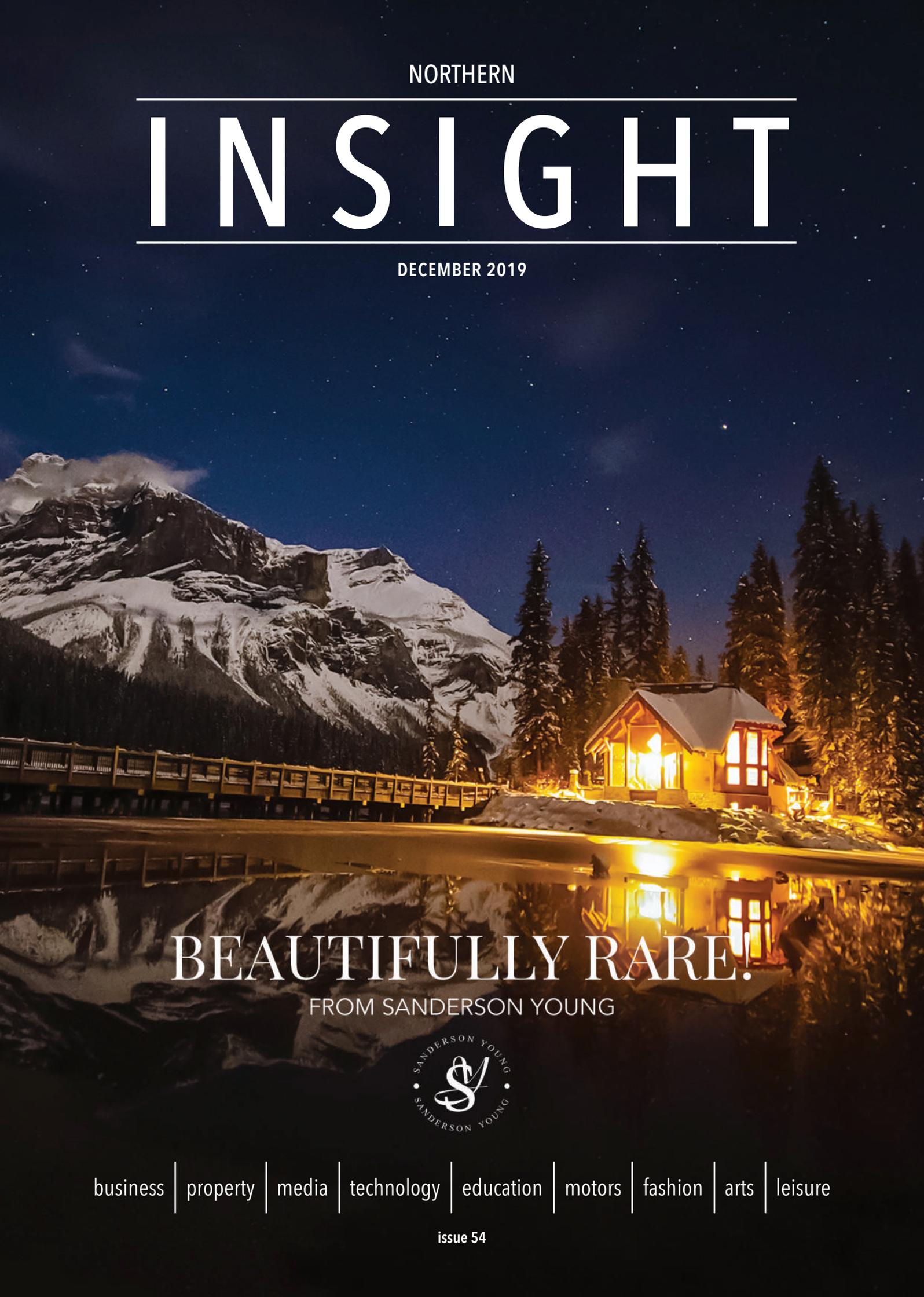


NORTHERN

INSIGHT

DECEMBER 2019



BEAUTIFULLY RARE!

FROM SANDERSON YOUNG



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

issue 54



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WHAT HAS THE EU EVER DONE FOR THE NORTH EAST?

Direct Funding

- ★ Portobello Trade Park in Durham was financed with £2.7m of European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) funding.
- ★ Consett Business Park received £1.1m in ERDF funding.
- ★ The Core Science Central in Newcastle received £5.6m in ERDF funding.
- ★ Refurbishment of Newcastle's Toffee Factory received \$4.4m in ERDF funding.
- ★ Sunderland Software Centre received £4.4m in ERDF funding.
- ★ Washington Business Centre received £3.4m in ERDF funding.
- ★ University of Sunderland received £1.3m to finance graduate placements in local business.
- ★ River Tyne Energy & Innovation Centre received £1m in ERDF funding.
- ★ £7.8m to fund a low carbon enterprise zone at Swan Hunter shipyard at Wallsend.

Employment

- ★ 100,000 jobs in the region are linked to exports to the EU, which accounts for 58% of NE exports.
- ★ The NE has benefitted from £1.1bn of inward investment for EU members over the last 5 years.

Tourism

- ★ In 2014, there were 274,000 inbound visits to the NE from EU countries. Tourism contributes £90m to the NE economy and employs around 117,000 people.

Farming

- ★ From 2007 to 2013, the region received £800m in payments from the EU's Common Agricultural Policy.

Health

- ★ In March 2019, nearly 1,400 NHS staff in the NE were from the EU, including 7% of hospital doctors, 5% of nurses and health visitors, 2% of clinical support staff and 4% of GP's

Security

- ★ Through the European Arrest Warrant, 10 people have been brought back to the UK and 110 have been extradited to face justice since 2009.

Research

- ★ Newcastle University leads a cross-European consortium of an EU funded £4.6m project into liver disease.

Structural Funding 2007- 2013

- ★ The NE region received £73 per head in European Social Fund funding and £114 per head in European Regional Development Fund funding, more than any other English region.

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FOREWORD

Welcome to the December edition of Northern Insight.

To close a fantastic 2019 we are delighted to bring you our biggest ever edition and one we are very proud of.

Our festive cover stars are Sanderson Young who reflect on a strong final quarter to the year.

Our interview slots include a focus on the fantastic Bradley Lowery Foundation and an Entrepreneur interview with Sarah O'Mahoney reflecting on her journey so far.

Amongst some terrific social coverage we showcase our recent Wynyard Hall and Jesmond Dene lunches and the fantastic WonderLAN Ball.

Elsewhere we enjoy our first visits to Newcastle's Côte Brasserie and the beautiful Beadnell Towers Hotel.

We look forward to returning in 2020 and in the meantime may I wish everyone a very Merry Christmas and prosperous New Year.

Thank you to all concerned for your fantastic support. Till next month.

M.J. Grahamslaw

Michael Grahamslaw, Publisher
mjgrahamslaw@outlook.com



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Barry Speker

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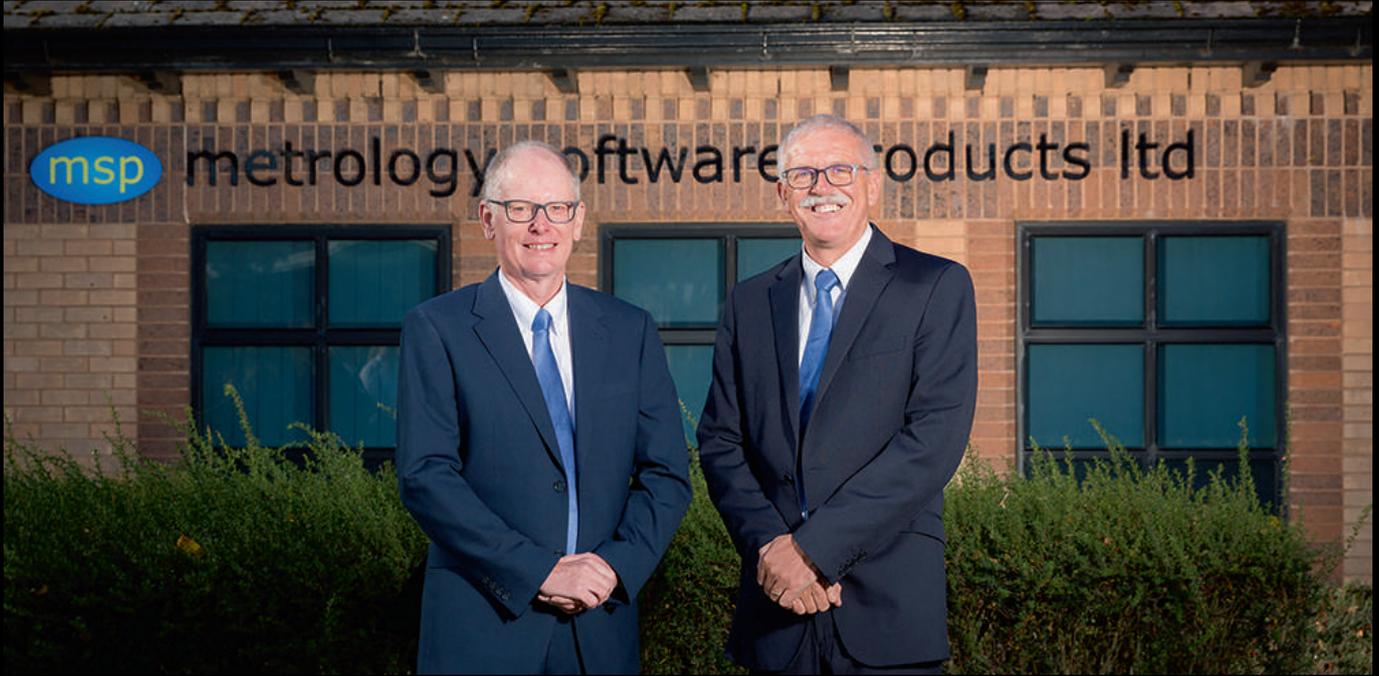
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Advertisements

Although every care is taken to ensure accuracy the Publishers regret that they cannot accept responsibility for loss or damage caused by an error in the printing or damage to, a loss of artwork, transparencies or photographs. Complaints will only be considered for up to a week after publication. Advertising must be received by the 20th of the month. No responsibility is accepted for errors.

MSP REAFFIRMS COMMITMENT TO NORTH EAST



A company specialising in precision software and part manufacturing solutions has reaffirmed its commitment to the North East through purchasing its headquarters.

MSP, whose world-leading manufacturing technology is used on almost all seven continents, has bought the freehold of its site in Alnwick, the premises where it began life in 2002 and has grown to become one of the key names in advanced manufacturing internationally. Clients include Safran, BAE Systems and four leading Formula 1 teams.

The fast-growing company is the creator of the NC-Checker and NC-PerfectPart products, which have delivered significant time, cost and efficiency savings for major manufacturers around the world. Despite its global success, MSP has always remained deeply committed to its Northumberland origin, where founders Tony Brown and Peter Hammond relocated from the south to establish the company.

MSP's purchase of its Greensfield Court premises confirms its ongoing contribution to the local and regional economy as the company continue to create jobs for local people and attract and retain

talent in the North East.

Since moving into Greensfield Court in 2002, MSP has continued to grow through new client wins, which has seen the business achieve annual growth of up to 25% every year since its inception. The purchase of the site will allow space for further growth when required.

Through purchase of the building, MSP has also become landlord to three existing tenants, Alnwick Farming Consultants, Scottish Woodlands Limited and Renal Services UK Limited, all of whom are set to stay for the long term.

CHRISTIAN PUTS IN STRONG BID FOR SENIOR LEADERSHIP ROLE

An MBA qualification and a change in career direction have propelled a former recruitment professional into a senior management role at a Newcastle-based firm.

46-year-old Christian Rowe, from Jesmond, is flying high with bid and tender specialists Executive Compass. Christian is set to take on the role of managing director designate, with training and mentoring to fast-track his progress.

Christian joined the firm in 2016 as a bid writer, embarking on an 18-month apprenticeship with mentoring from MD Neil Capstick. He quickly made his mark with valuable contributions to the direction and day-to-day running of the firm and joined the management team as client relationship director in November 2018.

Now studying for an MBA with Durham University, Christian is set to assume greater responsibility to run day-to-day company operations and allow Neil to focus on other projects within the business.

Christian said: "After many years of working in different fields and disciplines, I really feel I've found the right specialism. I'm thrilled to be playing an integral part in the future of the firm and Neil's succession planning. All being well, the aim is to take over as MD of this exciting, high-growth business."

Based in Newcastle with offices in London and Glasgow, Executive Compass now has a core team of 18 staff. The company has just expanded its Hoults Yard offices by taking over an adjoining property and, via its graduate recruitment scheme, will be appointing four new staff members this autumn.



IF YOUR BRAND IS WHAT PEOPLE SAY ABOUT YOUR BUSINESS WHEN YOU ARE NOT IN THE ROOM, WHAT WOULD THEY SAY ABOUT YOUR COMPANY?

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SHOP CELEBRATES FIVE YEARS OF INSPIRING PEOPLE

A social enterprise that has become a launchpad for entrepreneurs and provides work inspiration to hundreds of young people recently celebrated its fifth year in business.

Gateshead College launched the handPICKED shop in 2014 to give enterprising students and other retail entrepreneurs the chance to sell their products to the public.

Based at intu Metrocentre's Green Mall in Gateshead, handPICKED lets entrepreneurial students showcase their retail flair and grow their fledgling start-up businesses. In five years, the shop has provided retail, customer service and marketing experience to 144 young people.

handPICKED also enables local traders and craft-makers to stock their handmade gifts and accessories, including many with a North East theme.

Gateshead College students with special educational needs and disabilities are also gaining work experience at handPICKED. 25 people have worked in the shop and have been able to boost their employability skills by developing in areas such as communication, problem-solving and teamwork.

The partnership between intu Metrocentre and handPICKED has also seen the development of a training academy. intu Retail Gold is run by the college to encourage people to train towards retail, hospitality and customer service careers within intu Metrocentre and Eldon Square in Newcastle.

CDS RECRUITMENT CELEBRATES TENTH ANNIVERSARY

North East-based engineering, technical and scientific recruitment specialist CDS Recruitment is celebrating 10 years in business.

Established in 2009 by Chris Sultman, CDS Recruitment offers executive search, contingent permanent and contract recruitment, recruitment process outsourcing and training services.

Over the past decade, CDS Recruitment has enjoyed great success, with year on year organic growth and doubling the size of its turnover and team within the last five years. The company has also developed an impressive client base, which includes SMEs and national corporate and international blue-chip organisations.

In line with its milestone year, CDS Recruitment recently opened its second office in Hertfordshire to help further strengthen its position. The company is also in the process of recruiting for its training division.

Chris Sultman, Managing Director of CDS Recruitment, said: "CDS Recruitment was born out of a desire to set up a recruitment business which took the time to really understand its clients and develop personal and long-standing relationships with them. I'm very proud of what we have achieved over the past 10 years. We have a fantastic business which is credit to the very dedicated and hardworking team who go above and beyond to ensure we meet our client's individual needs."



HISTORIC NEWCASTLE SITE ACQUIRED BY GAINFORD GROUP



Fast-growing leisure and care operator Gainford Group has added one of Newcastle's most iconic buildings to its portfolio.

The business has been revealed as the new owner of the city's Moot Hall, a Grade 1 listed building with Ancient Monument status.

Gainford Group has purchased the Moot Hall, formerly Newcastle's Crown Court, to enhance its existing operation and portfolio. The building is still used as a Courtroom, as well as hosting wedding ceremonies, conferences and seminars, and will continue in its current function under its new ownership.

The Moot Hall, which dates from 1812, is directly opposite the Vermont Hotel, another property owned by Gainford Group, marking another highly significant acquisition for the business.

In addition to the iconic Moot Hall, Gainford Group currently owns and operates six hotels, six restaurants, bars and night-time venues, 14 care facilities and a number of children's day nurseries.

Imran Khaliq, Director of Gainford Group, said: "The Moot Hall is a building we know very well, being so close to the Vermont, and it really is an iconic and unique piece of Newcastle's history. We are very pleased to incorporate it into the Gainford Group to enhance our existing operation."

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IN CONVERSATION WITH...

NATASHA McDONOUGH

Managing Director, MMC Research & Marketing

Tell us about your career path so far?

I started my career in a global publishing house down in Hertfordshire, which is where I'm originally from.

I didn't experience the typical route into work – no university, no internship. I just showed up, worked hard and said yes to every opportunity my boss gave me.

That role launched a 25-year marketing career which has taken me to London, Los Angeles, Sydney and now sunny Sunderland for the past 12 years.

What challenges have you encountered?

I got promoted into a senior role in a very male dominated industry at a young age. It was 1998, I had been promoted to the position of Publisher, and I often travelled to different countries on my own to be one of five women in a room of hundreds of men.

I quickly learned how to hold my own in business conversations and how to travel independently, which motivated me to then spend four years working in LA.

What has been your career-defining moment?

I think much of the work at the start of my career was defining, but in recent years it was setting up MMC and then hiring my first member of the team and securing our first office.

What services does your company offer?

We help companies understand their customers' voice and opinions through market research and then turn those insights into marketing strategies and plans. Also, we often step in as a company's outsourced marketing team.

What does 2020 have in store?

More SMEs coming to us wanting our evidence-based approach to marketing. Business owners want to see a return

on their marketing budget and that's something we can help with.

Our market research division has secured some fascinating projects for next year – we'll be busy on some consumer research and some stakeholder perception projects too.

Personally, I have joined the Board of Governors at University of Sunderland, so I'm looking forward to learning more and helping more there.

What is your company's USP?

Turning evidence and insights into actionable marketing and communications strategies.

What is the best business advice you have been given?

Focus on setting up a cash flow spreadsheet and know exactly where your P&L is throughout the year, not just at the end of the year.

Who are your heroes and mentors?

I worked for a formidable woman in the US. She was a senior executive at a TV studio – and juggled a hectic schedule, two small children and didn't take any nonsense! She was also never afraid to show her softer side too. I learned a lot from her and, whilst I might not have the glamour of a TV studio, I often find myself wondering "what would Miranda do?".

How do you like to unwind?

If you ask anyone they'll probably say I don't! However, I do yoga most mornings before everyone gets up and plan on spending more weekends in the Lake District next year.

Favourite Book/CD/DVD

Currently watching Fargo (the TV series) again. I fall asleep too quickly to read in bed nowadays!



Natasha McDonough

A STRONG START TO THE FINAL QUARTER OF 2019 FOR SANDERSON YOUNG INDICATES THE TOP END OF THE NORTH EAST HOUSING MARKET REMAINS BUOYANT

TREES

MIDDLE DRIVE, WOOLSINGTON



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PRICE GUIDE: £850,000

HIGHBURY

JESMOND



SALE AGREED

PRICE GUIDE: £749,950

DARRAS ROAD

DARRAS HALL, PONTELAND



SALE AGREED

PRICE GUIDE: OFFERS OVER £965,000

THE LODGE

OAKFIELD ROAD, GOSFORTH



SALE AGREED

PRICE GUIDE: £995,000

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Sanderson Young's Rare! brand, which deals with some of the region's most high-profile property transactions at values over £700,000, has reported very strong sales rates in the last quarter of 2019, indicating that the top end of the property market is largely unaffected by political uncertainty.

The offers which have been accepted indicate regional hotspots such as Gosforth, Jesmond and Darras Hall continue to thrive. Sales have also been agreed in Northumberland and County Durham, displaying the regional spread and market dominance of the Rare! brand.

Most importantly, the accepted offers were at an average level of 97% of asking prices, further demonstrating that professional market advice and expert guidance on the property's value will result in sound interest.

Duncan Young, Chairman of Sanderson Young, commented "Whilst it is unusual for the last quarter to be so busy with Christmas on the horizon, we welcome the confidence at the top of the market and the value for the money that these properties are providing to high quality well qualified buyers".

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PRICE GUIDE: OFFERS OVER £599,950

BONOMI LODGE BURN HALL, DURHAM



SALE AGREED

PRICE GUIDE: £899,500

ESPLEY HALL ESPLEY, MORPETH



SALE AGREED

PRICE GUIDE: £1.35 MILLION

JESMOND ROAD WEST NEWCASTLE



SALE AGREED

PRICE GUIDE: £799,500



rare!

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NEW APPOINTMENTS HERALD NEW ERA FOR LUMLEY CASTLE

North East based Lumley Castle has made two strategic appointments. Gordon Cartwright joins as General Manager, whilst Craig Sherrington takes on the role of Executive Head Chef at the luxury hotel, which is based in Chester-le-Street near Durham.

With over 30 years' experience in hotels, Gordon joins Lumley Castle from Macdonald Hotels and Restaurants where he was Group Quality Director. Gordon's new role is to oversee the rejuvenation of Lumley Castle, which includes the refurbishment of eight bedrooms.

A highly experienced chef, Craig has been tasked with launching a new menu for autumn and winter, which will fit in with the planned refurbishment of the Knight's Brasserie, the library bar and the lounge.



GROWTH ADDS UP FOR ACCOUNTANTS



A North East accountancy firm is marking a decade of growth after expanding its branch network and team.

Stuart Hall & Co was set up in 2009 by Stuart himself and has since grown to 16 members of staff and three branches.

Stuart explained: "I launched the firm from my bedroom at home and we've grown organically since then. We've recently opened our Stockton office and we're building up a great team there to give our clients the best service in a location that suits them."

Looking ahead to the next ten years, Stuart hopes to keep up the momentum, planning more recruitment and an expansion of the branch network.

GROWTH FOR CORPORATE FINANCE FIRM



Following a year of rapid progress and development, a leading corporate finance boutique has increased the strength and depth of its team as it targets further growth.

Leathers Corporate Finance launched in early 2019 and has already assembled an impressive client base, as well as demonstrating its strength and expertise in leading a number of highly significant North East deal processes.

The firm, co-founded by award-winning dealmakers Abu Ali and Phil Williams, is looking to the future with confidence and has made a significant hire to help accommodate its growing workload.

Alex Farrahi now joins Leathers Corporate Finance from Deloitte, where he spent three years supporting a range of multi-national clients.



ABBY AND TOM TAKE ON SOLICITOR ROLES WITH HAY & KILNER

Two young North East lawyers have been appointed as solicitors by regional law firm Hay & Kilner after successfully completing a two-year training programme.

Abby Dorani and Tom Bridge have both undertaken four blocks of six months in different departments within the Newcastle-headquartered firm, which helped them gain a range of practical legal experience and identify their particular strengths and areas of interest.

Abby has joined the corporate team, where she assists and advises clients on a range of matters including business sales & acquisitions and data protection. Meanwhile, Tom has taken a solicitor role in the private client team, with a particular specialism in wills, trusts and tax planning.

LUMINOUS GROUP APPOINTS NEW CHAIRMAN

Mixed reality specialist Luminous Group has appointed a new chairman providing additional expertise as the company branches further into the food and beverage industry.

With over two decades of experience in the technology and food industries, Will Parker brings a wealth of expertise to the team and will be instrumental in helping with the company's transition into new markets.

Will was introduced to Luminous by Mercia Asset Management which recently aided a second round of investment for the Ouseburn-based company, raising over £400,000.

On what attracted him to Luminous Group, Will said: "What was really appealing was Luminous' new



offering, traXR. This new software presents a real opportunity for the food industry but also a much wider range of industries such as pharmaceuticals, medicine and cosmetics."



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BUSINESS @ NEWCASTLE FALCONS

Over 130 people recently attended the latest Business Club event held at Kingston Park. Guest speaker, former Great Britain and England Rugby League International Denis Betts, spoke about 'The Importance of Resilience in Business' followed by members networking. Business @ Newcastle Falcons has over 120 businesses members from all across the North East part of the bi-monthly group which boasts guest speakers, networking and brand awareness for just an annual fee of £140 + VAT.

For more information please contact corporatesales@newcastle-falcons.co.uk or call 0191 214 2892





Andrew Silver, Alice Ackroyd, Sam Legget,
Mark Jenkinson, Emma Richards and
Sharon Coull

RESOURCING YOUR VISION

Great things in business are never done by one person, they're done by a team of people - Steve Jobs
...But be sure you're clear about what you need.

Start by articulating your culture and values

What are the values, behaviours and attitudes you want to encourage which give your business its unique culture? Make sure that they are evident to all whatever the engagement. Most business relationships fail due to a lack of shared values rather than technical incompetence.

What resource do you need to get there?

You know your why, your vision and your culture but as you grow make sure that the essence of your business is sustained and visible to prospective employees or partners? Try to identify people who are aligned with your values to support your growth journey, whether that is internal appointments or external partners.

To recruit or not to recruit

We take considerable time to recruit people to join the team, measuring their technical skills but also evaluating their 'fit' with the culture and existing team. But what if it doesn't make sense to actually recruit someone. The need is spasmodic, too specialist or requires a level of experience that you can't afford. What are your options? What are your capability gaps?

Try conducting a skills audit – what are the technical and attitudinal capabilities you need to reach your goal? What have you got in house and what are the priorities over the next 12 months?

Trust is the basis for any successful relationship

Don't underestimate the importance of finding a person or organisation that fits your culture and values, even if they are not going to become a permanent fixture in the business. Use the same approach as you would for an internal appointment. Ask yourself how comfortable would you be having a difficult conversation with the individual. How would they react?

What's it like doing business with you?

Sometimes internal inefficiencies are magnified when working with external suppliers or partners. Ineffective decision making can be a barrier to getting the right results from an external provider. Take the time to create a detailed brief clearly focused on the expected outputs or return and ensure there are clear lines of communication to catch any 'molehills' early.

Any external relationship will be impacted on how well you manage it. Work together to achieve the

objective and clarify your respective roles and responsibilities.

Insource v partner v outsource - how do you decide?

Create some criteria for your decision. What is core to the delivery of your goals? How discreet is the piece of work? How regular is the task? What can you afford? How much do you want flexibility v control? Do you want to develop strategy but also require the extra resource to do the work? How specialist is the work?

Collaborate with your colleagues or find an external soundboard who can support you with the decision.

Be aware of the risks of different engagements

Make sure you have considered the risks involved and remember that any outsource or partner will still need time invested. The 'forming' and 'norming' stages of any new relationship will have its challenges. Try to plan ahead so time and urgency don't become the only priority.

Ultimately you will achieve your vision through the people you employ and partner and never lose sight of your values.

Andrew Silver is the owner of 360 Growth Partners who grow businesses as a trusted partner by taking the time to understand what you do, sharing your vision and working together to achieve it. For more information go to www.360growthpartners.co.uk or e-mail start@360growthpartners.co.uk



EXCLUSIVE BUSINESS & NORTHERN INSIGHT LUNCH CLUB



**BOOKING NOW FOR
MONDAY 20TH JANUARY 2020...**



Speaker - NEIL STEPHENSON
Entrepreneur

Venue - Jesmond Dene House, Newcastle upon Tyne
Date - Monday 20th January, arrive 11.30 lunch at 12.15
Price - £55pp to include a two-course lunch and coffee

Neil Stephenson is a serial entrepreneur and former CEO of the Onyx Group, a key speaker delivering master-classes in sales and marketing focussed on B2B.

**BOOKING NOW FOR
MONDAY 10TH FEBRUARY 2020...**



Speaker - JASON KNIGHTS
Blue Kangaroo

Venue - Wynyard Hall, Stockton-on-Tees
Date - Monday 10th February, arrive 11.30, lunch 12.15
Price - £55pp to include a two-course lunch and coffee

Jason is the Managing Director of global branding agency, Blue Kangaroo, Design. Based in Gateshead the companies client list includes, Pixar, Warner Brothers and National Geographic.

At our lunch events you will enjoy meeting a network of peers, develop and grow your personal contacts, access a talent pool of experts, exchange ideas and information, develop your business through new ideas and build a trusted network of friends – all over a great lunch.

Limited places available - contact Linda Hitman to reserve your space, Linda@exclusivebusiness.net

Diary Dates:

Monday 24th February 2020 – John Mills CBE, The Lakes Distillery – Jesmond Dene
Monday 9th March 2020 – Graham Robb, Senior Partner at Recognition PR - Wynyard Hall

E CLUSIVE

BUSINESS



**Great minds, stimulating conversations,
join us at The Exclusive Business Lunch.**

Thank you to everyone who has attended, sponsored or spoken at our lunches during 2019, your participation is what makes them exceptional.

We wish you a very Happy Christmas & prosperous New Year



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RIGHT TIME, RIGHT PLACE, RIGHT PEOPLE

We had two great business lunch events in November.

Dr Bill Scott OBE, CEO of Wilton Engineering attracted a great following at Wynyard Hall and it was also a full house for Duncan Youngs Q & A at Jesmond Dene House.

Thank you to both our speakers and all our attendees. See you in 2020.



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CLIMBING THE LAW SOCIETY LADDER

The In-House lawyer at a leading North East hospitality and leisure group has been given a Law Society promotion.

Less than six months after Anu Kaura, Head of Legal at Newcastle-based Malhotra Group PLC, became a committee member for the Law Society's In-House Division, she has been appointed joint vice-chair.

Anu, from Prudhoe, Northumberland, hopes this will strengthen her aim of expanding the firm's presence in the region.

The Division is the community for in-house lawyers working in corporate and public sectors, not-for-profit organisations and charities. It aims to bring in-house lawyers together to share best practice and address current issues and challenges in a supportive environment.

Anu's new role at the Law Society will allow her to be more actively involved in coordinating events in the North East and to contribute more effectively to the Society's engagement programme.



NEW COASTAL LOCATION FOR HOTPOD YOGA

Commercial law firm St James' Square has advised Hotpod Yoga on the opening of their new site on the outskirts of Whitley Bay.

The Hotpod experience, which involves yoga classes in 37°C heat, recently opened its second premises in the Newcastle area.

The franchise, which can be found all over Europe, was first established in the region in May 2017 by husband and wife Alex and Jules Hurley. After the success of the inflatable, heated studios in Jesmond, the couple are now expanding the business to new premises on Earsdon Road, Monkseaton.

Conor Wells, Solicitor at St James' Square, advised the team on all legal aspects of the expansion into the new space.

Owner Alex said: "The team at St James' Square have been excellent throughout the process and we are delighted with all of advice and support that Conor has given."



LAW FIRM RETAINS IIP GOLD WITH INDUSTRY LEADING SCORES

North East independent law firm for businesses Muckle LLP is celebrating having renewed its IIP Gold status and Health and Wellbeing accreditation until 2022, after 92% of its people agreed Muckle was a great place to work.

Investors in People has over 14,000 accredited high performing organisations across 75 different countries worldwide. As part of the process, assessors listened to the feedback of 120 Muckle employees, holding one to ones, reviewing documents and observing team meetings.

Muckle achieved a score of 787 out of 900, 63 above the IIP benchmark and 66 above the industry benchmark in all nine indicators. Compared with other IIP assessed law firms of the same size, Muckle ranked third across all 75 countries.

Jason Wainwright, Muckle Managing Partner, said: "We're delighted to have achieved gold status in our recent IIP assessment. This is a tremendous achievement and a testament to our people."

WARD HADAWAY STRENGTHENS BUILT ENVIRONMENT TEAM

With a growing reputation for its strength and expertise in the Built Environment sector, the sizeable team at Ward Hadaway has continued to invest in talent on the back of another successful year.

Alistair McDonald, Olivia Brown, Sarah Hawkins, William Conway and Elizabeth Armett have all been appointed following a year in which the team has seen a further 11% growth in annual turnover.

Alistair has been appointed as business development manager for the Built Environment sector whilst Sarah joins as an associate, responsible for advising on a wide range of real estate work.

Olivia joins as a solicitor specialising in freehold and leasehold site acquisitions and associated development arrangements.

Meanwhile, newly qualified solicitor William will work within the Built Environment Team whilst Elizabeth joins the team as a paralegal after working for two years in-house.



MERRY CHRISTMAS

and a prosperous New Year from

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MD

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Since launching in 2015, Master Debonair has made its mark in suave suiting and has recently been recognised by renowned fashion institute Drapers as 'Best Independent Menswear Retailer' 2019.

It would be Master Debonair's pleasure to assist you on your suit journey. The company caters for all shapes and sizes and also offers a casual collection as well as tailoring. Whether you are looking for your wedding suit or a pair of jeans, Master Debonair has you covered.

Having recently launched their biggest own brand suit collection to date, the leading independent menswear retailer offers first-class styling and fitting experience, making sure every suit is a perfect fit.

UNUSUAL (IN THE BANKS HEADS!) CLIENTS THAT WE HAVE HELPED RECENTLY

We have helped numerous clients during 2019 across all areas of the market allowing satisfied clients to receive the keys to their new home, remortgage to a better interest rate or perhaps develop a Buy to Let portfolio.

The opportunities available in the mortgage market are now very diverse...could we help you at some stage in 2020? Below are some examples of the types of scenarios that we have helped our clients with in the last quarter of 2019 - all of the following mortgage offers were successfully received from mainstream lenders at prime rates.

First time buyer buying an affordable home - our client approached us to look at mortgage options for a property which had a restrictive sale covenant (sometimes called a Section 106 purchase). This is a government backed scheme designed to help borrowers buy in the area in which they live/work and where they couldn't ordinarily afford. The client had approached their bank in the first instance but they hadn't heard of the scheme (!) and so we were able to help with both the mortgage application and the application to the local authority for approval.

Debt consolidation - our clients had racked up numerous unsecured debts and the costs in meeting these repayments was dragging them very close to bankruptcy. We were able to step in and raise sufficient capital on their remortgage to enable them to repay the debts and remove the threat of more serious action from their lives.

Bridging loan - these clients were looking to buy a new home but had yet to sell their existing property. They didn't want to miss out on the new purchase so we were able to set up a bridging loan for them to enable the new purchase to go through. This loan was then repaid as soon as their existing property was finally sold.



Paul Hardingham, Director of Innovate Mortgages and Loans

Family gift - our clients are in their 80's and were looking to release capital from their home to assist their daughter to purchase her former matrimonial home from her ex-husband. We arranged a retirement interest only mortgage to release funds and allow the daughter and grandchildren to remain in their home.

London home mover - our client was looking to move up the property ladder, but was struggling to sell her existing flat due to a slow sales market. Having established that the demand for rental property in the area was strong we facilitated a let to buy mortgage on the existing flat, releasing capital for the new purchase. A new residential

mortgage was then also arranged on the new home.

First time buyer needing family assistance - our client was looking to assist his daughter in purchasing her new home and suggested a joint purchase as his income was needed to support the level of mortgage required. We arranged a joint borrower/sole owner mortgage which achieved the aims and also saved over £8,000 in stamp duty!

This is a small example of the enquiries that we have received with positive outcomes for our clients, and also demonstrates that we can help most people. We offer local, face to face, independent mortgage advice and can advise on the best solutions for you.

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 2843723.

As a mortgage is secured against your home or property, it may be repossessed if you do not keep up the mortgage repayments.



CHAMPIONING FINANCIAL WELLBEING FOR EMPLOYEES

Statistics show that 36% of us worry about money. Those that do are five times more likely to suffer from mental health issues and four times more likely to experience panic attacks. The same research also shows that 28% of people find it difficult to talk about money.

For businesses in the region, this means that if an employee is having problems, you're unlikely to hear about it. Instead, employees may present a range of issues such as low mood, conflict with teammates or absenteeism, masking the root cause of the problem.

While there has been a significant rise in businesses adopting a range of wellbeing strategies for their team, one aspect which has been largely ignored is employee financial wellbeing. In fact, this area has been so overlooked that the Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development has called on employers to specifically include this when designing HR strategies.

One reason suggested for the lack of focus on financial wellbeing, is that business owners and HR professionals don't know where to turn for help and are unsure how to implement meaningful schemes which will deliver a return on their investment.

That said, money can have such a large impact on so many other areas of life and therefore has a knock-on

impact on things like mental and physical health. Having enough money allows freedom to enjoy hobbies, buy nice things and treat our loved ones - yet people receive very little formal education around managing it effectively.

It is because of this that Vintage, Chartered Financial Planners, based in Stockton-on-Tees, has launched a service for businesses who want to support their employees in achieving financial wellbeing, while boosting morale and productivity at the same time.

The package offers both business owners and their employees access to education, advice and guidance about their money through on-site seminars, coaching sessions, access to the Vintage View App and personal recommendations tailored to the needs and budget of each individual business.

Given the link between employment and pay, employers are well-placed to take on the challenge of growing knowledge about finances. Employers are there when employees reach significant milestones such as a change in job, promotion or retirement which are key times when access to financial advice could make a huge difference to the outcome.

What is interesting is that financial wellbeing doesn't just affect those at the lower end of the pay scale. In fact, it's reported that those who earn over £100,000 experience the same level of stress as those who earn under £10,000.

This shows that financial wellbeing isn't about pay rises. While it is important to ensure that you are paying your team a fair wage and are ideally open and transparent about salary, giving people more money is unlikely to lead to long-term financial wellbeing.

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT EMPLOYEE FINANCIAL WELLBEING
FROM VINTAGE-FP.COM OR CALL 01642 525050.

Vintage is a trading name of Vintage Investment Services who are authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority. Statistics taken from the Salary Finance '2019 Employers Guide to Financial Wellbeing' report.





Selina Pyers with Christine Huntington

COMMERCE INVESTS IN TENANTS WITH NEW TEAM MEMBER

A new team member who is dedicated to helping the tenants and guests to the building has joined the Commerce House team in Middlesbrough.

Selina Pyers has been appointed to the receptionist's role, where she handles incoming queries on the phone, is the first line of contact, for guests and tenants arriving, sorts tenants post and handles all booking enquiries for the events space, board room and hot desking service. She also looks after the virtual tenants needs, and sets up meeting spaces for when clients arrive.

Aged 27 and living in Middlesbrough, the job is perfect for Selina, who is returning to work from maternity from having her third child.

Selina, who has experience in office and recruitment work, said: "With three children under four I really need to find a job that was busy and varied but also

chilled and enjoyable. This role offered just that and the team is lovely it means that the environment is totally stress free.

"The flexibility around extra hours is good too as it means that there is the capacity in the future to grow the role as my children get older. The reception is a lovely and now the offices are almost full, it is a busy and fun place to work."

Commerce House is a Grade II listed building in the heart of Middlesbrough that opened its newly renovated doors last year and has grown month on month as a thriving business community. With tenants ranging in size from one man bands up to 16 desk office spaces, the building is nearly at capacity with just a few opportunities left. Running

the hot desking, virtual tenancy and event space offerings keeps the team busy with new faces everyday.

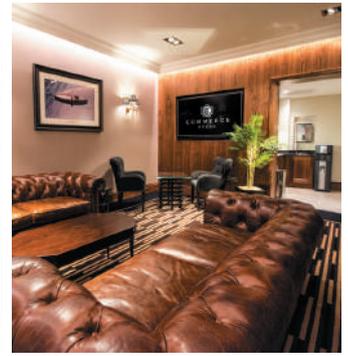
Christine Huntington, facilities manager of the building, has been there since the renovations began. She said: "It is very satisfying to see the building so busy and with so many tenants and visitors coming and going, I knew we were going to have to expand the team.

"We are delighted to welcome Selina to the team. From day one of joining us, she has quickly made her mark and is a bright and cheerful face ready to greet both tenants and visitors alike."

More information on the building and on job opportunities is available at www.commerce-house.co.uk

READY FOR BUSINESS

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filling fast!



Commerce House, the outstanding, iconic, grade II listed building in the heart of Middlesbrough is now fully refurbished and has released the last of its stunning office space. With rooms available for two to fourteen people.

With enviable facilities, Commerce House is the perfect opportunity for a head office, satellite office or to expand operations within the prestigious TS1 area of Middlesbrough in the heart of the newest regenerated location in the region. And now we have some great deals available for a limited time only!

**To find out more and to take advantage of this offer, you'd better get moving!
Contact Christine Huntington on 01642 917 116 or Christine@commercechambers.co.uk**

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WHAT ARE YOUR BEST SAVINGS OPTIONS AS WE CLOSE 2019?



Dr Emma Black

Dr Emma Black of Cascade Cash Management is an expert in all things to do with saving cash, and here she shares her insights on the best savings options as 2019 comes to an end.

"Savers looking to maximise their returns can do so by moving away from high-street brands and considering deposit products on offer from challenger banks. These new banks have entered the market at various stages over the last decade and typically offer the most competitive rates, particularly in the fixed term savings bonds market over a one to five year period.

"As the main high-street banks have worked hard to adjust their balance sheets following the 2008 crisis, new banks have entered the market focussed on providing credit to niche segments left underserved by the big four. These new banks have been able to provide competitive savings rates through being able to earn higher rates from lending activity due to low competition in the niche segments serviced. Moreover, any deposit made under the Financial Services Compensation Scheme limit of £85,000 per person or eligible entity will be fully protected in the circumstance

that the new provider enters difficulty.

"Personal savers can earn 1.46% Gross/AER on Instant Access from Coventry Building Society followed closely by 1.45% Gross/AER offered by Virgin Money. In addition, Saga has recently launched an Instant Access account paying 1.40% Gross/AER with its savings partner, Marcus by Goldman Sachs. In comparison, HSBC leads the big four high street rates offering 0.55% Gross/AER for its Online Bonus Saver.

"In the fixed term space, Shariah compliant banks, such as Al Rayan Bank (formerly the Islamic Bank of Britain) and Bank of London and the Middle East (BLME), tend to pay the highest rate to savers. These providers pay an expected profit rather than an interest rate. On a one year term, Al Rayan Bank presently will pay 1.86% expected profit, followed by BLME and Gatehouse Bank (formerly Milestone Savings) on 1.85% expected profit. Metro Bank and

Masthaven Bank are paying 1.80% Gross/AER in comparison, only slightly lower.

"While these are considerably higher than those on offer from the big four, rates have fallen since the start of the year as we approach a General Election following a further Brexit delay. This is also true for five year rates that began the year at 2.70% Gross/AER and are presently sat at 2.36% Gross/AER, on offer from United Bank UK."

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

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

If anyone has questions or needs advice on their savings or personal impact, then please contact the team of Cascaders. Details on how to are at www.cascade.co.uk



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THE FUTURE OF INHERITANCE TAX

The famous phrase that there is nothing certain in this life except death and taxes is usually attributed to Benjamin Franklin. But even that isn't certain these days as there are examples of the phrase being used which predate Franklin's letter to Jean-Baptiste Leroy. Just goes to show that recycling of political jokes is nothing new!

Which leads me onto the ultimate tax and death being Inheritance Tax (IHT). Of course it isn't actually a tax restricted to death although that is where most people will come across it. The Office of Budget Responsibility (OBR) is forecasting record receipts from IHT of £5.3bn in 2019/20. It was therefore an opportune moment for our friends at the Office of Tax Simplification (OTS) to reopen the debate of whether it is correctly targeted and is it ripe for change.

The OTS mission is not of course to decide whether a tax is fair; they should only be concerned about whether it is too complex. The clue is in their name after all! However, they have chosen to look at the scope of Business Property and Agricultural Property Relief (the main exemptions for business and land owners) and invited comments on whether the relief should be restricted. In particular, they wonder whether passive investment in stocks and shares or passive ownership of farmland should offer the same exemptions as those available in qualifying circumstances to entrepreneurial business owners and active farmers.

By opening the debate, however, it has begun to focus politicians' minds to the purpose of IHT. If it is a tool to reduce wealth inequality, it doesn't really seem to be working. It is a blunt tool and proportionally hits more modest wealth, the owners of which cannot realistically access the various reliefs available. If it is a tax raiser, than the latest OBR forecast shows that it is working to some extent.



Stuart McKinnon

But is it fair? For many hit by IHT they see it as the Government taxing again already taxed income. At the extreme, someone earning sufficient to pay 45% income tax is left with £55 for every £100 earned. If this is then subject to IHT at 40% their beneficiaries receive only £33; an overall tax take for the Government of 67%.

As with all things in life, whether you feel IHT is fair and correctly targeted very much depends on where you stand both socially and politically. As a society there is little doubt that wealth inequality is an issue and needs to be addressed. But how is that best achieved?

There are increasing calls in some quarters for the introduction of an annual wealth tax. Annual wealth taxes used to be popular with many of our European neighbours, but the general feeling was that they were unpopular, difficult and costly to administer and raised very little. Therefore, one by one countries have abolished them in favour of death or property-based taxes. Experience therefore shows that this isn't the answer.

So maybe our current system of IHT, although not perfect, is the best we are going to get. We have seen significant changes to the UK property

landscape over the last few years, so it is just possible that what was seen as an attempt to cool the UK property market is indirectly addressing wealth inequality. Was this actually part of the plan?

The debate is unlikely to go away but it would be good if the OTS concentrated on simplification rather than policy. My first suggestion would be to increase the nil rate band which has been frozen at £325,000 for far too long. If this moved to, say, £500,000 we could at the same time remove the ridiculously complex additional exemption available in qualifying circumstances for your home. Simple really. And if it needed to be funded how about restricting the nil rate band for estates over a certain size. Sounds like I am trying to make it complex again but it's worth a thought!



For more information on IHT or other taxation issues, please contact Stuart McKinnon, Head of Private Client at RSM North East on 0191 255 7000 or at stuart.mckinnon@rsmuk.com

PRISMATIC WEALTH: A YEAR IN REVIEW

2019 has been a phenomenal year for Stockton based, independent financial advisers Prismatic Wealth.

New Premises

Having purchased new, larger premises in Autumn 2018, Prismatic Wealth are delighted with how the transition and move has benefited their clients and staff. They now have the capacity to service their growing team with a modern, open-plan working space, five meeting rooms, a boardroom, seminar room and ample parking. Given this they have been able to expand their team by employing another eight members of staff.

New Staff

Since Autumn 2018, Prismatic Wealth have recruited an additional eight members of staff including, Caroline Pigg, Ethan Azam, Joseph Barton and Katie Watts as Financial Administrators, Jonathan Loughran, Chartered Financial Adviser, Kate Thompson, Office Manager, Sebastian Greig, Corporate Administrator and Amber Surtees-Lines, Junior Receptionist.

Furthermore, Prismatic Wealth have celebrated the exam successes of Andrea Softley, Senior Paraplanner and Tom Horner, Paraplanner, as their team continues to develop their knowledge and expertise. They are particularly proud of Rebecca Palmer, Head of Paraplanning, who won the Chartered Insurance Institute, Maddocks Prize.

Managing Director, Graham Laverick says, "It is important to us as a business to nurture and guide the next generation of financial planners whilst continually upskilling our existing staff. We look forward to helping guide and support our new members of the team."

Business Overseas

Earlier in the year, Graham Laverick, Managing Director, completed a trade mission to New Zealand in collaboration with the Department of International Trade which successfully developed the work Prismatic Wealth do for their overseas clients and further strengthened the bond between them and their partners in New Zealand.



