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Issue 9

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Impact of GDPR

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ISSUE 9:
MAR / APR 2018

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Printed in the UK by The Magazine Printing Company:
www.magprint.co.uk

They're only four simple letters, but they've got some of the UK's biggest companies running to the hills in a cold sweat.

GDPR – General Data Protection Regulation – comes into force in May as part of a massive shake-up of the way in which we use and process people's private information.

Some of our best known brands are so worried about falling foul of the new rules that they're ditching years-old mailing lists and starting from scratch.

Should your company be worried? There have been plenty of seminars and workshops taking place across Shropshire since the turn of the year to meet the demand from bosses who are eager to find out more, and we bring you a selection of the main points in an in-

depth report – including a basic 12-point checklist.

In the unlikely event that you still need an incentive to investigate the implications of GDPR, just check out the eye-watering fines which are being proposed for non-compliance!

It's not all grim news on the paperwork front, though. One form that's well worth filling in is the application for the 2018 Shropshire Chamber Business Awards.

The annual quest to find the county's best businesses is into its 18th year, and it's going to be another great Oscars-style evening at Telford's International Centre where the winners will be crowned.

We've got everything you need to know about this year's competition, including tips on how to maximise your entry, and the inside story of several new categories.



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on B2B community



We're proud to be sponsoring the awards again this year; it's always one of the highlights of the Shropshire business calendar.

There are certainly no shortage of success stories to choose from across Shropshire right now. Alarm maker Aico, for example, sold 4.5 million of its products across the UK last year, and has its sights on a £150 million turnover. We paid a visit to the company's Oswestry site to find out more.

Meanwhile, motor dealer Furrows has found the perfect time to break

through the £100 million turnover barrier for the first time – in its 100th anniversary year.

It's amazing to look back at the changing face of car and truck sales at this family-run company over the decades – check out some of the vintage pictures. What else? There's top tips on telecoms, IT, pensions and power bills, our usual round-up of appointments, the latest on Telford's golden anniversary celebrations . . . and if you think you've had a bad week in the boardroom, make yourself feel better by

putting your woes into perspective with a look back at the biggest blunders in business history.

And finally, we've introduced a new section called 'Five Minutes With...' posing a series of questions to a well known local business person to find out more about their office and leisure time. The first brave victim to sit in our hotseat is Tim Beech, managing editor of BBC Shropshire.

We're carrying lots more of these on our website, so if you're feeling brave enough to give it a go, simply email editor@shropshirebiz.com, with the words 'Five Minutes With' in the message line, and we'll send you everything you need to get involved.

Carl Jones,
Editor



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The disintegration of Carillion, the UK's second biggest construction company, has hit a number of Shropshire-based tradespeople

Carillion aftershock

The collapse of the building giant has shaken the industry to its foundations, but what does this mean for Shropshire contractors? **Chris Austin** gets feedback from the front line.

The collapse of Carillion has raised dozens of difficult questions.

Answers, though, seem to be far trickier to track down.

How has it come to this? Who should shoulder the blame? What does it mean for workers' pensions? And is it time for a root-and-branch change to the way tenders are handed out by big companies, to small contractors?

The disintegration of the UK's second biggest construction company has hit a number of Shropshire-based tradespeople.

Carillion has a multi-million pound mountain of cash owed to its partners, sub-contractors and suppliers – because the company only self-delivered 10-15% of its services.

And then there's the huge black hole which is going to impact on the pensions of its innocent band of workers.

Analysts say the scale of the debts will undoubtedly bring into question the sustainability of sub-contractors who considered Carillion a key client, yet will now receive just pennies for each pound of monies owed. Paul Barton, from Telford, is among them. He's a one-man band who

works for a small West Midlands contractor which was employed on Carillion's Midland Metropolitan Hospital project in Birmingham.

"To Carillion, this was relatively small fry, but this job was going to be nearly half my annual turnover," he says.

"It's bad enough now having to suddenly go out and try to find alternative work – but because so many other people are all in the same boat, the market is flooded with people with the exact same skills as me, so we are all scratching around for the same jobs at the same time.

"Meanwhile, the fat-cats who caused this mess, and buried their heads in the sand presumably pretending it was all going to go away, are still finding enough money to heat their swimming pools."

The use of cash retentions has been commonplace in the construction industry for years, and Jonathan Hyndman, partner at law firm Rosling King, says: "Some £3 billion of retentions remain outstanding in the UK construction industry at any one time."