Events

Given their added capacity of a seminar room and ample parking, Prismatic Wealth have hosted events by the Bank of England, Department of International Trade, Bupa, Unum, Westfield Health, LV and local charities Cash for Kids and Butterwick Hospice, amongst others.

They also now hold in-house 'Lunch with Prismatic Wealth' events for their clients and to date have collaborated with local solicitors and national fund managers to deliver relevant, meaningful and relaxed lunch presentations which enhance their customer service offering.

2020 looks set to be another landmark year, Prismatic Wealth have provided independent financial advice for over 32 years and current manage over £200 million in client funds.

To contact them for a free consultation call 01642 661600 or email enquiries@prismaticwealth.co.uk



PRISMATIC WEALTH

Providing corporate and private clients with bespoke, tailored financial solutions.

With over 30 years experience as corporate financial planning specialists, Prismatic Wealth have the expertise to assist your business, from providing employee benefits solutions to ensuring you comply with your workplace pension obligations. Our cost effective solutions are tailored specifically to the needs of your business.



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www.prismaticwealth.co.uk

A CHRISTMAS CAROLE?

Best wishes for the festive season to all readers. What follows is a seasonal tale.

Ebenezer Scrooge was writing out his extensive Christmas card list (post spiritual visitations) when he decided that it might be a nice idea to gift some of the money he had raised from the recent sale of his business.

He had received a tidy sum and he thought it would be more than he needed to support him for the rest of his life. However, still being of cautious disposition, he decided to take advice and called in those fine fellows from Rutherford Hughes.

Scrooge was feeling as well as he had ever done as he had struck up a relationship with a young widow, 35 years his junior. Carole had a son of just five years old and Scrooge was keen to give him every opportunity in life. The pair had been living under his roof for some six months or so.

The adviser arrived at the appointed time and announced his arrival with a firm rat tat of the brass door knocker.

Scrooge pulled open the door and welcomed the adviser with a firm hand shake and expansive smile. "You are most welcome," he enthused.

Scrooge offered the adviser a cup of mulled wine. "I better not, thank you, I am driving," was the response.

The two talked for some time as the adviser asked questions about Scrooge's current situation, how he envisaged his future, what concerned him and what he wanted to achieve. Scrooge found the conversation stimulating as it made him focus his mind.

Scrooge wanted the majority of his estate to go to his nephew and family. He felt a great loyalty to them as they had shared their Christmas meal with him after his conversion despite his previous antipathy.



Peter Rutherford

However, he wanted to take care of Carole and her son too.

"Can I give my nephew a significant sum now?" he asked.

The adviser responded, "you can but if you do not survive seven years it is still part of your estate for Inheritance Tax purposes."

The adviser went on, "Plus, as this money came from the sale of your business, it qualifies for Business Relief for IHT. If you reinvest it in certain qualifying investments within three years of sale it is immediately outside your estate. If you invest in those and gift them then the seven-year rule does not apply as the IHT value of the gift is nil."

"Splendid!" shouted Scrooge.

"Now what about Carole and the boy? I could leave them the house when I die"

"You could," answered the adviser, "but as they are not blood relatives and you are not married

to Carole, you would be losing the Residential Nil Rate Band which is increasing to £175,000, giving rise to another £70,000 of tax."

"Oh dear," mused Scrooge as he scratched his oversized chin. "What to do?"

"You could marry her." The adviser suggested, slightly nervously. He went on, "Anything you leave her then would be IHT free and she could keep the Residential Nil Rate Band if she leaves the house to the boy."

Scrooge's chin was being worked overtime as he tried to absorb this information.

"I am nervous," he said, "I understand that divorces are most common and expensive."

"Let me explain about pre and post nuptial agreements," said the adviser.

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

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

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SCROOGE IS BACK

In just a few weeks, we'll all be snoozing on the sofa after a huge lunch and a few snowballs!



Andrew Potts

Yep, Christmas is just around the corner which also means, so are your year-end taxes...the favourite part of the year here at KP Simpson...

People often make New Year's resolutions to live a healthier life, stop smoking or visit the gym they've been paying for but not attending. You can also make the same sort of resolutions for your business to help it stay in top financial shape for the coming year. Since money matters to your business, it makes good sense to look at its overall financial health and see where you can make improvements.

It may not be the financial year-end for your business yet, but it doesn't hurt to go through all those sales receipts and invoices now. Check your bank account to make sure the figures add up, and you've got time to chase up those receipts and invoices you don't yet have.

Take some time to reflect on the past year and ask yourself some important questions, did your business grow? Has your revenue increased? Have things gone wrong? And if so, what can you do to avoid this next year? Try and understand what has changed, it will make for an easier life come January and if you stay ahead of the game, you're in good stead for making waves next year.

In short, try to understand how your business has changed since the end of the previous year. If it's grown, celebrate and keep going. If business hasn't improved, ask yourself why, and dig into the figures to find out more. Remember, if you're not moving forward, then technically, you're slipping backwards!

If you're struggling with your accounts and the thought overwhelms you, speak to the experts. At KP Simpson we have a wealth of experience and knowledge and can get you on the right track to financial harmony in no time.

Don't let the bills keep you up at night; we're just a phone-call away. Visit the website at www.kpsimpson.co.uk or call 0191 420 0550 to find out more. Remember; There's Only Two Things Certain In Life; Taxes And Death, So Why Pay More Than You Have To?

TWAS THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

Where all round the house, not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse.

Well actually, if you listen carefully you can just hear the gentle flick of pages as Mrs Claus scans through the holiday brochure and relaxes with a glass of sherry and a mince pie. Then she squeals with delight as she finds her perfect holiday – a fortnight in Whitley Bay in January – and reaches for the debit card to pay.

Mr Claus is out in the barn running through sixteen pages of final Health and Safety checks before his busiest night of the year. A piercing scream rends the cold and frosty air and the reindeer, as one, all immediately lie down and play dead. The soft thump of Mrs Claus's fluffy slippers is heard across the yard.

'SANTA' she screams, 'the card has been declined, there's no money in the account, what has gone wrong!' Santa, realising he is in trouble, quickly rouses the trembling reindeer and shouting a cheery 'ho ho ho' heads off on his travels. It's his favourite night of the year, the jingle of bells as he flies across the skies, Rudolph's nose glowing as he guides them on their way, those innocent faces sleeping peacefully as he leaves their presents under the tree, and it passes quickly, too quickly perhaps.

Hopes of creeping in quietly are dashed on his return and he finds Mrs Claus at the kitchen table surrounded by mountains of paperwork. 'Do you know how much Christmas costs?' she asks icily. 'Well, no, but the looks on the little faces this morning will...' He's cut short by a frosty look and a short lecture on budgeting.



Cyd Smith

Mrs Claus has spent the night analysing everything. She knows exactly how much the elves are paid and has worked out their actual cost including the cost of 'lost hours' due to holidays, sickness etc. She has worked out the cost of materials, which suppliers give the best discounts, are most reliable and supply

the best quality product. The most popular toys now all have their own product code so that once production starts for next year the stock levels can be monitored. The cost of running the reindeer and maintaining the sleigh are all analysed and savings on carrots have already been identified. The other overheads have been scrutinised and some earmarked for further investigation – after what is now only a week in Whitley Bay.

As well as this basic information she has introduced some analysis fields so the types of toys, age ranges, geographical area and elf department can be identified. And furthermore, she has entered all of this information on her new snowcloud software (with the help of their new accountant) so she can keep careful watch on the cost of next Christmas and make sure it runs smoothly. She has linked some useful apps to upload information from the receipts she finds in Santa's pockets and to help forecast cash flow. Most importantly, the bank accounts are now connected to the software via bank feeds so she can check at a glance that there is enough cash for that holiday. Now all she needs is an app to connect to the list of who is naughty and nice, just to save checking it twice.

All is well in the Claus household, Mr Claus smiles contently at Mrs Claus as she rustles up the bacon butties for a well earned breakfast. Well, he thinks, it seems I'm not the only one who can perform miracles in one night!

Luckily you don't have to go all the way to the North Pole to get your budgeting in order, just call CS Accounting on 0191 4879870 or email info@csaccounting.co.uk



MAVEN TALKS TO LOCAL INVESTEE IPAC PACKAGING INNOVATIONS ABOUT RAISING FINANCE TO GROW YOUR BUSINESS IN THE NORTH EAST

Maven caught up with Gateshead-based thermoformed packaging manufacturer, iPac Packaging Innovations, who secured funding via the North East Development Capital Fund (NEDCF) earlier this year, to enable the company to invest in its state-of-the-art facility to deliver on its ambitious expansion plans.

iPac has achieved impressive growth since beginning production two years ago, quickly establishing the business as a key player and innovator in its industry. But how does an entrepreneurial, high-growth business such as iPac secure development capital funding? How do you find the right funding partner or decide if you should grow organically?

In Maven's latest guest blog, investee Jonny Catto, Operations and Finance Director at iPac, talks through the company's funding journey with Maven and how the finance has impacted the business and how it can help to achieve iPac's long term goals.

Please can you tell us a little bit about yourself – what does your business do and what's your role?

I'm Jonny Catto, Operations and Finance Director at iPac packaging innovations. Having spent 8 years in Audit and Corporate Finance at Deloitte, London, I returned to the North East to set the company up with my business partner (and Father-in-Law), Harry Reed, and we have now been trading for 2 and a half years. iPac makes thermoformed trays primarily for food packaging applications. Our trays are 100% recyclable and generally contain around 90% recycled material; and all of our trays are designed to provide functional; environmental; and cost improvement for our customers.

How did your search for funding lead you to Maven and what attracted you to Maven as a funding partner?

We were introduced to Maven through our accountants, UNW. As a start-up manufacturing business on a rapid growth trajectory, one of the key challenges is funding both fixed capital and working capital investments that are required to underpin growth and meet customer demands. The funding



package that Maven was able to provide was tailored to our specific needs and structured to reflect the start-up/scale-up stage of our business in the short-term – whilst also building in some flexible options in the longer term. This made the package ideal for our stage of growth.

How has the investment impacted your business?

Our year on year growth from 2018 to 2019 has seen revenues double. The investment provided by Maven has supported both the capital assets required to generate this revenue growth, as well as the working capital required to de-risk it and ensure that the growth is well controlled and managed.

What would you say to a business that is put off by taking on investment and would prefer to grow their business organically?

It depends on specific circumstances, but if the demand for your product or service is there today, why pass up the opportunity to exploit it? If demand is not your main obstacle to growth, then that probably means you are doing a fantastic job in providing a product or service that your customers

(or potential customers) want. However, exploiting rapidly increasing demand does of course carry risk – so, finding the right ways to balance and manage that risk is the key to unlocking the real growth potential of a scale-up business. For us, that is where Maven came in.

What do you think are the main obstacles to accessing finance to grow that businesses face today?

For a start-up business like us, the key challenge in accessing finance is ongoing risk aversity in a post financial crisis landscape. Luckily our key finance partners in the very early days saw the potential in our business plan and management team, and have supported us throughout, and since being introduced to Maven last year, they have done the same.

What are the long-term goals for your business, and how will the funding you secured through Maven help you to achieve them?

Maven's investment was key in achieving our Year 1-3 business plan, in which we have established ourselves as significant newcomer to our market. Our plan is to continue our extremely strong growth trajectory, continuing to support our current customers' needs (expanding existing business), and building new customer relationships. We are currently expanding our site and production facilities, with our next phase of expansion due to complete in Q1 2020, we will continue to expand production capabilities further over the medium-to-long term.

NEDCF can invest up to £2 million to support established businesses via debt finance, mezzanine loans or equity investment to help fulfil their growth potential. If your business is in need of finance to help unlock its growth potential, Maven may be able to help.

Contact Maven's team today on 0191 731 8590 or visit mavencp.com to find out more.

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COASTAL EXPERT REFLECTS ON MARKET

With a new election being called on 12th December, Brexit deadlock and reported uncertainty throughout the UK of all things financial, a local mortgage and financial protection expert has stepped forward to reveal the true position of the local property market for the residents of North Tyneside and the coastal area.

Fed up of negative national reports on the housing market, Martin Graham, mortgage expert from MG Financial Solutions is keen to add a sense of reality to the situation to help people in the area make better informed choices.

Martin, who has a team of seven which grows on a regular basis, specialises in residential and commercial mortgages, equity release and financial protection including life insurance, income protection and critical illness. Based on Silverlink in North Tyneside the company's clientele is predominantly from the coast and surrounding areas, and the team have never busier. He said:

"From a mortgage perspective there has never been a better to move. The rates are low, but stable. Lenders are happily lending, and many have relaxed criteria meaning it is easier for certain sectors to secure mortgages than in the past.

"The level of successful applications is positive, in fact this year we have secured over £50 million of lending so far, which is a company record. Lenders are keen to work with us to get as many people through as possible, and they are also upholding



valuations that are realistic.

"They key to success in the market at the moment is being realistic. Talk to experts do your research and be realistic about value, about loan to value cash opportunities and about what you can afford

to borrow, not just now but if rates do climb.

"We are also really keen that all our clients look at both critical illness cover and life insurance, as well as other forms of income protection, to ensure that if the worst occurs, your family and your property is well looked after. More people than ever now qualify for cover at reasonable rates, as brokers have loosened criteria, are more flexible and appreciate the need of a range of different personal situations."

The regeneration of the Whitley Bay has reignited interest in the coast and there has in this last couple of weeks been an increase in instructions at the higher end of the market with the more prestige properties faring well. Despite political uncertainty, houses are selling, mortgages are being secured with fabulous rates and new properties are coming onto the market every day.

Martin concluded, urging people in the area to have confidence in our beautiful location, and to keep our market on the positive:

"We urge people to not get caught up in any negative propoganda and online reports about markets being poor, prices dropping, interest rates changing and any other doom and gloom that is quite simply being guessed at.

"Look at the facts. Speak to experts. No-one knows what the future holds but here in the North East our properties are holding value, and as long as we all keep being steady and realistic, we will maintain that positive position."

Further information is available at www.mgfinancialsolutions.co.uk

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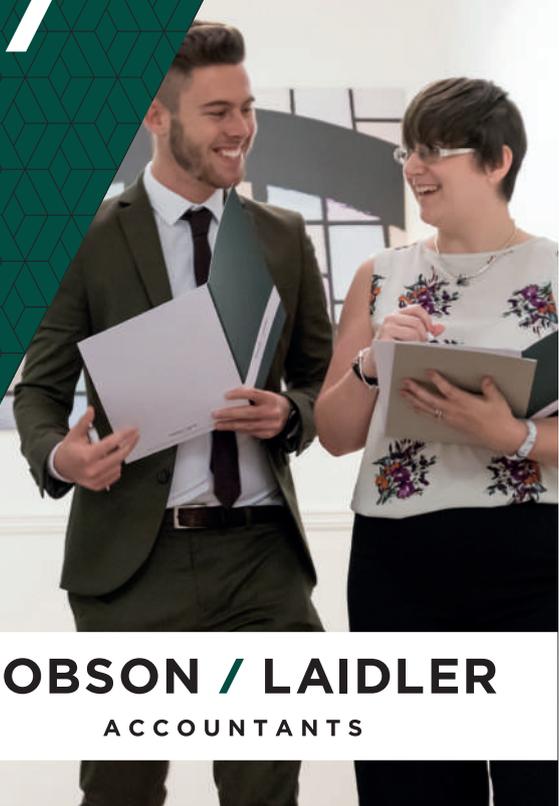
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ROBSON / LAIDLER
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NORTH EAST WOMEN – ARE YOU FINANCIALLY RESILIENT?

By Amanda Cowie, Chartered Financial Planner, Robson Laidler Wealth.



Recently we hosted an event in conjunction with a national initiative introduced by the Chartered Insurance Institute. The theme was "Insuring Women's Futures" and it deliberately coincided with National Talk Money Week on the basis that if you get women talking about issues through raising awareness then things might start to change.

Statistically the figures are slightly depressing:

1. The average pension pot of a UK woman aged 65 is £35,800 compared to £179,000 for that of a 65-year-old UK man. A difference of five times!
2. 52% of women in their late 20's say they don't understand enough to make decisions about retirement savings compared to 38% of men.

3. The average woman pays £80 per month into their defined contribution pension compared to £149 for the average man.

There are many reasons for this, but the study found that there were essentially six 'Moments that Matter' and making key decisions during these stages will definitely improve resilience.

1. **Growing up, studying and requalifying** - it often comes down to seriously thinking about the subjects you study at school and making practical choices based on future earning potential.
2. **Entering and re-entering the workplace** - often women opt out of pension schemes to fulfil spending needs/wants now without thinking of the consequences
3. **Relationships, making and breaking up** - divorce in later life for instance is probably the biggest risk to your financial resilience.
4. **Motherhood and becoming a carer** - on average women spend twice as long as men on domestic work and childcare
5. **Later life, planning and entering retirement** - over 56% of women hadn't thought about retirement at all in the last 12 months compared with 40% of men.
6. **Ill health, infirmity and dying** - it's a well-known fact that on average women live longer than men hence a greater need to plan!

Women are great talkers and influencers and it would be great if you could check out the www.insuringwomensfutures.co.uk website and the Talk210k link which will tell you all about hosting your own event. Check out the 12 Perils and Pitfalls that every woman should know and get talking.

If you are unsure about your own financial resilience, talk to us.



Amanda Cowie is a Chartered Financial Planner and Director of Robson Laidler Wealth based in Jesmond, Newcastle upon Tyne.
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**MHA TAIT WALKER
GOLF DAY**

A look back at our Autumn Wealth Management Golf Day at Bamburgh Castle.

We enjoyed the last golf day of the year with our clients and friends, we look forward to more great days on the course in 2020.





MHA TAIT WALKER WELCOMES NEW ASSOCIATE PARTNER TO CORPORATE FINANCE TEAM

North East accountancy and advisory firm MHA Tait Walker is marking a successful year for Corporate Finance with the appointment of a new associate partner Lee Humble.

Lee has 15 years of professional services, banking sector and Corporate Finance experience, having spent time in London and the North West. He brings experience as a finance director and business owner.

Lee will work closely with MHA Tait Walker's corporate finance partner Steve Plaskitt and the rest of the team, to provide transactional, strategy, growth and funding solutions to businesses across the region. The team will work with MHA Tait Walker's newly established Data Insights team, to build on the firm's existing service offering and help businesses use their data to drive strategy and value.

Lee said: "I love the transactional environment of corporate finance and the varied experience that I have gained over the years plays well into this role. I've always been an admirer of MHA Tait Walker and I'm really excited to tap into the expertise they have here and the wider service

offering across tax, accountancy and Wealth Management."

2019 has been an award-winning year for MHA Tait Walker's corporate finance team. The firm's recent work with the management buyout of Fabricom Offshore Services Limited achieved Deal of the Year at the Insider North East Dealmakers Awards and the team have completed a total of 11 deals across the year.

Winner of this year's Insider's Lifetime Achievement Award Michael Smith, will continue to support the corporate finance team with his 25 years of experience in the specialism. Michael will continue to strategically work with the team and the firm's clients.

Steve Plaskitt said: "It's been a fantastic year for the corporate finance team and it's been great to work with businesses across the region and help them to achieve their business and personal goals.

"Moving into 2020, we'll be working with our in-house data insights team even more to really help businesses to understand their financials, drive value and strengthen their business strategy.

"Graham Dotchin is head of our Data Insight team and when it comes to transactions or planning for future sale or growth, the team are focused on helping shareholders to increase value for every outcome. They also help clients to drive up things like profit ahead of fundraising, sale and other significant projects, as well as working on long term and short term business strategy".

Established in 1937, MHA Tait Walker is the largest independent accountancy and advisory practice in the North East of England. The firm offers large corporates, owner-managed businesses and individuals a complete set of accountancy and advisory services from taxation to corporate finance.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF...

JULIA FOX

Julia Fox is a tax director at Deloitte in Newcastle, working with family-run and owner-managed businesses.

She advises ambitious businesses and their stakeholders in all tax aspects of structuring, acquisitions and disposals, reorganisations and fundamental change. Julia invests a lot of time with her clients, creating strong, longstanding relationships which typically see her spending most of her time talking – which she is very good at. Every day is a school day and presents a different challenge. Last year Julia was awarded North East Accountancy Awards Tax Advisor of the Year for her work in this area.

Julia is part of a close-knit team of seven, most of whom work agilely and this requires a flexible approach and, on numerous occasions, a fair bit of creativity.

Julia shares her (chaotic) home with husband John and their two children, together with two cats, two budgies and a hamster. What little spare time she has is spent with the family and she likes reading, eating (a lot) and visiting the theatre.

5.00am – My day starts very early – usually before the alarm goes off. I'll meditate first thing (I find this helps me to focus on the day ahead) and I'll then spend half an hour on the treadmill to get my steps in or I'll check my emails – early morning is my best thinking time.

6.15am – After a quick shower, it's time to get the kids up. I do the morning shift and my husband does the evenings but I think I get the thin edge of the wedge as it's a huge effort to get them out of bed. I spend at least 40 minutes every morning shouting at everyone to mobilise the family and get us out the door on time(ish).

7.30am - I start the drop off in various places for the kids to meet friends and make their way to school.

8.30am - I arrive at the office and my work day officially begins. The first half hour is spent looking at my diary, planning my day and setting aspirational goals from my to do list. It's rare the day pans out as planned because client phone calls will usually send it in a different direction. I'm project based so my days are always different and I spend most of my time talking to clients and giving them the support they require.

9.00am - I spend time with the team reviewing advice that has been prepared and forming a view on how to progress matters. The team always have my back, they are brilliant and their work is exemplary.

10.00am – I catch up with Stephen Hall, the Newcastle office senior partner and also a tax partner. We talk about clients and I give him an oversight of the advice we've been preparing. Stephen is my sounding board for any tricky

client work, staffing issues and pastoral matters. We will also discuss marketing strategy - who we are targeting – and any Responsible Business events.

11.00am – The next hour is spent reviewing technical advice and shaping the deliverables for getting work out of the door. My role is to add insight to the advice the team has prepared using my knowledge of the clients and sector experience.

12.30pm - I make a rule of trying to get out of the office for some fresh air, to stretch my legs and take a break from the desk and the laptop. Generally I'll listen to some music and my taste is fairly cheesy – my favourite song is Mr Blue Sky by ELO and I have a playlist of upbeat cheese.

1.15pm – I eat lunch at my desk checking emails and social media. I'm checking Twitter and LinkedIn for work and generally catching up.

2.00pm – I have a meeting with a potential new client introduced to us by an ex-colleague. He's asked us to pitch for tax and audit work for one their portfolio companies. This business has been through some challenges and I'm meeting them to find out about the business and give them a steer on next steps. I'm very curious and I love finding out about companies – getting into the nitty gritty.

4.00pm – My diary tells me I have a coffee and a catch up with a client. It's out of the office at their premises. I always drive to clients in my clapped out 13 year old Golf. I'm not into cars; it's just a means of getting about.

5.00pm – Back to office for a roundup of what's been going on with the team, check my emails and plan what we are going to achieve tomorrow.

6.00pm – I'm attending a meeting at Sunderland College where I am a Governor, a position I have held since the beginning of June. I did my A levels here and feel strongly about helping children to get an education who may not have had the best start in life. I'm on the Finance, Resources and Projects Committee where we discuss financials, staffing and capital project matters. It's all really interesting and plays to my skillset.

8.00pm – Finally I go home and see the bairns before they go to bed and check in with them both about their days, making any arrangements I can for the next day to be more organised.

8.30 pm – I make some food for me as I'm diabetic so my diet is different to theirs; much less carb dense. I'll then watch a bit of TV.

10.00pm – I'm definitely in bed asleep.



Julia Fox



Paul Gilsonan

WHEN IT COMES TO BUSINESS, PLANNING YOUR EXIT CAN'T START SOON ENOUGH

Paul Gilsonan of PSG Wealth Management discusses how, when it comes to an exit strategy for your business, it's never too early for planning to begin.

December is traditionally a time to reflect on the year that has passed, and to start making plans for the coming 12 months. For many entrepreneurs this is also a time to reflect on longer term goals, including when they may decide to step away from the business and what form that will take.

That day may seem far down the line, with other concerns such as stock, staff or clients rightly taking priority. However, when it comes to a successful exit strategy, laying the groundwork can ensure you are able to avoid pitfalls, maximise available tax reliefs and preserve wealth for future generations.

Having a sensible strategy in place for your departure from the business can also focus thinking around crucial decisions in the short-term, by drawing into sharp focus the impact on the wider value of the company in the long-term.

Planning for an exit can be as straightforward as reviewing current arrangements to ensure your assets are delivering as efficiently as possible, to restructuring areas in order to allow for sustainable growth, such as establishing recurring revenue streams. Having a well-established exit strategy can also be of assistance when it comes to attracting potential acquirers for the business, giving them a clear understanding of the asset they would be purchasing.

A solid exit strategy can also have an impact on your tax liabilities, from how your business is structured to whether your plan involves selling assets or shares, to how you can maximise the use of Entrepreneurs Relief or Business Property Relief.

In both cases there are a number of qualifying criteria that must be matched in order to qualify for the relief, including the number of assets

held in trust and the period of time shares have been held. Marrying each of these criteria to your personal circumstances and plans for the future. These can include selling the business in whole, passing ownership to future generations, beginning again with a new challenge, or simply stepping away and living the retirement you've always dreamed of.

At PSG Wealth Management, our focus has always been on helping clients make the most of their money and achieve their financial goals through the development of lifelong relationships, wealth management strategies and financial planning services. In the case of successful exit strategies, beginning that relationship early can have a significant impact on the final outcome.

Contact PSG Wealth Management on 01740 617720 or visit www.psgwealth.co.uk



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CAMERONS BREWERY EXPANDS ITS RETAIL MANAGED PUB ESTATE WITH ACQUISITION OF BAR SOBA GROUP

Camerons Brewery, the largest independent brewer in the North East, has announced the acquisition of Bar Soba group, with support provided by UNW and Weightmans.

The acquisition will see Hartlepool-based Camerons Brewery grow its current managed pub estate to 34 sites across the UK. Bar Soba, which was founded in 1999, has three venues in Glasgow as well as one in both Edinburgh and Leeds, and is characterised by its vibrant South East Asia-inspired food and creative cocktail menu.

Chris Soley, Chief Executive at Camerons Brewery, said: "We have been working on this transaction for a while, and are delighted that it has now gone through. Growing our retail pub group is one of our key business strategies, and we will continue to identify opportunities to add venues to our various pub brands. Our acquisition of Bar Soba complements our offerings in The Head of Steam and Urban Country Pubs brands, and we are excited to see our estate develop further."

David Ladd, CEO at Bar Soba, said: "We are all delighted to become part of Camerons Brewery. Bar Soba is a successful brand with a highly talented, dedicated team, and with support from the management team at Camerons, we will be able to look for further opportunities to grow the business."

Chris added: "A big part of Bar Soba's success has been its people, and so all of the current management team and staff will remain in place, with Bar Soba operating independently as a standalone business. We look forward to welcoming David (Ladd) back into our business as he was a great asset to Camerons when he worked with us previously within our operations team."



David Ward, Tax Partner, and Simon McNally, Tax Senior Manager, from accountancy and business advisory firm UNW provided tax due diligence on the deal, while Duncan Reid, Partner at national law firm Weightmans provided legal advice. Finance for the acquisition was provided by HSBC. Both UNW and Weightmans previously advised Camerons on their acquisition of Leeds Brewery's pub estate in 2017, which saw the group add seven venues to its portfolio.

John Foots, Finance Director at Camerons Brewery, said: "We are delighted to complete our latest acquisition and were very grateful to both UNW and Weightmans for providing advice and assistance to the company during the process. It's a pleasure to continue to work with such professional and commercially astute advisors."

Simon McNally, Tax Senior Manager at UNW, said: "We have supported Camerons Brewery for a number of years, including on its acquisition of Leeds Brewery's pub estate in 2017, and are delighted to have helped them throughout this latest transaction. The deal is representative of their ambition, and we look forward to seeing their continued growth in the future."

Duncan Reid, partner at Weightmans, said: "We are proud of our long-standing relationship with Camerons and to have advised them on yet another successful acquisition as their ambitious expansion strategy continues apace. It is our priority to provide solutions driven legal advice in order to help our clients achieve their commercial goals, and I am pleased that we have been able to deliver this once again for such an established brand in the North East."



For more information please visit: www.unw.co.uk



Bar Soba - Inside Bryers Road, Glasgow



Bar Soba - Inside Greek Street, Leeds



THE BRADLEY LOWRY FOUNDATION

Established in August 2017 after six year old Bradley Lowry, lost his fight to Stage 4 High Risk Neuroblastoma, a rare and aggressive form of childhood cancer.

Why was the charity founded?

In 2013, his mum, Gemma, started a fundraising campaign to raise funds to get Bradley treatment in the USA, which was not available in the UK. The campaign was very successful and with the support of thousands of people, raised over £1.3m, as well as vital awareness for Neuroblastoma and childhood cancer in general. And these donations, provided the funding base for the charity.

Which area do you cover?

England and Wales.

What type of fundraising events do you have?

We hold lots of different events, from Gala Balls, talent shows, and lots of football events, and supermarket bag packs.

What have been your proudest moments so far?

We have lots of proud moments, when we have a supported child hit their fundraising target and access the treatment or equipment they need, it really does make us feel so proud, that all the hard work has paid off.



Bradley Lowry Foundation
Supporting Fundraising Campaigns
Charity No: 1174333

Who are your main trustees and patrons?

Trustees – Gemma Lowry, Lynn Murphy, Phil Empson, Pam Thirlaway, Rebecca Harbron-Gray.

Patrons – Jermain Defoe.

What are you currently working on?

One of our main objects is a luxury holiday home, for families to make much needed memories, the holiday home will be situated in Scarborough, and

will have 5 double bedrooms, so that all family and friends can enjoy their time together.

What does the future hold?

We campaign for better, safer treatments to be made available on the NHS, we do this by funding vital research here in the UK. We have pledged over £200k into Neuroblastoma research, and a further £50k into all childhood cancers, where 100% of the funds raised go direct to the scientific team carrying out the vital research.

How do you get involved?

The Bradley Lowry Foundation rely solely on the donations from our wonderful volunteers. So if you would like to hold your own fundraising event, or need support with an event you are hosting, email contact@bradleylowryfoundation.com. We also like to work closely with businesses up and down the UK, we offer a lucrative sponsorship package based on the needs of your business. So please get in touch with Lynn at lynn@bradleylowryfoundation.com to find out how we can work together, to create a brighter future for the children.

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REGION'S ENTREPRENEURS OPTIMISTIC ABOUT FUTURE BUSINESS

Can-do businesses in the North East remain optimistic about the future and are ready to overcome challenges, the region's largest business conference heard.

Jonathan Lamb, chief executive of the Entrepreneurs' Forum – speaking during its Fortune Favours the Brave conference – said entrepreneurs, by their very nature are resilient and remain upbeat about the future business landscape.

He said: "There are many exciting developments and opportunities within the North East, including the emerging software and technology industry, advanced manufacturing, health and life sciences and subsea, offshore and energy technologies.

"This region has a proud history of producing world-beating innovators and industries and once again it is developing key sectors that can grow and drive the economy forward."

He said that such optimism is reflected by a business survey that found business confidence in the North East increased three points during October.

James Robson MBE, Chairman of the Entrepreneurs'

Forum, added: "This conference is all about being brave and courageous and standing by your convictions.

"Entrepreneurs are expert at navigating the highs and lows and overcoming the inevitable challenges. That's why North East business leaders display resilience and remain optimistic."

An audience of more than 250 business leaders attended the conference at Wynyard Hall – one of the highlights of the Forum's calendar of events – to hear a series of inspirational keynote speakers.

They included Chris Cathey, a director of Rivers Capital Partners and a senior training mentor for the Institute of Trading and Portfolio Management.

He was followed by Jo Fairley, who in 1991 co-founded Green & Blacks before selling the upmarket chocolate brand in 2005, now worth an estimated £100m.

Other speakers included North East businessman Phil Kite, who at 53, departed as CEO of Reece

Group to found rowing team Team Tyne Innovation.

He was accompanied by Claire Hughes, part of the victorious crew who in January completed the world's toughest row, the Talisker Whisky Atlantic Challenge in 42 days 10 hours and 26 minutes, a record time for a mixed four.

Additional speakers included James Brown who established Edinburgh-based online beer subscription service Beer 52, which has achieved a turnover of more than £11m.

Graham Robb, senior partner at Recognition PR, hosted a panel of young North East entrepreneurs, including Dan Martin of Elmtronics, Steve Erdal of Wordnerds, and Dan Foskett of Connection Flooring, who shared their experiences of scaling up their businesses.

The conference was compared by BBC journalist and presenter Charlie Charlton and supported by Recognition PR, Lumo.Tax, Park Commercial, FW Capital, British Business Bank and Sapere Software.



FORTUNE FAVOURS THE BRAVE

Supported by Recognition PR, the Entrepreneurs' Forum autumn conference saw over 250 business leaders come together for a day of inspiration, networking and learning.





Sarah O'Mahoney

An Entrepreneur Interview with...

SARAH O'MAHONEY

Director, Bradley O'Mahoney

Tell me about your background in business

I have always had an interest in business with my father, Daniel O'Mahoney, being a strong influence on me when growing up. I flirted with the idea of studying journalism and Law (not sure if I had the attention to detail) but I decided to keep the family tradition going and so studied PR at what was then Leeds Metropolitan University. I always had it in the back on my mind that I would end up at Bradley O'Mahoney Public Relations.

In the early days I had to work harder than most to be recognised in my own right - overcoming the hurdle that is often associated with being the son or daughter of the boss - and it is fair to say that things were not always easy for me.

I had to fight to prove I belonged and there was certainly no preferential treatment, quite the opposite, and I believe this made me the individual I am today, both in and outside of business.

I grasp every opportunity that comes my way to continually develop my skills and I am never complacent in my learning as I believe we can always know more. In recent times, I have become increasingly focused on my responsibility to help drive the business forward, while ensuring that our clients are front and centre of everything we do.

Without them we are nothing! I have now been at Bradley O'Mahoney for ten years and I am continually learning and developing.

How was Bradley O'Mahoney formed?

The company's origins go back to 1991 - a time well before social media and digital marketing were thought of - and the very first clients were IBM, Hay & Kilner and Mono Containers. Daniel O'Mahoney and Tony Bradley merged their respective firms in 1993 and the rest, as they say, is history. The firm, based in South Tyneside, has represented a vast range of clients in the private and public sectors during that time and there have been many fantastic highlights, not least, Tony Bradley being appointed national President of the Chartered Institute of Public Relations. This was not only a huge honour for the business, but Tony was the first practitioner from the North East to attain such high office in our industry.

In your own words, what is it that Bradley O'Mahoney Public Relations does?

I think it is more relevant to ask what our purpose is, rather than what it is we do. Quite simply, we are here to make our clients famous! After 30 years operating in the sector, we are more than familiar with the many and varied ways in which PR can have impact, from assisting companies when they are making redundancies (mitigating bad news) through to developing complex stakeholder engagement programmes, but the fact remains that the single most important reason we exist - and why the vast majority of clients call upon our services - is to give them a greater share of voice in the market... to make them famous! We create fame for our clients by delivering authentic, enduring brands built on storytelling.

What is your proudest achievement with the company?

My proudest moment is my own personal journey. I felt quite out of my depth when I first joined the company 10 years ago but always

had a clear focus to never give in. Working within an admin role for a year at Bradley O'Mahoney gave me an insight into the business and I was able to watch and learn how the managers ran their teams. I sat back and soaked up the information. From day one I worked with Daniel partly because I never really felt part of the old team, but this benefitted us in the long term. When the business hit the recession back in 2012 it was either sink or swim for me. I suddenly found myself in a position of being thrust to the forefront of the business and had to lead on accounts. I chose to swim and never looked back. Having free reign of the client accounts allowed my personality to come through and I found people wanting to work with me. I enjoyed the creativity and freedom of being in charge and my confidence grew.

I have a burning desire to be known for my work and put my heart and soul into the business. It is something that I have inherited and feel very proud of. I also always want to make Daniel feel proud of me and to carry on his legacy alongside my sister, Jane.

I also get restless. I need to be constantly stimulated and enjoy meeting lots of interesting people and this has led to exciting opportunities such as becoming a co-opted member of the North East board of the Chartered Institute of Marketing, a board member of Young Enterprise North East and a member of the Future Leaders group of the CBI.

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

My mistake has been trusting the wrong people at times. I always like to see the best in everyone I come across, but I have now learned to be more guarded and take my time to trust people. The vast majority of people in business are well meaning and genuine. However, there will always be the charmers, egotists and those with alternative agendas. I am still young and learning all the time and not just about PR and business but judging people.

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

Our growth comes in two ways - organic growth and networks.

Organic growth within our client base, as a result of the strength of the relationships we forge with them and the confidence they have in our advice and ability to deliver. This takes time to cultivate but is most satisfying.

As the saying goes, our networks are our net worth. We are members of a number of very interesting networks, most are based here in the region, with one in Boston, US. These networks allow us to rub shoulders with inspiring people from all corners of the business world. However, we do not want to be observers and will only join a network if we feel we can add value and fully contribute.

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

We all have to deal with disappointments, frustrations and knocks. I have faced many and despite the outcomes I will always bounce back. I take positive energy from failures and setbacks and that enables me to come back stronger. Working in business you have to be resilient and develop a thick skin.

Sarah O'Mahoney 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



Adrian Waddell

BREXIT/ELECTION

By Adrian Waddell, CEO of NE1 Ltd

The race is on – and not before time! The quest for power in one of the most important post-war elections is finally underway.

With polling on 12th December we can expect to be bombarded by politicians and commentators keen to tell us what the issues should be; with Brexit, police numbers, the NHS and schools funding high on their lists. These are all important, but top tier issues should not be allowed to obscure other matters that will affect the development of our city and the excellent progress being made closer to home.

The context is important; Newcastle is doing well. Over NE1's last two BID terms working with partners has allowed us to add millions to the value of the city's evening economy, redeveloped the Central Station - with more yet to come, secured investment that's allowed us to rejuvenate the Bigg Market and expected to leverage a further £60m of private investment in the area, and started work with Newcastle City Council on ambitious plans to help strengthen the city's retail core around Blackett Street and Northumberland Street re-establishing it as a destination of national significance.

This election gives us a great chance to highlight collective achievements, underline our capacity for effective joint working – across both public and private sectors – and shine a light on the massive potential of Newcastle and the city region. The new occupants in Westminster have just as big a stake in 'Project Newcastle' as we do, making sure the city's offer exceeds all expectations as a modern European regional capital.

So what are the issues that really matter? To my mind they revolve around policies - to improve our connectivity and our environment, so supporting our thriving businesses and encourage new ones.

Our transport systems need investment. There is a compelling case for upgrading the East Coast line and expanding the Metro network. East Coast rail is the main north/south rail artery for our visitors. Whilst Newcastle-London generally works well the route across to Leeds, Manchester and Liverpool is poor. Speeding that up, and improving reliability, would be a real boon for business. If it's HS2 then so much the better – but that's years away. We need an improvement sooner than that.

A commitment to air quality and the environment goes hand in hand with investment in our local public transport. It is really excellent to see how the new North of Tyne Combined Authority has worked with the four south Tyne authorities to make an ambitious bid for over £400m to be spent on prioritising sustainable, environmentally friendly travel across the region. Whatever the outcome, and let's hope the new cohort of Westminster MPs recognise the return they'll get from making this investment, another real win for business is seeing how the seven LAs have pulled together so effectively. In post-Brexit Britain, the ability to present a united North Eastern front, is going to be more important than ever before.

Tech Nation puts Newcastle as one of the top locations for digital start-ups and last year, investment in digital businesses was among the highest in the UK. We have a brilliant track record; we're home to global digital businesses such as Sage and the location for a large proportion of the 40,000 jobs in the North East created in the digital sector are here in the city. And, with the region's tech sector showing 82% growth in 2018, there are really excellent prospects for building a high

performing jobs ecosystem. The ability to combine brain power in one place, and the accelerated innovation expected from it, has global significance.

Our built environment forms a critical part of the legacy for future generations. It's good to see cranes on the Newcastle skyline. Landmark buildings, such as the impressive Hadrian's Tower, are taking their place in the cityscape. Buildings help set the tone for places. The government needs to apply policy that affect our built environment; how we tax buildings, how we regulate their energy consumption, the criteria we use to develop our cities. In particular the system used for Business Rates is well overdue for reform. It is not fit for purpose and is stifling innovation and change. Many businesses in Newcastle would benefit from an overhaul that created closer parity between online retail businesses and those with a bricks and mortar offering. The property tax system needs to respond to protect what we value most about the places where we live and work. An Amazon warehouse doesn't contribute towards the sense of 'soul' we get from the buildings, businesses and people that form a community in our towns and cities. This matters and it needs to be protected.

We have been talking about Brexit for more than three years. Parliament has been paralysed; after this election it really must make room for other issues that will shape our lives. In Newcastle, we are ready to implement new ideas, able to innovate for the future and can demonstrate we are willing to collaborate in partnership with the next government to deliver results that people expect and deserve.

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AKZONOBEL CELEBRATES MILESTONE PRODUCTION TARGET AS ASHINGTON SITE TURNS TWO

As its state-of-the-art manufacturing unit in Ashington celebrated its second anniversary in 2019, AkzoNobel has announced that the site has also achieved a ground-breaking production milestone - producing one million litres of paint in just one week.

Hailed as the world's most advanced, most sustainable paint factory, AkzoNobel Ashington utilises cutting-edge manufacturing technologies brought together from AkzoNobel sites all over the world.

Over the past two years, AkzoNobel has been systematically transferring manufacturing volume to Ashington from some of its older facilities to steadily build up the site's resilience and product portfolio to become the new UK home of Dulux decorative paint. Built on 'blue sky thinking' and the consideration of 'how good can it be?', reaching the one million litre production target is a huge breakthrough for the site's bespoke automated systems and the team who helped commission them.

"The high levels of automation on site mean that we have access to an incredible amount of data for all of our processes," explained Jeff Hope, Head of Manufacturing at AkzoNobel Ashington. "This means we can monitor every aspect of the manufacturing process to identify key areas where we can make improvements and ultimately increase production capacity whilst maintaining consistent quality.

"Hitting one million litres in a week is an incredible achievement which is testament to the outstanding culture of the fantastic team at the site and their relentless pursuit of operational excellence."

At the time the one million litre milestone was reached, the site was producing white Dulux Valentine Colour Resist paint for the French market.

The plant, which was officially launched in September 2017, was a significant milestone in AkzoNobel's history, creating over 160 skilled jobs for local people as well as a further 100 in the local supply chain.



Looking ahead to 2020 and beyond, the next target for the state-of-the-art plant is to demonstrate a further 50 per cent increase of capacity of 1.5 million litres per week.

"With an outstanding culture, there is no limit to what can be achieved here in Northumberland," Jeff Hope added. "This time last year, we were producing around 500,000 litres of paint per week. To have doubled our capacity in time for the site's second birthday is absolutely phenomenal and I couldn't be prouder of the team for making it happen."

AkzoNobel is the world's leading manufacturer of decorative paints and specialist coatings with brands including Dulux, Dulux Trade, Cuprinol and Hammerite.

For more information, visit www.akzonobel.com

COMPANY FORGES LINK WITH AGE UK NORTHUMBERLAND TO ENSURE THE ELDERLY ARE SAFE IN THEIR HOMES

ATV Aerial and Satellite Company has forged links with Age UK Northumberland to make sure that older people in the community have access to a safe pair of hands to deliver a safety service whilst raising much needed funds.

The team has put together a special package on internal and external security measures. The installations mean the home owner can see outside before opening doors and that family members can keep a close eye on their loved ones at home, in between regular visits from themselves and carers.

Homecare providers from Age UK Northumberland will be sharing the information with service clients as they visit them in the coming weeks of dark nights, and leaving literature for them to share with their families.

The Information and Advice line at Age UK Northumberland also have all relevant information and will be sign posting callers, so they know who to speak to and what is available.

ATV Aerial and Satellite Company is a family run business with 26 years experience. The father and son team also specialise in fitting and repairing aerials, satellite dishes, 4g antennas, broadband boosts, and TV set up/wall hanging which can make viewing TV easy for old people who are bed ridden. Grant and Blaine Smith said: "Over the last few months we have worked for a number of families wanting security and safety for their loved older members of the family. This isn't to replace visits, but just to ensure when they are on their own, the older people who may be ill or just live on their own, are safe.

"It made sense to extend that service and work with a charity that could also benefit!"



As an added bonus, the generous company is donating at least 10% of each CCTV installation back into the charity. Amy Whyte, Head of Charitable Services at Age UK Northumberland, said: "This partnership with ATV Aerial and Satellite is what we are looking to build with company's from all industries across Northumberland and the North East. Not only does it tick the Corporate Social Responsibility box, it raises finds for us and promotes the company to a wider audience. We are delighted to be working in association with Grant, Blaine and the team and look forward to helping older people feel and be safe in their homes this winter!"

More information is available at www.atv-aerialsatellitewhitelybay.co.uk or www.atvaerialandsatellitecompany.co.uk; and www.ageuk-northumberland.org.uk



NE6, from left, Steven Symonds with Steven Gibbons

NEWCASTLE DIGITAL PRODUCTS AGENCY GROWS THROUGH NATIONAL WORK

A Newcastle-based creative digital agency is driving growth by focussing on new technologies and securing business from beyond the North East.

NE6, founded almost two years ago by Steven Symonds and Steven Gibbons, is on target to break through £1m in revenue within the next 12-18 months. The team is set to expand to 15 - 20 people.

The fast-growing agency is building its reputation both within and outside of the region as a leading digital products and applications design studio. Significant new work is being secured through its specialist skills in React technology – a cutting-edge JavaScript library created by Facebook and increasingly used for building complex digital products.

Founder and director Steven Gibbons explained: "We have built a really strong team of skilled developers who are able to design and create a broad range of digital products. We tend to work in React technology and are lucky to have a fantastic in-house team.

"Our projects stretch from highly responsive

websites and fairly simple apps to complex, data-driven platforms."

A good example of this is seen in the work already done for Ludlow-based Premier Medical Group. During this summer, Premier Medical partnered with NE6 to streamline the company's digital evidence reporting process for helping customers win clinical negligence cases. Within three months a specialist Digiportal was developed, slashing report creation time from 1-2 days to just five minutes. NE6 continues to work with Premier Medical developing several new digital products.