Does he think the collapse of Carillion will bring about a change?

"By deducting and retaining a percentage of the value of the works from interim payments due to the contractor during the construction phase, developers

can be seen to enjoy an element of protection against late completion and defects arising during the rectification period," he says.

"Similarly, main contractors will deduct and retain a percentage from each interim payment due to their subcontractors again, to be released when the subcontract works have been completed and when the subcontractor has made good any defects.

"Widespread and persistent failures to release retentions on time or at all, whether as a result of simple breach of contract or the insolvency of the party holding the retention, has encouraged contractors at all levels of the supply chain to price the risk of their retention not being released into the contract sum."

Reform of retentions in construction contracts has long been demanded, and The Construction (Retention Deposit Schemes) Bill received its first reading in the House of Commons in January.

The industry insists that Carillion's collapse means it is imperative that this is fast-tracked into the statute books.

The intention of the bill is to introduce secondary legislation requiring cash retentions to be paid into a Government-approved scheme - and so ring fencing them from the other assets.



Carillion expanded too rapidly and attempts to mask its true performance included the audacious bid for Balfour Beatty four years ago

The idea is that the contractor will still be incentivised to complete on time and remedy defects but in the event of the client's insolvency, the cash retention, held in a Government-approved scheme, would fall outside the insolvency process and would be available for release.

The proposals have met with widespread support from the construction industry which feels reform of retentions is overdue and welcomed. Sadly, though, even if it is now pushed through, it will come too late for Carillion's sub-contractors and suppliers.

"It is not for the first time the spotlight has unwelcomely been shone on the outsourcing sector," says Mark Maunsell, from advisory practice Clearwater International.

“ The consequences are far reaching and unprecedented, and raise a number of pertinent questions ”

"In fact, in the last couple of years it has been difficult to keep leading players out of the headlines as the companies have been tarnished by profit warnings, redundancies, accounting scandals and malpractice.

"Nothing, however, compares to Carillion. The consequences are far reaching and unprecedented, and raise a number of pertinent questions."

For example, he points out that Carillion expanded rapidly through debt-funded acquisitions in new geographies and service lines, helping to mask the true underlying performance of the business.



*Jonathan Hyndman,
partner at law firm
Rosling King*

"Its debt levels rose rapidly, and a bid for rival Balfour Beatty in 2014 was an audacious attempt to further disguise its financial health."

Carillion attributed a slowdown in orders and poor performance to Brexit and the change of government.

Whilst the claim may have been used as somewhat of a scapegoat (Carillion won £2 billion worth of contracts after the vote), data does indicate that skills shortages in the sector have been exacerbated following the referendum.

It also now brings into question the security of the 2,000 apprentices in the process of completing a government funded contract Carillion had been paid £6.5 million to deliver.

The news that Carillion paid £72 million

in dividends to shareholders as recently as last summer, despite ailing performance and a growing pension deficit, brings into question its corporate governance, Mr Maunsell adds.

"There is no doubt that the impact of Carillion's failure is colossal and will take years to unwind.

"The key question though of whether lessons have been learned remains to be seen."

Barclays is one of many organisations to have set up helplines to provide advice to those worst hit by the Carillion collapse.

Andrew Gornall, head of SME banking for Barclays in the county says: "This is a difficult outcome for all those involved, and it is having an impact on many of the connected suppliers and stakeholders. ►



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S O L I C I T O R S



The 8,500 employees who have a pension with the collapsed Carillion face the same difficulties as those from failed high street giant BHS

◀ “Some of the affected businesses are our clients and we want to make sure that we stay close to those impacted and provide them with all the support we can.

“It’s important that we understand the nature and extent of the impact and their plans to manage the situation, along with any support they may ask from us and/or heightened risk across facilities we extend to them.”

Telford & Wrekin Council had no live contracts with Carillion at the time the liquidation was announced, but points out that a recruitment and redundancy group operates in the area, working to support businesses as they recruit, retain or go through job losses.

Councillor Lee Carter, Telford & Wrekin Council’s cabinet member for economic development, says: “We are very aware that this is a difficult time for everyone affected by the liquidation of the second largest construction company in the country.

“We are very mindful that there is a knock-on effect for a range of businesses who had contracts or ventures with Carillion and the support is available to employees of all companies of all sizes.”