NE6 is carving out quite a niche in the MedTech sector with a range of projects and clients that also includes bio-medical company Tecrea. More recently, NE6 has formed a strategic partnership with healthcare marketing specialist Onyx Health to target and strengthen business links in the sector.

Other large regional clients that NE6 has secured

and is working with include high-end estate agent Sanderson Young and rapidly expanding energy broker Northern Gas and Power. The company has also undertaken web projects for Yorkshire housebuilder Stonebridge Homes.

Steven Symonds, NE6 founder and director, said: "We're really proud of our North East roots but we see our opportunity as national. We have the skills and talent to take on the best, whether that's in London, the south-east, Midlands, or Yorkshire.

"Technology has few boundaries and geography will not hamper the growth of NE6. And while we're establishing strong credentials in certain areas like BioTech and the built environment, we are not sector specific.

"We've recently started working with Pin Point Recruitment, building a new business platform for the team. One of our first modules is a new pay slip portal built in React JS."

For more information about NE6 and some of their work visit www.ne6.studio



THE PATHWAYS 4 ALL ANNUAL CHARITY BALL

Organised by Lynn McManus, the charity founder and CEO, this annual event was recently held at The Grand Hotel Gosforth Park.

Attended by 300 guests, who support the local charity, the evening raised a staggering £50,198 on the night.





APPRENTICES ENJOY AN AFTERNOON OF CELEBRATIONS AS A WAY OF RECOGNISING THEIR LATEST ACHIEVEMENTS

Sage UK, based in Newcastle upon Tyne held a graduation ceremony for 109 apprentices who had recently finished their apprenticeship.

Among the 109 apprentices were high achievers Conner Hollinshead, Harry Sanderson, Daniel Edgar, Rebecca Castle and Steven Dewar who all achieved a Distinction for their end point assessment.

End point assessments are part of the newly introduced apprenticeship standard and are a series of tests an apprentice must take as the end of their apprenticeship. This new format was expected to challenge learners however through their apprenticeship with Northern Skills Group, Sage's apprentices have taken on the challenge with ease.

Rebecca Castle, Customer Service Practitioner said: "I'm so proud to say that I have finished, I thought I couldn't do it but I did! I have actually now set up a mentoring programme within Sage to help with this year's intake of apprentices so I can help others succeed!"

Rebecca's passion around learning is clearly embedded throughout Sage who pride themselves

on investing in the talent of tomorrow and support the younger generation.

Susan Miller, Customer Service Manager at Sage is thrilled at her apprentices' achievements.

"We recognise that our apprentices are a big part of the future makings of Sage, apprenticeships are a fantastic opportunity to help shape career paths and support our employees through their career.

"We have a fantastic relationship with Northern Skills Group who work on site at our Head Office to support our apprentices in-house. I feel we are very lucky to have them!"

It was not only Customer Service who saw great success, Steven Dewar Accountancy Level 3 apprentice also achieved a Distinction grade for his end point assessment, he said: "I prefer to learn on the job so this apprenticeship was ideal for me and to achieve a distinction grade for my end point assessment is even better!

"I have now progressed on to the Level 4

qualification and feel like this has given me a great boost for my career."

Steven's Line Manager, David Pickering is pleased to be have Steven in his team.

"Steven is such as a great asset to the team and is a great example of how Sage can discover emerging talent through apprenticeships, every year we work with Northern Skills Group to recruit a new intake – we really value them."

"Today's graduation has been truly amazing, it's a great way to show our appreciation as an organisation and to celebrate the hard work and achievements of our staff. It's also a great opportunity for us to thank Northern Skills Group staff for all their support."



To find out more about how Northern Skills Group can drive your business forward through an apprenticeship call 03453 40 40 40 or visit northernskills.co.uk

YOUR EYE ON THE REGION...

NAHEED AKRAM

CEO, MyRooh Fitness, Blaydon.

MyRooh is a unique fitness and wellbeing centre opening in January 2020. Offering a range of classes and events, our talented and fully-trained professionals will be hosting unique fitness sessions including; BoxFit, Dance Cardio, Barre, Pilates and even mum and baby classes, to make sure you're fit and healthy this 2020.

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

I grew up in Newcastle but ended up in London after university for work and have been there since! I come back to the North East a lot, especially since having a baby as all my family are still here. I'm also in the process of opening MyRooh Fitness in Blaydon, a brand new concept to fitness and wellbeing – which is big in London, but new to the North East.

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

It's an exciting time to do business here. It's great seeing new industries such as the tech sector grow and also people changing the way they work with better work / life balance. I think it's a good time for a holistic fitness business to open and offer services to support this balance from a health perspective. People, thankfully, are realising that it's not just your body you need to keep fit, it's their minds too.

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

People are friendly and you can make connections easily here. The community spirit is definitely something I see here a lot more than in London. That's very important to MyRooh, we want our centre to feel like a community where people can meet others as well as work out.

Do you have a favourite hot spot for a business meeting?

Not a regular one. I love trying the different cafes and flexible working/business spaces that have cropped in the region. It's great to have the variety!

Where do you like to eat out in the region?

One of my favourite things is going out for a meal which I tend to do quite a lot of when I'm back here catching up with family. I like my childhood favourites like Francesca's and Anisa's as well as newer ones like Peace & Loaf. Riley's Fish Shack

is also great when visiting Tynemouth in the summer. I'm still discovering new places.

Where do you like to unwind within the North East?

After spending time in London, I like to get out in the outdoors when I'm here and enjoy the countryside. I love Kielder Park and have discovered some great places in Gateshead like Thornley Woodlands centre. I also like to keep up to date with what's happening culturally here with visits to The Baltic, Quayside and Ouseburn.

Are the people friendlier?

There are some lovely people in London but it's easier and pretty normal to strike up a conversation with a stranger here so yes I would say it's more friendly. Not just compared with London, I've lived in other Northern places and the North East seems to have a unique warmth!

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

Some of the roof top restaurants in Newcastle like Chaophraya, it's interesting to see Newcastle from a different angle!

Living and working in Newcastle offer same opportunity as elsewhere in UK?

There's a lot more opportunities here than there used to be. There wasn't much in my field of finance when I lived here hence the move to London. I think that's changed a lot now. Newcastle has become more sophisticated over the years and the variety in type of jobs, people, culture and social scene is much more visible.

Experience of working elsewhere?

Still living in London which I love for all the advantages a big city provides but love coming back to Newcastle. It's like comfort food!

The size makes it easy to get around and you know exactly where everything is. Quicker to get things done, when you're constantly busy, like I am.





Michelle Rainbow

PLANNING FOR OUR REGION'S 'UPSKILL BATTLE'

The Confederation of British Industry (CBI) has published a report into the importance of lifelong learning in our modern economy. Michelle Rainbow, Skills Director at the North East Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), explains how the North East LEP is working with partners to tackle the challenges of our changing economy.

The CBI entitled their recent report 'An upskill battle', which perfectly encapsulates the challenge we face as we respond to an ever-changing sector and skills landscape, and as we work to develop a more competitive economy for the North East.

The very nature of this challenge – particularly around technology, digitalisation and innovation – is that the landscape will continue to evolve and change. It is indeed an uphill battle. So how do we plan and prepare for a future that could change the very moment we think we've caught up with it?

The North East Local Enterprise Partnership has been working for some time now - with employers, training providers, schools, colleges and other partners - to explore these challenges and keep them at the top of the agenda when it comes to future planning around employability and skills in the region.

And as highlighted by the CBI in their report, lifelong adult education and careers guidance need to be a fundamental part of the solution.

The demands of today's global, digitally-driven

economy require a broader, more agile skillset than ever before. It's a fast-moving landscape that waits for no-one. Employers and government need to recognise this quickly and work together to make sure that people can access the training and support they need to remain productive throughout their working lives.

Employers need to build training and skills development into their business models, and government needs to ensure that training is accessible and affordable for those who need to pay for it themselves.

We also agree with the CBI that we need to extend careers guidance beyond 19 and abandon the idea that teachers can equip young people with all the knowledge they need at the start.

Instead, we need to think about careers guidance as a journey from primary-age to retirement, and this is particularly important for those who experience loss of work or whose skills face becoming obsolete.

If we can put the right support, guidance and training opportunities in place in our region, we can revive, revitalise and extend working lives and

create a workforce that's adaptable and ready to take on whatever the future economy may throw at us.

An important part of this will be around supporting people to understand how they can map and transfer their strengths, skills and knowledge from one role to another throughout their career.

That's why we particularly support the CBI's suggestion that government should look to develop a nationally recognised skills 'passporting' tool as part of the National Retraining Scheme, so that informal training and skills are taken into account when looking for future employment. The Department for Education's Get Help to Retrain scheme, piloted in the North East, is a good step towards this, supporting people to map their current skills and signposting opportunities.

This CBI report highlights some very stark realities; people will typically work up to twenty years longer than their parents, well into their 70s, meaning the growing need for adult education and a shift towards a lifelong learning culture is critical.

Working into our 70s and beyond is a challenge that many of us will personally face. The time to plan for that future is now.

Read more about the North East LEP's skills, employment, inclusion and progression work at northeastlep.co.uk

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L-R: John Milburn, Head of Marketing, Digital and Telesales at Hays Travel, Scott Duncan, Business Development Manager at Advantex.

The photo was taken inside Hays Travel's new Gilbridge House HQ in Sunderland.

HAYS TRAVEL RECEIVE 5-STAR SERVICE FROM ADVANTEX

Advantex Network Solutions, the North East's leading and award-winning technology firm, has partnered with UK travel experts, Hays Travel to improve communications and technology at their new Sunderland city-centre-based HQ.

The move will see the Gateshead-based technology specialist provide a new communication and telephony system that will interconnect over 500 members of staff from their Gilbridge House Head Office in Sunderland city-centre.

Hays Travel has more than 180 retail stores, which are supported by 240 experienced home workers, and with the recent acquisition of 555 new stores nationwide, the newly installed solution is robust and scalable - meeting the ambitious and continuous growth plans of the business.

Head of Marketing, Digital and Telesales at Hays Travel, John Milburn said: "The partnership with Advantex has been fantastic. Not only have they allowed us to seamlessly integrate and migrate communications across the business into one solution and place, but they've done that without

out any downtime or disruption, allowing us to focus on our day-to-day operations. I wouldn't hesitate to recommend."

The work, which is ongoing, utilises the Mitel MiCloud Flex solution, delivering the highest levels of performance, reliability and security through the Mitel global mobile cloud.

Advantex Business Development Manager, Scott Duncan said: "Everyone in the North East has heard of Hays Travel, and soon, following the recent acquisition of 555 new nationwide stores from Thomas Cook, so will the rest of the country - so for us to call them a client, that's something we are extremely proud of.

The partnership has already allowed us to consult, design and implement state-of-the-art solutions at their new Gilbridge HQ, so we're all very excited to help grow the business over the coming years too."

Advantex's partnership with Hays Travel is one of many recent wins for the firm, who have just celebrated their 17th anniversary in October and currently employ almost 60 people at their Follingsby Park-based head office.

The company is a Cisco Premier, Microsoft, and Mitel Silver accredited partner, providing a single source managed services package, which combines to deliver flexibility, added value and cost-saving benefits.

Advantex works with some of the UK's biggest and best-known brands, boasting a client list that includes Rockliffe Hall Hotel, Newcastle International Airport, McDonald's, Hitachi Rail Europe, Caterpillar Trucks, GE Oil and Gas, and END Clothing.

ONE VISION. ONE MISSION



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*Wishing you a very
SMERry Christmas!*



Ammar Mirza CBE

MERRY FIXMAS

As we enter the alleged period of festivities, I wonder how much stress and strain is unnecessary inflicted on us all at this time of year.

The office parties, Christmas presents for people that have everything, the costs of Christmas shopping, parking, crowds, queues, drunken people that don't normally drink, and trying to get business done before the close down period and all that jazz.

When I was a child, many decades ago, due to the abject poverty we lived in, we didn't exchange gifts as we couldn't afford them. However, the highlight of Christmas was buying the Radio Times and circling all of the programmes to watch as a family, not worrying about going out or getting up for school. A true feeling of joy and happiness, which is what Christmas should be all about.

Christmas later on in life turned into being purely commercially orientated, bigger, and better costlier presents. I truly disliked it, turning myself into a Humbug. The incredible pressures placed on families to get into debt just to pay it off in time for the following year.

Now having small children and a grandchild, it is, as it should be, all about them. Looking forward to the magic of Christmas, where the joy on young, innocent faces can brighten the hardest of hearts.

Reflecting on the year, it is easy for me to become distracted by all of the challenges, issues and problems experienced, and I must admit it has been a truly challenging year. One of my team members actually said recently that "Ammar you have so much luck, it is a pity that it is all bad!"

However, it is easy and natural to focus on the negatives, something I usually don't do, being and believing in the power of positivity. And there have been some great things happened this year, with a particular highlight last month of collecting an Armed Forces Covenant Gold Award in London. This was a great demonstration of our amazing Armed Forces and a celebration of the incredible employers that support them.

Christmas is also a time when sadly people feel as though they need to pretend to be something they are not, and generally we appear to become more sensitive, and friends and family telling one another they need fixing. However, people don't need fixing, no one is average, and we just need to be true to ourselves. Authenticity is one the greatest assets we have. And we all have something, one thing, which we are great at. Being ourselves.

So as we look forward to Christmas this year, and before I start stressing about all of the things associated with all of the usual Christmas challenges, I intend to focus on family time in the traditional way. But also using the time to focus on the positive aspects of life and concentrating on enjoying the company of the wonderful family I am blessed to have. I don't need fixing and I am just going to be me.

Love and peace to one and all.

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



**AmmarM would like to wish all customers,
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and prosperous New Year**



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THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY - MY BUSINESS OR SOMEONE ELSE'S?



Alison Shaw

Alison Shaw, Professor of Practice for Success and Progression at Newcastle University, and Director of the North East Initiative on Business Ethics (NIBE), explores how businesses can help counter climate complacency.

There is little need here to rehearse the facts or provide more evidence that we are not on the brink of global disaster as a result of mass climate complacency; the disaster has begun and is growing in scale. Apart from a few notable exceptions, most of us have now accepted that it's a real thing. It's happening.

What is perplexing is why more of us don't appear to be doing much about it. Perhaps we don't know what we ought to do first; perhaps there is confusion between climate warming and air pollution; or perhaps we just feel that anything we do choose to do will be futile anyway and so probably isn't worth the effort.

Back in the spring, I gave a talk; it wasn't particularly good, but it grappled with this recurrent issue of our moral agency as individuals in the face of apparently insurmountable challenges. In the case of climate, can one tiny person among the 7.7 billion or so of us possibly make the least difference to the seemingly inexorable destructive course which we humans have set for our world?

I argue that each of us indeed can - but that if

we are part of or lead an organisation, we have a much greater opportunity to make a difference and therefore a greater responsibility to try.

This includes business. A business is, by its nature, a purposeful organisation. Regardless of the products or services it trades in, it is bound to have expertise in persuasive communication. I can think of none which does not.

Is this, then, not a vehicle for those people within it to multiply and amplify their potentially insignificant individual impact into something more powerful, collaborative and influential? Leaders in business can empower and engage their people - indeed a driven individual can take the lead from within. Either way, collective effort, as most of us will have experienced at some time, not only has impact but is encouraging, inspiring and often, when we need it to be, comforting.

Whether your business takes action to help its people see the value in turning the heating down; in only making car journeys if they are really necessary; in limiting air-miles and rejecting the 'frequent flier' premium; or in examining the

investment policies of pension funds, it IS worth doing. There will be a small but real impact.

However, the greater premium is on actively channelling our eco-anxiety - more often than not a 'first world' malaise for the worried well - into generalised behaviour change.

That the circumference of our small and beautiful planet is less than twenty-five thousand miles round jars in a shocking way with the number of carbon miles each of us generates, certainly in the northern hemisphere. For those people concerned about the number of children increasingly struggling with their breathing or the figures on pollution-related morbidity and mortality, this is equally the case.

'Once the penny drops', says Sir David, 'you have to act'. Businesses can help the penny drop, so that more of us understand that we can and must change how we live and we can realise many ways of doing it, supported by the knowledge that others around us are doing it, too.

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MENTAL HEALTH CHARITY HELPS KICKSTART BUILDING CONVERSION

A local mental health charity is starting preparatory work on a £400,000 building conversion project that is scheduled to begin in spring 2020.

Service users from the woodwork department of Blyth Star Enterprises' Woodfuel Centre have begun to craft and replace windows at the Old Chandlery, Blyth, in preparation for its upcoming transformation into eight spacious, supported living apartments.

The Old Chandlery building was previously used as a base for Blyth Star to deliver its innovative range of day services, including cookery classes and art and craft workshops, prior to a recent move to the repurposed Steamboat building. The conversion into new apartments has now been made possible by generous donations from The Bradbury Foundation, The Edward Gostling Foundation, The Barbour Trust, William Leech Charity, The Hospital of God at Greatham and CRASH charity.

The Woodfuel Centre's manager, Neil Hedley, said: "This is a fantastic opportunity for our service users. They're excited to implement the skills they've learnt as part of such an important project.

"Our clients really enjoy getting involved with work that benefits the local community as well as their peers. The conversion project is highly anticipated and it's great that we can be involved in the creation of the new supported living facilities.

"We're really pleased to play such a big part in the preparation work as the building means a lot to us. We look forward to seeing the finished transformation and will be on hand to assist throughout the project."

The Woodfuel Centre is one of two small businesses operated by Blyth Star Enterprises which provides sheltered working environments for service users to learn essential skills and gain structured exposure to the local community. The Sleekburn-



Neil Hedley

based centre produces sustainably-sourced, kiln-dried kindling and logs for wood-burning stoves as well as various made-to-order sculptures through its dedicated woodwork depot.

While attending the Woodfuel Centre, service users can also complete an in-house vocational training programme which offers the opportunity to acquire higher level skills and qualifications. The course is tailored to fit an individual's needs and progression is assessed and monitored through use of a personal care profile which tracks how users are developing throughout each module.

Gordon Moore, chief executive at Blyth Star Enterprises, said: "Being able to convert one of our buildings into a supported living environment means so much to us and to the people involved. It's great that the Woodfuel Centre can assist in the building's conversion as service users have the chance to demonstrate the skills that they've acquired through attending the Centre.

"It's important that our service users are given these opportunities as it helps them continue to grow, build self-worth and confidence whilst interacting with the local community.

"Blyth Star Enterprises is committed to providing high quality services across Northumberland and look to help as many people as we can. A project of this size involves partnerships with the local council as well as other grant funding charities so we're extremely grateful to all who have made this project possible. We wouldn't be able to complete such fantastic work without the generosity of others and we're always open to new partnerships and support."

Blyth Star Enterprises is a not-for-profit charity providing living support services, training and sheltered employment opportunities. It offers innovative day services to over 350 people living with learning disabilities and lifelong mental health issues across Northumberland and the North East.

To learn more about Blyth Star Enterprises and The Woodfuel Centre visit: www.blythstar.org.uk

WHY DECEMBER IS A GOOD TIME TO FIND A NEW JOB

Bryony Gibson, managing director of Bryony Gibson Consulting, discusses why the run-up to Christmas is one of the best times to make a career move.

There is no month quite like December. While businesses get ready to pay annual bonuses and hold parties for employees, productivity in the workplace slows down on an almost daily basis as the festive season draws near.

Despite management's best efforts, it can feel impossible to stop some people's attention drifting away from the workplace to become wrapped up in holiday preparations.

Wanting to spend more time with family and friends, enjoying the social side of the yule-tide, or assuming businesses won't be looking for new recruits at this time of year are just some of the reasons why I also see job seekers put their search on hold when, in fact, this month presents a golden opportunity.

December is traditionally a time when people begin to re-evaluate their goals, including job and career prospects. It's not until the New Year that action is usually taken but, in my experience, companies are constantly searching for talent and you run the risk of missing out if you bring your job search to a temporary halt.

There's less competition

The most popular day to search for a new job is the first Monday in the new year, so you won't be alone if you arrive back to work with the resolution to make a career change. Bucking the trend and looking now means much less competition and first-mover advantage over the January crowds.

You get more attention

Recruiters are easier to contact and more receptive when workloads reduce. Not only that, but they are also in the office more, which makes it much easier to build a healthy working relationship. After all, the better they know you, the better they will represent you.



Bryony Gibson

There are plenty of new opportunities

Contrary to popular opinion, a lot of new vacancies arise in mid-December, usually triggered by the payment of annual bonuses and businesses preparing to hit the ground running in January to get ahead of competitors.

It's a good time financially

The end of the year is often the last month of a company's annual recruitment budget, meaning they either have spare money and want to recruit swiftly to avoid losing it or, if they have spent up, it's almost time for the new budget to begin, so they are likely to be gearing up to restart their recruitment drive. Either way, it's good news for job seekers.

Networking is effortless

With lots of festive drink receptions, events and parties, it's a great time to network, reconnect and mingle with colleagues and new contacts who might be able to help you. One of the trickier parts

of securing a new job can sometimes be finding enough time to attend the interview process, but December also makes this a little easier; not to mention putting people in a positive mood.

People don't switch off

Traditionally people have been met with a deafening wall of silence if they tried to recruit during the Christmas period but now, technology means people don't switch off in the same way when they are away from work. Social media and email are ever-present, and a mobile phone is never far away; especially when people have a little more time on their hands.

The moral of this story: it pays to continue your job search throughout the month of December because employers are recruiting, and you can easily miss out by waiting until January.

December is one of the most wonderful times of the year, and one of the best times to look for a new job so if you feel it's time for a new challenge, why wait.

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INVESTING IN THE BEST: CELEBRATING SUCCESS AT BMC RECRUITMENT GROUP

At a time when organisations are increasingly offering apprenticeships to help people train and become adept at various roles, BMC Recruitment Group are really proud to say their own apprentice, Shannon Hogarth, has deservedly been promoted to Office Manager after just four years with the company.

The promotion is a direct result of her hard work; Shannon has been integral to the growth of the business since she joined in 2015.

Since the beginning of her career with BMC where she was a business apprentice, Shannon has developed in her role and she is now in charge of helping to keep the team highly organised and motivated. As part of her role, Shannon has even been involved in building BMC's new website which was created by award-winning digital marketing agency Mediaworks. The website launches soon including valuable, informative, free content for any candidates looking for new opportunities and for clients seeking to expand their teams.

Shannon's role also sees her assisting the team in ensuring that ISO9001:2015 standards are up to date, which means that the highest possible service standards and the most efficient internal processes are attained by the company. This is a standard which is not easy to come by and is one of the many things which sets BMC apart from its competitors as clients and candidates can be confident that they are regularly (externally) audited and have been commended for their exemplary processes and practices.

Operations Director Andrew Gibbison comments: "There's such a positive culture of growth at BMC; we really believe in our people and value our team and we have seen great potential in Shannon over



Shannon Hogarth

the past four years. In such a short space of time, Shannon's become a key player at BMC and she has been promoted to Office Manager having started out life at BMC as an apprentice. Our greatest assets are our employees and we put them at the heart of what we do. We happily offer training and support to staff who are seeking to take their next step career-wise and we love to promote and reward people for their hard work and dedication which is what makes BMC so successful. We are so pleased Shannon has chosen to progress in her career here and we look forward to seeing her excel in her role further".

BMC also recently promoted Matt Wragg and Sarmon Gaffney to Managing Consultants in their

sectors, Tech and Construction, respectively, as the company continues to expand.

BMC are growing their team and strengthening their specialisms rapidly, having recently recruited several new members of the team including James Orange, a consultant within their growing Construction Team. James will be supporting Sarmon Gaffney and his team in working to continue to find talent for companies such as Avant Homes, Bellway and Gleeson Homes, and many others.

BMC are focussing their expansion plans on high growth sectors including (among others) Tech, Finance and Construction and the team have exciting plans for 2020 and beyond.

There is clear career progression for those in the team who show aptitude and have a passion for recruitment so please get in touch with Managing Director Chris Milnes at chris.milnes@bmcrecruitmentgroup.com if you're interested in joining the team where you can expect a respectful and rewarding culture.

BUILDING A WINNING WORKING CULTURE: HOW WE DO IT AT SAMUEL KNIGHT

Building a winning working culture is intrinsic if you want to find the right people for your firm. Head of Learning and Development at Samuel Knight International, Steven Musham, discusses the culture journey.

As a global recruitment agency, we know first-hand how important finding the right talent for your company is. We are also well aware of how difficult this can be. Attracting individuals in this skill-short climate is extremely difficult - which is why it is crucial that companies have strong hiring strategies in place and a workplace culture that stands out.

Here at Samuel Knight, we have aggressively grown our headcount over the last few years and have learned a thing or two about creating an all-star team and culture that resonates our values and vision.

Identify your culture

First, it is important to know what your culture is before you start looking for candidates. This will help you identify the individuals that will bring innovation, gel with the rest of the team and stay with you while you grow. At Samuel Knight, although we are all very different, we all share a few common traits. For example, we are passionate about what we do, motivated to do our best and have an entrepreneurial flair about us. This stands out when we communicate with candidates and approach potential clients, which, of course, gives us a distinctive and winning edge.

We have also nurtured a culture of continual learning and progression. We encourage our team members to strive for more and offer plenty of opportunities for growth.

For example, Dan Kerr, who joined the company back in 2014, started as a consultant; however, after showing determination and passion, he quickly progressed to senior consultant level within a year. He is now the Managing Director of Samuel Knight.



Steven Musham, Head of Learning and Development at Samuel Knight International

Work environment

To allow people to flourish and build a winning workplace culture, it is important to have a work environment that is creative, inspiring and a place where employees are proud to be a part of. We will be opening our brand new office space in Newcastle come early 2020, this will be to facilitate our growth plans and extensive hiring strategy. We now have offices in Newcastle, London, Bristol, Chicago, and the Middle East, with more locations in the pipeline.

Building a winning workplace culture: Have creative hiring strategies

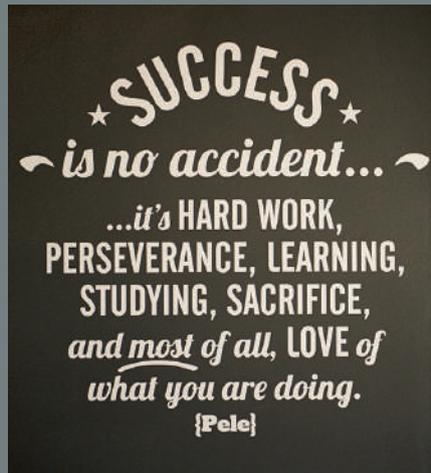
To ensure that you are attracting the best people, and winning the war for talent, you must have a strong employer brand and creative hiring strategies. Invest in your marketing and understand your internal and external audiences. It is vital to

engage applicants right from the start create a connection during the recruitment process and communicate all benefits early.

We are hiring

Since our inception, we have always had the vision of growth and international expansion, and over the years, this dream certainly has manifested into reality. Our US operations are firmly on track, with our first office opening in Chicago this year – a strategic location designed to support our service lines and grow the business.

Our CEO & Founder, Steven Rawlingson, started SKI with the vision of building a business we as a team can all be proud of in 50 years' time. We hire on SKI DNA traits, our business is built on the people we hire – that is the foundation for long-term success.



A BUSINESS BUILT TO LAST

Meeting Managing Director Andrew Mackay at the Coleman James office in Hoults Yard, Newcastle, is a refreshing experience. You get a great feeling when you walk through the door – the atmosphere it's modern, warm, friendly and welcoming, much like Andrew.

But let's start with some background.

In 2016, Andrew decided to take the knowledge and experience he'd gained over a decade-plus in the recruitment game, specialising in the built environment sector, and do things his way.

Frustrated by the constraints of the corporate recruitment machine, he believed there was a better way to operate. He had a vision to change the game – to forge his business on a set of personal values that would define not only the people who work at Coleman James, but the way they operate.

It was a bold move for the then 32-year-old entrepreneur, who at the same time also became a first-time dad. The name is an amalgamation of his grandmother's maiden name, Coleman, and his middle name, James. It's a neat touch and a nod of recognition that behind him is a very supportive family.

The core values of integrity, long term relationships, excellence and specialist knowledge are woven into the Coleman James DNA and embody Andrew and his team of experts. The approach has resonated with clients across the UK during their four short years in business, and the rewards have been significant.

"Unfortunately for my profession, recruitment has a bad reputation. It's not all deserved – there are some exceptional recruiters out there - but some of it is historic and justified. Many larger firms play the numbers game. They employ inexperienced staff, fail to invest in their development, and work on a high volumes sales strategy – screening lots of low grade candidates and hoping something sticks.

"In my experience, this rarely works. At Coleman James, we need to understand your company culture and the skills and values you are looking for in your candidates. Only then can we seek the right person for your company. We know that our clients will invest significant time and resource, not only in finding the next recruit, but developing them. So, we need to get it right. It's about the long term strategy, building partnerships with our customers, who come to trust us at all levels."

To make the right connections, build those long term customer relationships and find the right candidates takes experience.

When Andy recruited his growing team of 14, he was looking for specialist expertise, a set of knowledgeable individuals who understand the built environment sector – from construction to architecture to building services and facilities management. The average age of the Coleman James workforce is around 35, because if you are going to live your values – and knowledge is one of them – you have to have experience.

Andy continues; "When I set up, I needed people who could hit the ground running. Our team have been operating at the highest level for many years. They know and understand the industry and their customers. They are highly successful at forming partnerships with businesses and building trust and credibility."

Since 2016 Coleman James has gone from strength-to-strength. Earlier in the year they won Small Business of the Year at the North East Business Awards, as well as scooping a runner up prize in the Service Award category.

The business now has a national footprint and a burgeoning client book, with 40 per cent of customers operating outside of the North East region.

There are plans to open new offices in key locations and in early 2020 the firm will move into the rail and engineering sector. With the advent of HS2 and new rail projects, Andrew has identified an opportunity to apply his boutique approach to recruitment to the sector.

This will include the appointment of experienced new team members, with in-depth knowledge of the sector. They will quickly set to work, identifying and supporting high quality candidates that meet the aspirations of the organisations Coleman James works with. New customers can expect the personal and attentive service Coleman James has built its reputation on to date.

Andrew concludes; "We've come a long way in four short years, but this is just the beginning. If we continue to stay true to our values and build our reputation on integrity, knowledge, relationships and excellence, I know we will continue to grow our business and our team in the right way – and importantly continue to deliver for our customers and our candidates. The future looks very bright."

If you operate in the built environment or rail industries and are seeking high quality staff to meet your needs and fit your company culture, visit www.coleman-james.com or get in touch with Andrew and his team at Coleman James. Call 0191 300 6360 or email info@coleman-james.com

coleman james

Specialist Recruitment



JULIAN PUTS THE SUN IN SUNDERLAND



Consumers around the world will soon be wearing sun protection products that started life in a Sunderland lab.

Industry expert Julian Hewitt has decided to make the city the base for his business, JPH SunCare Technologies, which develops sun care and skin care products for clients across the globe.

From his new lab at the North East BIC, Julian formulates, develops and tests innovative products offering UV protection.

Julian said: "Suncare is one of the fastest growing sectors of the global personal care market because people have really woken up to the dangers of sun damage. They want more of their everyday skin care products, as well as their sunscreen, to offer protection from harmful rays.

"Many of the small and medium-sized companies developing cosmetics and decorative products want to add UV protection to their claims and benefits but don't have technical departments to do this inhouse so using the expertise of an independent consultant like me is a perfect solution."

Clients provide Julian with a brief outlining the properties they want in the final product, and a shopping list of ingredients they want to use or exclude in their formulation, and he finds a way to use them to optimise the product.

He also draws on his 30 years of industry experience to provide training – teaching the science of sun protection to those new to the field – and offers advice to companies unfamiliar with complex industry regulations.

Julian set up JPH SunCare Technologies in 2011 after a highly successful career leading sunscreen applications research and technical service for chemical giants ICI, Uniqema and Croda.

Originally operating from a pay-by-the-week lab in Teesside, the investment in dedicated lab space and new equipment represents a major leap forward.

Julian said: "I have built up a great client base and repeat business so I now have the confidence to grow the business and finding the perfect permanent home was top of my list."



SERVICE LAUNCHED TO TAKE THE STING OUT OF FAMILY LEGAL FEES

A lecturer turned social entrepreneur is helping families and individuals access much-needed financial and support services after working with the North East BIC.

Founded by former University of Sunderland social sciences lecturer and researcher, Dr Angela Wilcock, the Family Advisory Service is a community interest company (CiC), providing advice and signposting to vulnerable people and families across Sunderland.

Angela founded the organisation after helping a family friend regain contact with his daughter and witnessing first-hand just how little support was on offer and how much legal providers were able to charge for simple tasks such as completing forms and accessing advice.

After guiding him through the entire legal process, the family friend gained access to his child for the first time in over six months and the interaction inspired Angela to set up on her own and help others in similar circumstances access the same support which helped him through the process.

"After finding out that a family friend had been stopped from contacting his daughter, I got in touch and met him for a coffee to hear more about what he was going through," she said. "He was being quoted over a thousand pound just to access advice and start the court process and I knew there had to be a better and cheaper solution.

"After seeking out support from other organisations, we were surprised to find that there was nowhere that offered the service he required and so, with my expertise as a lecturer and researcher and having previously worked with voluntary and family support organisations, I helped guide him through the entire process after just two hour-long catch-ups.

"That was what inspired me to explore the idea of setting up my own non-for-profit organisation to help others in similar circumstances. After taking time out from work and realising my passion was in front-line service provision, I approached the BIC and pitched my idea to them."

RECRUITMENT SPECIALIST DESIGNS HIS OWN DREAM JOB

After finding the perfect job for thousands of candidates around the world, North East recruitment expert David Gallagher has finally landed his own dream role – as his own boss.

A 15-year career in the recruitment industry has seen David develop the prospects of professionals in far flung places.

Now he's focusing on fulfilling his own ambitions, having launched a specialist recruitment agency with the help of start-up experts at the North East BIC in Sunderland.

His new company S&G Recruitment, set up in Washington with business partner Steven Roberts, specialises in the supply of staff to the engineering, automotive, manufacturing and professional service sectors.

David said: "The idea of working for myself had been percolating in my head for a long time but once I'd decided to do it, it came together really quickly.

"I went from having nothing but a business pitch to having a fully formed company in just a few months. That's in no small part thanks to the support I had from the BIC."

Within just weeks of launching, the business had

already won a series of significant contracts – an achievement David attributes to his technical background as a former Royal Navy mechanic and Steven's experience working in manufacturing, engineering and security sectors.

David said: "It makes the world of difference to clients when you've worked in the field and actually know the jobs you're recruiting for. We are so confident about the quality of our work we actually provide a 12 month guarantee to clients on each and every candidate we find for them – that's way above the industry standard of three months."



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REDU AND HONCHO ANNOUNCE INNOVATIVE NEW PARTNERSHIP



Redu, Jonathan Ward & Honcho, Graeme Stoker.

North East firm Redu has teamed up with Honcho - the world's first reverse auction marketplace - to offer a unique money-saving rewards scheme to its customers. Here Honcho's Chief Digital Officer Graeme Stoker explains more.

At Honcho, our mission is to bring trust, fairness and transparency to the insurance market. That's why we launched the world's first reverse auction marketplace.

Our technology platform provides consumers with a simple, cost-effective and engaging way of buying insurance products and services.

Through Honcho's reverse auction marketplace, insurers bid for the consumers' business, which ensures a highly competitive quote and puts their interests at the heart of the transaction.

Since our launch in August, we now have 10,000 people signed-up to our app, with over three quarters of those actively using it to find the best deal on their insurance.

We were delighted with this response and needed to find a way to reward our customers – and that's where fellow North East tech business Redu came in.

FREE CUSTOMER PERKS THROUGH REWARD ME NOW

Redu offered us the opportunity to thank our customers by harnessing the unique money-saving power of its Reward Me Now app.

As part of its free Reward Me Now for business service, Redu built us a Honcho-branded app - 'Honcho Rewards' - which allows us to secure major discounts at over 100 top brands providing savings for our customers. The app is so accessible and easy to use and the team at Redu are constantly adding value to it.

The thing that really excites us about the platform is it offers discounts at retailers that people regularly go to so consumers using Honcho Rewards can save really quite a lot of money over the course of a year. Giving consumers the opportunity to regularly save a little bit of money is a really great way to keep the cash in their pocket.

It's about thanking our Honcho customers with a rewards app that comes at no cost to them, but equally no cost to us.

A PARTNERSHIP OF INNOVATION

Redu, like ourselves, are a County Durham-based business and the innovative work they were doing in the retail space reflected the innovative work we are doing in financial services.

There was a lot of affinity between the transparency and affordability that we're trying to bring into the insurance market and what they're bringing to the retail market.

Technology firms are traditionally London-based and to find two of us in County Durham doing really innovative things - it made sense that we worked in partnership together.

We are delighted to partner with Redu and look forward to working together to get the very best deals for our customers.

For more information on Reward Me Now for business, email j.ward@redu.co.uk or call 01915630995



David Taylor

NEW CHALLENGES AND NEW OPPORTUNITIES

Looking into a new year comes both new challenges and new opportunities, the recruitment market is no different. With more than 40 years of experience between us at Howie White, we would like to think we know a thing or two that may help you to tread the minefield that is recruiting new team members.

So, you have a position to fill? Any business wants to attract and then employ the cream of the crop for their available roles, but how do you attract those premium candidates, the ones who will show passion and drive not just in their interview, but in their role for years to come? At Howie White, we believe a pro-active rather than passive approach tends to land the best quality of candidates. With a plethora of job sites on the internet, it can be tricky to decide the best platform for your advert. We prefer to use our extensive network, spanning all industries, and having discussed what skills or experience are a 'must have' and which are a 'would like', to find those stand out candidates.

Once a shortlist has been decided, with unemployment at an all time low, it is imperative in this climate to get things moving. A lot of employers lose candidates during a lengthy recruitment process. We suggest setting out the full process, along with rough timescales at the

first opportunity. Adding extra stages, and extra time, can lead to the best candidates being offered something better elsewhere. It is also key in an initial interview to really sell your business to the candidate. As important as the salary package is to the candidate, so too is the culture and reputation of the business. A candidate should have a clear idea of the role and the business' activities prior to the interview based on the job spec and their own research however, it is in the interview that they will decide whether they can see themselves working there.

It cannot be denied that at present, there is a definite candidate driven market, candidates are in the driving seat and looking to command more than just a better salary. This means employers need to be looking at what else they can offer, not just the figure on the payslip. The good news is that this doesn't have to be a costly venture. In an evolving working world, you don't have to go 'full google' and install a slide, but there is a

lot to be said for, and a lot of value placed on - flexible working hours, company discounts or even Christmas parties for employees' children.

Once an offer has been made and the benefits package explained, employee retention is key, most employees look to leave when growth of their role within a business appears stunted. Although there are many who decide they want out when they don't feel that they have a strong working relationship with the management team within the business. Taking both of these into consideration, as an employer; regular reviews, with targets and personal development plans with clear outcomes and benefits will go a long way. As will taking a genuine interest in the people you work with and who work for you.

If we can give two pieces of advice, it is to; remember why you hired this person, and that ultimately, everybody wants to feel valued and responsible within the role they play in a business.

RONALD JAMES TO TAKE DIGITAL RECRUITMENT-MARKETING BY STORM IN 2020



The North’s leading Digitech talent agency is changing the game for the sector, making 2020 their biggest year to date. With an upgraded strategy, Ronald James will help businesses overcome the struggles of attracting highly-skilled tech professionals in the new year.

Ronald James Group is a specialist IT, Digital and Tech recruitment agency based in Gosforth, Newcastle upon Tyne, with offices in Boston, USA. Its tailored digital recruitment-marketing plan is cutting-edge, serving top clients to find the finest professionals for their businesses.

In 2019, the company hit its 4th anniversary with a growing team of over 20 recruitment and marketing experts. Over the years, Ronald James has built a successful series of partnerships with leading tech companies across The North and beyond; each client successfully increasing their talent pool through bespoke marketing strategies that target and engage with top-of-the-line candidates.

Tesco Bank, the agency’s latest addition to its extensive client portfolio, has nominated Ronald James to lead their search for tech experts who will join their new tech hub at Quorum Business

Park in 2020. It all starts with the correct inbound talent pool.

CEO, James Blackwell, explains: “From what I’ve seen (speaking to hundreds of business owners and heads of departments), companies with recruitment marketing strategies in place are over 30% more likely to hire greater quality employees”. The company found that 70% of job-seekers regard an employer’s brand as highly important in their decision to work for them. By correctly marketing clients to the top 15% of candidates, Ronald James brings businesses the best, most motivated talent, decreasing the chances of employee turnover greatly.

Digitech employers are finding it more and more difficult to attract and preserve high-quality talent in their field. After speaking with over 100 business owners in the North East digital and tech sector, the company spotted five key

problem areas they were all experiencing:

- 1. Businesses lacks passionate coders.**
- 2. Holding onto talented developers is becoming increasingly difficult.**
- 3. Hiring costs are increasing.**
- 4. Businesses are struggling to find and attract top developers.**
- 5. Companies are falling behind on projects due to one or all of these issues above.**

Ronald James tackles the root of the problem by tailoring clients’ candidate outreach to specific engagement points within the sector. With its dynamic, unrivalled approach, the agency forecasts its biggest and most successful year in 2020, continuing to attract tech giants and expanding into the North West with targets of over £2 million.

We find the TOP 15% of Talent
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The Director Doctor will see you now!

Are you an entrepreneur or SME business owner feeling overwhelmed in your business, lonely or stressed? What's going to happen if you don't get a handle on it?



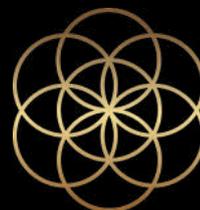
With help from the Director Doctor, you can take the stress out of success with a bespoke programme designed to meet your needs and budget.

Serial entrepreneur and qualified master coach, Lisa Vescio began a lengthy career as a mental health professional and spent 12 years as a company founder and managing director before helping other directors work through obstacles and challenges within their minds and businesses.

Merging her experience and expertise, Lisa works with entrepreneurs to remove the underlying causes of stress and create a better work/life balance with clarity and confidence to move their business to the next level.

She can help:

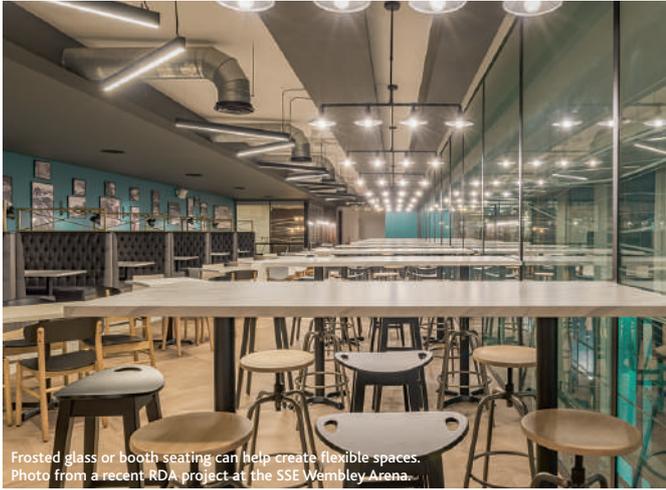
- Free old patterns of behaviour that keep you in a stress cycle
- Create a healthy and focused mind set
- Work with you or your team to overcome challenges and obstacles and gain clarity on your next steps
- Mentor and implement strategies to create a successful business which ultimately finds you a truly auspicious life



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Frosted glass or booth seating can help create flexible spaces. Photo from a recent RDA project at the SSE Wembley Arena.



High street design is popular in lots of contexts, including schools, hospitals and for business and industry clients.



RDA



Thoughtful design features can help to suggest a brand's commitment to sustainability. Sketch visual from RDA.

FIVE FRESH TRENDS FOR THE FOOD & BEVERAGE INDUSTRY

With over a decade in business, a reputation for excellence and a loyal client base that includes high street brands, international blue chip companies and private businesses of all sizes, RDA's insights on the future of dining are valued right across the food and beverage industry.

So what are the hot topics in the world of eating out? Director Nick Bradley tells us more.

The high street is alive and well

"For quick and casual food and drink, the high street still dominates thanks to three key factors: choice, convenience and price," explains Nick. "So much so that our clients in the education and healthcare sectors continue to look to the high street for inspiration."

"Customers are less loyal than they used to be. They're prepared to go elsewhere if a setting can't provide what they're after."

Street food crazy

Street food is still an exciting trend, and one that food retailers would be wise to tap into.

"For a while the street food trend was very 'London', but its appeal has broadened and independent food venues - found in city centre markets, pop-up venues or even shipping containers - are now well-established right across the UK."

"It's creative, fun and it suits millennial and Gen

Z customers' preference for experiential, exciting dining experiences - venues just need to appreciate that they need to set the bar higher than cans of lager and portaloos. Customers expect more than they did ten years ago."

Top Tech

Tech is a hot topic across all catering sectors, although particularly for the high street, travel hubs and colleges and universities.

"McDonalds - voted the UK's most loved food brand by one survey in 2020 - was an early adopter of the tech trend and we're seeing more and more food and beverage venues follow their lead, installing contactless charging, self-ordering screens and cashless payment systems to speed up processes and improve hygiene."

Flex Appeal

Flexibility is vital for future-proofing catering and dining spaces, as Nick explains.

"When a client invests money in a new restaurant design or refurbishment, they want to be assured of

a good return. We work with them to ensure that the space we create is flexible and that its appeal will endure."

"Whether that's with quality equipment that can carry out a multitude of different functions or using dividers to create a luxury private dining experience for VIP events, there are lots of ways to make the back and front-of-house more versatile."

Sustainable Futures

There's no doubt that the public consciousness has become more sustainability-minded over the last 12 months, and diners are becoming more concerned about the environmental impact of their food.

"Restaurants have to look at their supply chain and sourcing, but a brand's eco credentials can also be suggested through thoughtful design features," says Nick.

"Living walls, green ventilation and lighting systems and bold signage advertising brand values are just a few options a venue might consider."

THERE IS SOMETHING EXCITING HAPPENING

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Dr David Cliff

NEVER BETTER!

In the first of a regular column for Northern Insight, coach, consultant and therapist Dr David Cliff of Gedanken, based in Houghton-le Spring, reflects on some of the pressures faced by those in business.

We've all heard it, the Dragons, the movers and shakers. Indeed, the word entrepreneur was not in common usage 20 years ago. Now, it is associated with success and greatness. Such people are the risk takers, the wealth generators, the employers and the contributors to communities. This is perhaps why they are viewed by some as almost modern-day heroes!

The problem about this really lofty place of community esteem is that the realpolitik of being an entrepreneur means committing oneself to a life of risk and reward where one doesn't necessarily follow the other in short order. It can be quite an anxious uncertain place and it is no accident that some studies indicate that entrepreneurs experience more stress than the rest of the general population.

In common with the self-employed however, entrepreneurs do not have the luxury of taking paid sick leave. As much as any ambition, the loss of cash flows, erosion of organisational growth, the maintenance of reputation and a myriad of other factors come into play that require

entrepreneurs to keep going back to the fray. They do this often with little support, increasing neglect of their work-life balance and a consequence of potentially cataclysmic mental health difficulties further down the line.

Most organisations don't have workplace mental health policies. Those that do tend to professionalise mental health responses, rather than looking at its maintenance as something that is about work-life balance, mutual support, kindness to self and others and just plain talking about our challenges long before there is a need to knock on the psychologist's door.

The problem is people are just way too busy to do this. Equally, distraction from our problems of stress, business risk and the general market uncertainty can be all too easily provided by the flurry of activity that is tacitly accepted as par for the course when building a business.

The consequence is that many entrepreneurs work in isolation. They often become less thoughtful and supportive employers than they might be, and it is not unusual for them to display erratic

behaviour and/or physical problems related to their psychological stress.

It's perhaps time we had a real debate about the nature of entrepreneurialism and its attendant stresses. We need to move on from the hyperbole of success and risk taking into a sensible view of stress and burnout as common social phenomenon that affect our movers and shakers just as much as our young people are affected by disapproval and hostility within social media and our older citizens by social isolation.

Many entrepreneurial behaviours are habit-forming. Whilst serial entrepreneurship is represented as almost heroic, some academics talk about entrepreneurship addiction. The very persistence considered vital to running a business, gaining customers, staying competitive and improving market share, requires behaviours that are almost obsessive in nature.

Yes, it's important that entrepreneurs look after their self-care and everyone takes it upon themselves to ensure they go beyond the rhetorical social ritual of "how are you" and truly start to listen!

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Michelle Minnikin

IN CONVERSATION WITH...

MICHELLE MINNIKIN

Co-founder of Inspiration North and Founder of Insights Business Psychology,
experts in the science of work.

What led to the career you now have?

I was a huge fan of Cracker, the TV drama starring Robbie Coltrane as the flawed forensic psychologist and decided I wanted to catch bad guys. I found out this job didn't exist. So, I continued my studies with an MSc in Occupational Psychology and set off on my career. I always wanted to run my own business, but as a naturally bubbly, friendly and slightly rebellious human (always asking why!) I didn't feel that I had the credibility / gravitas to set one up. After persevering and doing well in my corporate career in HR, recruitment and learning & development, I took the plunge and set up my own business in July 2016 with Alnwick Rugby Club as my first client. Funnily enough, I now help my clients avoid hiring 'bad guys' and destroying their businesses.

What services does your company offer?

We essentially do two things. We help organisations select and hire awesome humans by designing reliable and fair recruitment processes, including psychometric testing, creating recruitment frameworks, assessment exercises etc. And once you have your awesome humans, I help to coach, mentor and develop them into the leaders that organisations need to play bigger, realise their potential and increase performance.

What is the biggest challenge you have faced so far?

Sadly no one teaches psychologists how to run a business, so I found a couple of coaches to teach me how to create a successful and sustainable psychology practice. Part of this challenge was the realisation that I can't do everything. So, I've taken the step to hire other humans to help me grow the business.

Tell us about your team?

My business partner is James Eves who has had a fairly extraordinary career across 3 continents and many sectors. He speaks 3 languages, has an MBA and his experience spans both the entrepreneurial start up and big corporate worlds. He has joined the company to help me bring more structure and process to develop the business. Sophie Birkett is

our apprentice who supports the smooth running of both businesses. It's her first 'proper job' and she is enjoying it so far.

What is your company's USP?

I'm a Chartered Business Psychologist and have also spent much of my career as a Recruitment Manager and in HR in large corporates. This combination is uncommon. I've lived and experienced the people problems my clients face and I'm well positioned to partner with and support them.

What is the best advice you have received so far?

As the oldest child in my family and with a boarding school education I was very much "Miss Independent" when I was younger. I have learned over time to never be afraid to ask for help.

Who are your Heroes and Mentors?

The inspirational Karren Brady who has shown great business acumen, resilience and has done an amazing job at West Ham. I also greatly admire Michelle Obama, Sam Conniff Allende (the author of Be More Pirate) and my mum for always ploughing on.

What other business projects are you involved with?

I am on the board of the Association of Business Psychology, an enterprise advisor for the LEP and a trustee for the PIE Project charity. I also have involvement with the global charity, Action for Happiness, which has the bold aim of teaching people how to be happy.

How do you like to unwind?

Spa days, road trips and camping.

Favourite Book?

Be More Pirate by Sam Conniff Allende.

Favourite DVD?

Has to be Dirty Dancing!

Favourite Song?

Lose Yourself by Eminem which has fantastic, challenging lyrics.

For further information visit the website www.insightsbp.com



POP UP TO KIRKHARLE FOR NEW ANTIQUES SHOP

A new addition to the exclusive artisan workshops and galleries of Kirkharle Courtyard is bringing a touch of the past to visitors.

Lesley Newman from Ulgham near Morpeth is opening a temporary pop up antiques shop in the historic farm setting near Wallington and is looking to offer Christmas shoppers something a bit different to what you would find on the High Street.

Lesley said: "Kirkharle Courtyard is a great place to visit any time of the year and it has a very special atmosphere at Christmas. I've been looking for a shop for my business All Your Yesterdays for a while now and when I saw the old barn at Kirkharle I knew that I'd found the ideal place. We have everything from pocket money collectables to high end jewellery, a huge collection of local history and maritime books and many curios and prints."



MONUMENTAL WORK BY NORTH EAST CHARITY

A national charity based in the North East is celebrating 35 years of helping people in crisis transform their lives for the better.

From humble beginnings, when a small group of young Christians set out to provide affordable housing to Gateshead's homeless, Oasis Community Housing is now making a monumental difference to the lives of around 2,000 vulnerable people every year. With established local projects in Gateshead and Sunderland, the charity will soon be extending its work into South Tyneside too.

One such project are the charity's two drop-in centres, Basis@Gateshead and Basis@Sunderland. Both offer sanctuary for men and women who are sleeping rough or are in housing crisis, offering help and support that focuses on long-term solutions.

Oasis Community Housing project teams have also started a pop-up choir, a baking club and art classes to offer a small piece of fun to those that normally wouldn't get the chance.



FEED A FRIEND FOR A FIVER THIS CHRISTMAS

As most people look forward to celebrating the festive season, The People's Kitchen are asking the generous people of the North East to remember the vulnerable and homeless and pledge to help feed a friend for Christmas.

For more than 30 years, The People's Kitchen have been providing food and friendship for those that need it the most. For six days a week the charity provides food from its base near St James' Park or from special catering vehicles in various parts of Newcastle. The charity is run entirely by volunteers, no government funding is received and no one is paid for their work.

Last year, kind-hearted pledgers raised more than £80,000 which ensured that everyone who needed it received a hot meal throughout the cold winter months.

The People's Kitchen are once again asking people to pledge £5 for the cost of a winter meal via their website www.peopleskitchen.co.uk/feed-a-friend.

ONE MAN'S CHALLENGE TO REACH THE SOUTH POLE ON FOOT

This month, Michael Mitten, an avid adventurer from Newcastle upon Tyne, will attempt to trek to the South Pole, as what can only be described as one of most physical and mental challenges for any human to undertake.

10 years on from a successful trek to the North Pole in memory of his dad that raised £40,000 for Macmillan Cancer Support, Michael is now taking on this momentous challenge in memory of his mum who spent over 18 years fighting multiple sclerosis (MS) before she passed away in 2016.

With an aim to raise £50,000 for the MS Society, Michael wishes to raise awareness and support research into the disease. If Michael is successful in his feat, he will be one of very few individuals in the world who have reached both the North and South Poles on foot.

To support Michael's challenge, please visit www.polesapart2019.com.





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CHRISTMAS PRICE LIST

	Normal Price	Christmas Offer		Normal Price	Christmas Offer
Castration:			Ovariohysterectomy:		
Cat	£40	£35	Cat	£62	£55
Rabbit	£60	£55	Rabbit	£66	£60
Dog (up to 10kg)	£107	£100	Dog (up to 10kg)	£128	£115
Dog (up to 20kg)	£115	£100	Dog (up to 20kg)	£145	£130
Dog (up to 40kg)	£123	£110	Dog (up to 30kg)	£154	£140
Dog (over 40kg)	£138	£125	Dog (up to 40kg)	£216	£200
			Dog (over 40kg)	£228	£200
Caesarean:			Dentals:		
Cat	£550	£500	Scale & Polish inc		
Dog	£750	£675	General Anesthetic,		
			X-rays		
			Minor Extractions	£308	£280



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For more information, please contact us on 0191 414 4233 or find us on Facebook

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Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year from the Concept Team

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IN CONVERSATION WITH...

DAN KITCHEN

Managing Director, razorblue



razorblue is an IT Managed Services firm which has offices across the North East, North West and London.

The team of over 80 people provides full end to end technology for businesses from IT support to network and software services. Now on a mission to become a national firm with local relationships, we caught up with Managing Director Dan Kitchen to find out more.

Tell us about razorblue's roots

I launched razorblue when I was 17 after a very short stint at sixth form college.

I've always had a passion for tech, but writing reports on other businesses wasn't enough for me – I suppose that's the entrepreneur in me! I knew I could do it, so I left college, set up razorblue and have never looked back.

What sets you apart from competitors?

The service level we offer. We want to make sure we're offering as complete a service provision as possible so we only outsource if absolutely necessary.

We have our own network, can develop software and systems in house, and our team is second to none. Every single one of our account managers is from a tech background, not sales, so they know and understand the system as well as what customers need.

Proudest moment within the business?

In March 2019 we won the 'Let's Grow' award at the North East Business Awards. This was a huge night for me and the team as winning this meant all the hard work that is driven into the business every day has been recognised.

What is your business mantra?

- The only limit is yourself.
- Get tough and get on.

• Whatever it is, it can be fixed.

I suppose I have a few – but they're all equally important!

What is the best piece of business advice you've ever been given?

To always be gracious. There are times when we've lost business to competitors, or a prospective client has simply gone with the cheapest option and it can be so frustrating. But being gracious, keeping in touch and living the 'no hard feelings' approach can really make you stick in mind when they come to renew or, most likely, standards don't live up to ours.

How has the business landscape changed over the last decade?

In my opinion, the government has done a good job of creating opportunities for enterprise, but one of the most common issues businesses are facing across the board is the shortage of good people. Without these, it's difficult to drive business forward.

What's next for razorblue?

Nothing much different to what we are doing now – maintain and grow the right structure and the

right team, adding more businesses to our portfolio and bringing in new services as we go.

Heroes in and out of business?

My wife. Not only for agreeing to marry me, but just who she is. She sees life the same way as I do and is always on hand to support me and my business alongside working incredibly hard in her own career.

Favourite aspect of the job?

I love the variety that our industry creates – but also the fact that every day is a school day! The technology industry moves so fast that we're learning daily to be able to not only keep up but be ahead of the curve.

But it's not just the technical side that I enjoy, owning a business brings so many other things to understand from HR to law and finance – all things that are vital for me to get right to make my company and team successful.

How do you measure success?

By asking whether the people around me – from the team to my family - are happy. If they are, we're definitely doing it right.



www.razorblue.com

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CHRISTMAS HIGHLIGHTS

Christmas is a busy time for everyone and Keith Newman of Highlights PR is no exception.

Here Keith tells us about some of the clients his company helps at Christmas time.

Christmas can be a hard time of the year for many people. The People's Kitchen in Newcastle help vulnerable and homeless people by providing food and friendship. This year, their "Feed a Friend for a Fiver" campaign will ensure that everyone who needs a hot meal during the winter period is catered for.

To help: www.peopleskitchen.co.uk/feed-a-friend

Serving Gateshead, Sunderland and South Shields, Oasis Community Housing is now in its 35th year and making a monumental difference to the lives of around 2,000 vulnerable people every year. Their annual "Giving a Home" appeal will help those in desperate need and address both the immediate needs and root causes of homelessness.

www.oasiscommunityhousing.org/campaigns

Christmas at the Cathedral is a festive night of carols, popular music and sketches all delivered in the wonderful setting of St Nicholas Cathedral. Performed in front of a sell-out audience, the event raises much needed funds for the Sir Bobby Robson Foundation.

A ticket for the Sunday for Sammy live show makes a fantastic Christmas present. The 20th Anniversary shows are on Sunday 23rd February 2020. **Tickets available from the Newcastle Utilita Arena or Theatre Royal.**

Northumberland Theatre Company's pantomime in their home town of Amble this year is Beauty and the Beast. The show starts on 20 December and runs until New Year's Eve. **Tickets from:** www.northumberlandtheatre.co.uk

The Ultimate 70's Show is the best Christmas party night out and a chance to swap Christmas jumpers and business suits for flared trousers and lurex loons to relive the decade that fashion forgot – the 1970's. A special Christmas party night will take place at Newcastle's Riverside venue on Saturday 7 December with party hats and crackers taking second place to the musical entertainment on offer. Intent on re-creating the era they love, they promise fans an authentic evening of Seventies classic hits delivered just as you would have heard them back in their heyday.

Tickets are on sale now from www.riversidenc1.co.uk

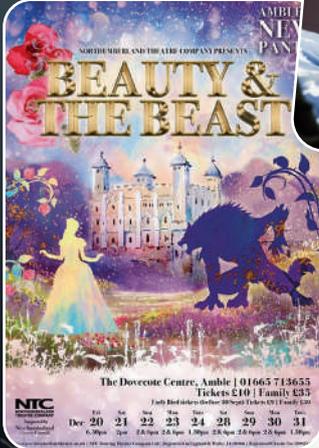
For interesting and unusual Christmas presents try Kirkharle Courtyard Shops near Belsay. The latest addition is All Your Yesterdays Antiques and Collectables. There's also Northumbrian food, a gift shop, Papier Mache artwork, handmade luxury kitchens, silver jewellery maker, stained glass artists, mixed media artist and supplies and art galleries. There is also a coffee shop and play area for children.

Kirkharle Courtyard Kirkharle, Newcastle Upon Tyne NE19 2PE

Cinderella by the Geordie Panto Company runs at Gateshead International Stadium from 6 to 29 December.

Ticket information: gatesheadstadiumpanto.co.uk

To get your business, organisation or event in the media spotlight, contact Keith@highlightspr.co.uk www.highlightspr.co.uk 07814 397951



DURHAM START-UP TO DISRUPT MARKET WITH NEW PEER-TO-PEER LEARNING APP

After research published by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) demonstrated how peer-to-peer tutoring can benefit a child's learning progression by up to five months, a County Durham-based start-up has developed an innovative new mobile app designed to give students a helping hand with their homework or exam revision.

Peer Tutor provides young people with access to high-quality learning resources endorsed by Collins, as well as question and answer based support, essay feedback and live tutoring sessions, all delivered through the app 'on demand' by a DBS checked and verified peer tutor who has passed their own exams at Level 6 (Grade B) or above.

"Peer tutoring is a fantastic tool which is already widely used across the world to help students consolidate what they have learnt in the classroom," said Wayne Harrison, CEO and founder at Peer Tutor.

"Through technology, we want to make this accessible to everyone, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to create a better balance in students' learning experiences and improve educational outcomes."

Peer Tutor has grand ambitions to make peer tutoring available and affordable to every student across the UK and is actively seeking corporate partners who, as part of their CSR strategy, can sponsor Peer Tutor usage for a learner or a school in their local area.

"After looking at what was available to educators to support their learners out of hours, we devised our corporate sponsorship programme specifically for schools, especially those operating in areas of high economic deprivation. This will enable schools and learners to access high quality resources and support, at no cost to them," Wayne added.

"Working together with schools to identify those most in need of some additional support, a nominal donation can help up to 10 students to access the app for a full school year to help them change the course of their futures."

Peer Tutor is wholly owned by North-East based educational charity, awarding organisation and education services provider, NCFE. The company will be working with Peer Tutor to help develop and moderate the app's content to promote successful outcomes for learners.

David Gallagher, chief executive at NCFE, commented: "At NCFE, we are committed to promoting and advancing learning to help students of all ages to reach their learning and career goals which is why we are really excited about our new partnership with Peer Tutor."



Wayne Harrison, CEO and Founder at Peer Tutor.

To find out more about Peer Tutor visit www.peertutor.com



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SCALE-UPS AND HOW TO BECOME ONE IN 2020

Five years ago, the amazing ball of focused commercial energy that is Sherry Coutu was commissioned to write the Scale-up Report for central government. Reading that document changed my life.

The results were stark and I quote, "Competitive advantage does not go to nations that focus on creating companies, it goes to nations that focus on scaling companies. Scale-up companies drive economic growth, job creation and long-term productivity."

For clarity the OECD defines a 'scale-up' as a company with an average annualized return of at least 20% for three consecutive years, with at least 10 employees at the beginning of that period.

I'm passionate about supporting business growth and my own company mission is 'growing the nation by improving sales performance', so after I read that report and met with Irene Graham, the CEO of the newly formed Scale-up Institute in London, me and my team went to work.

We doubled down, changed our focus and I'm proud to say that in the five years since, my organisation has become part of the eco-system that supports and enables aspiring entrepreneurs scale-up. I already knew that scaling a sales operation is one of the key challenges to growth and that we had an evidence based methodology to help create a scalable Sales Engine for any business, we just needed to stop phaffing about and focus relentlessly on supporting this part of the business landscape.

On Tuesday 12th November this year, I was invited back up to the Scale-up Institute's five year update at The National Gallery in London, to hear first-hand the impact of the work of all the supporters of Scale-up. Not surprisingly the results are tangible and positive.

The number of scale-ups per 100K of population has grown by 3.7% (or 1,300 businesses in real terms). Scale-ups are more evenly spread across the country (of course there are more in the South and South-east, but there are no more black spots. Hurrah!) Scale-ups are not all Tech businesses. Warranted most scale-ups do use technology to leverage productivity and increase their competitive advantage but there is a balanced mix of scale-ups across sectors. Scale-ups have grown on average by 35% in the last five years,



Nicola Cook, CEO of Company Shortcuts.

compared to 9% in UK GDP growth over the same period. Scale-ups create employment, employing 3.4M more people than five years ago and 56% offer work experience, apprenticeships and internships.

And get this...

...the 5.7 million SMEs in the UK contribute £1.9trn to GDP BUT scale-ups which represent 0.6% of that that number, contribute a MAHOOSIVE £1.3trn!!

If only I could include a well-deserved fist pump emoji into this article as there's no doubt, scale-ups are vitally important for our economic growth and stability.

So if you're reading this, and you're thinking that 2020 could be your year to scale up, then your first action should be to reach out to Scale-up North East www.scaleupnortheast.co.uk. They're amazing and they'll tailor a package of support to meet your individual company's needs.

Then after you've done that, grab a cup of Christmas Eggnog, sit down and answer my six fundamental core scale-up questions.

1. What is your UDP? (Your company's Unique Differentiating Proposition). It needs to be market defensible, proven and clearly defined. Without one, you'll be left competing on price alone and by the way, it's not 'your people', 'your level of service', or any of your other USPs.

2. Who's your Target Client Avatar? And why do they buy from you? If you're selling B2C, this will be your end-user/consumer persona, but if you sell B2B this is your target customer's company,

followed by the individual buyer or buyers? Remember the customers that have got you to where you are, may not be the next generation of customers you need to scale-up.

3. What is your Sales Methodology? Different types of customers, markets and sectors require a different sales approach. Gone are the days of hiring armies of sales reps, sticking them in Ford Sierra's and expecting them to bring home the dough. You must build a Sales Engine, which often includes multiple sales methodologies, that allows your customers to buy from you in the way that they want.

4. What's your Sales Engine Index? What activity delivers what sales output? Until you know this you cannot set accurate sales targets or set metrics to measure sales effectiveness. Within every business lies a sales algorithm. Work out yours and it becomes a simple mathematical equation of increasing input to increase output.

5. What's your Pipeline Gestation period? Your pipeline lead time determines the working capital needed in order to grow. Most people guess this and vastly underestimate it, leading to a lack of finance and cashflow nightmares.

6. And finally, Resourced how? This final question leads into what kind of sales and marketing structure you will need in order to grow.

Answer these six core questions and you'll have the basic understanding of what will be required to grow your own Sales Engine.

To watch a video on how to improve the sales focus of your business follow this link; companyshortcuts.com/neinsight



VILLAGE HOTEL CLUB NEWCASTLE UNVEILS NEW VWORKS BUSINESS CLUB

New business club aims to change the game and the way local Newcastle businesses work and meet.

The local Village Hotel Club in Newcastle has opened the doors to its brand-new business club - VWorks – which will help support and promote the needs of local businesses and entrepreneurs by offering a place for local people to work, connect and network.

Tailored to the needs of local workers and travellers alike, the new VWorks boasts impressive meeting rooms fitted with sharp, reactive technology and a comfortable lounge area perfect for relaxed meetings.

Local businesses and individuals looking for a smart, creative and innovative environment to work from will enjoy the modern hot-desking spaces – equipped with super-fast WiFi, free printing and photocopying, free energising refreshments and flexible bookings via a digital app.

General Manager of Village Hotel Club Jason Dalus said: "We're thrilled to unveil our new VWorks facilities and look forward to welcoming back old and new guests. Local businesses lay at the heart of our community and we're thrilled to now offer a space that supports and promotes the needs of the business owners and entrepreneurs of Newcastle by connecting them to work, mentors and new networks."

Smaller meeting pods are also available to accommodate private meetings for two to six people, and can be hired for as little as an hour for impromptu get togethers and video calls. Larger meeting spaces, up to 20, will be available for larger conferences and events – all of which can be booked easily via the Village Hotel Club App.

In addition to meeting and coworking spaces,

VWorks offers its business club members unique access to resources, information and seminars, designed to help them learn, connect and grow.

In her role as VWorks' Local Business Ambassador, formidable business woman Baroness Karren Brady CBE, helped to host VWorks' first 'Tales from the Boardroom' seminar series exclusively for its business network earlier this year, with further seminars to be rolled out in the coming year. Together, Karren and Village will be hosting the inaugural VWorks Awards next year, in order to celebrate the achievements of local businesses and entrepreneurs.

A variety of VWorks membership options are available for individuals, local businesses and entrepreneurs.

To find out more information or book a free visit, call 0191 2706491 or www.village-hotels.co.uk/hotels/newcastle/vworks

SAMUEL PHILLIPS LAW BRINGS '20S STYLE TO LIFE AS IT CELEBRATES 100 YEARS



Samuel Phillips Law firm recently celebrated its 100th birthday in grand style at the Baltic Gateshead. The law firm transformed the space into a 1920s Art Deco black and gold extravaganza, with guests echoing the theme dressed in top-to-toe sparkling 'flapper' outfits or channelling their black tie and peaky blinder fashion.

The Gateshead Millennium Bridge lit up the river with the firm's rebranded colours of teal and gold, and the front of the Baltic screened a huge projection of 'Samuel Phillips Law 1919' smashing through to 'Samuel Phillips Law 2019'.

Over 200 guests from local businesses enjoyed the event, which brought together all sectors of regional private and public sector companies and agencies with Samuel Phillips Law.

Samuel Phillips' 100th year has been an outstanding one. The firm completed a major move of its offices to 18-24 Grey Street in Newcastle last year and since then have grown and introduced new technology.

In the last twelve months it has also recruited a new Head of Commercial Property, Phil Dean, and commercial property lawyer, Will Jarvis-Smith, new family law senior associate Sarah Ward, appointed two partners, Stephen Robinson and Jane Fiddes and expanded their highly regarded residential property team to seven members of staff. The firm has also created a litigation and dispute resolution team led by Claire Farrell, and promoted Roisin O'Donnell to wills, probate and trusts solicitor.

Samuel Phillips Law has rebranded, with a renewed website, interactive online residential property services, and stylish furnishing throughout the firm's offices in the new brand colours.

The firm's marketing strategy, and its proactive approach to creating new contacts through events, online and offline communications reflects Samuel Phillips' aim of being first choice for clients and referrers.

It is actively involved with local charities and community services, with team members driving charitable donations and participation to make a substantive difference to many regional good causes.

Samuel Phillips Law works across a range of sectors including business, property, education, health, charity and the public sector. It also works with individuals and families in all areas of personal law, including serious injury, wills and probate, family law and dispute resolution.

Managing partners Robert Gibson and Jennifer Goldstein spoke of their pride at the achievements of the firm over its 100 years, during which time legal services have grown and changed enormously. Samuel Phillips has embraced the newest technology and ways of working, but retained the primary importance of personal contact, with long term relationships built with loyal clients.

Sharon Boyd, chief executive of Samuel Phillips Law has driven the changes to the law firm which hallmark its 100th year. She said: "The centenary evening went even better than I could have hoped. We were thrilled that our guests embraced the 1920s theme. Everyone looked so glamorous and the buzz in the room was fantastic! We've so much to celebrate this year, and to look forward to in the next 100 years.

"What sets us apart is our priority of developing relationships with the business community and empowering our people to make the most of their potential. We have developed programmes and a supportive culture to develop their confidence, professional prowess and personal well-being. We

encourage juniors to have responsibility so that they begin to build relationships with other firms and sectors early in their careers, rather than focussing solely on senior staff. Each member of staff is important to the firm, and we make sure they know they are valued and respected.

"As a result, we're trusted for great service and expertise, and from this solid foundation we can move forward confidently and grow in the future."

Samuel Phillips, the founder of the law firm, came to Britain from Belarus. With his parents, Samuel moved to England in 1906 to seek a better life. An immigrant, he attended Leeds University to study English Literature and graduated with 1st Class honours in 1911, a remarkable achievement given English was his second language.

He served in the Royal Army Medical Corps in the first world war, and was shot and wounded in 1915. At the end of the war Samuel returned to England and set up his legal practice in 1919.

The law firm thrived, acquiring another practice in 1954. Samuel Phillips died in 1971 aged 81, but left a growing law firm with a strong reputation.

Sharon Boyd said: "Samuel Phillips was courageous, resilient, hardworking and not afraid to pursue what he felt was right. It is an ethos which we hope reflects the firm today, and will take it forward into the next 100 years."



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Legal solutions that fit



WHY YOU SHOULD ADD MAKING A WILL TO YOUR LIST OF NEW YEAR RESOLUTIONS

Did you know that over 60% of the UK population don't have a will?

There are many reasons for this, from 'I'm too young' to 'I don't have anything to leave', from 'I haven't got time' to 'it's too expensive'. However, what happens to your estate when you die is something that should be given serious consideration whether you are eighteen or eighty, and there's no time like the beginning of a new year to put your affairs in order. Here at Toomey Legal we make sure that making a will is quick, hassle-free and, for all but the most complex of arrangements, inexpensive.

Many people find it difficult to sit down and talk to their family about what they want to happen to their estate after their death, so making your wishes known, in writing, can provide clarity, certainty, and peace of mind.

So, here are six good reasons why you should consider making a will:

1. A will puts you in control, enabling you

to choose who you wish to benefit from your estate and who you want to handle the task of collecting in your assets, paying off your debts, and distributing your estate.

2. Without a will, your estate will be shared out in accordance with the rules of intestacy which may not be what you want, and will not include an unmarried partner, no matter how long you have been together.

3. Having a will reduces the risk of a problem or dispute arising, a situation which could lead to costly and stressful applications to court.

4. It becomes even more important to have a will if you have children under the age of eighteen or wish to make provision for a disabled or vulnerable member of your family. By making a will, you can nominate your own choice of guardian as well as create a trust to ensure your children are supported financially.

5. A will can minimise the impact of

inheritance tax and help with estate planning.

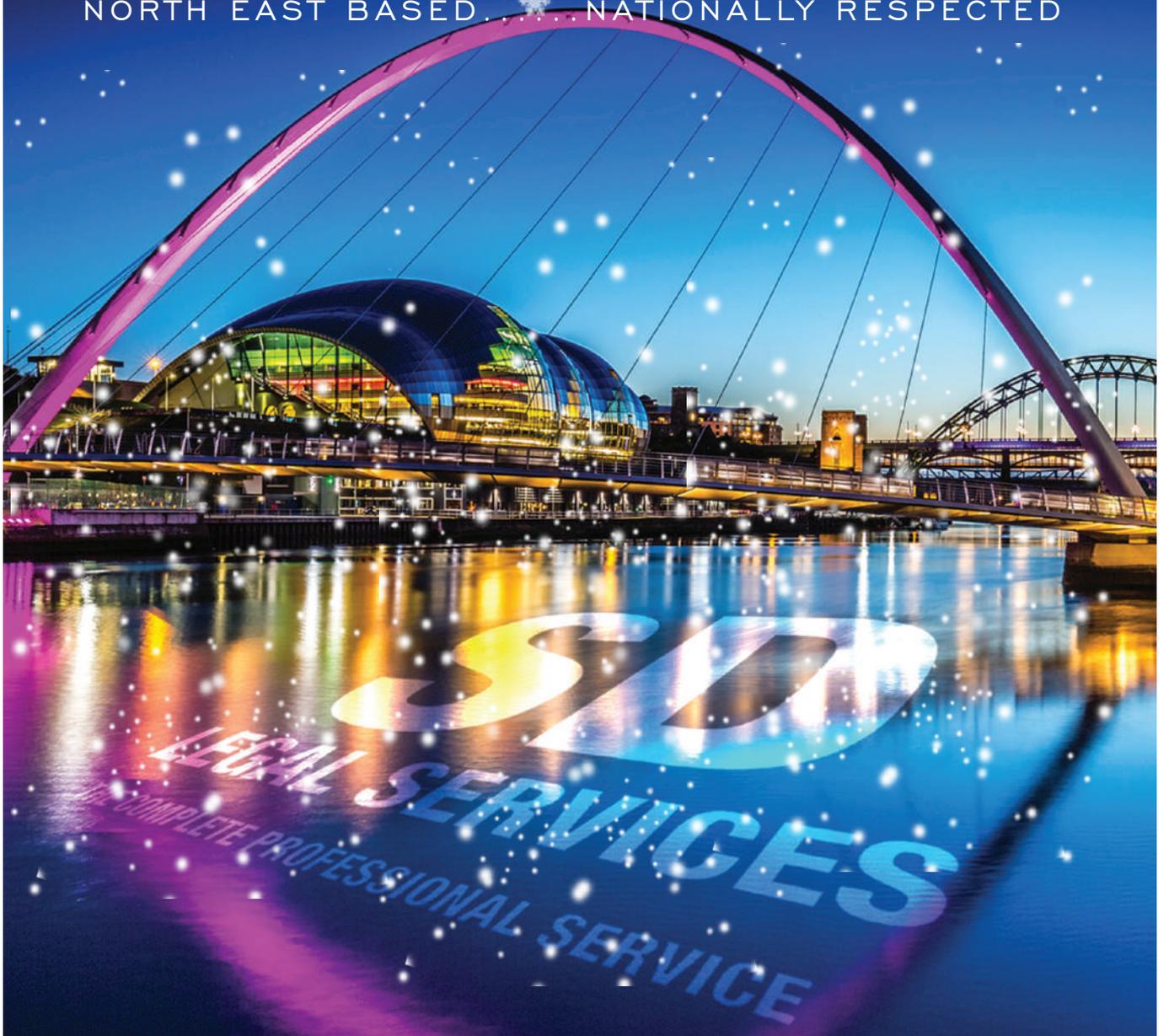
6. A will can record gifts to your favourite charity, who you would like to care for your pets, or any specific funeral requirements.

And while you're thinking about the future, why not consider making a Lasting Power of Attorney, too? There are two kinds of LPAs – one that deals with your Property and Finance, and one that deals with your Health and Welfare. You can have both or either. Once registered, your appointed attorney is authorised to handle your financial matters or take decisions on your behalf should you lose the mental capacity to do so yourself.

So, alongside climbing Mount Kilimanjaro, or cycling the Coast to Coast, or visiting every football stadium in England, or taking a trip to see the Northern Lights, why not add making a will and an LPA to your list of New Year's resolutions for 2020?

Call 0191 6053710 and ask to speak to Gillian so that we can put your resolutions into action. www.toomeylegal.co.uk

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EXCITING VENTURE FOR BUTTERFLY CABINET OWNERS

Commercial law firm St James' Square has advised The Guwahati Limited on the acquisition of the Quilliam Brothers' Teahouse.

St James' Square has helped three entrepreneurs with the purchase of The Teahouse, based at the Newcastle University campus.

Simon Robson, Matthew Smith and Jennifer Burton, directors of The Guwahati Limited, have previously successfully managed The Butterfly Cabinet in Heaton, renowned for its all-day breakfast and long queues out of the door.

The team were presented with the opportunity to expand their already successful offering into the town centre when the founders of the former café decided to explore new opportunities abroad.

As the landlord of the listed building, Newcastle University played a significant role in the Butterfly Cabinet's takeover of the business, as the institution were keen to ensure the space maintained its popular appeal to students.

Jenny Atkin, Senior Associate at St James' Square, project managed the acquisition, along with Katharine Mather at Barclays.

Jenny, who works in the firm's Real Estate – Commercial Property team, said: "It was evident throughout the process of the acquisition how

passionate Simon and the team are about running a business that appeals to the student experience and maintains the fun and relaxed ethos they have cultivated at their existing premises.

"With the Butterfly Cabinet already so popular in Heaton, there was absolutely no doubt that the team were the perfect fit to take over the teahouse and it is a major coup for Newcastle University to have this offering so close to the Student's Union."

Katharine Mather provided funding for the deal and said: "It's great to see a local business thriving, expanding for the future and contributing to the local economy. Simon, Matthew and Jennifer already have a great brand and following, and the new site will enable them to continue with their growth plans and reach more new customers across the University site."

Having drawn inspiration from its predecessor, The Butterfly Cabinet, The Teahouse will open from 9am and offers a variety of breakfasts, lunches and cakes with plenty of meat, vegetarian, vegan, gluten-free and dairy free options throughout the day and into the evening.

The team have also expanded their operation

into catering private cinema nights and function bookings. Moving into the new year, there are plans to launch an online platform for the purchase of loose tea and to establish an NHS discount for Teahouse patrons.

Simon commented: "We were dealing with a very tight timescale, but Jenny went above and beyond to ensure we completed the purchase within six weeks.

"Jenny's specialist knowledge and experience of working with leisure facilities meant the process was seamless, despite the timescale and the number of parties involved. She took the time to explain each step of the process to us in a no nonsense, commercial manner - which was invaluable given this is our first expansion into new premises.

"It was a pleasure working with St James' Square and we're very excited about our future plans."

St James' Square provides cost effective and high-quality legal advice for businesses and individuals. The firm has acted for several regional businesses in the leisure sector, including restaurants 31 The Quay and The Naked Deli.

RECORD FUNDRAISING TOTAL FOR ST JAMES' SQUARE



Fundraising stars from St James' Square with Founding Partner, Andrew Carser and Heel and Toe's Amanda Tweedy.

Commercial law firm St James' Square has had a full year of fundraising, having raised a staggering £40,000 for a North East children's charity.

The team at St James' Square have certainly had a busy year. The firm, which is only two years old, has been welcoming new members of staff, establishing new departments and continuing to provide an excellent service to their clients – all whilst raising a huge amount of money for charity.

Local children's charity, Heel and Toe, was voted by staff of St James' Square to be the firm's Charity of the Year 2019.

The charity provides free conductive education therapy to children who have cerebral palsy and other physical disabilities in the North East.

A range of fundraising events have taken place throughout the year after the firm pledged to raise the ambitious target of £40,000.

St James' Square hosted its inaugural Charity Ball in October with Lee Ridley, aka Lost Voice Guy, as the headline act of the evening. Two hundred guests turned up to support the evening at The

Biscuit Factory which raised over £20,000.

Fundraising efforts have also included the annual St James' Square client karting event at Karting North East and will conclude this month with a festive screening of Elf at Tyneside Cinema for clients and their families.

Members of staff have completed sponsored events, including a skydive, the Blaydon Race and the Simplyhealth Great North Run, as well as several dress down days to raise money for the charity who provides therapies to over 160 children from all over the North East area.

Paul Monaghan, Managing Partner, said: "We knew that raising £40,000 was a huge undertaking, but we are always up for a challenge!

"Raising money for those less fortunate than ourselves has always been high on the agenda for us and I'm delighted that we are in a position to help. Handing over £40,000 to such an amazing charity is an incredible feeling and I know what

a difference this will make to the lives of the children at Heel & Toe."

Amanda Tweedy, Fundraising Executive at Heel and Toe added: "We're so grateful for the amazing support of St James' Square this year. The firm have gone above and beyond to raise money for the charity and their events have been a real success.

"Heel and Toe is not government funded and we rely solely on donations and fundraising so support from generous businesses like St James' Square is vital for the charity."

St James' Square's fundraising efforts do not stop there though. Staff have already voted Samaritans as the firm's Charity of the Year 2020.

The team are hoping to continue the success of their fundraising next year to support the charity dedicated to reducing feelings of isolation and disconnection that can lead to suicide.

WORKFORCE WELLBEING MUST INCLUDE MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS

Mental health in the workplace has inevitably begun to receive greater attention in recent years, and with this change a greater focus on employers' responsibilities towards any staff facing mental health challenges and their wider workforce.

Mental health issues are acknowledged as one of the biggest causes of workplace absence, yet the definition is so wide, it can be hard for employers to know how to prepare for and respond to individual situations, as well as to fully understand their responsibilities towards their employees.

Research by mental health charity Mind found that more than one in five employees said they had called in sick as a result of workplace stress and more than half of the employers they talked to said they would like to do more to improve staff well-being, but didn't feel they had the right training or guidance to help them do so. It is estimated that the cost of mental ill health to UK employers each year is around £40 billion.

Whether work is causing a health issue or aggravating it, employers have a legal responsibility to help their employees. Work-related mental health issues must be assessed to measure the levels of risk to staff. Where a risk is identified, steps must be taken to remove or reduce it as far as possible. Some employees will have pre-existing mental health conditions when recruited or may develop one caused by factors that may or may not be work-related. Employers may also be under an obligation to make reasonable adjustments under equal opportunities legislation.

It is important that employers, managers and employees take steps to promote positive mental health, recognise the warning signs and support anyone experiencing mental ill health.

Hay & Kilner can provide practical guidance to help employers develop an appropriate workplace strategy which creates the right working environment, supports employees, and allows them to resolve any problems as they arise, thereby fulfilling their legal responsibilities around mental health. It is important managers are confident in supporting staff experiencing mental ill health, that they are able to spot the signs, know how to approach conversations sensitively and support their team members.



Sarah Hall

By having strategies that focus on mental health as part of employee wellbeing, businesses can help drive individual support, as well as improving the bottom line. They may also avoid potential complaints or claims from staff.

In some cases, mental health issues may be classed as a disability under the Equality Act, which makes it unlawful for an employer to treat a disabled person less favourably because of their disability, without a justifiable reason. Mental health issues may be considered a disability if they have 'a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.'

Tips for employers include:

- Develop a policy that addresses mental health issues with a clear route to raise any problems. This should be well published across the

business, as well as being included in the staff handbook.

- Encourage everyone to understand the issue, through disability and equality training, and equip line managers to identify potential mental health issues.
- Establish support networks for employees to access, whether HR-led internal support or through external employee assistance programmes providing access to counselling, medical insurance or occupational health.
- Whether recruiting, or with an existing employee, focus on the ability of an individual to do the job and, if they have any physical or mental impairments, consider whether reasonable adjustments could be made to enable them to fulfil the role.

For more information, please contact Sarah Hall, Partner in our Employment team on 01912328345. www.hay-kilner.co.uk

EOTHEN HOMES SPREADS CHRISTMAS CHEER

Christmas at Eothen Homes is a special time of year filled with fun and festive cheer. Here Chief Executive Jenny Hearl explains more.

At Eothen Homes, we pride ourselves on our homely environment where residents are cared for as part of one big family.

Christian values of empathy, openness, trustworthiness, honesty, equality and nurturing underpin everything we do.

Christmas is so important to the Eothen family as it gives the opportunity to reflect on the most important gift of all, Jesus.

When the decorations are up and the Christmas lights are twinkling, things really turn festive at our homes in Gosforth, Wallsend and Whitley Bay.

Throughout December, we encourage our residents to take part in activities such as Christmas crafts, carol sing-alongs and mince pie-making. We've even been known to have a visit from Santa Claus himself.

This year our homes have organised special activities such as a performance from the North East Gospel Choir, a nativity play by nursery school children and the church, a Christmas market and fayre, carol services and elf exercises.

This year we have also extended our services to the elderly living at home with invitations for a few people to spend Christmas day with us, having lunch and enjoying the activities.

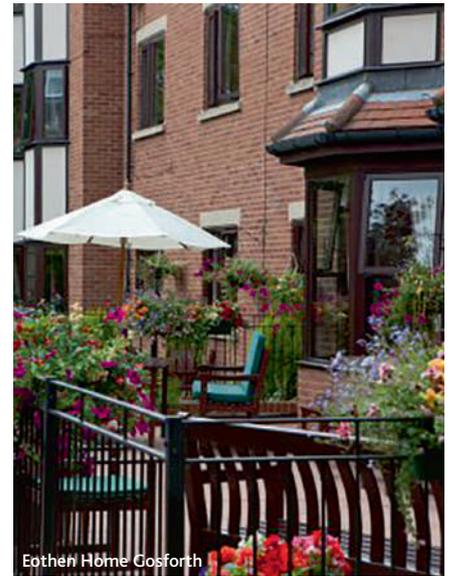


Jenny Hearl

Once Christmas Day comes around, it's lovely to take the chance to celebrate and relax.

A typical Christmas Day for our residents will involve visits with family, presents, lots of lovely food and drink, the Queen's speech, and even a turkey sandwich or two - just the same as it would be for residents in their own homes.

And of course, Christmas is a great opportunity for us to celebrate and reflect on the Christian values that are at the heart of everything we do.



Eothen Home Gosforth

We do our utmost to provide a loving, caring and homely environment for our residents all year long and seeing everyone enjoying Christmas Day together as one happy family is a wonderful reflection of that.

Merry Christmas everyone!

www.eothenhomes.org.uk

Hey You! Have You Made Your Will Yet?

Do You Have Children?

Will they be properly looked after if anything happens to you?

Do you know that if you don't make a Will your children may miss out financially? Do you have children from more than one relationship? If so, they may not be fully protected if you predecease them.

If you have a Will and are unsure if it will meet your needs, or you need to know why you need a Will, then let us help you. We can assist you to plan ahead for the benefit of your children.

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WHEN EXPERIENCE COUNTS, COUNT ON EMMERSONS SOLICITORS

When it comes to anything of a legal nature, you can't beat talking to a company that has a lots of experience. No matter what you need sorting, or if you simply need some advice, it's always good to know that the person on the other end of the phone or sat opposite you in an office has probably been there...done it.

And that is exactly what you get when you speak to Jacqueline Emmerson and her team at Emmersons Solicitors.

Jacqueline has been a solicitor for over 30 years and set up her own business in 1998. She started off with a small team of.....two.

She was then joined in the firm by her husband and, over subsequent years, her team has expanded to 20, which is impressive for a business that started off from nothing. It won't come as any surprise to read that Jacqueline has further plans for expansion, although for the moment she is allowing the business to consolidate after what has been a sustained period of growth over the past couple of years.

So what do Jacqueline and her team specialise in at Emmersons Solicitors?

"We specialise in all aspects of family law including divorce, separation, issues relating to contact between children and their parents and other relatives," said Jacqueline. "We also deal with Financial Settlements which can include houses, pensions and business assets as well as acting on behalf of a wide range of business owners. In addition we deal with Will Writing, Lasting Powers of Attorney, Court of Protection and Probate matters. We will look after all property matters if clients are buying or selling a house, and we also cater for investors who perhaps have a property portfolio. We even have a specialist department to look after commercial and property law, but we also have our own targeting information for first-time buyers."

Jacqueline is one the most experienced solicitors in the region. Such is her standing within the profession that she was one of the first and youngest members of the Law Society's specialist Family Law Panel. She is also a member of Resolution and a trained Collaborative Family Lawyer.

And it's always nice to be recognised for the standard of work you and your business is achieving. Jacqueline was awarded The Lifetime Achievement award at this year's Wearside Women in Business Awards. She's also been a finalist on several occasions at the Northern Law Awards and the National Law Society Excellence Awards. In the recent Sunderland Echo Portfolio Awards, Emmersons Solicitors won the award for Corporate Social Responsibility and in previous years was Highly Commended in the medium size business category.

Jacqueline is also heavily involved in charity work. For the last 20 years, she has been a volunteer with the Armed Forces charity, SSAFA (Soldiers, Sailors & Airmen's Family Association) aiming to raise awareness about the needs of serving an ex-serving personnel, especially in the area of PTSD. She works

closely with the LGBTQ+ community to provide advice and guidance for clients. Both she and her husband help with the Dementia Action Alliance which aims to not only help those people who are affected by dementia, but also encourage businesses to realise that they can also provide assistance and fully understand the needs of anyone who suffers from the condition. Her husband is a Dementia Champion.

Jacqueline is proud of the fact that Emmersons Solicitors are the only Law firm in the country to offer Slow Shopping. Emmersons offer a free drop in service for those with visible, invisible or intellectual disabilities to obtain advice in a supportive environment.

"Corporate responsibility is such an important feature of what we do at Emmersons Solicitors," added Jacqueline. "The key word in all of the volunteering work we do as a business is 'education'. So many people don't realise what sort of assistance can be provided as well as being unaware of any potential legal pitfalls which may suddenly crop up. We are a drop-off point for Feeding Families Christmas hampers to help those who struggle at this time of year. We work with the Alzheimer's Society, and I'm proud that we have raised more money for the Cancer UK charity than any other firm in the region of a similar size."

As you would expect, when you can call upon the level of experience that Jacqueline and her team have acquired over the years, they can deal with any legal matter, but is there a pattern of new legal requirements that have appeared over the past few years?

"We are dealing more frequently with older clients. It is no longer rare for a couple in their 70s to want a divorce. This can often be extremely complicated if they have property, pensions and investments which need to be shared or protected. Another area where we are becoming extremely busy is licensing law; helping pubs, restaurants and nightclubs work their way through a complicated legal minefield. We can also help individuals who perhaps have accumulated 12 points and are at risk of losing their driving licence."