And what of the 28,500 employees who have a pension with the collapsed company, including many here in Shropshire?

Robert Palmer, a director at the West Midlands office of Quantum Advisory, says: “This unfortunate story, which is seemingly becoming more frequent, is akin to what happened with BHS but on a much bigger scale.

“BHS’s liabilities when it went into administration were in the region of £500 million.

“Comparably, Carillion operated 13 final salary pension schemes in the UK which accumulated liabilities of around £3.5 billion, with assets of around £2.5 billion.

“All members from the 13 defined benefit schemes will now get Pension Protection Fund compensation, and



Robert Palmer of Quantum Advisory

therefore it will be down to the PPF to plug the shortfall.

“For those above normal retirement age, they will continue to receive their pension in full, but for those yet to retire or those who have retired in good health but are below normal retirement age will receive lower pension benefits than anticipated, with a minimum 10% drop immediately. Most members will also have lower increases in the future.

“There is some good news in this terrible tale, in that the PPF currently has a surplus of around £6 billion so it can easily take on Carillion’s pension liabilities at the current time.

“However, the subsequent impact could be an increase in PPF levies for other defined benefit schemes in the medium to longer term.

“I am surprised more wasn’t done by the government to stop the collapse of Carillion, particularly given their significant involvement with Tata Steel, although that may have been a political move to ensure that steel production remained in the UK.”

The collapse should ‘trigger alarm bells’ for pension savers across the UK, according to the chief executive of one of the world’s largest independent financial advisory organisations.

Nigel Green, the founder of deVere Group, says: “Whilst the PPF is an important and valuable support, UK final-salary pension schemes have an enormous deficit black hole, which raises the inevitable question, ‘how many more big hits can the PPF take?’

“This deeply depressing, and now all-too-frequent, turn of events should be a wake-up call to pension savers.

“The fact of the matter is that, despite rising stock markets and a positive global economic outlook, companies – including some of the biggest brands and household names – are severely struggling to fund their pension funds for a variety of reasons.

“These include, amongst other factors, falling gilt yields, which have driven up transfer values.

“This is good news for those wishing to take money out of the defined benefit scheme, but these larger pay-outs put further pressure on the pension schemes themselves – many of which are already critically underfunded.

“To help avoid unwelcome surprises, I would suggest that pension savers regularly and thoroughly review their pensions to become aware of what could represent a risk to their retirement income.”

So, will lessons be learned as the dust begins to settle on the situation? According to the Federation of Master Builders, they simply must.

Chief executive Brian Berry says: “Carillion’s liquidation raises serious questions for the Government, not least about its over-reliance on major contractors.

“The Government needs to open up public sector construction contracts to small and micro firms by breaking larger contracts down into smaller lots.

“That way, it can spread its risk while also reaping the benefits that come from procuring a greater proportion of its work from a broad range of small companies.

“Construction SMEs train two-thirds of all apprentices and are a sure-fire way of spreading economic growth more evenly throughout the UK.” **3**



Members of the CREST team pictured outside University Centre Shrewsbury

It's funding joy at university centre

The Shropshire business community is set for a near £2 million boost thanks to a successful bid for European Union funding by University Centre Shrewsbury.

A new centre is being created at the institution, in partnership with University Centre Reaseheath, to develop and increase the productivity of environmental science and technology businesses in the area.

The Centre for Research into Environmental Science and Technology (CREST) is bringing together a range of experts to help businesses grow and succeed.

They will work with small and medium sized enterprises in the county, including the Telford and Wrekin area. Support will be provided through research and specialist advice, and helping SMEs to develop innovative ideas and products before bringing them to market. This will include workshops to learn about new technologies and opportunities, and researcher placements.

The centre is creating jobs directly, including the appointment of business development managers and researchers.

The £1.97 million project has been made possible by a European Regional Development Fund grant of almost £1.2

million awarded to UCS, via the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership, as well as a contribution of almost £800,000 from the University of Chester.

CREST will support businesses offering services and products in areas including: groundwater; contaminated land; bio fuels and energy; flooding and hydrology; ecology; bioscience; air quality; noise and dust pollution and sustainable/smart housing for rural communities

Paul Kirkbright, deputy provost at University Centre Shrewsbury, said: "We are thrilled to have secured this funding to contribute to strengthening the county's business economy and creating new jobs.