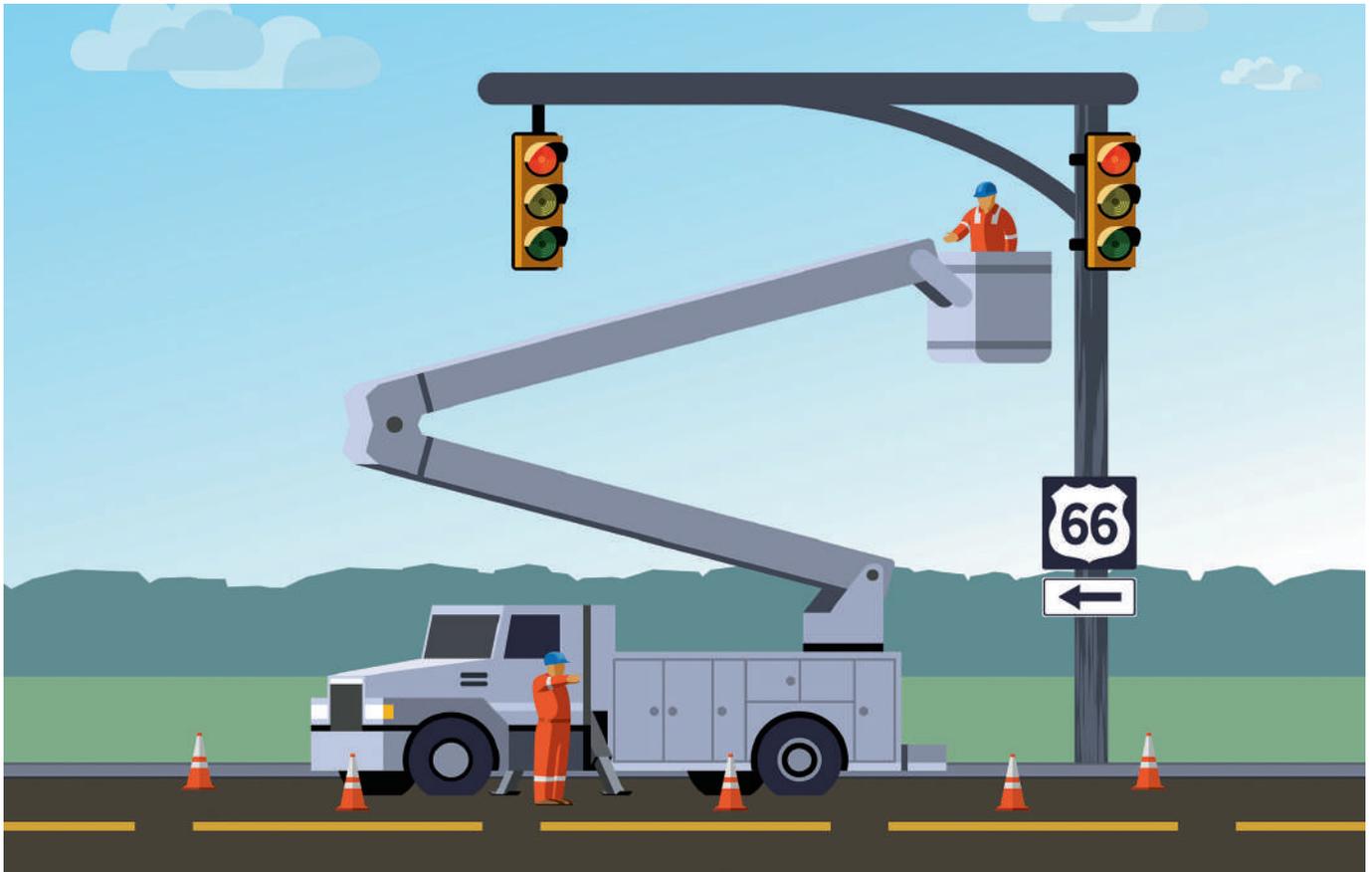
Which brings us back to our first point. You can't beat experience when it comes to legal matters. You also need a firm which is big enough if, for example, the person you are talking to needs some legal clarification on a bit of small print. Rather than sending you on your way without an answer, they simply call for another member of the team to pop in and sort things there and then. Perfect.

Get in touch, sort out an appointment, and then get ready for some down to Earth advice.

If you need some legal information or want some advice, the best idea is to get in touch with Jacqueline and her team at Emmersons Solicitors. They have offices in Newcastle and Sunderland. For Newcastle, call 0191 284 6989, or if Sunderland is handier, call 0191 567 6667.



Jacqueline Emmerson



GET READY TO RUMBLE: ROUND 2

Having trouble with a construction project? Following his advice on preparing for an adjudication, Henry Mullen, dispute resolution lawyer at Muckle LLP, shares his tips on how to handle yourself once an adjudication notice lands.

If you read last month's article, hopefully you're feeling better equipped to deal with adjudication - a process designed to resolve construction industry disputes within just 28 days. But how should you respond once you've actually received a notice?

To your corners

Groundwork is key – so do as much preparation in days 1-7 as possible. Get your defence team together and allocate tasks, identify key people (witnesses, experts, decision-makers) and make sure they are available throughout the 28-days.

Produce a timetable and set yourself deadlines. Clear your weekends as you will need all the time you can to prepare. Only bank holidays, Christmas Day and Easter Sunday are excluded from the 28-day period.

Defence! How to approach your response

1. Keep it simple - focus on the basics

(i) **Establish the law** – what are the relevant legal principles. Analyse your legal position - how strong is it? Should you be settling not fighting?

(ii) **Establish the facts** - who, what, when, where and why? Compile the evidence - prove those facts. Remember 'facts' without evidence are not facts.

2. Have a gameplan. Should you go on the attack or defence? You can choose to run a positive case (advance an alternative case to your opponent) or a negative case (argue that the opponent's case is unlikely to be true). It all depends on the strengths and weaknesses of your argument compared with your opponent's.

3. Can you counterpunch? You can raise any points in your defence to the claims that would amount in law or in fact to a defence to the claim, regardless of whether those points have been raised prior to the adjudication. Can you bring a cross-claim or counterclaim?

4. Get the referee inside. It can irritate the adjudicator if they have to work hard to interpret the evidence, so make their life as easy as possible. Be courteous at all times, helpful, friendly and prompt with any responses - win the sympathy war and stay in their good books. It's important to make sure they understand your version of events.

5. Save your breath. Don't include irrelevant information in your response as this wastes your time and detracts from your good points.

After the final round: What if you don't agree with the decision?

The courts will generally enforce adjudication, however there are some exceptions if, for example, the adjudicator has operated outside their jurisdiction, not been impartial or allowed each party the opportunity to make its case. If there is an error or omission in the decision that appears to be accidental, you should contact the adjudicator and the other party immediately.

Any correction must normally be made within five days of the delivery of the adjudicator's decision. Don't expect them to change their mind on the substantive issues.

Even if the adjudicator's decision is enforced, you can

always take your dispute to court or to arbitration. This is not an appeal of the adjudicator's decision, but a completely new hearing starting afresh.

Your costs - who pays?

The parties will usually bear their own costs relating to the adjudication – but check your contract, it may say otherwise.

Usually, the adjudicator will decide who pays their costs. Often, they will decide that the overall 'losing' party must pay, however, they may consider how each party has behaved, or whether each party has won on some issues, and split the costs accordingly.

The adjudicator may also simply apportion the fees equally, because technically both parties are jointly responsible. That also means that if one of you defaults on payment, or becomes insolvent, the adjudicator can legally demand their fees from the other.

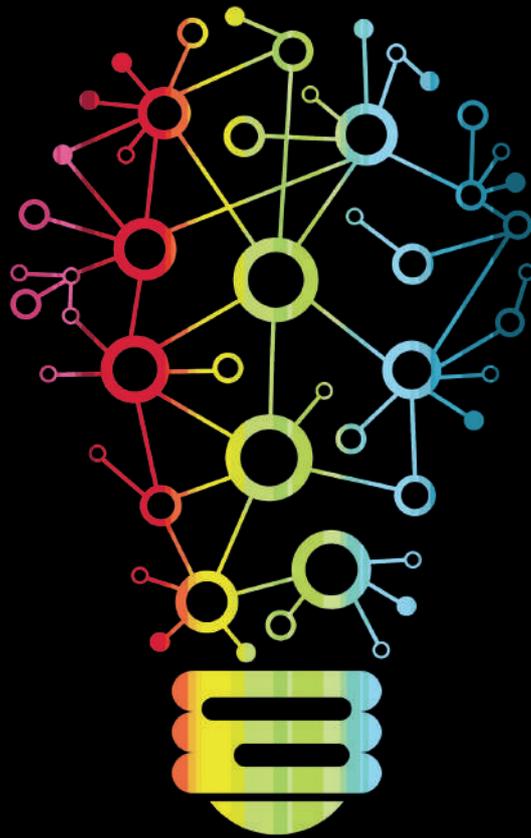
You may also have to pay for:

- expert advice sought by the adjudicator, providing they have advised you in advance
- legal advice to support your defence or claim, as the adjudicator does not have the power to award costs

This advice is designed to be practical and only touches on the complex legal issues involved in adjudication. That is why it's best to seek professional advice as early as possible to establish the most cost-effective and commercial approach for your business.

Whatever the dispute, you can call Henry Mullen on 0191 211 7999 or email henry.mullen@muckle-llp.com for advice or a free consultation.

muckle^{LLP}



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For a chat or free consultation on protecting your brand, your trade secrets and the way you do business, please get in touch.

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HOW CAN WE PROTECT THE INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY OF OUR APP?

Since the launch of the Apple iPhone and the subsequent AppStore in 2008, the use of mainstream mobile apps has grown across the world. So much so that it's becoming more and more common for companies to create their own APPs to give them a direct connection between them and their intended user.

But what about your intellectual property rights when it comes to APPs? Is it even possible to protect these assets and if so how can companies do it?

Ensure all Copyright and Design Rights are owned by the Company

An APP is essentially a software programme and any original source code in the programme will be automatically protected by copyright as a literary work. Copyright does not prevent others from designing their own APPs to perform the same function, but it can be used to prevent direct copying of the programme behind the APP.

Copyright in the APP will initially belong to the programme developer or software house that employs the programme developer unless it is transferred by a written contract signed by the developer/software house and the company.

If a new business is being established between a team of individuals and one of the team is responsible for writing the source code for an APP, any copyright will belong to that individual team member unless and until there is a written agreement transferring a share of ownership of the copyright to other members of the team, or it is transferred into the new business.

A written agreement should also be in place to cover any outsourced design work, such as designing a logo for the APP.



Keith Jones

Register Your Trade Marks

Take appropriate steps to protect the name of the APP and also the APP logo that will appear on the smartphone or tablet screen so as to deter competitors from developing their own APPs using the same or very similar name and logo. Character names in games should also be considered for protection.

Trade Marks can become very valuable over time and especially so the more successful your APP becomes.

Register Your Designs

Consider also protecting any graphical aspects of your APP including backgrounds, icons and Graphical User Interfaces. This provides a further layer of protection for the visual appearance of elements of the APP.

Apply for a Patent

Patenting software inventions can be problematic, but do not rule it out without first taking advice. If your software has technical character, that is to say, it involves a technical solution to a technical problem, you should explore its potential for

gaining a patent. Besides which, there can be real benefits in simply applying for a patent and having a patent pending.

Use Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDA)

NDAs are legal contracts between parties that want to share information in a controlled way.

Having an NDA allows you to discuss the APP with another party, but restricts their ability to pass on the information to third parties. This can enable you to speak to developers or companies that may be interested in helping in the development of your APP, whilst providing a legal means of redress should they disclose the information without your consent.

Document Your Work

Keep detailed records of the development of the APP. This helps not only to provide a chain of evidence should you have to take action against someone who copies your APP, but also helps to establish the timeline and history of the development of your APP should you be accused of copying another company's APP.

**If you have any further questions or would like to protect your company's APP, please contact Keith Jones:
T: 0191 211 3552 E: keith.jones@murgitroyd.com**

For more information about Intellectual Property, Patents or Trade Marks – subscribe to our Innovation Talks podcasts on all major podcast platforms.

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SOLICITORS

GORDON BROWN LAW FIRM WELCOMES NEW FAMILY LAW SPECIALIST TO ITS TEAM

North East law firm Gordon Brown Law Firm LLP (GBLF) has strengthened its eight-strong family law team with the recruitment of a collaboratively trained lawyer.

Naomi Potter, who is originally from Norwich and moved to the region seven years ago, joins the firm with extensive experience in the legal sector spanning 19 years.

She is an accredited specialist with Resolution, a UK-wide group of family justice professionals who work with families and individuals to resolve issues in a constructive way.

Naomi is also a member of the Law Society's Family Law Accreditation Scheme and is trained in collaborative law, which means she can help advise the firm's clients on alternative routes to dealing with their differences in a face-to-face setting.

Naomi developed an interest in law as a teenager after spending time as a barrister clerk. She got her first big break as a legal assistant at a law firm in Norwich when she was 19 and hasn't looked back.

Based in the Newcastle and Chester-le-Street offices, she will work with the family law team on matrimonial finance and divorce cases, as well as complex family and property matters.



Naomi Potter

Commenting on her appointment, Naomi said: "I made the decision to move to Gordon Brown Law Firm as I admired the team's dedication to excellent customer service and client care. I'm really looking forward to working with head of family law, Simon Dakers, as well as the rest of the team."

Naomi's appointment to GBLF brings the firm's headcount to 77 across its Chester-le-Street and Newcastle offices. In the past year the law firm has made two appointments to the team alongside a raft of internal promotions.

Head of family law, Simon Dakers, added: "I am delighted to welcome Naomi to the team. We

pride ourselves on delivering an efficient and effective service to our family and matrimonial clients and Naomi's appointment strengthens that offering."

Kathryn Taylor, managing partner at GBLF, said: "At GBLF we are dedicated to ensuring that we have the best legal talent in the region and it's great to welcome Naomi to our growing team.

"Naomi stands out as someone who not only shares our firm's values, but she also brings with her specialist expertise as a collaboratively trained family lawyer which will hopefully enable our clients to avoid court and help preserve relationships at what can be a very difficult time."

With offices located in Newcastle and Chester-le-Street, GBLF offers a range of legal services and advice across all areas of family, residential conveyancing, wills and probate, dispute resolution, corporate and commercial law. For more information on GBLF visit www.gblf.co.uk or get in touch on 0191 388 1778.

HOW TO ENJOY A FAMILY CHRISTMAS AND GUARANTEE MANY MORE TO COME!

It's that time of year again. Christmas is all about family time; celebration, relaxing together, welcoming friends, entertaining at home, in a living room shining with festive decorations and a Christmas tree. There is nothing quite like it, but what if the "Care Grinch" decided to turn up, uninvited, and take all of this away?

The risk of losing your home to pay for care fees is a real problem no matter what time of year is with us, and we can help you to protect it.

If you were to wrap up your house and mark the parcel as a present, would you rather address the gift tag to your family or to the local authority? We all know the answer, but many people think that there is no solution to this problem.



Nigel Miller & Noel Dilks
Directors



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FIESTA WONDERLAN BALL

Piñatas, live llamas and a Mariachi band brought the Mexican Fiesta theme to life at EMG Solicitors' fifth annual WonderLAN Ball.

The event, which was held at Ramside Hall Hotel, Golf and Spa, at County Durham, raised more than £11,000 for North East charity Headway to support people affected by brain injury.







NEW NETWORKING GROUP FOR YOUNG PROPERTY PROFESSIONALS

A new initiative to support young property and construction professionals is to be launched in the North East for the first time.

For more than two decades, Young Entrepreneurs in Property (YEP) Global has provided a forum for like-minded entrepreneurs, rising stars and future leaders in the sector to network and share ideas and best practice.

Now the Newcastle division of Henry Riley, an international property and construction consultancy, is bringing the initiative to the North East by launching YEP in Newcastle.

Several local companies have already signed up to be involved in the initiative ahead of its expected launch early next year, taking in sectors from across the built environment including construction, architecture and engineering.



LABC DOUBLE SUCCESS FOR JDDK ARCHITECTS

Newcastle-based JDDK Architects Ltd were double winners at the prestigious national LABC (Local Authority Building Control) Building Excellence Awards recently held in London.

JDDK and the Building Control Department of Sunderland City Council won the Best Partnership with a local authority building control team for their work together on a number of projects including the RSPB Sherwood Forest Visitor Centre in Nottinghamshire, which also won the best Small Commercial Project 2019.

The Building Control partnership has grown since 2002 to the benefit of both organisations. JDDK Principal Architect, Alison Thornton-Sykes, explained: "By working closely together on diverse projects over the years, we understand the way each other work and can carry successful outcomes from one project to the next."



NEW CHAPTER OPENS FOR NORTHUMBERLAND BUSINESS PARK

A new masterplan for a 62 acre-site at Ashwood Business Park in Northumberland has been unveiled.

The next phase in the site's development, which is being spearheaded by economic regeneration company Advance Northumberland, is set to make Ashwood Business Park a centre for advanced manufacturing, process and engineering companies, and a fulcrum for further industrial growth in the region.

Plots available at Ashwood Business Park, which is one of the largest development sites in Northumberland, are from 50,000 sq ft to 500,000 sq ft. A variety of industrial units can be developed, with tenure options ranging from a freehold sale to a bespoke, turnkey solution on a short-term lease.



INVESTMENT BRINGS TWO NEW TENANTS TO NO. 2 COLLINGWOOD STREET

A six-figure refurbishment has attracted two new office tenants to a Grade II-listed building on Newcastle's Collingwood Street, meaning the property is now almost full with just one suite available to let.

Knight Frank Newcastle has secured new lets to Crawford & Company and Ryder Geotechnical on behalf of the landlord, RPU Group PLC.

Claims managers to the risk and insurance industries, Crawford, have taken 1,918 sq. ft. on the third floor and offshore geotechnical consultants, Ryder Geotechnical, have moved into a 1,140 sq. ft. office on the second floor. These businesses join Leathers LLP and Kani Payments who both moved into the building earlier this year.

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Gary Morton

21st CENTURY CONSTRUCTION, THE MORTON WAY

Whenever we talk to a construction company here at Northern Insight, it's usually about a new development. However, that wasn't the case when we went to see Gary Morton at the Morton Group.

Yes, his company has various construction plans in the pipeline and yes, they have a stunning housing development in Gosforth, but that was to come later in our conversation.

"We are shaking-up the way the construction industry does business and how they go about property development," said Gary. "We operate an 'open book' approach where we show potential investors absolutely everything about what we intend to do, how we intend to do it and what sort of return they can expect. We engage with them."

Of course a big plus point for Gary and the Morton Group is that they have a proven track record. Although the company was formed only three years ago, this is a family firm which has its roots back in 1980. In terms of what you can expect from them, all you have to do is go to All Saints Church overlooking Newcastle's quayside to see the standard of workmanship and attention to detail which potential investors can expect in all future developments.

It also helps if you've been there and done it, when it comes to the construction business.

Gary comes from a family of builders. His father, Brian, is one of the directors of the Morton Group.

"I've been working in the building industry since I was eight, helping out my family on various schemes. I studied at Northumbria University, graduated as a Quantity Surveyor and then went to work for several well-known firms who were involved in major projects like Crossrail in London. I was with Arcadis Group for the rebuilding of London Bridge Station which necessitated keeping London's fourth busiest station open for the 50 million passengers that use it each year while also undergoing a massive construction programme. The experience I gained was invaluable, but I always knew there was a better way for construction and development companies to operate. I also wanted to make sure that any new company would do things the right way in terms of how we look after our staff and how we treat investors and suppliers."

So in December 2016, Gary formed the Morton Group.

There are now three companies within the group;

Kapex Construction is the building arm of the company, the principle construction partner responsible for the delivery of both group developments and third-party client projects.

LOK Developments specialises in acquiring land or buildings and then coming-up with highly creative ideas and solutions to produce a valuable asset and unlock the potential. This can include new build properties, challenging refurbishments or identifying and taking over a project that has stalled.

Regents Gate Homes is the residential side of the company, a customer facing brand selling the homes delivered by LOK Developments. Their vision is to provide homeowners the highest-quality living spaces in the most striking of locations.

This is all part of Gary's 15 year plan.

The first part of the jigsaw was Kapex Construction. The name comes from Capital Expenditure which means adding value or improving existing projects. This is exactly what the company did with their first major project...the Grey Street Hotel.

By the end of their first year in business, turnover had reached £1.4m and they were responsible for the management of projects worth almost £10m. Gary had also brought together a highly experienced management team.

Up next was LOK Developments. Their first major project was the multi million pound acquisition of Eagle Star House in Gosforth which had stood empty after the DVLA moved out. The plan was to convert the office block into seventy apartments.

"Eagle Star House, which we've now renamed Regents Plaza Apartments, is a classic example of the way we operate here at the Morton Group. I viewed the building on a Wednesday, agreed a deal on the Friday, immediately started organising planning applications, drawing-up designs and raising £6.5m of finance and, within the space of fourteen weeks, I was handed the keys. The following day we had a team from Kapex Construction beginning work."

Apartments will be ready in 2020 and are now on sale via Regents Gate Homes.

It won't surprise you to read that Gary is not easing off.

"We have momentum within the business. The LOK Developments team is currently working on £60m worth of schemes which represents a combination of 184 houses and apartments. There are developments either underway or at the planning stage in Durham, Gosforth, Gateshead and Hexham. In addition, Kapex Construction has £61m worth of contracts secured to deliver between now and October 2021.

As a group we have already brought around £45m of inward investment into the North East and use local suppliers and contractors whenever possible. But we can always do more!"

One thing is certain, Gary and the Morton Group are making life extremely difficult for some of the big boys in the construction industry. This is purely down to the way they do business. They like to form partnerships; their 'open book' approach means potential investors don't get any nasty surprises and, because everyone is working together, Morton Group can move things along quickly. It's all a matter of everyone having confidence. Put it this way, the fact that the Morton Group has a 75 per cent success rate when they tender for business, proves that Gary's decision to do things his way...the right way...has paid off.

The Big Interview...

If you would like more information on how Morton Group can help you with any development or construction work, give them a call on 0191 691 9480 or email info@themortongroup.co.uk

A CHANGE CAN DO YOU GOOD

2019

has been an interesting year for me, both professionally and personally. I was absolutely delighted to be asked to join the team at Sanderson Young by the Chairman, Duncan Young, earlier this year. This has provided me with a fantastic opportunity to work for, what I feel, is the North East's leading and most prestigious estate agency brand. I feel that with the new changes experienced in recent times, my own experience and expertise will certainly inject the company with what's needed for 2020 and for the future.



We have had a fantastic start to our final quarter of 2019. Our rare! office has agreed a great number of transactions with the sales team achieving values in excess of £700,000, which has certainly surpassed our expectations, and has also given us the confidence that the top end of the market has been relatively unaffected by the political uncertainty so far. I am also delighted to announce that we have had 10 recent sales with an average asking price of £1million, most importantly these offers were at 97% of asking price, further demonstrating that professional market advice and expert guidance on the property's value will result in sound interest and an outstanding net result for our clients.

It has been proven that regional hotspots such as Gosforth, Jesmond and Ponteland have continued to thrive this year, with interest mainly coming from buyers who are primarily focused on properties that are well presented

with a high specification and that are also close to outstanding schooling, local amenities and transport links. Importantly, we also have a substantial portfolio of buyers who are in a cash position or who are able to proceed to purchase, again demonstrating that in this supposed time of unrest, with the right agent, there are indeed buyers ready to purchase.

Our new website has also seen a huge increase in traffic, with our focus, as always, being on an impressive and relevant portfolio that is constantly up to date; exciting new features enhance our properties which ensures that the online experience is as effortless as our personal one and, in turn, means we remain competitive in this incredibly important mode of selling. We are extremely proud and delighted to have been asked to be the sole agent regarding the site at Sycamore Square in central Gosforth and I personally believe that this is going to offer the market some of the finest, modern homes within the centre of Gosforth's conservation area, and even within the city, with access from North Avenue. It is a rare opportunity that a site in such a prestigious and central location becomes available and this fantastic new development will offer a mix of luxury apartments, town houses, bungalows and

substantial detached family homes. We are hoping that construction will begin in late 2019, with the first units becoming available at the start of summer of 2020. We anticipate an extremely high demand for this site and would strongly recommend any interested buyers to contact the Gosforth sales office to register your interest and obtain the best possible advice as soon as possible to assist them with their move.

The challenges and uncertainty of Brexit over the last year, and the upcoming general election, have meant that the market has certainly required a greater focus, and it would seem to have been extremely price sensitive. However, with the right advice and assistance, our clients have still been able to sell and have managed to obtain excellent prices, even in a more challenging market place. In a tougher market it is more important than ever to choose the right agent to work with, and with our many years' experience of the local area and the proactive mind set of the Sanderson Young team we believe that the unrest felt can be managed if placed in the right hands.

For me personally, I have always put my clients first, and I feel very strongly that this should be reflected in the way that we work. I have assisted many new and old clients since joining the company this year, with a wide range of property values and locations. I have the utmost confidence in the Sanderson Young team who are incredibly knowledgeable with an impressive, combined expertise and to me, most importantly, a highly professional yet personable approach. This gives me great confidence that our clients have the best possible start to their selling or buying journey. It is, in my opinion, imperative that if you are looking to sell your home you require the right team by your side. Finally, we would like to thank all of our clients, past and present for their loyalty in recent times and we look forward to welcoming a host of new clients to our company in the new year, where, as always, we will strive to exceed their expectations.

MERRY CHRISTMAS & A HAPPY NEW YEAR.

Greg McCarthy

Regional Valuer
Sanderson Young

greg.mccarthy@sandersonyoung.co.uk





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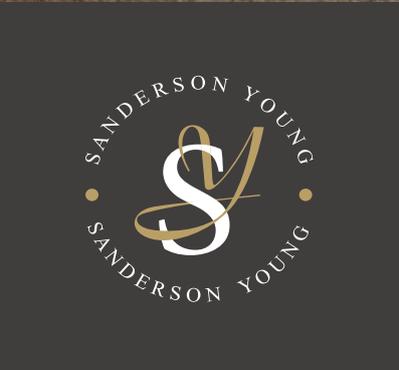
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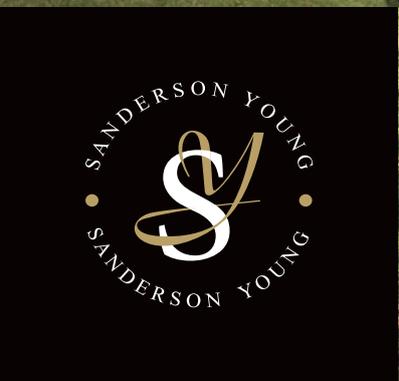
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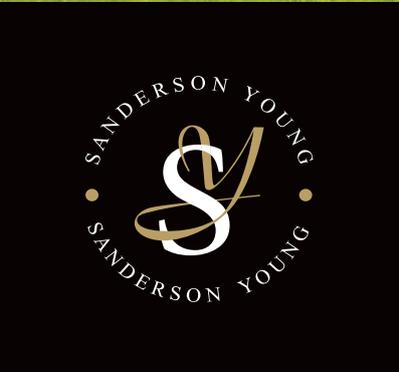
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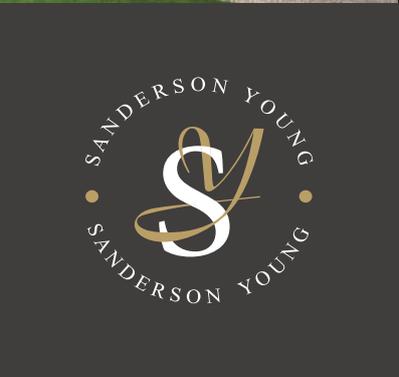
translated into a tremendous amount of hard work from a dedicated, expert team of almost 40 staff representing the best of the region’s estate agents.

Here at Sanderson Young we look forward to a new decade and the year 2020 with tremendous excitement and the willingness to exceed the expectations of our clients.

We wish all our clients and colleagues in the property industry a healthy, prosperous and peaceful 2020.



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IN CONVERSATION WITH...

GARY POWELL

Managing Director,
Admired Properties, Morpeth.

Gary Powell is the managing director at Admired Properties which he established in 2014.

The company specialises in linking global property investors with UK developers.

Tell us about your background?

I was born and raised in Kenton, Newcastle. I have two siblings and we were raised to work hard and look out for each other. My parents wanted us to take all of the opportunities that weren't available to them and we were taught that you can achieve anything you set your mind to if you want it enough, a motto I have instilled in my own children.

I have always worked in financial services and spent five years working in Singapore and just over five years in Hong Kong. Like many people from the North East, family is the most important thing to me. That is why after working abroad, the novelty of being back home has still not worn off and to have a business that is performing well and to work alongside my son, Connor, makes me a very happy man.

What have been the biggest changes in your profession?

Without a doubt it would have to be legislation and examinations. There were no where near as many exams when I started out in financial services. I'm very pleased that I no longer have to sit any and the last exam I did was in 2012 when I undertook my UK Diploma to become a financial services advisor. I was keen to have a back-up in place in case Admired Properties didn't go to plan. Thankfully, I haven't had to make use of my Diploma!

What has been your career defining moment?

I have had many but my most satisfying has to be coming home after so many years and establishing Admired Properties. I am extremely proud to say that we have had year-on-year growth and it is all the sweeter because it is a family business. My son, Connor, is business development manager and we look forward to my daughter, Grace, joining us someday soon.



What is your proudest achievement?

My proudest achievement in life will always be my family. I have recently become a grandfather after Connor and his wife, Bethany, welcomed their little girl, Arya. Nothing brings me more joy than spending time with my family and that is how it should be. Professionally, I have many achievements that I am proud of and it gives me great excitement to know that the best is yet to come. 2020 is set to be a fantastic year for us and I am looking forward to attacking it with gusto!

What challenges have you encountered?

Legislation is always a headache. Changes in government, in particular, affect us and when stamp duty on second properties came in to place, brokers had to change how they packaged properties to overseas investors. I hate to say it, but Brexit has changed investment in the UK. It is not all bad though, as whilst we have seen overseas investors take a step back from investing in London, we have seen a dramatic increase in interest in property investment in more Northern cities, such as Manchester, Birmingham and Newcastle. As a Northerner, it is fantastic to see money being invested in to our cities.

What does 2020 have in store?

By the time this article is published I will have returned from a trip to Asia where I have appointments with 26 investment partners. I am seeking investment in Admired Developments, a new venture which will see us developing our own properties. I am also speaking with construction companies in the North and I predict 2020 will be a very busy year! I have also recently launched Admired Homes and we will be investing in brand new, discounted properties in the North East that we will rent out. Additionally, we will be building between 5-25 properties in and around the North East which we will also be renting out.

How do you relax?

I am an avid golfer and there is nothing that relaxes me more after a busy week. Family time is extremely important and we like to go on three or four family holidays each year. One of our favourite destinations abroad is Puerto Banus where we like to rent a big villa and all pile in and back home you can't beat the Lake District. Our next family holiday is Seahouses where we will be spending Christmas and New Year. I am already thinking about the roaring fire and my wife's amazing Christmas Lunch!

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HOME FROM HOME FROM WEEK2WEEK

There's no doubting that the trend for renting apartments is on the increase. It doesn't matter whether it's for a long weekend holiday break, or a six week stop-gap while moving home, or possibly a preference to stay in an apartment rather than a hotel, the option to stay in a place of your 'own' rather than having to fit in with the arrangements of a hotel, have a great appeal to a lot of people.

Most will search for somewhere online and, once they spot something that takes their fancy, will apply online. If the dates are clear, complete a few forms, pay your money and, bingo, you're sorted. Simple.

Up to this point you have taken for granted that the photos and descriptions are 100 per cent correct. What you've seen is what you expect to get.

But, have the owners ensured that the property is not only clean and tidy, but that everything is working. Crucially, is everything safe? Have they ensured that all gas and / or electrical appliances are working correctly? Have they been serviced regularly? Has any damage been repaired?

Or is the property you have rented merely a place that a faceless landlord has decided will earn them a few quid whilst not seriously bothering to look after it?

Thankfully, if you rent an apartment through Newcastle based Week2Week Serviced Apartments, you needn't have any of the above concerns.

"We are members of the Association of Serviced Apartment Providers which means we are fully accredited and are audited on a regular basis," said managing director, Claire Parry.

"Every one of our apartments has to meet strict guidelines before we are allowed to rent it out and ensures that clients can rent a property with total confidence, knowing that they will get what they are expecting....a spotless, well equipped, totally safe, fully furnished apartment which comes with wifi, car parking and all of the utility bills taken care. Sadly, many of the apartments you will find on the internet are not accredited which means you are taking a risk."

A quick glance at the Week2Week website (www.week2week.co.uk) reveals a stunning selection of apartments across the North East offering everything from one to five bedroom apartments. VIPs can choose from penthouses. Every apartment is given the equivalent of a 3 - star rating. This avoids the sort of inconsistencies that can lead to confusion when renting an apartment. With Week2Week, you know what you're getting.

"We create a home-from-home atmosphere in our apartments,"

added Claire. "We offer a 'bring your own device' policy whereby every apartment offers charging points and is wired to accept HDMI connections. If you want to use your own DVD player or games console, no problem. Most of our apartments are in convenient locations which means clients can either pop out to do some shopping so that they can eat in their apartment, or alternatively have a great selection of places to dine and have access to entertainment and transportation."

It's when you look closely at the apartments on offer that you can instantly tell Week2Week only offers apartments which go the extra mile. The appeal is obvious. If for example you have a company that needs to find accommodation for clients or consultants, why not provide them with a seriously comfy apartment instead of putting them into a faceless hotel. Many business people spend a lot of time away from home and it's been shown that life on the road can be stressful. They can often drink and eat more than they should. Wouldn't it be better to take into consideration the wellbeing of a client or visiting contractor and let them feel as though they can relax in the privacy of their own apartment without having to worry about anything? They can kick their shoes off and do what they do at home. Chill.

"We've noticed a trend for companies to hire a two or three bedroom apartment when they have hired several consultants. It means that colleagues have their own bedroom and bathroom, but can still relax together rather than being on their own in a hotel room."

Something else that Week2Week Serviced Apartments offers is a property management and hosting facility. Perhaps you're heading off to Spain to get away from the British winter weather, or you may be going to visit friends and family in Australia and could be away for six months. Why not let Week2Week rent out your property and take care of it while you are away? Are you thinking of investing in property? If so, Week2Week can make your rental property earn its keep.

The best idea is to go onto the Week2Week website and check out the properties for yourself. The booking process is quick and simple, and because Week2Week is a fully accredited company you can book in total confidence knowing that your home-from-home experience will live up to all expectations.

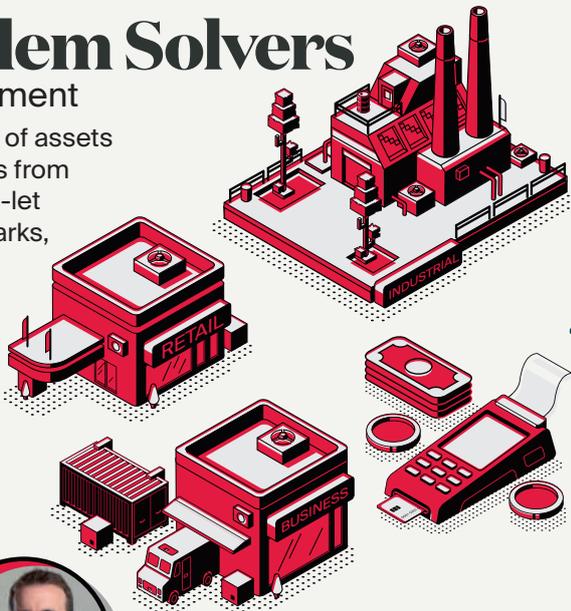
If you need any further details or would like to chat to Claire Parry and her team, call 0191 2813129 or email info@week2week.co.uk



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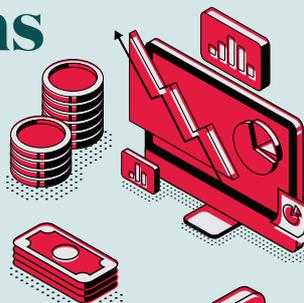
We value residential and mixed-use property portfolios, land, student accommodation and PRS schemes, as well as identifying and transacting land for residential development.



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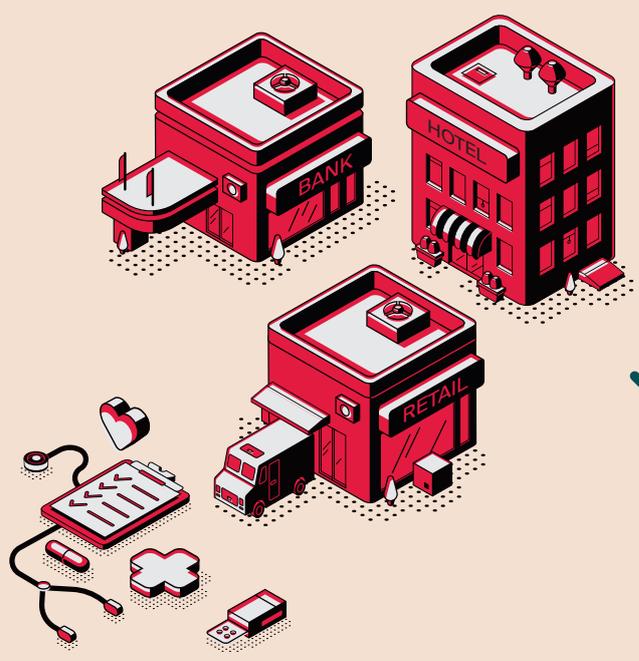
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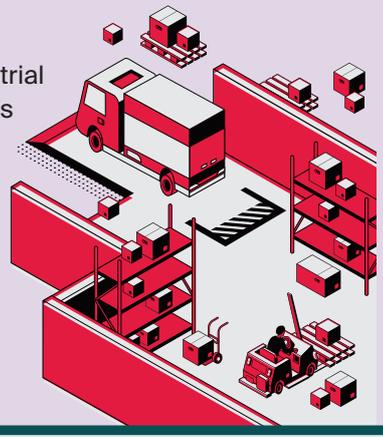
We market, sell and lease offices to occupiers on behalf of landlords and help tenants find their perfect office.



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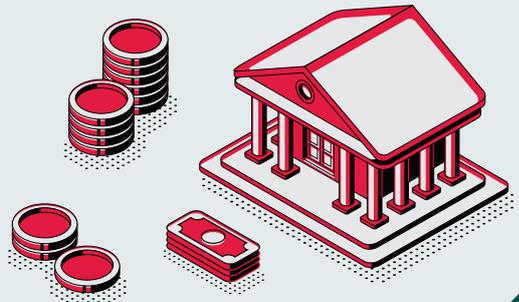
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Damiano Rea, Director, Heaton Property

FROZEN ITALIAN MEATBALLS

It is that time of year again, when thoughts of peace, goodwill and optimism help temper the revolting weather and endless repetitions of 'So here it is, Merry Christmas' by Slade in every shop and supermarket.

For those of you with daughters, there is good news. Just when you completed therapy for 'Let it Go' from Frozen on repeat on the car audio, Frozen 2 was released last month. You may look forward to your little darlings belting out the theme tune till February.

For me, this is a season of mixed blessings. The blessings? I love Christmas and time spent with family is always a joy. On the downside, an Anglo-Italian-Bulgarian Christmas dinner means two days in recovery. I have purchased a defibrillator to be on the safe side.

So, once the turkey, ham, Italian meatballs, turshia and brussel sprouts with Aunt Liliana's panettone have been put behind us, it is time to reflect upon the year past and make plans for the year to come. The year past has been a tad fraught for many. The Tenant Fees Act 2019 has caught several national lettings agents by surprise resulting in liquidations and shockwaves through the sector. The Regulation

of Property Agents (RoPA), when it comes into force in 2020 will require lettings agencies to comply with regulations like those imposed upon independent financial advisors. This will drive smaller, non-compliant agencies from business.

The year to come presents new challenges but equally, new possibilities. Many smaller landlords with two or three properties are beginning to realise that they can no longer wing it, regarding their properties as an income stream. They need to put their investments onto a business footing or sell up and find new income opportunities.

This may seem harsh for a landlord who regards their single property or small portfolio as a pension pot. But with an increase to over 150 pieces of legislation that must be complied with, that is the harsh reality. The landlord needs to treat their investment as a business or, like non-compliant lettings agents, get out of the business.

In the lettings sector, 2020 may be the Year of

the Still Standing (YSS). Landlords with a small number of properties will be unable to deal with new legislation and will sell up. Lettings and property management agencies unprepared for this legislation will go out of business.

For those of us who are fully YSS compliant, 2020 presents an opportunity. We will be Still Standing because we are fully compliant, protecting the interests of our landlords and tenants. Ensuring staffs have our support to achieve the professional qualifications required by law and, basically, doing what we have done since we first setup in business.

As we move into the festive season and a glorious new year, is my glass half full or half empty? I am of Italian descent so take a wild guess. I leave the final word to American actress Goldie Hawn who said "I don't eat a lot. I think we overeat". Goldie clearly never spent time with my Anglo-Italian-Bulgarian family. That is her loss! Happy Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

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PROPERTY
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REBECCA CHUBB

Office Manager, Jack Harrison Estates

Did you always envisage a career in property?

Not always but ever since I was very young. I have been very interested in it. It was when my family were purchasing a property and I went to the viewings that I realised this could be a career for me. I had always loved interior design so I suppose there was a tenuous link there. I moved into the industry with a Wallsend-based agent eight years ago and haven't looked back since.

Tell us about your current role?

I am Office Manager with Jack Harrison Estates after joining the company upon its inception three years ago. I deal with the whole sales progression from offer to completion dealing with both buyers and vendors as well as handling viewings.

How has the market changed since the start of your career?

I don't feel the market has changed significantly but there are new challenges that we have to deal with all the time. I feel that I have also experienced two very different areas in Wallsend and High

Heaton but I really enjoy dealing with a variety of locations and the people that live in them.

How would you advise people looking to buy property?

Ensure you have your finance correctly in place by speaking to someone in a professional capacity. I think it is beneficial to come in and speak to someone face to face about your requirements. I think that personal touch that Jack Harrison Estates offers sets us apart from a lot of our competitors.

What is the biggest challenge in your role?

Trying to always give the best service and advice and managing the expectations of both buyers and vendors. We offer a step by step buyers guide which shows when things should be done as it can often be a minefield for the first time buyer. We always want to do all that we possibly can to help everyone that we deal with.

Tell us about the Jack Harrison team?

We are very much a close knit crazy extended family. We work in a lovely environment and enjoy a bit of fun at the same time.

What is your fondest career memory?

It was flattering to be appointed Office Manager at a brand new business three years ago. It has been amazing to play a major role in helping the company to flourish so much in such a short space of time.

What are the best places to live in the North East?

I suppose it very much depends what you are looking for. Both places where I have worked, High Heaton and Wallsend, have a terrific infrastructure with great value property, fantastic schools and lovely people.

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

Remain friendly, humble and approachable at all times.

How do you like to relax?

I enjoy socialising with friends, going shopping and the very occasional drink only on Bank Holidays and Christmas!

www.jackharrisonestates.co.uk

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REVIEW OF THE YEAR'S PR HIGHLIGHTS

Not a real question this month, more of a conversation amongst ourselves to pick out the best and worst examples of PR over the year – everyone will have their own choice but these were the ones that sprang to mind for various reasons.

Looking back over a year dominated by politics, Brexit, the Tory Party's self destruction and the madness of Trump feature every month with stories that would be normally dismissed as ludicrous soap opera fiction becoming the norm. But the point about these, to my mind, is that the justifiably horrendous publicity the increasingly bizarre and often downright dishonest actions of our 'leaders' has attracted, has not actually affected them or their progress at all – Trump and Johnson are proven to be liars yet their popularity amongst voters increases? There's no doubt a lesson to be learnt here but this isn't the platform.

Elsewhere, the year was dominated by common themes. The environmental movement grew in prominence with Greta Thunberg becoming an increasingly important ambassador. Companies which embraced green principles, particularly in the troubled retail sector, received positive coverage with the supermarket chains falling over themselves to reduce plastic and packaging and Asda even trialling the sale of second hand clothes to piggyback onto Second Hand September. Extinction Rebellion were asking all sorts of the right questions until they began to disrupt public transport and rapidly lost support, although I'm sure they will triumph as one of the most successful non-violent protest movements in modern times.

Dr Martens launched a boot made from a vegan leather alternative whilst the ever reliable Greggs

launched their vegan sausage roll which would probably have been a triumph in any case but when Piers Morgan slammed it, success was assured!

McDonalds had good and bad coverage – the good was a great stunt in Sweden where outlets often have beehives on their roofs which was echoed by the construction in May of a beehive as a miniature McDonalds. In the UK the bad was a consumer complaining that his spicy vegan wrap contained chicken fillet!

Airlines' publicity also varied although most was negative. BA's data breach cost them a £183m fine (don't feel too bad as it's only 1.5% of it's annual turnover as pointed out by striking pilots later in the year) and the failure of their IT system later in the year was equally disastrous. Ryanair showed their usual subtle touch by refusing to take an autistic boy's case of toys even though the family had paid extra for cabin baggage, and then lost the same bag on the return journey. The airline also refused another young autistic passenger to take his comfort doll without a £25 overcharge – the patents refused, the child had a meltdown and was surrounded by police and then medicated by an airport doctor. Good news is that Jet2 stepped in to treat him with dignity and respect and took the family home. In August, they followed this up with boss Michael O'Leary sending a filmed message to 900 employees stating that job losses were coming and they'd learn their fate soon.

The good was a lovely story about Qantas CEO,

Alan Joyce, replying personally to a 10 year old boy who had written in to ask for tips about running his toy airline – if only other CEO's worldwide could learn this lesson?

In the sporting world, Ben Stokes winning the Cricket World Cup took first prize recovering from his disastrous fall in reputation last year whilst the USA Women's football team may have won the their World Cup but won few friends with their celebrations after beating Thailand and England.

So, hero and zero? My heroes were the Brave Blossoms, the Japanese rugby team who showed incredible skill, respect and courage and the Canadian rugby team who helped the post-typhoon clean up in Kamaishi after their final Rugby World Cup game against Namibia was cancelled. Compare this to the Scottish rugby authorities who threatened to sue the organisers if their game against Japan was cancelled – poetic justice perhaps when they then lost?

For zero, no choice – despite an early strong challenge from Liam Neeson admitting to wanting to kill the first black person he saw, and the ever-present Piers Morgan and Katie Hopkins, Jacob Rees-Mogg's arrogance obviously knows no bounds and the photograph of him lounging on a House of Commons bench revealed his disdain for both Parliament and democracy. It will be a photo, I believe, that will return to haunt the Tory Party forever.

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.

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ARE YOU BUILDING YOUR DIGITAL KNOWLEDGE FAST ENOUGH?

By Veronica Swindale,
Managing Director of nesma

The world is functioning digitally around us but as companies and individuals are we up to the job?

Veronica catches up with Dr Sarah Roberts-Bowman, who recently completed her Digital Marketing Institute Diploma in Digital Marketing with nesma.

Is it possible to get a marketing or comms job without digital qualifications?

Digital is now built into every marketing or communications role, and it is vital to demonstrate that you have these capabilities. Qualifications validate skills and show to employers that you are committed to continuous professional development, and this is beneficial to everyone.

What are employers looking for?

I think they are looking for people who can problem solve and think critically and holistically about the organisation, its people and its operating environment. Then reflect, analyse and create multi-dimensional marketing and communication strategies that are appropriate rather than think that there is somehow a one size fits all approach. It is that unique blend of behaviours and skills.



Veronica recently introduced Dr Sarah Roberts-Bowman as a nesma tutor. She will support colleagues on a range of CIPR and CIM qualifications including the new CIPR specialist diploma in public affairs.

How do you think the DMI course will help you in your own career?

It has certainly given me more confidence when thinking about how to integrate digital more fully into strategies, in particular, some of the more technical aspects. Creating more effective solutions can only but help your career!

Do you think spending a whole day on each topic would be beneficial and why/why not?

A full day on each topic would allow time to really explore the potential it offers to your organisation and to get more peer to peer discussion so that you can share ideas and solutions as a group and learn from each other. It would also allow you to have some hands-on time to experiment and learn by doing. Creating some online ad campaigns, for example, or creating SEO keywords and meta descriptions would be really useful.

What advice would you give to others about 'moving up a gear' in digital?

Don't be afraid, nobody has all the answers in this brave new world. We are all learning to experiment, and take that first step to break down some of the mystery by getting some qualifications and start your digital CPD journey. Its one that I don't think will ever end as the technology changes and becomes more disruptive and transformational.

Digital is now built into every marketing and communications role, and it is vital to demonstrate that you have these capabilities. Qualifications validate skills and show to employers that you are committed to continuous professional development, and this is beneficial to everyone.

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If you have time to have a cuppa with Veronica, please get in touch! www.nesma.co.uk

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Hannah Lambert, Digital Marketing Executive

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2019 WAS A ROYAL HOT MESS; WILL 2020'S MEDIA STAGE PERFORM ANY BETTER?

It's that time of year again.

The office Secret Santa was drawn weeks ago, "the best Christmas film" has already been debated and we've bought more festive outfits than remotely necessary. But as an office of communicators, when Christmas planning is all but done before the summer ends, we can firmly say our minds are already looking ahead to 2020...and not just so that we can stop singing All I Want For Christmas Is You.

This year has seen big names in pop hit back at social media trolls in award-nominated documentaries, the trial removal of Instagram likes in an effort to reduce pressure around popularity metrics, and "fake news" took centre stage, politically, royally, and unequivocally.

The communication industry is changing all the time in response to big brand strategies, consumer behaviour and news scandals. At a rate of knots, social media never sleeps. But after a year fuelled with Brexit-led campaigns and political and social "wokeness", here's what we place our bets on for 2020.

Podcasts will continue to rocket in popularity

Traditional broadcast forms of radio and TV still reign as most popular, but it's been reported by Ofcom that around 7.1 million people in the UK are now listening to podcasts each week. According to the BBC, there's some 700,000 active podcasts in circulation so it's clear that this is more than just an 'up and coming' communication channel and it's clearly taking a big bite out of traditional media platforms.

RAJAR, the official body in charge of measuring radio audiences, reported that Zoe Ball had lost a million listeners in a year for BBC Radio 2's Breakfast Show. There's every chance that a good slice of these listeners departed with Chris Evans, but the rise of podcasts could well be accounting for a number of high-profile falls in live radio listening.

Three quarters of people say they now listen to podcasts of a BBC radio programme as opposed to listening live. Podcasts can cover a huge range of topics and cult podcast series' span a vast number of topics. True crime series, comedians chatting over a pint about the issues of the day, specialist sport content and gaming are just a few of the genres which are so easily accessible to consumers and they are drawing in huge figures worldwide.



Francine Clark

With this undeniable elevation in popularity, more brands will look to podcasts as a new port for delivering content and brand messaging. With such high listening figures, having a 30 second slot at the beginning of a podcast which is aligned with the subject matter should absolutely be considered as part of comms strategies.

Why professional influencers might feel the pinch in 2020

In 2019, it's undeniable: to be a social media influencer is to possess a fully-fledged career. This decade has created a new wave of jobs in the form of influencers who build lucrative professions built on likes and follows. However, in the past year, Instagram has begun to trial the removal of likes in numerous countries. For those who have forged their careers on engagement levels, with their influence quite literally measured by the likes that each of their post possesses and their subsequent follower count, this has no doubt triggered concern. Instagram's reasoning to remove likes is to "depressurise" the social media platform, removing the compulsion to compare and obsess over this digital symbol of popularity. But how is this solving the deep-rooted issue of social media anxiety when there are still many other features – followers and comments, for example – that will continue to promote someone's social status on the platform?

Put simply, the removal of likes could hurt the influencers whose business models rely on it in the same way that if a salesperson who worked on commission wasn't able to prove their sales. Smart PR teams will work with influencers to see beyond the headline numbers – they're easily gamed – but there is every chance that removing likes could also negatively impact brands who work with influencers to promote their goods. They might be less likely to choose to work with a micro-influencer even though their engagement - inclusive of likes - is

much higher and more organic, but is now hidden. All in all, 2020 could be the year that social media influencers really start to feel the pinch.

Zuckerberg STILL won't have tackled fake news

In an effort to restrict the extensive proliferation of misinformation and fake news on social media surrounding politics, Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey announced in October that all political ads are banned from the platform. An extreme solution to a hotly debated topic, but a response, nonetheless and diametrically opposite stance to Zuckerberg. There appears scant sign that Mark Zuckerberg is attempting to tackle this with any meaningful gusto.

Although Facebook policy chief Nick Clegg (remember him!) now claims that the social network is considering limiting the targeting that political parties can do on the platform, Zuckerberg's position on the matter has never really wavered. Unyieldingly, he believes that free speech is imperative on Facebook – even if blatantly inaccurate – and that it isn't the right of private companies to censor political messages.

Looking at other social media bodies, Pinterest already prohibits political ads and teen favourite TikTok recently announced it would be doing so too. Whether Facebook wants to be a part of it or not, the social media landscape is definitely changing with regards to fake news and 2020 will only see this become more apparent.

Inevitably, as Brexit continues to loom, media coverage will remain all-encompassing. Similar with the pressures that social media brings and attitudes towards it in the public eye. But how brands, social media platforms and consumers react to these recurring topics will be the real visible difference in 2020. We look forward to the New Year with relish!

Francine Clark is a senior account executive at W North. Visit @wcommnorth on Twitter and Instagram and www.wcommunications.co.uk

CINDERELLA'S COACH AWAITS

A Tyneside based coach operator has once again sponsored a North East pantomime to ensure that school children from all over the region will go to the ball.

This year, more than 9,000 children from North East schools will benefit from free coach travel supplied by Wallsend's Premier Transport to get them to the Geordie Panto Company's production of Cinderella at the Gateshead International Stadium. As Gateshead's first and only professional Christmas pantomime, the company creates a modern theatre arena experience which includes a 700-seater family-friendly auditorium, state of the art light and sound technology and fully accessible facilities.

Celebrating their 20th anniversary, Premier Transport are one of the region's largest independent bus companies with more than 60 vehicles ranging from minibuses to luxury coaches. Working with schools on a daily basis is part of Premier's work providing transport for school trips and excursions. They also specialise in working with children with special educational needs and disabilities and have a wide range of minibuses with wheelchair access and specially trained drivers.

Tino Wilson-Ford, Manager of Premier Transport was delighted to once again offer the services of his transport fleet to the panto.

"Christmas is a magical time of the year and it's all about the kids. Seeing their smiling faces as they get back on the bus after hours of laughing out loud is really heart-warming. The teachers love us too as everything is so well organised from the pick up at



Maxie Peters, Tino Wilson-Ford and Emily Swan (Highlights PR)

the school gates to the doors of the Stadium and return. We love working with the children and we're glad to support the Geordie Panto Company once again."

Panto Producer, Eric Armstrong said: "We all know that Cinders will arrive in style at the ball in her horse drawn carriage but more importantly each of our 9,000 school children this year will arrive and leave the panto in safely and in comfort.

"The free travel offer is being taken up by schools right across our region from Berwick to Sunderland and everywhere in between and already some schools have booked up for next year's panto so that they don't miss out. We've a few available dates left for this year but places are going quickly.

"Like Cinderella's shoe, Premier Transport are a perfect fit for us and we're very grateful for their support."

Cinderella by the Geordie Panto Company runs at Gateshead International Stadium from 6 to 29 December.
Ticket information: www.gatesheadstadiumpanto.co.uk

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DELIVERING A NEW MESSAGE

When it comes to marketing and communications there's very little that Lisa Eaton hasn't seen.

She's been involved in the creative business for almost 20 years and has worked for some of the biggest and most recognised firms in the region.

However...and most of us will have experienced this at some point in our business careers...there are times when we've known that things should be done differently but could never actually implement those ideas.

Lisa took the brave move to start her own business around five years ago driven by the motivation to deliver a more insightful and customer-focused approach to creative services.

Lisa set out to challenge the status quo in the region and she's never looked back.

'I knew there was a better and more insightful way to work and add value through an integrated approach to communications. I've recruited a forward-thinking team and we're achieving remarkable results. We start with strategy, always central to what we deliver for our clients. By immersing ourselves in the brand and its values, becoming familiar with its strengths and weaknesses, we understand its purpose and who it needs to reach to succeed. Once we have a plan, we get to work.'

So, what's been the secret to the rapid success being enjoyed by Unwritten?

Anyone reading this who has recognised the need for some help with their marketing, PR, perhaps new ideas on design or website, or would just like to know how well their business is REALLY doing, will know that they need... you guessed it...a marketing specialist, or a PR firm, or a design agency etc. Unwritten now look after all of that, drawing upon their specialisms to achieve results - be it launching a new business or product to market, fundraising, acquiring investment, diversifying, profile building, generating leads or growing a business operation. And, their approach is working.

Lisa and her team have introduced The Partnership Solution - one of those simple ideas that, once you've read the next bit, will make you think...'why don't we do that?'

There are three levels.

First is the full blown, all bells and whistles, Partnership Solution. This is aimed at businesses who have no marketing, design or PR department...or person. Perhaps you've had an idea that you'd like to explore and develop but either don't have the time, resources or finance to do anything or everything in-house.



Lisa Eaton

Unwritten will swing into action and you will, effectively, be given a team which will work on your behalf. It's a bit like appointing a load of staff but without the staff actually being there at your premises. They will work remotely in their city centre offices. To start with, there will be a series of meetings to investigate precisely what you are looking for. Your main point of contact will regularly report to you with updates and, once everything is underway, you will be given a regular performance report.

In other words, you have acquired a marketing, design, PR, creative department overnight, working for you and keeping you fully up to date as though they were in an office elsewhere in your building.

The second level within the Partnership Solution is aimed at businesses that already have a marketing expert in-house. This can work several ways. Perhaps the company's marketing guys need a fresh approach and would like some new ideas. It may be research and insight they need to understand if their ideas are working or perhaps they are looking for tactical delivery. There tends to be peaks and troughs in company marketing departments; times when it's ticking along nicely and times when it's bedlam. This second level within the Partnership Solution allows a bigger team to cope with the peaks, and the potential to look for new ideas when things are a bit more manageable.

And lastly, level three of the Partnership Solution. This is when you or your business has a single project which needs to be managed, delivered and monitored. In this case, Unwritten will help you to get everything off the ground and keep an eye on how things are going. As with all of the other levels, you will have a Marketing Manager who will lead a dedicated team of people working on your behalf.

'Earlier this year, we secured 16 new clients after launching the Partnership Solution' added Lisa.

'In ten months, we've added £390,000 worth of new business with organisations such as Leighton Group, Northern Recruitment Group (NRG), Northumbrian Water and Orchard Systems. Everyone appreciates our retained approach that shows exactly what we intend to do and how we will monitor the results via real time data. Businesses need to be accountable, transparent, and show a return on investment. This is what we can deliver with the Partnership Solution which allows businesses to tailor everything to their exact needs.'

Such has been the recent success of Unwritten, that Lisa is already looking to expand into the North West of England. The company is also establishing a training department for those looking to develop a career in marketing.

In other words, Unwritten is proving to be one of the most forward-thinking, integrated communications agencies in the region...and beyond.

Christmas at MetroMail

Christmas is fast approaching and here at MetroMail, we like to spread the festive cheer throughout the month of December!



As usual, we'll be running our "12 Days Of Christmas" campaign on our website, with some exciting prizes up for grabs, including a luxury Christmas hamper!

Our previous themes have included "Charlie & The Chocolate Factory" and "Jack & The Beanstalk" - can you guess what this year's theme will be?

Christmas is a time of giving and at MetroMail, we like to make sure we give back to all of our hardworking staff for their work throughout the year.

As part of our Better Health At Work Award, our festive activities boost staff morale and improve how they are feeling in their health and wellbeing.

Staff can take part in Christmas Jumper Day on 13th December to raise money for Save The Children. There are also raffles, decorate your area for Christmas, Christmas Stalls that allows employees to do Christmas shopping during work hours and letters to Santa where families can get involved.

We like to dedicate a day for Christmas lunch for our staff where everyone can get together and take a break from their work to get into the festive mood.

Finally, all of our members of staff are awarded with a Christmas hamper to say "thank you" for their hard work throughout the year. These hampers are not only a treat, but provide help to staff who are struggling at home.

Keep your eyes peeled on our social media channels for more details on how you can win!



Merry Christmas from MetroMail!





SOCIAL MEDIA TRENDS 2020 & BEYOND

North East based social, digital and design agency Curtis Gabriel share their essential social media trends for 2020 & beyond.

The world of social media is always evolving with changes in user behaviours and developments to devices and platforms enabling new ways for people and businesses to interact.

A recent example has been the rise of stories, just a few years ago stories weren't even a consideration and in 2019 more than a billion people use Stories every day across Facebook and Instagram.

It can be difficult for businesses to keep up with the latest social trends and this guide shines a light on some of key trends we expect to see in 2020 & beyond.

Personalised Content

Social users value content that is personally relevant and meaningful, yet many brands lack the time and resources to invest in personalised ad content. Facebook AI is making it easier than ever to develop dynamic ad & organic content that resonates with your target audience.

Here today...gone tomorrow

Ephemeral content such as Instagram stories have continued to grow in popularity during 2019. By using visual content, you can share in-the-moment social content that allows you to take your audience behind the scenes of your brand to trigger immediate reactions.

Product discovery

Up to 50% of online searches will be through images or speech in 2020, consider how this could impact your social content and copy to ensure you are appearing in search results.

Video Content

In 2019 56% of internet users watched video content on Facebook, Instagram or Twitter, high quality video content that aims to engage, entertain or inform users will deliver the best results. With the rise of messenger apps where people type less and increasingly use audio snippets or live video messages, the opportunity of social video has only just begun.

VR & AR has arrived

Expect to see the practical roll out of a range of new VR & AR tools like Facebook 360 immersive video content or Facebook Canvas, a full screen ad experience built for bringing brands and products to life on mobile. Consider how your brand could adopt these technologies to better connect with your audience.

Influencer marketing will grow...not dwindle

Social audiences are increasingly seeking out reviews and trusted voices when making online

purchases. This has seen the rise of social influencer over recent years, many leading brands have stated that influencers now play a key role in driving their success and reaching new audiences. Targeted micro-influencers will become more important in 2020 and users focus in on personalised content.

Social CEOs

Social media offers business leaders the perfect tool to communicate with their teams, listen to customers and communicate their vision. Employees are vocal, they have immediate social reach and they can easily build or pull down an employer's brand. By 2020, large organizations will understand that employee comments and perceptions on social will need to be managed similar to how companies monitor customer complaints and feedback.

Social Messaging Apps

Social Messaging Apps like Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp will become a key tool as part of your customer service and engagement strategy, offering an alternative to online live chat functionality. In a recent survey, 67% of people said they expect to use messaging apps to talk to businesses.

For more information or to discuss your social media visit www.curtisgabriel.com



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INFLUENCER RELATIONS: A BEST PRACTICE GUIDE TO PROTECTING YOUR BRAND

Astute.Work provides management consultancy, PR and marketing to organisations wanting to articulate their purpose, manage change, engage with stakeholders and build profits both ethically and sustainably.

As part of its industry give back, the agency founded and invests in an opensource learning and development community called #FutureProof. Here Astute's managing director Sarah Waddington provides the low down on a new #FutureProof guide covering influencer marketing governance so everyone can follow best practice.

Influencer relations is growing in popularity as brands recognise the opportunity that comes with harnessing the networks of high-profile individuals, but this emerging area is fraught with potential pitfalls.

The new #FutureProof guide aims to share the latest advice around the critical area of governance for influencer marketing. It's a challenging area of practice which sits between marketing and public relations and earned and paid media.

The guide has been written by Scott Guthrie, an independent influencer marketing consultant, and Stephen Waddington, managing director of Metia and visiting professor at Newcastle University.

It includes contributions from Jake O'Neill, senior marketing manager, Vuelio; Rupa Shah, founder and director of Hashtag Ad Consulting; and Andrew Terry, partner and head of intellectual property & media, Eversheds Sutherland.

Spotlighting the growing issue of influencer marketing governance

There were more than 16,000 complaints made about 14,000 online ads and social media posts last year according to the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) and the Committees of Advertising Practice (CAP) Annual Report 2018.

According to MarketsandMarkets, the global influencer market is currently estimated at £4.5 billion in 2019.



Sarah Waddington

In the UK influencer campaigns are governed by existing ASA and Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) laws. Members of the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) and Public Relations and Communications Association (PRCA) are also covered by their codes of conduct.

The #FutureProof guide characterises the market, includes applicable media law and guidance from advertising, marketing and public relations.

It also covers guidance for campaigns where no money is exchanged, gifts in kind such as accommodation or travel, and financial payment.

Governance impacts agencies, brands and influencers

The tension between earned and paid campaigns isn't only a challenge for marketing and public relations practitioners. It has also led to influencers themselves breaching advertising and trading standards law.

The #FutureProof view is that there is a growing need and opportunity for formal representation for influencers. Insurance company Hiscox launched an influencer and public figure protection insurance policy in September 2018.

Here are the top six take aways from the guide:

1. Everyone involved in a campaign has a responsibility to adhere to relevant advertising and media law. This includes agencies, brands and influencers.
2. Influence is often confused with popularity. Influence is the ability to shape or change a person's opinion or behaviour.
3. Marketing approaches influencer marketing from the perspective of high control and low trust. PR deals in low control and high trust. Marketing is often marked by short term and tactical campaigns. This is set against PR's bedrock skill of building long-term, mutually-beneficial relationships.
4. The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) and Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) set out how to abide by media laws and regulations.
5. If you are an organisation pitching a story and an influencer creates organic content based on that pitch but there is no exchange of payment or value, then there is no need for disclosure on either side.
6. Disclosure of a paid influencer marketing relationship should be obvious. It should be easy to understand, unambiguous, timely and prominent. Use hashtags such as #ad, #advertisement or #advertising

You can access the guide at www.futureproofingcomms.co.uk/we-are-all-influencers-now



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THE RISE AND FALL OF THE LIKES

In the last few months, it's been reported that Instagram will be trialing removing Likes for users on posts in the U.S, a feature that has already been trialed across the world, and is expected to be rolled out globally and soon, the U.K.

The decision to take away the vanity metric of popularity is so that users can, "focus on the photos and videos, not by how many likes they get."

The aim of hiding likes, the company stated, is to remove the element of "pressure" from the social media platform and to stop it feeling "like a competition." All of which sounds admirable, especially given the 2017 study that found Instagram was the worst social network for your mental health, linking it to depression and anxiety.

In one sense, hiding likes is a simple fix for what the platform is morphing into: a mood board of orchestrated images that has prompted many people to abandon posting to the main feed entirely in favour of the like-free Instagram Stories. The pressure with posting is too great, and our feeds are overrun with photographs advertising the best bits of our life, complete with catchy captions.

Take away likes and the clock turns back to a time when a photograph of a cup of coffee was just that, not a paid partnership with a coffee brand offering followers the chance to win a lifetime supply of coffee. Showing off is in the DNA of Instagram, and hiding the number of likes won't make it any less influential, aspirational or inspirational.

If implemented, users would be able to see their own likes, but not that of others. Brands wouldn't be able to tell how popular a specific account is or image hugely affecting any influencer marketing strategy. Influencers could share those numbers themselves to an agency or brand, but they could easily be doctored or manipulated.

But how would the removal of Like counts change user behaviour? Would users be less inclined to tap 'Like' if they didn't have the context of how many others had done the same? And how would that impact overall on-platform engagement?



April Bowden

Feedback from users based in the U.S have suggested that they have been more personal with the things they actually like versus what everyone else is liking. This feels like more of what Instagram should be rather than an advertisement of ourselves on their page.

Given Instagram's recent increased efforts to prioritise mental health, Instagram Stories were created in part to alleviate the pressure of receiving likes.

Without the likes, users can be more carefree about posting. The platform feels less like a popularity contest between Instagram influencers with carefully curated aesthetics and average users who use their page to share glimpses of their daily lives with family and friends.

With social media fast becoming an over crowded market, new changes coming in daily, and shiny new platforms infiltrating the space every day, as a consumer, it's difficult to determine which networks to choose to spend your time and your marketing budget affectively.

In 2019, habits changed, platforms evolved, and

new platforms came into existence. All of this has influenced how people use and reacted to social media marketing, as well as how marketers were able to reach their audience.

In 2020, I believe that more people will choose to "detox" from social media, deleting apps and profiles in order to step away from it. This is more than just the usual changes we see in terms of people choosing to use one platform less in favour of another – such as Facebook seeing users decline but Instagram attracting more – this trend is seeing people take a temporary or permanent break from all social media.

Ultimately, it's vital that you don't start putting all your marketing eggs in the social media bucket. You need to ensure that enough of your budget and resource is still being given to other channels, including email marketing and search engine marketing. However, it's also vital that you ensure that any social media presence you do have is as meaningful as possible. Your brand needs to offer more - you need to deliver content that has a positive and memorable impact on your audience and that provides as much value as possible.

If you need any help or guidance for 2020, contact April directly - april@playthefieldnorthumberland.co.uk

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LEADING TECHNOLOGY COMPANY SUPPORTS THE CUSTOMS HOUSE

The Customs House has benefited from a generous donation in kind from award-winning North East company Aspire Technology Solutions.

The Gateshead based company, which was established in 2006, supported a recent IT upgrade at the South Shields arts venue, donating equipment and expertise worth around £20,000.

The Customs House is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year and fundraising has been a major focus as it looks to the future, with the replacement of ageing infrastructure having been identified as a priority.

Ray Spencer, Executive Director of The Customs House, said: "We have been very lucky that a number of companies have given us gifts in kind. The most significant of these has come from Aspire Technology Solutions, who helped us by making a sizeable contribution in hardware and technical expertise to upgrade our internal computer systems and customer-facing telephonic equipment."

PROTECH AND GENTOO 'PAY IT FORWARD'

Technology firm Protech have recently partnered with Gentoo who have chosen to 'Pay It Forward' to local charity The People's Pantry NE with the donation of IT equipment. The charity collects surplus food from major supermarkets which would otherwise make its way to landfill, offering it to the community at an affordable price in the form of 'happy boxes.'

Michelle Wemyss from The Peoples Pantry NE said: "Kind donations such as these are a huge boost for us. Until now I found it very difficult to be organised as I was keeping track of everything on my phone and in a notepad. This makes life far easier and means I can be a lot more efficient, dedicating more time to the people we're trying to help."

As part of their Pay It Forward scheme, Protech



will also continue to partner with many more organisations across the UK to help as many worthwhile causes as possible.

FINTECH SCALEUP EYES ASIAN EXPANSION AFTER SUCCESSFUL FIRST YEAR



An award-winning fintech scaleup is targeting expansion into Asia after achieving its original long-term geographical growth targets within its first year.

Kani Payments is already working across Europe, the United States, Middle East and Australia after its SaaS platform for reporting and reconciling transactions and moving funds became an instant success.

The business, based in Newcastle, is seeing its technology adopted by increasing numbers of clients around the world, ranging from multi-billion dollar financial businesses to startups.

Asia has now been identified as the next territory for Kani to target.

Kani was recently named as one of the UK's top 33 rising stars in tech and recently won the leading financial services or payments startup accolade at the Emerging Payments Awards.

The business was founded by chief executive Aaron Holmes, who identified the need for such a technology-driven back office function for the financial services sector.

VISUALSOFT ANNOUNCES PLANS TO DOUBLE MARKET SHARE



E-commerce and digital marketing agency Visualsoft recently announced plans to double its market share at an Entrepreneurs' Forum event.

Founder and CEO Dean Benson revealed that the Stockton-based company is expecting to reach £820m in terms of the value of goods passing through its e-commerce platform by the end of the year.

Speaking at one of the Forum's member events, Dean said that Visualsoft, which has more than 1,000 clients, has drawn up a strategic five-year plan to double its sales figures.

Dean told an audience of almost 50 entrepreneurs from across the North East that one of the biggest challenges facing the region's digital economy is securing the necessary skills. So, he called upon those within the digital sector to collaborate with education providers, training organisations and universities to ensure businesses have access to a well-trained and agile workforce.



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CLOUD COMPUTING - WHAT'S NEXT?

It wouldn't be the December edition of Northern Insight without a look forward into next year to predict what the future holds for organisations across the region.

While a year is a long time in the technology world, Google's latest report on the future of cloud computing sets out some pointers on how cloud will continue to shape enterprises of all shapes and sizes.

It will come as no surprise to hear that by 2024, most enterprises will operate multi-cloud environments, with on-premise, off-premise, public, and private cloud models.

Cloud's incredible potential can transform organisations – helping to develop stronger partner and client chains, cut costs, improve efficiencies and foster collaboration.

But it is not a panacea. Many of the organisations who call us in for help have applied cloud, but simply dropped it on top of existing systems and methods of working, which is a real waste of its potential. It is not surprising that it does not deliver the benefits they were hoping for.

It needs careful consideration and effective application, with the help of real experts in private, public and hybrid solutions. That is when it becomes a powerful way to support innovation, improve efficiency, and drive revenue growth.

Boards will back cloud adoption

The next decade will see cloud dominate IT delivery, with more than half of the C-suite respondents in Google's global survey of 1,100 business and IT decision makers believing it will meet at least three quarters of their IT needs by the end of the next decade.

Increased revenue

The same survey showed that 79% of respondents see cloud as a key revenue driver, while 87 percent expect it to become one by 2029. Interestingly, the numbers break down to show that only 83% of UK respondents said the same, which could pan out to see UK businesses missing a trick.

Edge and cloud computing to move closer together

Edge computing, which processes the data near its source, reducing bandwidth requirements and latency, is set to be an increasing feature of cloud solutions. Add Internet of Things (IoT) devices into the mix, and you can see why the use of this powerful combination is predicted to underpin the ever-growing demand for faster, smoother customer experiences.

Security will remain key

As cloud solutions and infrastructures become increasingly complex and multi-faceted, it follows that security will remain a top priority for all organisations looking to guard against vulnerability while balancing accessibility with security. Data needs to be protected not just from hackers, but in order to comply with the General Data Protection Regulation. One thing is certain - attacks will increase in scale, frequency and ingenuity.

Cloud will unlock the potential for artificial intelligence

Cloud's ability to handle huge amounts of data makes AI and machine learning (ML) the next

logical step in development. Using integrated tools to analyse data, identify patterns and even make decisions opens up technology to assist in every area of business.

Along with the opportunities come the threats

The biggest of these is shadow IT, leading to cloud sprawl. This means the use of IT-related hardware or software, without the sanction - or even the knowledge - of the IT department. With users now very comfortable downloading and using apps and services, the threat could be as simple as a member of staff innocently using their new smartphone to access your systems and data in the course of their work.

When IT departments cannot keep track of cloud instances it leads to cloud sprawl, and ultimately opens up security and storage issues. A recent case in the news highlighted the need for cloud security and vigilance, when a potential vulnerability at a major UK organisation was identified, which left the personal details of thousands of clients exposed.

These and other threats like them can and must be managed.

One thing is for certain. If you are a business owner your future success will hinge on your ability to effectively apply cloud technology, and properly regulate cloud services to your users.

Let us help you unlock the benefits of cloud computing – the future of your business depends on it.

DON'T GET LEFT OUT IN THE COLD

Can it really be December again? I could have sworn that we were just taking our wreaths off the doors and yet here we are again.

It has been a year full of exciting change, not just for Synergi but for digital business solutions as a whole. It is important to be aware of advances in technology as these innovative developments can transform organisations, improving their efficiency and providing them with a competitive edge. Cutting edge technologies over time become commonplace solutions. Business solutions are always evolving, whilst you may feel comfortable and safe with your current processes and platforms, they are becoming increasingly outdated the longer you leave them unaltered.

Let's take a look at some key technological advances from this year:

Process Mapping

Whilst process mapping is not a new phenomenon, it has certainly found its footing this year. Following process automation leaders, Nintex, acquiring process mapping and management technology, Promapp, last year I have closely followed the development and onboarding of digital process mapping. Nintex Promapp is a particularly notable tool as its highly visual interface and simple drag and drop editing capabilities allow for users of various technical skill levels to easily map and own their processes; there is no need to wait for IT department availability. Nintex Promapp also helps businesses identify suitable processes. By simplifying existing processes and improving their visibility workers can choose to optimise the existing process or create



Justin Short

new processes. On top of this, live feedback and one-click approvals are available, making collaboration simple. And of course we couldn't mention Promapp without covering the coolest new feature (in my opinion, anyway), the 'Workflow Generator' button that uses AI to read a process map and build out an appropriate workflow. Over the year, we have seen an increasing number of organisations invest in process mapping. This one has earned its place at the table as a solution we'll be seeing utilised and developed for years to come.

Passwordless Authentication

As a Microsoft Gold Partner, we pride ourselves on staying up to date with all their latest solution offerings. One of the commonly discussed technologies is modern authentication. This is centred around the idea that in the current digital environment passwords carry too much risk. Given the rise of phishing and password attacks it is advised for organisations to make a move towards using passwordless multi-factor authentication, also referred to as MFA. Not only does this improve security, it also reduces the wait for IT helpdesks. Forrester Research estimated that large organizations spend up to \$1 million per year on staffing and infrastructure to reset passwords.

Microsoft Teams

From October 2018, Skype for Business Online was no longer included in Office 365 for new customers with fewer than 500 seats. This was an indication of the mass movement from Skype for Business to communication hub, Microsoft Teams. 2019 has seen Teams develop and further improve as it has become the go-to inter and intra organisational communication and collaboration hub with features such as private channels, multi-channel posting and new filters appearing within the past three months alone.

To find out more about how digital solutions can help your business improve efficiency and competitive value, get in touch with Synergi today.

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IN CONVERSATION WITH...

PETER JOYNSON

CEO, Synergi

Tell us about Synergi's roots

Synergi was founded in August 2013, at that stage my career in the tech industry amounted to 26 years. Our family technology business, Joynson Limited, became the first business acquired by TSG in 2003. It was there that I met our Chief Technology Officer, Justin Short, he having also sold his business in 2011. We have a great working relationship, we share the same vision on the evolution of technology, making Synergi a next generation "born in the cloud" technology partner.

What sets you apart from competitors?

Clichéd I know, but it really is our industry experience. We are recognised globally as one of only a few cloud experts to achieve the highest partner accreditation with technology partners such as Nintex, Valo and Microsoft. This doesn't happen by chance. We invest in paid CPD time each month for our team to ensure they are ahead of the curve on industry updates, solutions and trends along with the relevant certifications. We also recently launched the region's first Digital Business Den at our HQ in Gateshead. This modern space allows clients to explore the future of digital business either through our education programme or a bespoke meeting with our consultants. We are by no means a "traditional tech" or "break fix" reseller, we're a modern partner helping clients drive digital change using modern applications. Our five-strand core focus of Teamwork, Automation, Dynamics 365, Business Intelligence, and Security all adds up to deliver improved business productivity, efficiency and insight.

Proudest business moment?

It's difficult to pick just one. Selling Joynson in 2003 was a high point, however so too was starting and building a new business with Justin. Winning the workflow automation specialists Nintex partner of the year award for the fourth successive year is up there, as we set our sights early on being a leading UK partner and we're proud to be just that. The ongoing highlights are seeing Synergi grow year on year by over 40% since 2013, the team culture we have created, and the calibre of clients we work with. It genuinely makes every one of us proud, every single day.

What is your business mantra?

To empower our clients to thrive as modern digital businesses. We live and breathe it.

What is the best piece of business advice you've ever been given?

Don't put off until tomorrow what can be done today. Getting things done and out of the way means you can focus on lifting

your head and looking at where improvements can be made. And they can always be made.

How has the business landscape changed over the last decade?

The technology industry changes fast, and the introduction of cloud subscription computing has massively changed the rules, complexities and opportunities. It's an evolution, a true game-changer that gives businesses of all sizes access to affordable business tools. It levels the playing field and the possibilities, but only if it's harnessed correctly. While many businesses are forging ahead and enjoying the benefits of being more agile and productive, there are still so many of them that need help to do so, and that's what is so exciting about the next decade.

What's next for Synergi?

We have plans for continued growth in all of our focused practice areas, and having established Synergi in the North East, Scotland and London we have plans to launch in two new geographic territories, to grow our market reach in other major business cities.

Although we will always be 'cloud first' partners, we are also widening our services into infrastructure provision, in response to increasing client demand. This will allow us to directly manage hybrid 'on premise' infrastructure platforms, offering flexible legacy support capabilities. Combined with our unique transformational skills it means clients don't have to worry about managing multiple technical relationships as they develop their cloud strategy. We are giving them the best of both worlds.

Heroes in and out of business?

My Dad, Ray, for giving me my first career opportunity at 16 years old, and the foundations for a life in business. My other heroes are Lewis Hamilton and Rory McIlroy, both great sporting idols at the top of their games, and fulfilling their childhood dreams.

Favourite aspect of the job?

Working with new clients and building lasting relationships, and working with our team to drive the Synergi passion.

How do you measure success?

Seeing smiling faces in the workplace, and being able to create good career opportunities. Our team currently numbers 32 and we are already recruiting for early 2020. And of course seeing solid financial results on the bottom line, not just within our own business but in those of our customers.



Peter Joynson

HOW DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES ARE CHANGING SUPPLY CHAINS ACROSS THE NORTH EAST

In 2017, the UK Government released an independent review, Made Smarter, which summed up how the manufacturing SME community could maximise benefits to the industry by adopting digital technology. Digital Catapult NETV's Programme Engagement Manager, Sophie Craggs, explains what is happening two years on.

Over the last two years, we've seen industry starting to adopt emerging technology, to help drive lower costs, reduce product time to market and become more competitive – ultimately helping to 'futureproof' businesses. There are still challenges; the Made Smarter Review highlighted that lack of effective leadership, poor levels of adoption and under-leveraged innovation assets all limit UK manufacturing's ability to reach its potential. Yet, the businesses we work with are finding new ways to use technology to solve very real business challenges.

The transformative technologies being explored and utilised can be labelled in the following areas:

- Immersive (Virtual Reality/Augmented Reality, Mixed Reality and Haptics)
- Future Networks (5G, LPWAN, Internet of Things)
- Artificial Intelligence (Machine Learning)
- Future Focus (blockchain/cyber security)

Of course, most of these technologies aren't new – VR has been around for years now – but what is exciting is the way in which these technologies are being used in industry and the advances in the hardware and software available to manufacturers.

Virtual and augmented reality are now being used in a number of ways in the manufacturing space. Virtual reality has become a popular way to train staff for on the shop floor. We've seen everything from basic fire safety training to being able to immerse staff in hostile environments, delivered using VR.

For example, there is an immersive training scenario which allows engineers for wind farms to 'virtually' fix a turbine's blades. This tests a potential engineer's ability to do their job at height, without the risk of putting someone in a dangerous situation for which they are not yet equipped. The technology has led to more skilled, and more confident, workers, thanks to the 'practice time' they have had.



Sophie Craggs, Programme Engagement Manager Digital Catapult NETV.

Technologies like VR and AR are also being used to attract both future generations of employees to companies, and to attract new customers. North East-based company Zerolight work with a number of global car brands to deliver immersive experiences for customers looking to purchase new vehicles. While we don't advocate using technology for the sake of it, understanding how your customers engage or use your products can inform the manufacturing process, and winning new customers is key to remaining competitive.

Less mainstream technologies, such as LPWAN (Low Power Wide Area Networks) are also increasingly being used as an enabler. Companies are able to fine tune processes using a technology that is relatively cheap and easy to implement. A great example is the work Dyer Engineering has done through the Connected Factory demonstrator: by being able to track assets (a signal emits from the asset location every few minutes using LPWAN) Dyer has been able to understand where there are bottlenecks in the workstream. This has also been well received on the shop floor - staff no longer have to waste time looking for missing parts or remaking lost parts.

We've also seen Artificial Intelligence being used

to solve issues around faulty products. A North East manufacturing company was able to work with a local tech company, Wordnerds, to help predict product faults and customer complaints. The technology combines deep learning, NLP and linguistics to analyse social media trends. The data gathered then allows the manufacturer to forecast trends and market demands.

Knowing where to start with technology adoption can be difficult, which is why we advise companies to follow a challenge-led approach. We also run a number of programmes designed to help manufacturers understand what technology is available and how it can be used in the industry. These, coupled with specialised support to help implement new practices into the workplace, can help North East manufacturers and supply chains to overcome the challenges identified by Made Smarter and ensure they are able to directly benefit from new technology developments.

Digital Catapult NETV is managed by Sunderland Software City, which is part-funded by the European Regional Development Funds as part of the Digital Innovation Partnership.

IN CONVERSATION WITH...

LEON HUGHES

Head of Technology,
Activ Technology

What were your career ambitions growing up?

From a very young age I was always into electronics. I had a shed converted into a workshop at the bottom of the garden where I designed and built electronic gadgets. At the time I never envisaged doing anything else.

Tell us about your role at Activ Technology

I've only been here a very short time but it already feels like I've been here for years. One thing that was obvious from the start is Activ is truly a business that cares about its people. It's refreshing to work with others who are on the same page, with the same values and with customers that genuinely like us. As with any new role, there is a lot to get to grips with, but we are already looking at ways to provide enhanced services to our customers.

What services does the company provide?

Activ's roots were in providing business to business connectivity and mobile telephony solutions. The company still has a large presence in that space but we also offer a full complement of IT services ranging from consulting through to end-to-end managed support. Coupled with this, Activ has invested heavily so as to offer cloud and hybrid solutions, so we really can offer our customers the best of both worlds. Desktop Virtualisation is becoming more and more prevalent and we have capability to offer the best technologies in this area to businesses of all sizes. We are a Citrix CSP provider, have specialists in VoIP telephony and are also a Mitel Partner.

What's your proudest business achievement?

Co-founding an award winning IT company called Jade Integration back in 2002. The business grew in turnover by almost 100% year-on-year during the last two years of trading largely because of the reputation we built with our customers. We had 100% customer retention when we sold the business back in 2007. We weren't looking for a sale but when we were approached it made sense for the business at that time.



Leon Hughes

What challenges have you encountered?

The IT industry is fast changing. Staying up-to-date with leading edge technologies is important. The skill is in understanding what is a good business opportunity versus what customers actually need. Finding that balance is paramount. It does make hard work all the more important. I have a very understanding wife!

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

Not an awful lot, however I've only been here a few weeks!

Who are your heroes in and out of business?

Anyone who is genuinely talented and passionate about what they do. I realise that is very open ended, but it's true. I actually get quite emotional when I see people achieve things they really deserve.

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

Never give up on a good idea, but know when it's time to move on.

Which fictional character do you most relate to?

Haha – I really think that is for others to judge but I do remember being compared to Columbo when it comes to technical fault finding. It really bothers me to fully understand what is going on when things go awry.

How do you like to unwind?

Spending time with my family. I have two children and we try to go on holiday as much as is practical during the summer months. I also have a passion for working as a music producer in my spare time.

www.helloactiv.co.uk



TRYLIFE: HELPING YOUNG PEOPLE CHANGE THEIR PERSONAL STORYLINE

TryLife (www.trylife.tv) has revolutionised how young people interact with online film, winning multiple awards for youth work, health and social care along the way. Here co-founder Nicky Kaur tells us all about this pioneering North East company.

Explain the concept of TryLife

TryLife is a pioneering purpose driven production and distribution company. We co-produce interactive films with our target audience, young people.

We seek to improve lives by allowing young people to try and to learn before they act.

Imagine a typical teen drama, but with TryLife the action pauses and you get to decide what happens next. Your decision will have an immediate impact on the storyline.

All our episodes are issue based and allow young people to experiment with life choices. Using this method of storytelling we can cover all the health and social issues young people face.

You've been on quite a journey since launching in 2012 – give us the highlights

The TryLife Facebook page now has 7,100,000 fans and is growing daily. It reached 188,000,000 people in one week and in that same week 22,000,000 people engaged with it.

In the past 90 days we have had 849,200,000 social media impressions with no marketing or advertising spend.

Our video views run into the millions, our face to face work reaches hundreds of thousands and our social media output has reached billions.

We have won innovation awards in Youth Work, Business, Health and Social Care.

We were the only company to win the prestigious business competition Pitch@Palace competition in both the People's Choice and Overall Category. We've had our work showcased in Hollywood. It really has been an incredible few years.

As a leader in interactive content, tell us how you drive engagement and what sets you apart

We empower young people, using all the tricks of

media in today's technology driven world.

TryLife is subtly educating audiences by showing the consequences of their actions without telling them what is good or bad, right or wrong.

Our reach is organic and unrivalled by other brands. We have engaged with young people from all around the world, co-created content with them and started a movement of positive social change.

Our global community pro-actively listens and learns from each other. Trylife offers something unique: authentic, intimate content at scale.

The framework and back bone to our content is developed in partnership with professionals working in health, social care, government, community and youth work development. We engage with young people, youth services and educational establishments to empower the entire community to co-create our interactive films. The end result is a well-rounded product built using the best science available.

Both professionals and young people take ownership of the content. The community create TryLife, they share TryLife, we all Try Life.

You address incredibly hard hitting and complex issues from child exploitation and sex trafficking to isolation and loneliness. What support do you offer?

We are developing the hard-hitting episodes with a



wide range of professionals who work in these areas.

The interactive films are ideal at highlighting the issue and raising awareness. Sometimes people don't even realise that they're being groomed or in an unhealthy relationship.

We can signpost young people to relevant support services.

For the classroom we are developing focused eLearning content. This will provide youth focused professionals with all the tools they need to engage with young people on some of these difficult subject matters.

This multi-disciplinary approach is essential and we take our lead from the clinical commissioning group who have the expertise.

What's next for Trylife?

We are about to launch our fourth film; we have two in pre-production and a massive overhaul of the website underway.

We're engaging with some major brands and looking to expand our work to the USA next year.

Our eLearning content will be utilised by around 50% of the UK next year.

We have a huge interactive project in development with the producer of Bladerunner, but we can't say too much about that just yet.

How exciting.



IT'S A DIGITAL MARKETING JUNGLE OUT THERE

ROAR Digital Marketing is one of those firms that's tricky to keep up with.

Every time Northern Insight pops in to meet its founder, Michael Knowles, his office will have moved for the simple reason that the company is growing. Although he's still within the same building in Whitley Bay, Michael has to continually find additional space.

His team of innovative talent is expanding, including the recent addition of a Social Media Manager, Elly Roper, who originates from the USA but arrived at ROAR after Michael met her at the North Tyneside Business Forum. She studied for her MSc at Newcastle University. Michael is also involved with the university. Somehow he finds time to lecture to students about Direct and Digital Marketing, and Integrated Digital Marketing Communications. Michael's a fully qualified Google coach so he knows what he's talking about.

So, what is ROAR? Well to start, ROAR is not just a catchy name, it also means something...Real Opportunities with Actual Results. In other words, Michael and his team work closely with businesses to identify how they can improve their digital marketing and communications, but importantly also show what sort of results any new initiatives are achieving.

The company has a striking new logo. The familiar lion's head is futuristic with the image now surrounded by three lines and three circles which signify how the different areas of digital marketing are all linked together, as any well-rounded marketing strategy should.



Michael and Elly

What do they do? ROAR is a full-service digital marketing agency offering SEO (Search Engine Optimisation), HubSpot Software management, PPC (Pay Per Click), Google Analytics, Content Optimisation and Digital Journey Planning. They operate as a Digital Marketing Consultancy and are a fully certified Google partner. Throw all of this into the digital mix and it means ROAR can help businesses grow their online success, online sales, conversion rates, and improve their general perception with the customer.

Oh, and they're busy.



Michael Knowles

"To be honest, the last 12 months has been a whirlwind," said Michael Knowles. "We've grown the team, added extra office space and increased the consultancy side of the business. We're actually working at full capacity, but 2020 will see me double the size of ROAR which is something I'm really pleased about considering I only formed ROAR in 2016. The growth merely reflects the demand for our services."

"We're also developing the social media aspect of ROAR which is why Elly has joined us. Too often, firms make the mistake of not realising how important social media is to their business. It's probably a generation thing, but certain firms just don't 'get' how social media works. They often use a template format which is incredibly dull and lacking in imagination. They'd probably be better not bothering at all. Here at ROAR we make social media different...and we make it work. We can also prove that it works. Elly makes social media stand out; some of her work is even a bit 'edgy,' but it does the trick and makes people take notice."

ROAR is spreading its wings. They've recently started working with a tech start-up firm in Manchester called Conseгна.

Here in the North East, ROAR continues to work closely with Royal Mail PFS (that's Royal Mail's Property & Facilities solutions arm which recently rebranded as RM Manufacturing).

A new local client is MIW who're based near Stanley in Co. Durham. They're the UK's longest established water cooler company; they're also one of the UK's biggest, dealing with major clients like Heathrow Airport, the NHS, Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Association, London Transport and the Natural History Museum. ROAR is helping MIW with their digital strategy and Search Engine Optimisation.

ROAR is continually approached by smaller local

firms who need help with their on-line presence. Two of the latest are El Rebel Tattoos in Shiremoor and Rockpool Jewellery in Whitley Bay.

Michael has also started work with the Cove Enterprise Hub which is also based locally. The Cove (opening in early 2020) is an awesome new business acceleration hub and community passionate about building a collaborative environment for remote workers and business owners. It was set up by local entrepreneur Helen Butler who specialises in creating business communities and helping fellow entrepreneurs develop their business mindset.

"In digital marketing, everything works together in a joined-up journey. For example SEO, PPC, Google Analytics etc, must not be viewed as a series of individual, separate fields. Those fields work together and rely upon one another to maximise their potential. We are a fully certified Google partner agency. Very few digital marketing agencies are given this full accreditation. In other words, when it comes to knowing how to get your message across, whether it be by social media or websites, ROAR Digital Marketing can help you be heard and help you stand out from an increasingly crowded marketplace."

The best idea is to get in touch with the team at ROAR and discuss your concerns and your aims. They'll then put together a plan of action. One of their experts will become your direct point of contact and lead you through what ROAR proposes. Crucially, once you're up and running, they'll also show you what sort of results you are getting.

Go on, make some noise with ROAR Digital Marketing.



Call on 0191 486 2606, send them an email at info@roardigitalmarketing.co.uk or visit www.roardigitalmarketing.co.uk

AND THE NOMINATIONS ARE...

By David Tickner, Headmaster at Newcastle School for Boys

I was delighted to learn last summer that Newcastle School for Boys had been shortlisted as the Independent Boys School of the Year 2019. We were further honoured this autumn to be announced as finalists and eventually runners-up for the award.

We felt no shame – and actually, a certain pride - in finishing as runners-up to such a long-established and successful selective boys' school as Tonbridge School in my home county of Kent. Founded in 1553, their long list of notable alumni includes novelist E M Forster, Tim Waterstone - founder of Europe's largest bookselling retailer, former England cricket captain Colin Cowdrey and current national cricket selector and one of our previous prize day guests, Ed Smith.

The main aim of the independent awards was to recognise and celebrate the quality of pupils' experience in independent schools. Of course, we hadn't set out in pursuit of this or any other award, but recognition is nice when it comes, especially when it can feel that schools in our region are sometimes overlooked in a national view.

Newcastle School for Boys is still a relatively young school - formed in 2005 out of the merger of two boys' prep schools and a decision to extend its age range. Our school reached maturity with the addition of its sixth form just ten years ago in 2009/10.

During this period of rapid growth and development, the School has bucked a regional decline in pupil numbers and established itself very successfully in our local market. We are now a day school of over 400 boys aged 3 to 18. Eleven plus applicants for entry in September 2019 grew by 100% compared to the previous year. Demand for places means that our waiting lists are growing.

Our specialism, identified by the award, is delivering an education that challenges and supports boys to learn, achieve and develop to the fullest possible extent. It also highlighted our success in fulfilling our aim to maximise the academic process of each individual boy within a relatively broad overall ability range.

2019 saw our best headline A level results with 76.6% of grades awarded at A* to B. This is a good



David Tickner

measure of the quality of the School's teaching and learning as well as the environment of our new sixth form centre. In three of the previous four years, the progress made by boys at A level has seen us ranked in the top ten per cent of schools nationally.

At GCSE, where all grades are now awarded on the new 9-1 scale, a third of all of our grades this summer were awarded at 9 to 7 (A* to A in old money) compared to a national figure of just 21%. The School's strong and distinctive ethos was also recognised in the nomination. After consultation with boys, parents and staff, we have designed and implemented our own character compass built around the core virtues that we seek to develop in ourselves and each boy: community, integrity, resilience, courage, leadership and empathy.

These values are lived out in the daily life of the School and will be referred to by pupils and teachers alike throughout the taught curriculum and our extensive co-curricular programme.

They come particularly to the fore in sport and, in the past 12 months, the School achieved a significant number of team and individual sporting successes from its relatively small base of pupils. These included our Under 11 footballers finishing

as runners-up in a national final, our senior rugby team reaching the quarter finals of the national vase and two hugely enjoyable and successful tours playing rugby in South Africa and football in Cologne.

The School also achieves a great deal in music and in creative and performing arts - a strength that runs counter to some people's view of single sex boys' schools.

Although growing in size and reputation, Newcastle School for Boys continues to value and promote the strength of its close community and family ethos ensuring that each boy is well-known individually both as a learner and in terms of his character development. Our staff are extraordinarily committed not just to teaching the boys but in their attention to the boys' pastoral care and character development.

We are extremely proud of our achievements recognised in the award nomination but are not - by any means - resting on these laurels. We are underway with our ambitious plans to continue to grow and develop the School and its facilities. Based on the growing demand for places, my advice to prospective boys and families would be to get in early.

Newcastle School for Boys will be hosting their assessment days for entry into Year 3 on Friday 10th January and into Years 7, 9 and 12 on Saturday 11th January. Please visit www.newcastleschool.co.uk for more information and to apply.



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FROM THE HEADTEACHERS STUDY...

IAN WICKS

Headmaster, The Chorister School, Durham

What were your career ambitions growing up?

Music has always been in my life from an early age but my school career steered me on a path into Science A Levels and then a degree in Chemical Engineering. Music won in the end and a career in teaching followed with plenty of singing, playing, composing and conducting thrown in.

Tell us about your current role?

I am Headmaster of The Chorister School in Durham, a co-educational prep school for children aged three to 13. We educate the choristers of Durham Cathedral and music is a strength of our school, but you don't have to be musical to attend the school. We offer small class sizes and an inspirational broad ranging education which includes sport, drama, art, and music. The school is situated within the Durham World Heritage Site, adjacent to the Cathedral on Durham's iconic peninsula.

What is your proudest educational achievement?

I am passionate that a quality musical education should be offered and available to all children. Throughout my teaching career I have worked to provide opportunities for children to sing and I am proud that the choristers of Durham Cathedral work with primary schools across the North East in musical outreach. I am delighted that we have recently widened the opportunities for children to become choristers whether they wish to board at school or not. This is allowing many local families to consider this professional training for their children in their home Cathedral in addition to their family life.

How has the sector changed in the last decade?

The benefits of independent education remain the broad curriculum which goes far beyond what a state education can provide. What has changed in all schools, and in society at large, is the culture of keeping our children safe. Safeguarding is at the forefront of every decision and quite rightly so.

What are you currently working on?

The school is beginning to think about Christmas. Our youngest children including our three and four year olds in the Pre-School are preparing their Nativity plays which are so eagerly anticipated by everyone. Older children are working towards a Christmas concert and the Choristers are about to sing Handel's Messiah and the Advent and Christmas services. Alongside this children will be regularly playing matches and thinking about others less fortunate by collecting contributions for the Durham Food Bank Christmas appeal.

Tell us about your team

The staff at The Chorister School always want to 'go the extra mile' for the children in our care. Whether it is organising trips, running clubs and activities or planning wonderful lessons, they work as a team. My leadership team is very experienced comprising the Deputy Head, Head of Pre-Prep and EYFS, Housemistress and Bursar. My PA has served an astonishing 30 years at The Chorister School and I am the sixth Head that she has worked with; there is nothing that she does not know about the school!

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

Understand your unique selling points and market them effectively. The Chorister School is steeped in over 600 years of history and housed in extraordinary buildings but we deliver an education fit for life in the 21st century. We are a school that seeks out the potential in every child. Our warm caring ethos nurtures teamwork, problem solving, critical thinking and respect for each other; skills that will be at the forefront for the adults of tomorrow.

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

Follow your passions and make the most of all opportunities that you are offered. I went to Exeter University and studied Chemical Engineering, but I spent more time in the Music Department and in the Cathedral singing and playing the organ! This and my subsequent musical experience led me into teaching prep school music firstly in London, then at Salisbury Cathedral School and now as Headmaster of The Chorister School at Durham Cathedral.

How do you unwind outside of work?

I enjoy watching Formula 1 not just for the racing but for all the technical innovations the sport generates for the future of motoring. Cooking and enjoying good food and wine. Spending time with family and friends and especially with my wife who is also a prep school teacher and wise counsel; our adult children are both musicians.

Favourite book/CD/DVD

As a child I enjoyed the Richard Scarry books with their intricate and myriad detailed illustrations and I often reach for Winnie the Pooh if I want a quote for an assembly. My favourite film is 'It's a mad, mad, mad, mad world' - a wild and wacky comedy with an all-star cast: I'm told my father was watching it in the cinema when I was born! My desert island discs would have to include the Bach Mass in B minor and Elgar's Dream of Gerontius, but I also enjoy the songs from Les Miserables. Most recently I have been listening to a group called The Gesualdo Six in their new release, 'Christmas'.



ONE SCHOOL, TWO PLACES

By Kieran McLaughlin,
Headmaster at Durham School.

The UK has had a long history of successful exports to the rest of the world. Cloth, oil, cars and even gold have made up the bulk of this trade over the years, but recently a new product needs to be added to the list – education.

We sometimes don't realise how lucky we are in the UK to have the education system that we do, and we certainly don't often appreciate how so many other countries look on in envy at what we sometimes take for granted. Relatively small class sizes, highly-qualified staff and a liberal approach to discussion and dialogue in the classroom are not seen in every country in the world. Our leaving qualifications are also of a gold standard, with many countries taking international versions of GCSEs, A Levels and even O Levels as a recognised measure of excellence.

Latterly however, many countries have taken this a step further and invited independent schools in the UK to open sister schools overseas. At last count, there were 58 overseas campuses for UK independent schools; the majority of these are in mainland China or Hong Kong, with Middle Eastern branches a close second.

I am delighted to say that one of those 58 includes our own sister school, Durham School for Girls, in Doha, capital of Qatar, which opened its doors to its first cohort of pupils in late August and welcomed 560 girls into the Durham School family. I had the pleasure of being at the school for its official opening last month, and I was struck by a number of things during my visit.

The first, and most heartwarming, was the delight



Kieran McLaughlin

that the pupils had in being part of a British school. We had worked hard in the development of the school to incorporate as many features of our school as we possibly could. This didn't mean creating a faux-Hogwarts in the desert – nothing could be worse – but, more importantly, embedding the values of the school into everything they did. Our school motto is the same, our curriculum structure is the same – even our uniform is the same (well, after having adjusted for 50oC summers). Our mantra was one school, two places.

The second striking aspect was the engagement from the parents of our newest pupils. Whilst Qatar may feel a different country, its parents want exactly the same for their children as Durham School UK parents want for ours. They want their children to do well academically; they want their children to develop and grow as young people; most of all, they want their children to be happy.

So far, it looked like we were doing an excellent job as the smiles on their faces were outshone only by the beaming grins of their children.

There is, of course, a degree of cynicism surrounding the expansion of UK independent schools overseas. Some criticise schools for selling their name for a fee, or accuse them of franchising education as if it were hamburgers. In our case, nothing could be further from the truth. It's a genuine partnership, with staff from each school collaborating in a shared vision to provide a first-rate educational experience for the young women of Doha. But it affects more children than those just in Qatar. Already we have seen interest and engagement from our pupils at home; they are learning and understanding more about a different country and its culture. In a time where we are in danger of becoming more inward-looking as a country, this is a benefit not to be underestimated.

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



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"The MARK of a Durham School education"

GAUDETE!

By Simone Niblock, Headteacher, Durham High School for Girls

Although I am not keen on the commodification of Christmas, I absolutely adore the religious and communal aspects of it; as the Head of a 3-18 school, I will have wept, snorted with laughter and a combination of the above by the time I have watched all the various nativity plays that my school put on for our parents. Equally, last year, one of my proudest moments as Head was the Nine Lessons and Carols that we held at Durham Cathedral. Even the prospect of tripping up in my heels on the way to the pulpit could not dampen my enthusiasm, and I am sure that this year's offering will be no different.

For the past three years, my husband and I have spent Christmas in Spain, usually warm and often gloriously sunny at this time of year. However, we have decided that, this year, we will actually spend Christmas in the UK. Having become used to a relatively simple- and decoration-free - Spanish Christmas, I am a little unsure now as to how we will celebrate. Will we go full-out kitsch and glitter, or will it be a more pared-back, minimalist affair, sans tawdry baubles and tatty tinsel? One thing I won't be doing this Christmas, however, is actually listening to radio stations that play 'festive' music. Even though I believe that 'Last Christmas' is one of George's finest, I do become weary of hearing Christmas songs on a loop, and, notwithstanding its charitable intent, I cannot think of a more inappropriate one than Band Aid's 'Do They Know It's Christmas?' In retrospect, listening now, 35 years after its release, it seems extremely patronising and culturally tone-deaf. I adored the song when it came out in 1984 but I think that it is time to remove this from the Yuletide playlist and replace it with a more appropriate song for the season: Steeleye Span's 'Gaudete' springs to mind and even if nobody speaks 16th century Latin, at least you can sort of hum along without cringing at lines such as 'Well, tonight thank God it's them, instead of you'...



Simone Niblock

www.dhsfg.org.uk

COSY UP THIS CHRISTMAS AT BEADNELL

Christmas...the one day of the year where you all get-together and celebrate.



It seems like the perfect memory, but the planning and hours of stress that go into it often leave you worn out before any of the family have even arrived...

Break up the Christmas traditions and give yourself some well-deserved time off. At Beadnell Towers, our quietly relaxing rooms are the perfect stop for a hideout this winter; escape the hustle and bustle

of the city with a short drive to the relaxing coastal countryside.

At Beadnell, you can go for a fresh walk along the golden sands, a potter around the village then warm yourself up sitting round our cosy lit fire before heading off to bed and getting the perfect nights sleep. You don't have to leave your pooch at home either, we have dog-friendly rooms available

so your four-legged friends needn't feel left out!

The hotel is a historic Grade II listed building, dating back to the 18th century. It has been, and remains, at the heart of the community of this Northumbrian coastal village for more than two centuries, and having recently undergone a £3m renovation, restoring it to its former glory and more, whilst offering a boutique-feel that oozes, class and sophistication, without the fuss, but plenty of home-comforts.

We've a fantastic Christmas menu too for you to enjoy, with a range of adventurous or traditional choices, for even the fussiest of eaters. If you've overdone it on the Christmas shopping and just want a quiet evening to unwind, you can relax in our Hotspur bar with a mince pie and a glass of port; the perfect end to any winters day!

Christmas get-togethers – from 3-24th December – Under 12's from £15.95, Adults 17.95.

Christmas Day luncheon – Under 12's - £44.95, Adults - £85.95.

Boxing Day – Under 12's from £18.95, Adults from £24.95.

New Years' Eve – Under 12's - £44.95, Adults - £84.95.

To book a room or find out what we have to offer visit www.beadnelltowers.co.uk

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NEW VOLVO XC40 IS A WINNER

Did you know that Volvo's first ever compact SUV is selling at an average of 2,000 cars a month and has already racked-up a host of top awards including being named European Car of the Year and *What Car?* Car of the Year.

All of this is significant because the XC40 is Volvo's first ever compact SUV, and it's stealing sales from other premium brands. No wonder Volvo's overall sales growth in the UK is around the 27 per cent mark.

The XC40 has three levels of trim; Momentum, Inscription and R-Design. Prices start at £28,965. You can also get Pro Edition models of each trim which adds extra goodies.

Our favourite is the R-Design. You get a stylish, sporty body kit which makes the car really stand out. There are smart alloy wheels, sports suspension, leather upholstery, folding mirrors and parking sensors. This is already on top of a really good level of standard equipment. Every XC40 comes with sat nav, air con, DAB radio, auto wipers and lights, electric windows and of course a fabulous level of safety equipment which makes the XC40 one of the safest cars in the world.

The interior is really smart with some neat, funky touches around the cabin. Everything is solid and feels good. Outside, the XC40 is very un-Volvo. It stands out on its own and doesn't look as though it morphed from the bigger XC60/XC90 models. It's a handsome animal. Roomy too.

It's also really good to drive. Apart from the entry level models, you get AWD as standard. This makes the XC40 feel incredibly surefooted. It's a car that will happily trundle around town, blast along the motorway or enjoy being hustled along country lanes. You can also get an automatic gearbox.

Engines are familiar to any Volvo fans with a mixture of punchy D3 and D4 diesels and smooth T3, T4 and T5 turbo petrol units. There's also a hybrid XC40 which comes with the petrol T5 engine. Not all engines are available with every trim.

Our favourite is the R-Design trim with power from a D4 AWD 2.0 litre diesel engine. 0-60mph takes a shade under eight seconds but go easily and you'll be close to 56mpg. These are impressive figures for a chunky car. If you want performance, go for the hybrid model which reaches 60mpg in 6.5 seconds. Wow.

Volvo was a late arrival into the small SUV market in the UK. They've clearly taken advantage of looking at the competition and making sure they hit the bullseye with their new baby. If you want a premium, compact SUV, the Volvo XC40 is the one to go for. It's brilliant.

Fancy a test drive? Pop along to one of the Volvo North East dealers in Newcastle, Sunderland, Stockton or Harrogate. You might not recognise the name, but Volvo North East is the new name for Mill Volvo. Mill has been taken over by another family firm, Stoneacre, who have other dealerships across the region. Apart from the name change, everything else is still the same. Same faces, same great service and some good deals. Go and renew some old friendships or why not find out all about the new-look dealers for Volvo in the North East.



UK TOUR OF THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA



Andrew Lloyd Webber and Cameron Mackintosh have recently announced a UK and Ireland tour of the brilliant original production of *The Phantom of the Opera*, visiting Sunderland Empire from Wed 4 Nov – Sat 5 Dec 2020.

Now in its 34th phenomenal year in the West End, *The Phantom of the Opera* is widely considered one of the most beautiful and spectacular productions in history. Andrew Lloyd Webber's romantic, haunting and soaring score includes *Music of the Night*, *All I Ask of You*, *Masquerade* and the iconic title song.

The Phantom of the Opera tells the tale of a disfigured musical genius known only as 'The Phantom' who haunts the depths of the Paris Opera House. Mesmerised by the talents and beauty of a young soprano, Christine, the Phantom lures her as his protégé and falls fiercely in love with her. Unaware of Christine's love for Raoul, the Phantom's obsession sets the scene for a

dramatic turn of events where jealousy, madness and passions collide.

The Phantom of the Opera is one of the most successful musicals in entertainment history playing to over 145 million people in 41 countries and 183 cities in 17 languages. It has won more than 70 major theatre awards, including seven Tony Awards and four Olivier Awards.

The Phantom of the Opera is the only show in history to have celebrated 30 years on both sides of the Atlantic. In October 2016, the London production celebrated its 30th Anniversary with a special gala performance at Her Majesty's Theatre.

Tickets are on sale now in person at the Box Office on High Street West, from the Ticket Centre on 0844 871 3022 or online at www.ATGtickets.com/ Sunderland.

GEORDIE ACTORS REUNITE FOR SUNDAY FOR SAMMY 20TH ANNIVERSARY SHOWS

Three of the stars from one of the most iconic TV shows of the 80s are reuniting to entertain the Geordie public at next February's Sunday for Sammy spectacular 20th Anniversary shows. The concerts, locally dubbed *The Geordie Command Performance*, will be held at the Newcastle Utilita Arena at 2.00pm and 7.30pm on Sun 23rd Feb 2020.

Tim Healy, Kevin Whately and Jimmy Nail will once again perform together in a sketch featuring the lads from *Auf Wiedershen Pet* which, together with its usual mix of music and comedy, will make the show one of the must-see events in the regional entertainment calendar.

Jimmy said: "I'm greatly looking forward to getting back on stage with Tim and Kevin again and inhabiting those characters – playing them is like putting on a comfortable pair of slippers and it's always a joy."

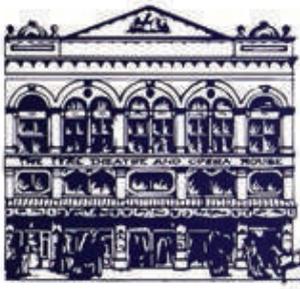
Chairman of the Sunday for Sammy Trust Tim Healy explained how the show will help young performers get a leg up in the business. He said: "Obviously the show is a great night for us, but when you're giving the grants out and are able to really help people, it's a fantastic feeling."



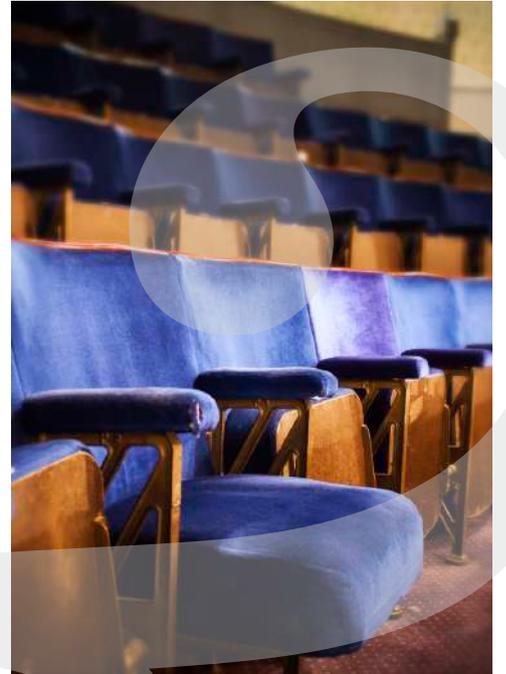
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THEATRE ROYAL ANNOUNCES EXHILARATING SPRING/SUMMER 2020 SEASON

Newcastle Theatre Royal has recently announced a jam-packed programme of new shows as it launches its Spring/Summer 2020 season.

Bursting with spectacular musicals, powerful drama and laugh-out-loud comedy, the new season will continue to bring the finest touring productions in the country to the North East.

Carrying David (9-10 Apr) from local writer and director Ed Waugh tells the inspiring story of how local hero Glenn McCrory, inspired by his terminally ill brother, became the first world champion boxer from the region.

Stephen Tompkinson stars in the popular British comedy Educating Rita (18-23 May), which tells the story of married hairdresser Rita and her tutor Frank who come to realise how much they have to teach each other.

The summer sees new neighbours move in when the kooky The Addams Family (30 Jul-8 Aug) make

themselves at home in the spectacular musical comedy.

Making a much-anticipated return following its sell-out run in 2017, Beautiful – The Carole King Musical (18-22 Aug) chronicles the remarkable rise to stardom of one of the most successful solo acts in popular music history.

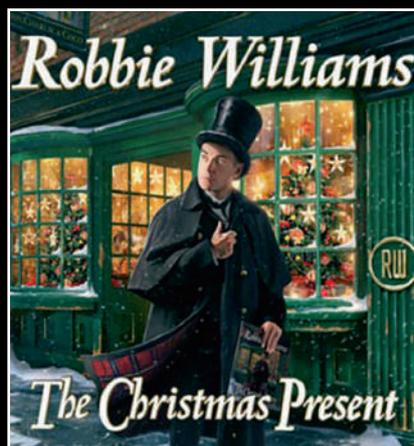
Pop superstar Beverley Knight will take to the stage in The Drifters Girl (5-19 Sep), a new show from Newcastle born producer Michael Harrison. Making its world premiere at Newcastle Theatre Royal, the show tells the story of one of the world's greatest vocal groups and Faye Treadwell, the legendary manager who made them.

It was the television quiz show scandal that gripped the nation. In April 2003, Army Major Charles Ingram, his wife and coughing accomplice were convicted for cheating on Who Wants to Be a Millionaire? The audience gets the chance to decide if he was really guilty in Quiz (21-26 Sep).

RECORD OF THE MONTH – ROBBIE WILLIAMS, 'CHRISTMAS PRESENT'

The music legend returns with his first Christmas album. The record was initially jokingly titled "Achtung Bublé" in reference to the Canadian singer's icy grip on the Christmas charts. Instead, we have The Christmas Present a deluxe double album split over two sides – 'Christmas Past' and 'Christmas Future'.

The track listing is therefore a mix of Christmas classics 'Let it Snow', 'Santa Baby', 'Winter Wonderland' et al not to mention a sparkling second side which is a host of new compositions, the best of which being the mid-tempo 'Time For Change'. Joining Robbie are a team of collaborators including Rod Stewart, Bryan Adams, Jamie Cullum and Helene Fischer. Most notably is a duet with Lineal Heavyweight boxing champion, Tyson Fury on "Bad Sharon" a hilarious glam-rock stomper which is rollickingly good fun and has sure designs on the Christmas Number One.



WHAT'S ON THIS DECEMBER?

Wolf!

December 1 – January 4
Northern Stage (0191) 230 5151
www.northernstage.co.uk

Beauty and the Beast

December 1 – January 19
Theatre Royal Newcastle
(0844) 8112 121
www.theatreroyal.co.uk

The Overtones

December 2
Sage Gateshead (0191) 443 4661
www.sagegateshead.com

Jools Holland and his R&B Orchestra

December 4-5
City Hall Newcastle (0191) 260 2020
www.academymusicgroup.com

Jack Whitehall

December 6-7
Utilita Arena (0844) 493 6666
www.utilitarena.co.uk

Dick Whittington

December 7 – 15
The People's Theatre (0191) 265 5020
www.peopletheatre.co.uk

Emeli Sande

December 12
City Hall Newcastle (0191) 260 2020
www.academymusicgroup.com

Bootleg Beatles

December 14
City Hall Newcastle (0191) 260 2020
www.academymusicgroup.com

Marlene Dietrich

December 18
Sage Gateshead (0191) 443 4661
www.sagegateshead.com

Lindisfarne

December 20-21
City Hall Newcastle (0191) 260 2020
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Best Books of 2019

There are a lot of talented authors in the North East region and here, Northern Insight has chosen six of the leading talents' books to spotlight, just in time to treat yourself or a loved one to them for Christmas!

The Stalker's Song

by Georgia E Brown

A fast-paced crime thriller, bursting with twists and turns and an unexpected ending. When Carol Barrington wakes up in a hospital bed in Barbados with no memory of being attacked, the police have their work cut out to find her assailant. It soon becomes apparent that Carol is still in grave danger and the race is on to find her attacker before he strikes again. On her return home to the North East she is plunged into a chilling, prolonged nightmare, from which there seems no escape. Who can she trust? As the sinister truth emerges, Carol needs to draw on every ounce of courage she possesses in order to survive. www.georgiaebrown.com

Stick Your Neck Out

by John Baharie

Set between London, Sunderland and South Shields - It's the near-future and the UK political regime is all about protection – protection against would-be terrorists. The Prime Minister has set up a National Intelligence Organisation to ensure there can be no repeat of the Docklands bombing. Muslims live inside open ghettos, and all activities are carefully monitored. Maverick officer, Eno the nee-oh, is out to get any "sympy" who helps the Islamic cause. Yet, despite the power of the NIO, one local man encounters a Muslim family in trouble and decides to stick his neck out – and the chase is on! www.stickyourneckout.co.uk

Imprisoned Heart

by Annette Greenwood

If you dare to believe... anything is possible, even from a prison cell. Katrina Sanderson is innocent, a victim of circumstance. Wrong place, wrong man, wrong time! Sentenced to prison for a crime she did not commit, where power hungry officers blackmail for sex. How will she get through the next twelve months? A compelling account of triumph over adversity, empowerment and a love so strong nothing can break it. Annette Greenwood is a Personal Life Coach who worked within the prison system. It was here the seeds of this, her first novel Imprisoned Heart, were born. www.annettegreenwood.com

Her Eyes Tell Our Stories

by Omotayo Sangofadeji

Omotayo's debut is a collection of stories in which she unravels complicated realities and prompts the reader to confront the uncomfortable truths that exist in relationships between lovers, friends and family. The title story, 'Her Eyes Tell Our Stories' narrates the troubling dilemma of six women as they navigate through life circumstances. 'No Extras' characters experience the fragility of love and loyalty. In 'The Mistress', Toun assesses her choices as 'the other woman'. 'With Love, Zoey' details a chance meeting between two old friends and rivals. The lead character of 'In Life and Death', is a young lady devastated with grief about the death of the most important person in her life. A truly focussed spotlight on the trials of being a woman, anywhere in the world. www.omotayosangofadeji.com

Dead Lions Don't Roar

by Tolu A Akinyemi

Dead Lion's Don't Roar is a collection of inspiring and motivating modern day verses. Addressing many issues close to home and also many taboo subjects, the poetry is reflecting of today's struggles and lights the way to a positive future. The uplifting book will appeal to all age groups, anyone going through change, building or enjoying a career and facing day to day struggles. Many of the short verses will resonate with readers, leaving a sense of peace and wellbeing. A true life bible of poetry. www.tolutoludo.com

Shining Child

by Dr P J Kennedy

The Shining Child reaches out to parents with advice and guidance to those who are undergoing separation and/or divorce. This book is full of practical suggestions and daily prompts that grow out of the need of every child to love and be loved. Dr Kennedy offers his reflections with tenderness, compassion and love. Beautifully illustrated by his daughter this is a rare book indeed! www.drpkennedy.com



All the books featured are available as e-book and paperback from Amazon.



THE DANNYLAND BALL

The DannyLand Ball was recently held at the Crowne Plaza in aid of the Charlie Gard Foundation.

The Ball was the 3rd Annual Ball hosted by Danny Mitchell, Founder of Change Fundraising Ltd.

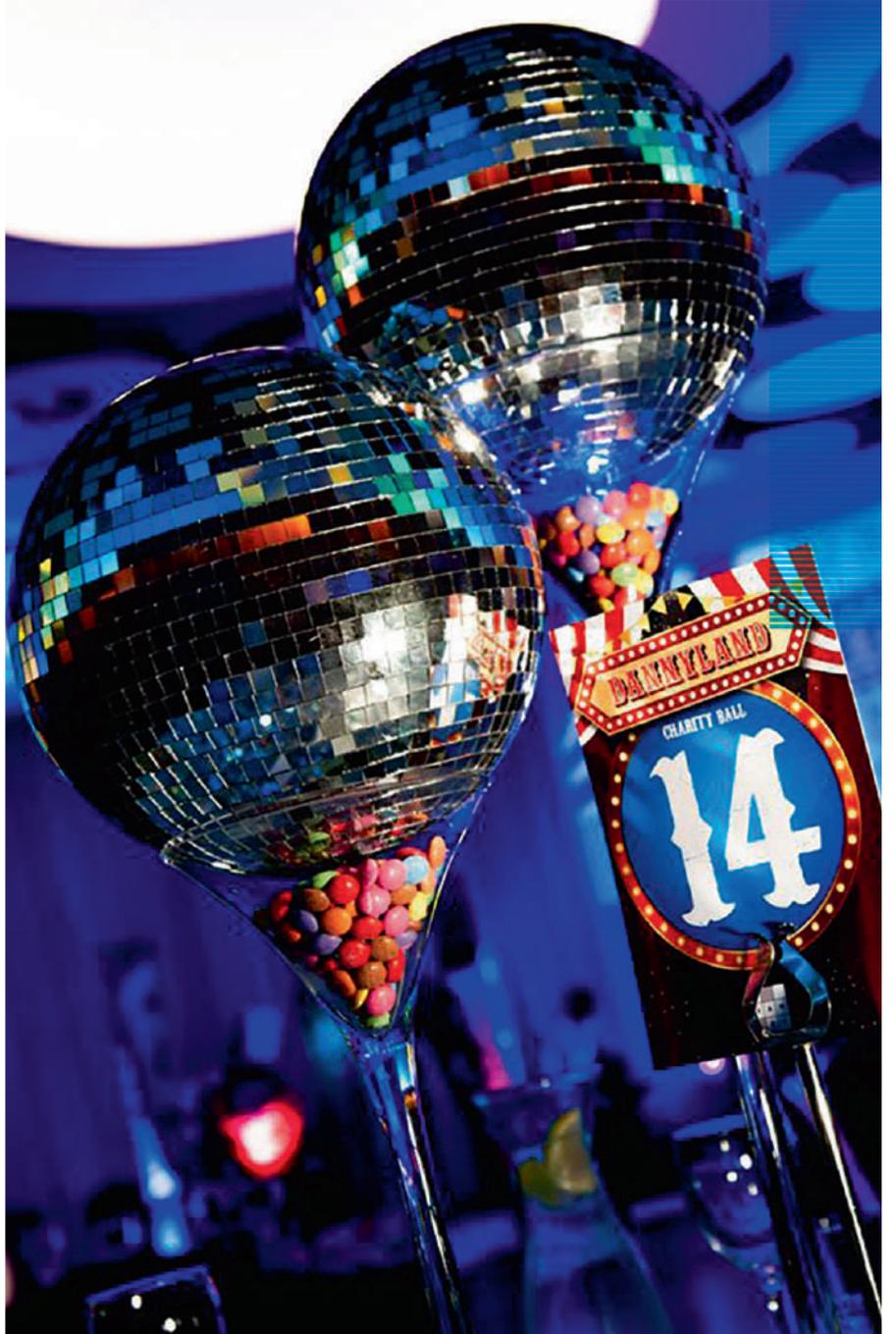
160 guests enjoyed the event which had entertainment from Rock Choir and the very talented Amelia Saleh.

Danny Mitchell said "It was a fun event to host with the amazing theme and AV being supplied by JC Events and to raise around £24,000 for the charity makes it even more worthwhile".

The next event being organised by Change Fundraising is the 2020 Firewalk which will be on 26th March at trinity Square and is open for any charity to take part.

For further information please email danny@changefr.co.uk







NORTH EAST COMPANY CELEBRATES 20 YEARS OF PARTYING

Gateshead-based party planners Last Night of Freedom, who specialise in Stag and Hen dos, is celebrating 20 years of party planning, unique destinations and a massive turnover of £50 million.

Established in 1999 by Managing Director Matt Mavir, Last Night of Freedom has hosted over 300,000 stag and hen partygoers and has reached the £50 million turnover mark just in time for its 20th birthday.

With a host of celebrity clients and extreme weekend packages, the company is known for organising some of the most unusual celebrations going, including trips to the North Pole, Bethlehem and even outer space.

Continued success is at the forefront of the firm's ambitions for next year, with plans for new locations, property investments and potential acquisitions fulfilling their aim to become the number one stag and hen company in the world.



CHRISTMAS WITH SANTA AT HOLYSTONE COOKHOUSE AND PUB

Santa Claus is coming to Holystone Park Cookhouse and Pub on Edmund Road with a special festive line-up for all the family. It's set to be the most magical Christmas yet as the cosy community pub launches its new seasonal menu packed with festive favourites and great drinks deals.

From Christmas parties to family lunches, Holystone Park is the perfect setting for friends, families and colleagues to enjoy the new festive menu, which offers great value and variety with specials including a Pulled Beef Yorkshire served in a gravy filled Yorkshire pudding and a Slow Cooked Ham Hock. Guests can enjoy the festive menu for just £11.99 for two courses or £13.99 for three courses.

Santa will also be stopping for breakfast at Holystone Park on the three weekends leading up to Christmas as well as 23rd and 24th December, with gifts for younger guests.



YOUNG DESIGNER LABEL CREATOR WINS ENTERPRISE AWARD

A young student who came to the UK from his native Gambia to better his chances in life has won a prestigious award from the Prince's Trust.

Lamin Gibba attended the Baltic in Gateshead to receive his Prince's Trust and TK Maxx and Homesense Enterprise Award.

Lamin contacted The Prince's Trust about their Enterprise programme which supports people aged 16-30 to make their business idea a reality. Lamin's business idea was to develop his own fashion brand, Jerry J Clothing. That idea has now turned into reality with his distinctive brand being worn by everyone from teenagers to professional footballers.

The brightly coloured 'Jerry J' t-shirts and hoodies are aimed at modern people who like to dress in style. The new designer streetwear brand gets its name from Lamin's street name of Jerry and the first initial of his young son Jackson's name.

TIME OUT REVEALS TOP RESTAURANT IN NEWCASTLE



The list of best restaurants in the UK has been announced by Time Out with Blackfriars being the top place to eat in Newcastle.

The EAT List by Time Out ranks the best restaurants in more than 50 cities worldwide. The lists celebrate the very best places to eat in these cities right now, from cheap and innovative new restaurants to fine dining establishments.

In Newcastle, the top restaurant was Blackfriars, located on Friars Street in Newcastle. The review said: "At Blackfriars Restaurant, diners can go full medieval-themed banquet (for large groups booking in advance) or simply enjoy fine European dining in a unique setting: a 13th-century friary."

Andy Hook, Managing Director of Blackfriars, commented: "We are over the moon at being selected as the only restaurant in Newcastle by Time Out. This achievement is testament to all of the hard work put in by our staff."



"To eat well in England, you should have breakfast three times a day."
Somerset Maugham

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OUT & ABOUT - ROTHERHITHE

A select band of rail professionals and interested members of the public recently gathered in the shaft of Isambard Kingdom Brunel's tunnel under the Thames, the oldest structure on the oldest Underground network in the world, and the first tunnel under a river ever constructed by man.



The occasion was the launch of the new National Rail map, and it took place in Rotherhithe, a mile down the river from Tower Bridge, which was hosted there for a special reason. The map this year features the voyage 400 years ago of the Mayflower ship from Rotherhithe via Southampton, Dartmouth and Plymouth to the new world and a port now known as Plymouth in Massachusetts.

The Mayflower is commemorated in the name of a pub on the riverside, on the south side of the Thames, where many of the Pilgrims boarded the ship of Captain Jones for the historic voyage. They used to be known as the Pilgrim Fathers, but since there were women and children too, they are now known as Pilgrims. The pub was known as the Spread Eagle in those days – indeed it would be most odd if it had been of the same name as the ship. But today it is one of the attractive riverside pubs from which activity on the river can be observed, and was an excellent spot for some networking after the launch.

Brunel's tunnel was originally opened in 1843 after many years of delay, for the passage of pedestrians and goods on carts, but was converted to become a railway tunnel in 1869, only six years after the first underground railway (Paddington to Farringdon) opened in 1863. It was for many years the fag-end of the Metropolitan line, known as the East London Section, and trains just ran from Shoreditch and Whitechapel in the north to New Cross or New Cross Gate to the south. In recent years, the stations on this line have undergone a renaissance and form part of the Overground orbital line around London.



The new National Rail map is an ideal Christmas gift for a rail enthusiast or regular traveller, and whilst it describes 2,700 stations on land in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, the story of the Mayflower and her ill-fated sister ship the Speedwell is told on the sea. Speedwell started its journey in the Netherlands at Leiden, but only Mayflower ended up in Massachusetts where the Plymouth Settlement was founded in 1620. It's a great educational tool for young people wanting to find out more about their home country. Today, the Mayflower pub in Rotherhithe is still licensed to sell US postage stamps for mariners and visitors, and proudly flies the star spangled banner over the Thames. There is a Thameside riverside path up and down the river, but the easiest way to get there is on the Overground. From King's Cross use the Hammersmith and City line and change at Whitechapel.

The map is available as a coated paper poster, and the size is 100cm width by 63 mm height. It retails,

as last year, at £10 a copy, and up to five copies can be placed in a postage tube for sending all over the country, indeed all over the world. Postage costs £5.80, plus £2 for a sturdy tube to send them in. There is a website at railmap.org.uk to order maps on line, or send a cheque for £17.80 for a single map including P+P made payable to National Rail Bishop Auckland Ltd at 32, Front Street, Pelton, Chester-le-Street DH2 1LX.



Extract at actual size

NORTH EAST MEETS WEST THIS CHRISTMAS @ SACHINS

Forget turkey and all the trimmings, Sachins Newcastle has created a fantastic menu to tickle the taste buds this festive season that certainly doesn't compromise on taste.



Finding the perfect place for your work Christmas party, family get-together or a place to catch up with friends can be difficult during December; lots of places are offering the same-old dinner (which we'll all be tucking in to come Christmas Day) meaning booking that table can be somewhat of a chore. Take the stress out of planning and enjoy a night at Sachins; Newcastle's finest Punjabi cuisine with their festive East-Meets-West menu this December.

Start with a festive amuse-bouche of mini onion pakoras with Brussels sprouts and tamarind sauce or chicken tikka over the coals which is sure to warm the soul of any northerner. Next enjoy Bob's take on the classic roast; turkey marinated in spices and masala gravy, root vegetables, garlic and chilli roasties, not to mention the delicious saffron mash...now how's that for a warming meal?

If you're fancying something a bit more on the traditional side for Sachins, they've also got the Boxing Day classic curry...but not as you know it! Turkey Tari Wala cooked in an authentic spiced Punjabi sauce, with rice and fresh naan from the tandoor. Makes the turkey left-over offerings at home seem like a poor substitute, doesn't it?

Room for more? Bob's created a delicious tangerine kulfi for you to enjoy with pistachio nuts, pomegranate and fresh mint; the perfect palette cleanser following a hearty meal.

With a newly renovated restaurant, Sachins is the perfect venue to dine this Christmas. Reserve the upper floor exclusively for you and your guests, or join the welcoming atmosphere downstairs in the main dining area and enjoy what this North East gem has to offer this December.

For large bookings, pre-order now with just a £10pp deposit and take the stress out of the office Christmas bash.

Visit www.sachins.co.uk or call 0191 261 9035 to book.

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AN EARLY CHRISTMAS TREAT

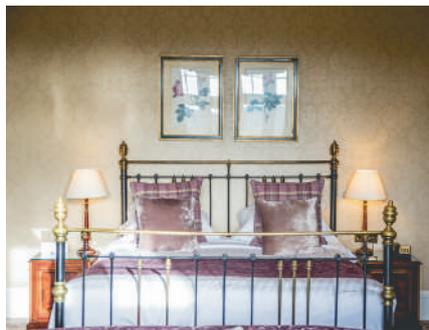
By Michael Grahamslaw

With Christmas looming, I wanted to take my wife Lisa somewhere for a romantic night out for two in sumptuous surroundings – but I wanted it to be a surprise. With subtle hints being dropped daily which I pretended not to pick up on, all was kept under wraps until one particularly drab Monday morning.

Working from home and halfway through the Victoria Derbyshire show, I told her of my idea which had long been in the planning. I announced with some ceremony that we were going for a night at Matfen Hall, the ancestral home of Sir Hugh and Lady Blackett. After initial joy came a rebuke for my deception followed by the inevitable phrase, “but I’ve got nothing to wear....”.

With three wardrobes to choose from, one solely for shoes, I assured her she would not be followed around all day by the Fashion Police if she wore an outfit for a second time. In the end, I relented and my plastic took a right bashing as a result. Never mind, it was all in the cause of making Lisa’s Christmas special and you can’t put a price on that – although my bank manager might hold a different view!

Matfen Hall is a very imposing estate which is surrounded by 27 holes of the North East’s best golf. It has a rich history that, like me, local people may not know about. William Blackett, its first baronet, was born in 1621 in Hamsterley, Co Durham into a family of merchants and became its first baronet in 1673. He had a hugely successful career as a trader in his own right and became a member of the Merchant Adventurers, trading in such commodities as flax, cloth, timber and linen before moving into lead and coal and subsequently



becoming a substantial owner of lead and coal mining interests.

Matfen Hall was completely rebuilt between 1832-6 on the site of an earlier Jacobean house owned by Sir Edward Blackett, the 6th Baronet. The last family member to live in Matfen Hall was Sir Hugh Blackett, 8th baronet, who died in 1961. Following his death, the Hall was leased to the Leonard Chesire Foundation. Following a major revamp, the Hall was re-opened as a hotel in 1999 followed by the addition of an extensive spa, golf course and leisure facilities in 2004. This 4-star hotel is now owned and successfully run by the 12th Baronet Sir Hugh Blackett and his wife Anna.

All of this rich history certainly impressed Lisa and that was the object of the exercise. After unpacking,

we headed for the Keeper’s Lodge on the 19th hole of the golf course, the place where yours truly has missed many a short putt and enjoyed a couple of glasses of fizz before getting ready for dinner.

There are four venues to choose from including the Juice Bar, with a variety of choices ranging from healthy to the sumptuously indulgent. We swerved the former for the latter and dined regally in the beautiful Library restaurant. The fine dining restaurant presents a combination of classic and contemporary dining in magnificent stately surroundings.

As it was a special trip, we pushed the boat out with Lisa enjoying asparagus soup with a raw quails egg to gently poach in the broth followed by a wonderful portion of beef Wellington, whilst I kicked off with the scallop spring roll and followed up with my preferred dish of all time, namely, fillet steak with peppercorn sauce. Very, very good food and service which would grace any London 5-star hotel.

We lingered into the night over a good bottle of rioja and several more glasses of fizz which rounded off the perfect day.

The following morning, whilst not exactly up with the larks, I smugly crawled to the Spa for a low exertion, “pretend” workout whilst Lisa passed this dubious honour in favour of a Full English breakfast!

www.matfenhall.com



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£49.50 Children aged under 10

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Enjoy the festive decorations and warm atmosphere of Horton Grange this Christmas with some delicious food too! Available between 1st December and 23rd December, excluding Sundays.

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Bring in the New Year at Horton Grange Country House Hotel with a Fabulous Party. Enjoy a Glass of Prosecco on arrival with canapes, a 5-course dinner followed by Tea and Coffee. Charge your glasses for the Midnight Bells, followed by celebratory fireworks and a late Bar & Disco until 1am.

£79.00 per person

BOXING DAY LUNCH

Enjoy a relaxing day of fine food and leave the cooking to us this Boxing Day. Unwind after the festivities with a delicious 3-course Lunch this 26th December 2019.

£29.50 per person

JASON ISAACS PARTY NIGHTS

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IN CONVERSATION WITH...

RACHEL DIVERS

Founder, Revive Events

Revive Events is a one stop shop for all your hospitality and event needs. Michael Grahamslaw met its founder Rachel Divers to look at the story so far.

Tell us about your background in business?

I suppose I have grown up within the wonderful world of sales. I started as a junior Sales Administrator at the lovely Slaley Hall before moving onto a role at Premier Events who were based in Slaley's grounds. My career really took off when I became Sales Manager at Sedgefield Racecourse and then promoted to Commercial Manager at Newcastle Racecourse which included organising The Northumberland Plate Day and Ladies Day. Latterly I was Head of Commercial at Sunderland Football Club. All of my various roles helped me to grow my network of contacts and develop my sales skills.

How was Revive Events formed?

The fear of redundancy and a desire to work for myself led to me setting up the business last year but I left it dormant until I had the guts to make the leap permanently which was in June this year. I definitely felt it was a now or never decision!

In your own words tell me what the company does?

We offer expertise in the booking and managing of all elements of hospitality and events. We can help you source the right venue and manage the finer details to create your vision.

What is your company's USP?

We are very much a one stop shop and take away all of the hassle and stress of organising events and managing the booking process for you.

What are you currently working on?

A range of projects including the 2nd Bradley Lowery Annual Ball on December 5th which promises to be a fantastic evening.

Tell us about your team?

I am ably assisted by my sister Katie who works as an Events Executive as well as looking after the firms social media channels.

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

Don't burn any bridges, work on your relationships and build your network.

What has been your biggest challenge?

Learning all of the components required to run a business whilst also being a single mum. Its fair to say there is never a dull moment!

Where do you see the business in five years time?

Enjoying organic growth, retaining existing contracts and adding new ones!

Who are your Heroes and Mentors?

I think we have some fantastic local entrepreneurs who are my inspiration including Alice Hall from Pink Boutique, Phil Cronin from Tombola and Alan Findlay from Pin Point Recruitment who have all grown fantastic North East businesses from scratch.

How do you like to unwind?

Socialising, spa days at Ramside Hall and most importantly movie nights and holidays with my son Ben.

For further information visit the website www.revive-events.com



WORLD-BEATING SATURDAY AFTERNOON FARE

By Michael Grahamslaw

The ever-dependable San Lorenzo continues to do brisk business from its site at the heart of Gosforth High Street.

The award-winning North East restaurant chain – which also has a branch in Washington – serves up all-day authentic Italian food in rustic surroundings.

On a biting cold early winter's day, this proved just the job for me and my wife Lisa who were both licking our wounds after England crashed out of the rugby world cup final.

Fortunately, San Lorenzo was the perfect tonic and the smiles soon started returning after being warmly welcomed and tucking into an excellent bottle of chianti.

San Lorenzo captures the zip and zing of Italian cooking. Its main menu champions stonebaked pizzas, Premio pastas and meat and fish dishes alongside a "Presto" lunch/early bird menu which boasts a good-value two courses at £10.95.

Looking over the menu, this irrepressible chilli monster was pleased to find his old favourite, Gamberoni alla diavola, which featured plump king prawns in an incendiary tomato sauce with braised fegula pasta.

Mrs G meanwhile also sought comfort in

her preferred Bruschetta di Funghi – wild mushrooms sautéed with garlic, parsley and butter on a toasted ciabatta.

Sometimes it just pays to have a little of what you fancy and we were certainly in the mood for flavours strong and simple. This isn't to say there isn't more adventurous fare on offer and we earmarked a couple of options for next time – and there will be a next time!

Following up, I fell spectacularly off the diet wagon with the Calzone San Lorenzo – the restaurant's signature folded pizza loaded with a meatball ragu, fresh chilli, peppers and finished with a parmesan crust.

Lisa meanwhile chose the Gambretti pasta premio: a seafood-laden dish which featured tiger prawns, mussels, cherry tomato and garlic whisked up emphatically in a white wine butter sauce. This was mopped up with gusto.

Swerving dessert in favour of coffee and sambucas, we reflected on an Italian meal which had ticked all the boxes for us. Fine wine, slick service and a calzone so good it erased all memories of Faf de Klerk!



www.sanlorenzorestaurant.com/gosforth

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New Year ?*

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NEW LOOK FOR THE BLACK BULL

The Black Bull, Morpeth has recently seen a complete overhaul with its recent refurbishment.

The tired bar in Morpeth has had £440k investment from its owners Blackrose Pubs and it looks amazing! Its VIP open evening was a massive success with around 400 guests over two nights on the 13th and 14th of November. They're now open to the public and getting all set for the festive season. For further information follow them on Facebook, Insta or visit their website on blackrosepubs.com.







COLMANS CONTINUES TO IMPRESS

By Holly Grahamslaw

With my Dad's birthday just around the corner, there seemed no better way to celebrate than a family meal down the coast, and Colmans Seafood Temple proved the perfect place.

Part of the family owned Colmans brand, which has famously served fish & chips to its loyal customers since 1926, Colmans Seafood Temple offers a sophisticated extension to the original business. Situated in a prime location on the South Shields promenade, we thought we would make a day of it with numerous pubs and bars available within walking distance to enjoy before or after your visit.

After an obligatory livener, we soon arrived at Colmans and were instantly impressed by the venue's atmosphere. Whilst the supplementary cocktail & oyster bar oozes sophistication, the restaurant itself offers a light and airy feel promoting feelings of comfort and relaxation. With minimal décor highlighting subtle nautical features, Colmans allows the panoramic views to assume centre stage, with floor to ceiling windows showcasing the delightful North East coast. Complemented by a fish & chip takeaway, the venue really does offer it all.

Colmans adopts an innovative approach to coastal cuisine with a unique plethora of dishes sourced from local fishermen. With much seasonal produce on offer, the restaurant provides everything ranging from classic fish & chips to more adventurous seafood dishes. There's a strong emphasis on charity with great support and care devoted to the sustainability of the seafood industry and the environment.



Immersing ourselves in the beautiful views, we decided to kick off proceedings with a delicious bottle (or two) of dry rosé wine before the arrival of our starters. My Mum first opted for the crispy fish goujons accompanied by a piquant tartare sauce, whilst my Dad enjoyed the delectable crab cakes soaked in a zingy curry mayo. Meanwhile, I savoured the grilled tiger prawns with delicious garlic butter, which mopped up nicely with a slab of

crusty bread. Washed down with yet more rosé, the starters certainly hit the spot and enthused us for the culinary delights that were still in store.

Eager to sample the restaurant's traditional fish & chip offering, I then tasted prime cod coated in Colmans' famous batter, which I greedily drenched in a hearty portion of chip shop curry sauce. My Dad instead polished off the succulent salmon teriyaki, an aromatic dish accompanied by stir-fried Asian vegetables and sticky jasmine rice, whilst my Mum was delighted by the salmon and crab salad. A heavenly fusion of smoked salmon and local crab, the dish was embellished by an exquisite new potato and fennel salad. Both courses offered an explosion of flavours, making it clear that Colmans only provides the freshest and finest ingredients.

Feeling satisfied, we unfortunately had to swerve the restaurant's selection of tantalising desserts and sweet treats in favour of coffees and liqueurs. This, however, proved a fitting end to the delightful afternoon we had spent at Colmans.

Having enjoyed a birthday treat to remember, it's easy to see why Colmans has thrilled customers for generations, and the seafood temple itself is certainly no exception. With inventive cooking and impeccable service throughout, Colmans really does cater for all, whether you're simply enjoying a day at the beach or looking to celebrate a special occasion like us. All in all, a unique venue that we are excited to return to.

Colmans Seafood Temple can be found at South Shields, Sea Road, NE33 2LD. For more information call 0191 511 1349 or visit their website www.colmansseafoodtemple.co.uk

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Andy Sutton

THE LEISURE EXPERTS

Andy Sutton is one of those people who plainly have the knack of making things work. For example, he started off working in bars, clubs and restaurants. Before he knew it, he was given the position of Complex Manager looking after absolutely everything including entertainment and sport facilities...

He then spotted a job with a company that owned and operated holiday and leisure parks. Andy was quickly promoted into an Area Manager role. The company, Pure Leisure Group, also had properties in Marbella and Barbados. He was obviously good at the Area Manager job because within six months he was Operations Director of the company. Within the first year the company saw its profits rise by a staggering 140 per cent. Needless to say that the company owner, John Morphet, one of the highest profile figures in the UK Caravan and Holiday Lodge industry, valued Andy's skills and saw Andy as his right hand man.

"Word had obviously spread that I was good at making leisure ventures work," said Andy. "I've always been a believer that if something is done properly and you take care of the small details as well as the big ones, then you've got a good chance of being a success. Consequently, I was approached by a couple of companies who asked me to look at what they were up to."

Those companies were the Gulliver's Travels Theme Parks and Aria Resorts who have a dozen holiday parks across the UK.

"Both companies wanted me to develop some of their ideas but, to be honest, I couldn't really decide which one to go for so I asked whether I could operate as a consultant and work two days per week for one, and two days for the other. Thankfully, they agreed and that was when I had the idea of setting up Sutton Hospitality Consultancy...and I've never looked back."

Andy still works with those early clients. He's also heavily involved with Hampton Court Castle in Herefordshire and is helping them develop holiday lodges and cottages within the estate.

Sutton Hospitality Consultants work closely with the British Holiday & Home Parks Association (BH & HPA) which represent the interests of the parks industry in the UK. Membership is made up of the owners and managers of park

home estates, touring, tenting and glamping parks, holiday caravan parks, chalet parks and all types of self-catering accommodation.

They also work with the National Caravan Council (NCC) which represents tourer, motorhome and caravan holiday homes and residential park homes.

These various organisations ensure that standards are maintained to the highest possible levels and give anyone who asks Sutton Hospitality to get involved with their ventures 100 per cent reassurance.

Andy's company are experts when it comes to designing and running holiday and theme parks. They are also the go-to firm when it comes to looking after property. For example, they are now looking after all of the land for a UK Government department. This is a huge undertaking for Sutton Hospitality, but proves how highly regarded the company is.

What about the future? Andy started on his own working from home or, more likely, from his car. He now employs a team who are collectively working on numerous projects around the UK and abroad. Four more staff are due to arrive shortly.

"The majority of our business is working within the holiday and theme park sector. We specialise in identifying green field sites on which to develop or improve leisure facilities. We are currently working in Dorset, the Lake District, Wales and Scotland. We've also been approached by a company to run their 42 sites across the UK. In other words, if you already have a site and would like it to be developed or run on your behalf, or perhaps you have some land on which you would like to open a holiday venture, then we can help. It's up to you how much we are involved."

If you want some advice or you want some plans drawn-up, or you currently have a leisure facility but would like it developed or improved, then the best idea is to get in touch with Andy and his team at Sutton Hospitality Consultants.

Sutton Hospitality Consultants...making leisure work for you.

Go onto their website and you can see what sort of projects they've previously been involved with. Give them a call on 0191 5197 477 or pop into their offices at Boldon on the outskirts of Sunderland and Andy will show you what is achievable.



THE INN CROWD

By Holly Grahamslaw

Having spent six weeks in Bordeaux as part of my university degree, I thought I would combine a trip home with a nice spot of pub grub with my family.

Ready to leave the baguettes and pastries behind for a weekend, I was delighted to visit St Mary's Inn, a firm family favourite offering the delicious home comforts I had eagerly been yearning for.

Situated near Morpeth in Northumberland, St Mary's Inn boasts a relaxed restaurant, 11 country-style bedrooms and two private function rooms available for both corporate and leisure events. Offering various dining options including afternoon tea, Sunday lunch and catering for weddings, on this occasion we decided to sample the restaurant's à la carte menu with a spot of late lunch.

Ready to warm the cockles on a crisp autumnal day, we were instantly impressed by the venue's relaxed and cosy atmosphere. Underpinning the restaurant is a farmhouse feel with inviting, leisurely spaces, comfortable seating and rustic fires. With much local produce on offer, the venue provides classic British favourites, as well as a unique tapas menu and numerous vegetarian/vegan options. Served in hearty, plentiful portions, generosity appears at the heart of St Mary's Inn, with the ample food offering complementing the warm and friendly hospitality

that we received throughout.

Feeling famished, we were thrilled by the arrival of our starters. Whilst I enjoyed the delicious cauliflower soup, a warm and delicious dish embellished with a curried onion fritter, my Mum sampled the mouth-watering prawn cocktail accompanied by pickled cucumber and wholemeal bread. Meanwhile, my Dad devoured the tasty crispy squid served with zingy Asian salad and peanut butter dressing, which proved a unique addition to the traditionally British cuisine on offer. The starters were extremely flavoursome and nutritious, providing an example of the high-quality fare that is served at St Mary's Inn.

Next up were the mains and what a treat they were. I tasted the roast chicken supreme accompanied by all the usual fixtures & fittings including steamed mash, king oyster mushrooms and fresh vegetables. Whilst my Mum was also delighted by the salt and vinegar battered haddock and chips, my Dad sampled the piquant Thai green curry. An aromatic fusion of spices served with roasted sweet potato, rice and naan, the dish evidently offered an

explosion of flavours. Sometimes a little bit of what you fancy really hits the spot and this proved to be comfort food at its absolute finest.

Looking to satisfy my sweet tooth, I savoured the heavenly dark chocolate brownie, a luscious dessert complemented by rich white chocolate ice cream. Along with coffees and teas, this proved a fitting end to the thoroughly pleasant afternoon we spent at St Mary's Inn.

Whilst on this occasion we were delighted by the full three-course shebang, the restaurant also offers a plethora of lunch options for the less greedy folk out there. This includes traditional British sandwiches including roast stottie of the day, as well as a unique 'soup and a sandwich' option.

Feeling replete, we left St Mary's Inn having enjoyed a meal to remember. With relaxed and comfortable surroundings, St Mary's Inn offered us exceptional, hearty food coupled with excellent service and friendly hospitality. All in all, a unique family favourite that we can't wait to return to.

St Mary's Inn can be found at St Mary's Lane, St Mary's Park, Morpeth, Northumberland, NE61 6BL. For more information call 01670 293293 or visit their website www.stmarysinn.co.uk.



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THE FRENCH CONNECTION

By Michael Grahamslaw

In tribute to my daughter, Holly, moving to the Bordeaux region for University, this month we thought we'd sample something of the French flavour.

Côte Brasserie Newcastle is one of the city's few French restaurants and has really offered diners something different since opening little over two years ago.

Occupying the former Barclays Bank site in the heart of the city, striped canopies create a distinctly French exterior whilst inside the dining area exudes that trademark brasserie chic.

On a Friday lunchtime in the lead up to Christmas, the place was absolute bustling with the three-course lunchtime offering and extensive wine list clearly proving a hit with punters.

The restaurant's "prestige set menu" showcases a tantalising array of brasserie classics and offers good value with two courses available for £15.95 and three for £18.95.

In addition to this, there's a 35-bottle strong wine list with an impressive 14 of these available by the glass. We picked out a lovely, smooth Bordeaux rouge along with a bowl of spicy olives and pretzel-style garlic bread to pick on.

Following on, I chose the traditional moules simmered in Breton cider with bacon lardons, crème fraîche and tarragon. Meanwhile, my son



Jack – a true trencherman- sought gallic stodge in the bread-crumbed calamari sautéed in garlic, lemon and parsley with tartare sauce.

Main courses also found their mark. Jack chose the pork tenderloin – another prestige menu staple – which was greatly enjoyed, served with gratin potato, braised savoy cabbage, apples, thyme and Calvados jus.

With many big flavours vying for attention, this

was when the wine really came into play and our bottle of rouge set off my rib eye steak frites exquisitely. An extra helping of roasted winter vegetables completed this pretty picture.

This had already been a superb meal yet we rounded off with real aplomb with a pair of table-tappingly good desserts.

"Big kid" Jack chose the Coupe Noire, vanilla ice cream drenched in warm dark chocolate sauce whilst I opted for the Crème Caramel – traditional-set vanilla pod custard with dark caramel and cream.

Inspired by restaurants in Paris, Côte Brasserie champions all-day dining with a sumptuous A la Carte menu also available in addition to a cheaper lunch/early evening menu with two courses from £10.95.

This is also a venue which likes to shake up its offering with ever-changing seasonal specials sure to feature some cockle-warming favourites heading into the Winter months

At Côte Brasserie then, we have something of a rarity. A chain restaurant with that added *je ne sais quoi!*

www.cote.co.uk

MYROOH - A SOLUTION FOR 2020

Is your New Year's resolution the same as last year, and the year before that? We all know that feeling, so why not try something new this year, something you actually can and want to stick to?

2020 is a fresh start, a new year and a brand-new decade, it's time to put those negative thoughts about fitness behind and try something you've never tried before.

At MyRooh, a health, fitness and wellness centre in Blydon, we give you the perfect chance to pick up a new skill that will develop you physically as well as mentally. Offering a range of classes and events, our talented and fully-trained professionals will be hosting unique fitness sessions including; BoxFit, Dance Cardio, Barre, Pilates and even mum and baby classes, to make sure you're fit and healthy this 2020.

And because we believe that physical health and mental health go hand in hand, we will also be offering a selection of classes to help you to become in tune with your mental health, including; aromatherapy, meditation, spiritual classes, rise and shine yoga and much more. So, if 2019 was a taxing year on your anxiety, stress levels and physical health, take some time to dip out of reality and head to MyRooh.

Described as a fitness centre come spa (but much more affordable!), MyRooh will also offer relaxing and rejuvenating facials, massages and healing treatments, so it truly is your one-stop-shop to a new you. Although more common in London, nowhere in the North East region currently offer this all-inclusive offering, making it not only unique, but perfect if you're looking for something different.

We will also have an onsite café selling locally sourced, fresh meals and take-out snacks, from some of the North East's most loved brands, so instead of your usual Friday night pub binge, you can stick to your healthy lifestyle and join us for a pop-up dinner club or healthy eating workshop!



Our flexibility means that anyone can join us, bring your baby, bring your friends, drop in and drop out, however you choose to manage your fitness schedule, we can work with you.

So, no matter who you are; age, gender, size, ability, we challenge you to join us at MyRooh this 2020 and become the best you that you can be. We do not judge; we do not discriminate and we do not make health a chore. Let us encourage you and mentor you on this journey.

For more information about MyRooh please visit our Facebook page at @MyRoohHealth

CHRISTMAS DINING, WITH A DIFFERENCE

It's back and the chefs have been at it again! The talented folk at Peace & Loaf have crafted their top Christmas menu for all you festive feasters.



Back by popular demand is this year's take on the locally famous ham and pease pudding stottie... Dave's carefully created Ham Hock, Peas Pudding, Tarragon and Scotch Egg starter; a top hit year-on-year for the diners at Peace & Loaf.

Instead of tucking into turkey, dine on something a little more indulgent... Goose, Crown Prince, Redcurrant, Sprouts, Stuffing and Parsnip, and no Christmas meal would be complete without a side of pigs in blankets or goose fat roasties.

Christmas Pudding Spring Roll, Mandarin, Brandy as well as Chocolate, Cherry, Pistachio, Pretzel, are all on offer for dessert. Or for those with less of a sweet tooth, there's also port and cheese for a traditional Christmas treat.

With months of planning and preparation ahead of the big day, you're due a gift to yourself and what better way than with a delicious meal with friends and family at one of Newcastle's finest dining hotspots.

For a Christmas meal to remember, it's got to be Peace & Loaf.

To celebrate the festive season in style, book early to avoid disappointment at www.peaceandloaf.co.uk or by calling 0191 281 5 222.



FALCONS AND MELROSE PLAY FOR 'DODDIE'S CLUB TROPHY'

Newcastle Falcons and Melrose will play for the 'Doddie's Club Trophy' on Saturday December 28, raising funds for My Name's Doddie.

The Kingston Park clash is a 3pm kick-off, with two of Doddie Weir's former clubs coming together to raise funds and awareness for Motor Neurone Disease.

The legendary Scotland lock has been diagnosed with the currently-incurable condition and has worked tirelessly alongside his foundation to improve the lives and future prospects of fellow sufferers.

Tickets for the game start from just £10 for adults and £5 for juniors, with the match intended to become an annual tradition.

Corporate hospitality starts from £55 +vat per person, while further funds will be raised through bucket collections, merchandise and a match-day lottery.

Newcastle Falcons director of rugby Dean Richards said: "Doddie is somebody who transcends our sport, and it's an honour for us to be involved in this fixture between two of the clubs which played such a huge part in his life.

"As well as raising valuable funds for My Name's Doddie it should be a great game and a proper rugby occasion for somebody we all hold very dear to our hearts."

Tickets can be bought online at www.newcastlefalcons.co.uk or by calling 0871 226 6060 or visiting the Kingston Park ticket office in person. Season ticket members are advised this game is not included in their 2019-20 package.

Hospitality enquiries and booking requests should be directed to corporatesales@newcastle-falcons.co.uk

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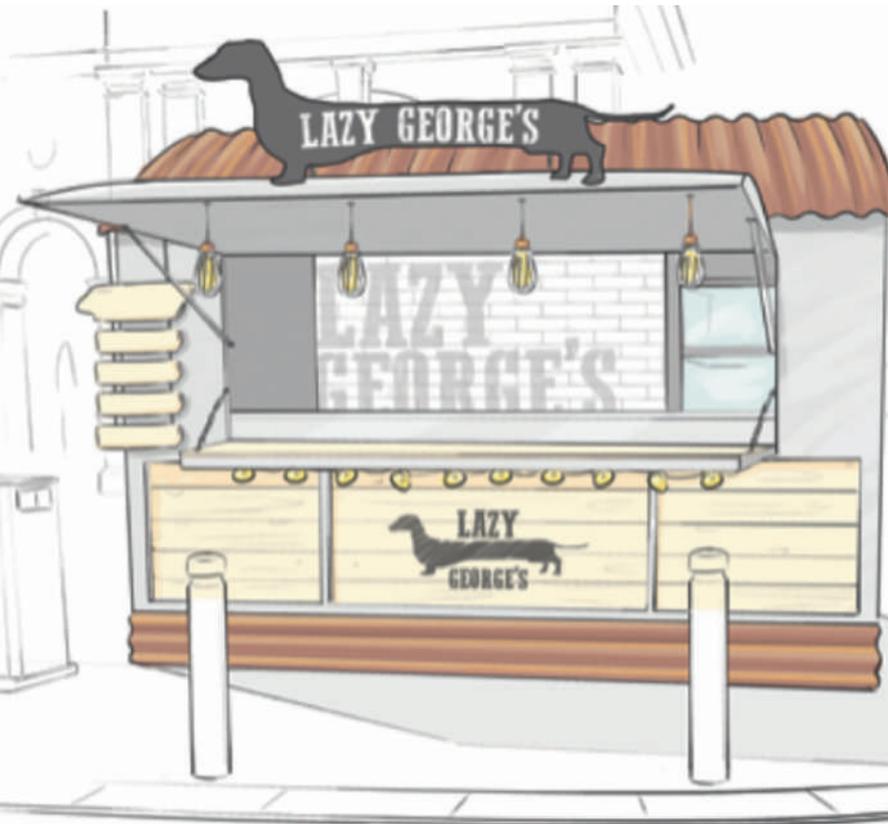
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A TOWERING SUCCESS

By Michael Gramslaw

There's something especially dramatic about the Northumberland coast at this time of year. The landscape adopts a certain wild beauty and there's nothing better than a seaside retreat for blasting away some of the old executive burnout.

On our radar this month was Beadnell Towers, a lovely boutique hotel in the heart of the village which is still glowing from a recent refurbishment.

The hotel now boasts deluxe accommodation in the form of 18 individually-decorated deluxe rooms, each named in reference to local parlance.

My wife Lisa and I pitched up one Sunday evening to review the experience.

Windswept from some particularly inclement weather conditions, the hotel proved a beacon of warmth upon arrival with a bustling Sunday teatime trade still in full swing. A real hub for the community, this was a mix of residents, locals, dog-walkers and Sunday Lunch stragglers and was exactly the type of place you might stumble across an old friend.

Luckily, we did. We happened across my old friend Steve who we shared a drink with (which turned into several) all within the cosy confines of the wood-paneled "Hotspur Bar" area.

Having been swept up in this haven of good cheer, changing for dinner was out of the question so we instead repaired to the hotel's informal yet high quality restaurant, "The Towers", for an early dinner.

The Towers is a stylish space decked out in shades of chocolate and navy and complete with an open-kitchen which creates a real sense of spectacle.

As opposed to a fixed offering, the restaurant's menu changes regularly to reflect the seasons and champions the best produce this wonderful county has to offer.

Unsurprisingly, there's an emphasis on seafood with local provenance central to the restaurant as a whole. As is her wont, Lisa kicked off with the crispy fishcakes paired this time with honey roast salmon, smoked bacon and poached egg.

I chose the Lindisfarne oysters in a rich red wine and shallot dressing which was an exquisite way to begin.

Following up, I chose the Steamed, smokehouse haddock resting on chive mash, and topped with a poached hens egg, smoked bacon, and drizzled with a delicate wholegrain mustard sauce whilst Lisa polished the traditional beer-battered fish with hand cut chips.

During our meal, we met the recently appointed new Group General Manager, Neil Slade, who leads by a shining example. Neil told of us about a working life from outside the area and how The Towers has quickly amassed a strong local following since the refurbishment.

We were doubly impressed upon checking out our guest suite "Muckle House" – Geordie slang for great house. This heritage room was a real showstopping affair featuring a super king-size bed, exposed stonework, high-beamed ceilings and glittering bespoke chandeliers. Two beautiful, free-standing copper bath tubs meanwhile assumed centre stage in an ambient, light-filled bathroom.

After a long soak, we collapsed into bed for a full eight hours sleep which always seems all the more restful on the tranquillity of the coastline.

The following morning, we breakfasted regally on smoked salmon and eggs before heading home with our mojo replenished and ready for whatever the working week could throw at us.

Well positioned on a sweep of Northumberland coastline, Beadnell Towers is well positioned to explore all the area has to offer be it winding beaches, castle walks or market towns.

The new refurbishment has retained the character of this 18th century building yet have also added home comforts and a splash of boutique style.

Beadnell Towers has a new lease of life.

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THE MOST WONDERFUL TIME OF THE YEAR

'Tis the season to be jolly and I love it!

I get all enthused by the love and giving the festive season evokes. As the decorations go up and the carols begin to ring out, proposals hit their peak and Christmas weddings commence. So exciting!

I feel about Christmas the way I feel about Weddings; the romance, the love, the happiness, the excitement, the anticipation, making the most of good times, celebrating the past and the passion about the future. This season simply allows you to just get lost in the very best moments of life. The wedding journey very much feels like the run up to Christmas, lots of fun, much to do, quality time with your loved ones and just like with Christmas, you want it to be absolutely perfect. The big difference? A wedding, it's a once in a lifetime event. Christmas stress multiplied by a gazillion, this is where I come in of course, adding much more magic than Father Christmas!

All I want under the wedding planning tree is a Christmas wedding. December is an amazing month to get married. You have the advantage of harnessing the spirit and frolics of the festivities and can ride on the highs of the party season. There are no rules when it comes to design, at all, ever, so the fun you can have with a Christmas inspired wedding is endless. It can be as tinseltastic as you wish; sleigh bells ringing, fairy lights twinkling, snow glistening, a real wedding winter wonderland. You can chuck everything Christmas, and everything wedding into your experience, and as long as it screams 'you', go be happy, be merry and have the most spectacular day ever.

Fundamentally, as a designer this season is open



Michelle Jones

to so many opportunities, but it also allows you to capture the essence that makes your eyes truly sparkle. Most couples who wish to get married in December will say to me 'we want it to feel like Christmas but not look like Christmas'. It's a great brief to have, providing me with two clear

aspirations for a couple's wedding experience; to be authentic and symbolic. Authentic to the couple's personalities and journey and to be symbolic of the beauty of the spirit of Christmas. It's a treasure of a gift and one I truly embrace.

Of course, it's December, mid-winter which does present a couple of challenges. Christmas activities are booked months in advance therefore you must ensure all your loved ones have the date booked on their calendar early in the year. And the ultimate wedding challenge is the weather, no matter what the season, however, it is winter! We can of course make it snow, if you wish, but real snow blizzards? Managing the unexpected is part of the magic of a planner, even on the snowiest of days I will ensure you have the most enchanting experience, with the help of a few elves of course.

If you are getting married this Christmas, have the most wonderful day of your life.

Wishing you all a very Merry Christmas! Be kind, share love and make the most magical of memories.



Image: Paul Liddement Wedding Stories



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WHETHER YOU'RE A GREEN OR BLACK OLIVE, AGE IS JUST A NUMBER



Olivia Lockey

Entrepreneur Olivia Lockey is owner of Northumberland's luxury wedding venue and glamping site, Northside Farm in Horsley.

Although I am just 30 years old, I have run my own business since I was 22 and have gained a lot of experience having set up the first stages of my business venture whilst still at University and continue to expand and grow it to what it is today.

However, if I am ever asked to advise a founding entrepreneur or asked to do a talk at a business event about my journey, I often feel like I shouldn't do it because many of the guests in those rooms are older than I am and I fear they would think, 'what does she know?' - Classic imposter syndrome purely because of my age rather than my experience.

Even though young business minds have been taking the world by storm for so many years now, especially in today's digital age, it feels a little like there's still a bit of a stigma around being a young entrepreneur, as well as someone taking the leap later in life. But age shouldn't matter.

I heard a nice phrase once about green olives

coming from the same tree as the riper black olives and it hit a chord with me. They both grow on the same tree and exposed to the same things so apart from the age of them, are they really that different?

A very close friend of mine who in her fifty's was recently made redundant, she decided to see it as an opportunity to take the plunge and set up her own bespoke interior design business for the first time, with no prior experience to running a business or what to expect. But that's all part of the exciting entrepreneurial journey isn't it? We all start out that way, from an idea and acting upon it to learning as we go.

I think instead of saying experience comes with age, it might be more accurate to say experience comes with time. I honestly think I still learn something new every day. And if I don't know something, I will seek out the advice of someone with experience in that area. Regardless of their age.

www.northsidefarm.co.uk

HO-HO-HOT

It's nearly here... just a few weeks to go and that's Christmas all wrapped up for another year!

We live in the 21st century, and not everybody follows the same traditions anymore. Times have changed, and so have our palettes, which is why at Zeera we're giving you something to really heat up your December when it's cold and wet outside.

Our talented chefs have crafted a tongue-tlingling menu sure to leave you feeling warm inside; enjoy four delicious courses and a carafe of house wine for just £45pp. Choose from a range of starters including duck mango glaze, Chole Samosa Chat or a more traditional Gol Goppa; a popular Indian street food of crispy wheat shells stuffed with chickpeas and garnished with a sharp sauce.

For your mains, don't just choose one; enjoy three delectable dishes of your choice! With chicken, lamb, vegetarian and fish dishes, there's something to suit everyone. Tuck in to two side dishes and a dessert to round off the night, and you'll be feeling as stuffed as the turkey on Christmas Day.

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www.zeeracuisine.com – Telephone 0191 456 1811

December Opening Hours: Monday to Sunday 5:30pm 'til midnight - Christmas Day 1pm 'til 4:30pm & 5:30pm 'til 11pm - Boxing Day 2pm 'til midnight - New Year's Eve 5:30pm 'til midnight.



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Blagdon Gallery

The advertisement for Maison Berger Paris features a dark blue background with abstract, flowing patterns in shades of teal and gold. In the center, there are two reed diffusers: one in a white cylindrical base and another in a copper-colored base. To their right are two perfume bottles: a clear glass bottle with a white flower-shaped cap and a copper-colored glass bottle with a similar cap. Further right is a dark brown perfume bottle with a silver cap and a small label. The text 'MAISON BERGER PARIS' is prominently displayed at the top, with a circular logo containing '1898' and 'PARIS' below it. At the bottom, the phrase 'PUR ART DE VIVRE' is written in a clean, sans-serif font, and the 'Blagdon Gallery' logo is in a white box on the right.



Chris Land, Centre Manager

2019 SEES THE TRANSFORMATION OF CANCER CARE IN THE NORTH EAST

The past year has seen the transformation of cancer care in the North East, from the arrival of cutting-edge treatments such as proton beam therapy to new public-private partnerships ensuring cancer sufferers have an optimal patient experience without facing any delays.

At the vanguard of this change has been the Rutherford Cancer Centre North East. Launched just over a year ago, the centre has brought significant progress to cancer care in the North East and has cemented the region's reputation as an emerging hub for healthcare innovation and advanced cancer care.

The centre is well known for being the first in the North East to offer high energy proton beam therapy, a type of radiotherapy that delivers heavily charged protons in a more targeted manner to reduce damage to peripheral tissue and organs. Its high precision and ability to stop at a defined point means that it can reduce long-term side effects. Proton beam therapy treatment began in the summer making it only the third centre in the UK to offer the treatment at the time.

In addition to proton beam therapy, the centre also offers conventional treatments, such as chemotherapy, immunotherapy and radiotherapy. In June this year, the centre struck a historic partnership with Northumbria Healthcare NHS Trust which sees chemotherapy patients in the region treated at the Rutherford centre on the NHS. The move adds significant treatment capacity in the region and means patients no longer have to wait to receive necessary treatment.

The centre struck a similar partnership more recently with Nuffield Newcastle and Boston Scientific for the provision of hydrogel spacers that means prostate cancer patients in the region can now have local access to the procedure, which reduces radiation exposure during radiotherapy treatment.

Chris Land, Centre Manager for the Rutherford Cancer Centre North East, said: "We have had a landmark year in the UK in

terms of the progress made in cancer care and we are delighted to have played a key role in that journey for the North East. A huge amount of effort has gone into bringing us to where we are now and it is fantastic to see the widespread recognition we are receiving."

In September, the centre was officially opened by HRH The Duke of Gloucester and HRH Duchess of Northumberland, who toured the facility and hailed the impact of the centre in fighting cancer in the region, before unveiling a ceremonial plaque.

The centre was also awarded the Building Project of the Year at the Constructing Excellence in the North East Awards 2019, along with some of its key contractors.

Chris Land added: "We hope that this is just the beginning. The North East has the highest incidence of cancer in the UK according to government statistics so there is still much more that can be done. We have achieved a significant step in 2019 by bringing advanced cancer treatments in the region and making them accessible to the patients who need them. The ultimate aim is to win the battle against cancer in the region and we hope that by having a state-of-the-art cancer clinic with the latest technologies and treatment options, we can begin to achieve that and transform cancer care in Britain."

The Rutherford Cancer Centre North East is part of a network of centres operated by Rutherford Health Plc. The first Rutherford centre opened in South Wales in early 2018 and was the first to bring proton beam therapy to the UK. There are now three Rutherford centres in total in Wales, Reading and Northumberland with a fourth under construction in Liverpool.

For further information, therutherford.com 0800 210 0402





Brendan Street

NORTH EAST HOSPITAL LAUNCHES EMOTIONAL WELLBEING SERVICE

Nuffield Health Newcastle Hospital in Jesmond has launched Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) support. The hospital is now able to provide patients with access to both emotional and physical treatment under one roof.

CBT is a clinically proven talking therapy, in which individuals process thoughts and behaviour patterns with a therapist. The therapy will be offered on a self-referral basis, which means anyone wishing to use the service won't have to speak to a doctor first and many will be able to start the process within 48 hours of their initial discussion.

Brendan Street, Professional Head of Emotional Wellbeing at Nuffield Health, said: "At Nuffield Health we believe that everyone has mental health needs, in the same way that everyone has physical health needs. Introducing CBT to our Newcastle hospital will hopefully improve access to these services for those who need it."

"Having to obtain a referral from a doctor, and the

growing length of waiting lists, can be off putting to many who are looking for support. However, we are pleased to be able to offer a service where people can self-refer allowing them to get the help they need, when they need it."

Alongside this, Nuffield Health is offering a guided online therapy programme, which gives people the tools to improve their emotional wellbeing through online resources and guidance from an emotional wellbeing professional by phone, email or a combination of both.

Following the principals of CBT, Nuffield Health also provides a self-help online programme, which allows people to follow a structured plan over 8 to 10 weeks. The programme incorporates a wealth of interactive tools and activities to

provide an engaging environment which reinforces learning whilst encouraging reflection and the implementation of new skills. Access to the most appropriate type of emotional wellbeing support is via an initial assessment, conducted over the phone.

Matt Lamb, Hospital Director at Nuffield Health Newcastle, said: "We're very pleased that we can now offer treatment for both body and mind at the Hospital. We are able to see people within 48 hours of initial contact and our emotional wellbeing staff will advise on the best course of action. We hope that by having the emotional wellbeing service running alongside our other treatments we can get people thinking more about their mental health and encourage those to access the support services available to them."

To find out more about the Emotional Wellbeing services at Nuffield Health Newcastle and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy visit:
www.nuffieldhealth.com/treatments/cognitive-behavioural-therapy-cbt



12 WELLNESS TIPS FOR DECEMBER

Claire Hawes, Osteopath, Director Back to Balance

1. Sunlight – we may be leaving and arriving home in the dark, but don't forget to get outside during the day for some much-needed vitamin D and sunlight – helping boost mood and energy.

2. Move – often we may feel like hibernating and keeping work and snuggled up indoors but try a Pilates class or brisk walk to stretch out your muscles and get your blood flowing helping stave off aches and pains.

3. Breathe – meditate. Not sure how? Spend a few minutes each day closing your eyes and following your breath in and out, slowly and peacefully. This allows your brain to have a much-needed break and reduce your stress hormones.

4. Give – at a time of giving, you needn't spend money. Instead smile at someone when you are out and about, it's amazing how contagious it can be and it generates feelings of happiness in all concerned.

5. Gratitude – take a moment and think of all the good that has happened for you this year and be thankful. We can all remember a time when we have felt the warmth of kindness or when something positive has happened for us.

Claire Hawes



6. Eat well – remembering to eat a varied and balanced diet helps us to maintain our digestive systems, weight and energy levels.

7. Sleep well – our sleep can take a tumble in the darker months due to changes in our circadian rhythms and the urges to nap can be stronger. Can you let yourself snooze for that extra 15 minutes in the morning? You may be thankful later in the day.

8. Look after your body – get those aches and pains seen to, it's true that we feel these more in the colder months, due to lower atmospheric pressure and damp air – osteopathy and massage can help you get moving more easily and release some of the associated tension.

9. Look after your immune system – say no if you are feeling under the weather to a social event – especially if you weren't sure anyway, better be warm at home with a hot lemon and honey and early night to restore and revive you.

10. Look after your mind – it seems there are more and more social events to go to in December these days, remember you don't have to go to them all. Give yourself a break if you need to – it's stressful with a full diary!

11. Gift of wellness – who do you know who needs a boost whether mental, physical or emotional? Get them booked in for a relaxing massage or reflexology session to recuperate and restore them – it's good to know that someone cares!

12. Look after you! – whether December is a season of fun, festivities or quiet contemplation, remember to look after yourself and give yourself a good start to the next decade – here's to 2020!

Gift vouchers are available with 10% off and can be posted before 15th December. Osteopathy, reflexology, massage, sports therapy at Back to Balance. www.back-to-balance.co.uk 01914661441

FESTIVE OVER INDULGENCE

The festive season and over indulgence seem to go hand in hand. Maybe it's time to be more aware of what you are eating and drinking and pull back where you can.

Here are some stats to make you think:

Even a small Christmas pudding requires nearly two hours of running to burn off the eye-watering 1,280 calories, while it would take 21 minutes of jogging to shift just one mince pie or five Roses chocolates.

A brisk 35 minute walk would be needed to shed one slice of Christmas cake, or a 12 minute stroll for a single Ferrero Rocher.

The ultimate shocker is a full turkey dinner with all the trimmings contains around 5,200 calories which means it would take a run of over 45 miles to burn it off.

Of course you can be sensible without taking away any of the enjoyment of Christmas, here are a few tips on how to curb your calorie count:

Pick and choose

Choose the days you are potentially going to eat more and pull back on the days between.

A sensible breakfast

Skip the croissants and sugar rich cereals at breakfast, instead look to have a protein based breakfast such as eggs with smoked salmon.

Water

Keep your water levels up this will keep you feeling fuller and help to avoid overeating.

Nibbles

Stay away from nibbles. It's too easy to sit and eat your way through a large amount of nibbles without even registering how much you have eaten. Watching TV is a classic example, before you know it the snack bowl is empty.

Cut down on carbs

Avoid overloading on starchy carbohydrates by replacing eg roast spuds with parsnips or sweet potatoes.



David Fairlamb

Avoid grazing

Once you've selected your food from the buffet, step away. When food is within easy reach you will be prone to grazing and take in calories you didn't need.

Don't skip meals

If you're going to a party straight after work, avoid ditching lunch for fear of overdoing your daily calorie intake. You will end up extremely hungry and eating way more than you would normally.

Clear the table

Dinner with family and friends often means spending longer sitting around the table. The longer you linger the more likely you are to keep eating, even though you have had enough. Clear the table therefore avoiding any further temptations.

Factor in the drinks

Alcohol is packed with empty calories. Research shows alcohol not only increases your appetite

but can weaken your willpower, meaning you are even more likely to overindulge on festive nibbles. Adding ice to alcoholic drinks will dilute them. Choosing lower-alcohol drinks such as spritzers and slimline mixers will also cut the calorie count.

Be mindful

Don't lose touch with your appetite regulators, listen to your body and give them a chance to feel hungry before you eat. Try to eat slowly and savour your food.

Treat sweets as treats

If you have a box of chocolates, avoid eating the whole lot at once. Put a small handful in a bowl and the rest out of sight, making it an occasional treat should mean you will enjoy it more.

Keep Training

The amount of extra calories usually consumed during the festive season means its even more important to keep training and it will also help clear your body of unwanted toxins.

DAVID'S SUMMING UP

If you are trying to be aware of your calorie intake this Christmas, plan the days you can be good and make a huge effort on pulling back on those empty calories where you can.

*"For my part I know nothing with any certainty,
but the sight of the stars makes me dream..."* - Vincent Van Gogh

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COMMENT WITH... Barry Speker

barry.speker@sintons.co.uk



As the annual winter health crisis is upon us again, with the rival political parties vying as to who will give the NHS the biggest number of billions, the shape of services is constantly changing. The traditional call for your GP to make a home visit is already a rare event. But now doctors want it removed. The Kent Local Medical Committee suggests that GPs no longer have the capacity to offer home visits.

They have proposed a motion for debate at the BMA's annual conference that the General Practice Committee England 'remove the anachronism of home visits' from doctors' contracts. They suggest this is a task for paramedics. No more Dr Findlay, Dr Foster or Doc Martin arriving to see patients at home. Anachronism indeed!

"Just get yourself an Uber to the surgery - and don't call 999 unnecessarily!" and "Don't trouble us with your anachronisms" or "Why not speak to your friendly local pharmacist?" or "Just see how you feel in the morning".

Irrespective of your religious persuasion or belief in reincarnation, rebirth, heaven or nirvana we may have a belief in life after death. It may be disappointing that Doris Stokes, who spent her life persuading us of life 'on the other side', has sent not a single message to tell us how things are going in heaven. Eddie Cochran said there are Three Steps to Heaven, whilst many have been singing about Knock Knock Knockin' on Heaven's Door.

Now the magicians of CGI (Computer Generated Imagery) have cast icon actor James Dean, (who died in 1955 aged 24 and was famous for Rebel Without a Cause) as a star in a forthcoming Vietnam war movie called Finding Jack. Of course Dean was not even alive when the war happened. Permission from Dean's estate was obtained.

There is some concern from Hollywood actors seeking starring roles that they even have to compete with the deceased.

This is consistent with the rising trend of using CGI to create hologram shows featuring the likes of the late Whitney Houston who will be touring the UK next year. No risk of her cancelling due to a sore throat. Similar shows will feature Buddy Holly and Roy Orbison. Could it be that a CGI Elvis will feature in a tour of Britain - at last?

If James Dean wins an Oscar they can create a Me Too hologram of him to turn up to accept it.

When asked to see the film 'The Good Liar' I assumed this was a televised debate of political party leaders or a compilation of Brexit canvassing. In fact it is a riveting thriller with comic elements starring Helen Mirren, Ian McKellen and Jim Carter - but far from Catherine the Great, Gandalf and Downton, this features some great twists. Well worth seeing but no spoilers from me.

Our four biggest supermarkets, Tesco, Morrison's, Asda and Sainsbury's have suffered a slump in sales. They attribute this to two four-letter words - Lidl and Aldi. The two German-owned retail chains account for the British shoppers' search for good value leading to Christmas, and will be greeting us all with 'Frohe Weihnachten'.

There was scepticism as to the potential cost of Labour's spending plans - £1.2 Trillion. The fears were palpable and not only because the concept of a trillion is much misunderstood, or rather is beyond comprehension.

Whilst our political pundits have woefully failed to explain anything in the last three years and it is still less predicted what will happen about Brexit, they can not even agree what a trillion is. The eurozone's bailout fund now stands at 1 trillion euros or \$1.4tn.

In old fashioned counting, a million million used to be a billion in the UK, but now, as in the USA, a billion is 'only' a thousand million 1,000,000,000. We now agree that a trillion is a mere thousand billions 1,000,000,000,000. That at least gives Jeff Bezos the chance to be a trillionaire and it seems enables J Corbyn the chance to claim he will spend £1.2tn, and not worry where it comes from.

As to a zillion, quattuorzillion or vigintillion why worry?

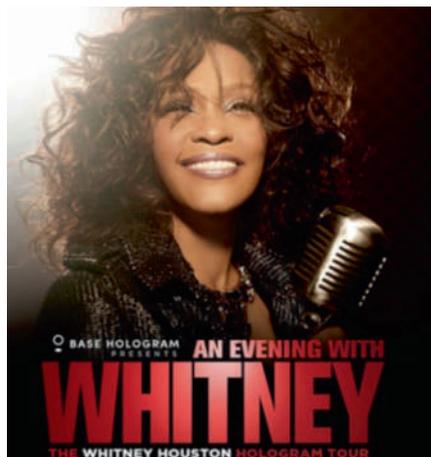
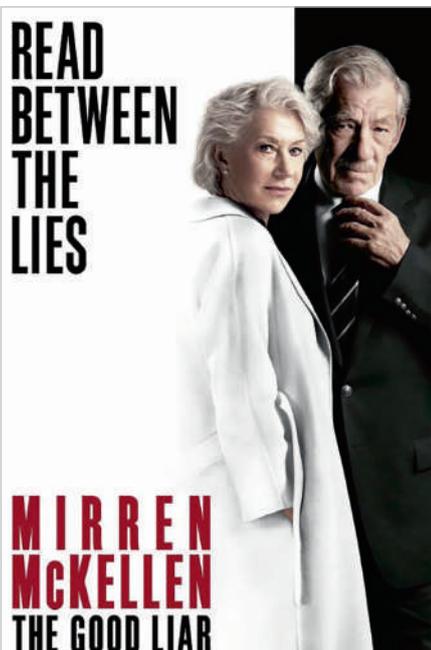
Unless you are perplexed that Astrophysics Professor Greg Laughlin of the University of California has devised a formula to determine how much worlds are worth and states that our own planet has a price tag of \$5,000 trillion or \$5,000,000,000,000,000.

Of course, the value may be decreasing due to global warming and unchecked population growth.

Not something we should be worrying about in the festive season as we carve the turkey, give out the presents and open the next bottle of wine.

Happy Christmas to you all!

“
...two four-letter words - Lidl and Aldi...
 ”



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