“ Hundreds of students are using businesses and services, working and joining organisations locally ”

"The series of principles underpinning the development of UCS include acting as a catalyst for economic growth, linking into key industrial, environmental and commercial sectors, and alongside this, attracting and retaining talent in the area.

"UCS is already contributing to the vitality of the area by bringing wide-ranging academic and industry experts together under one roof, creating jobs for teaching and support staff, and our hundreds of

students are using businesses and services, working and joining organisations locally.

"The creation of the University Centre is enabling the area to benefit from the opportunities that a university creates and this centre is a further investment for the future of the Shropshire region."

Jon Britten, CREST project manager, added: "It's important that the region contributes to the Government's Clean Growth Strategy which is about growing our national income while cutting carbon emissions - and this is a key focus of the Centre.

"Many businesses are not in a position where they can afford to explore new ideas to grow, or may not have even considered that they can benefit from activities such as research and specialist guidance on development and innovation.

"But there is real potential for growth and we're excited to work closely with businesses and help them take significant steps to ensure they prosper."

The CREST team is based at the Guildhall in Shrewsbury, the university's learning and research hub.

It was officially launched at an event which featured a keynote speech from Dr David Gregory-Kumar, science, environment and rural affairs Correspondent for the BBC in the West Midlands.

Presentations were also given by leading academic Professor Roy Alexander and chair of the centre's industry advisory panel, Adrian Platt.

Cheers to Gary's career change

Now here's a business venture worth raising a glass to . . . wine enthusiast Gary Carter has embarked on a radical career change by launching the county's first independent wine education company.

Gary, from Shrewsbury, has created Shropshire Wine School, offering a range of tastings and courses for those who are keen to learn more about wine.

Used to travelling round Europe working in a billion-pound multinational business, the new venture has brought Gary back to his home town of Shrewsbury to begin his personal wine business adventure on a very local scale.

Shropshire Wine School is the latest addition to the rapidly expanding www.localwineschool.com family – a UK-wide network of more than 25 independent wine schools established in 2000.

The school is offering tastings at all levels from introductory evenings to eight-week courses, and Saturday wine experiences including Champagne and lunch.

Food and wine matching workshops as well as unique wine tasting experiences for corporate and private clients will also feature at the school, based at Shrewsbury's historic Lion Hotel.

Gary says he will also be bringing professional wine training to Shropshire over



Based in Shrewsbury, Gary Carter of Shropshire Wine School offers courses and tastings

the course of this year as the region's only provider of Wine and Spirit Education Trust (WSET) courses. He was first inspired to learn more about the world of wine by local wine personality Robin Butler, and said: "Opening the wine school will be a fitting tribute to Robin, my close friend and mentor, who sadly passed away recently.

"We aim to help customers navigate the sometimes confusing world of wine and

encourage them to discover new wines. All of our events are designed to be fun and informative with a focus on enjoying wine with like-minded people in a relaxed, informal atmosphere.

"Shrewsbury is a beautiful town with a thriving local food and drink scene and Shropshire Wine School will be seeking to complement and support local businesses wherever possible."

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MBIG help for CMYUK



Caroline Cattle, Marches Building Investment Grant programme manager, pictured with Robin East, director at CMYUK in Shrewsbury

Print industry specialist has been able to expand its showroom and create new jobs thanks to a grant from the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership.

CMYUK, a leading UK independent supplier of equipment to the large format digital printing market, has received over £69,000 as part of the Marches Building Investment Grant.

It is part funded by the European Regional Development Fund and has allowed significant refitting work to take place at the firm's demonstration centre on the Battlefield Enterprise Park in Shrewsbury.

Founded 13 years ago, CMYUK has grown steadily since its launch to become one of the first equipment and material suppliers to the large format digital printing market.

By focusing on the promotion and sale of brand-leading technology, the business has been able to react quickly to changing market needs and, in 2014, due to an increase in business, it launched its Shrewsbury-based demonstration centre.

Director Robin East explained: "Our unique facility in Shrewsbury has proved so popular since we launched it three years ago, that we could quickly see the benefits to be gained by extending it further.

"Our vision was to expand the demonstration space to include the latest digital prepress workflow efficiency technology that is essential for our UK

customers' future investment, and allow them to experience the full workflow from digital origination to finished product. This will now be possible thanks to the MBIG grant that we've received."

The Marches Building Investment Grant totals £2.5 million and is open to businesses across Herefordshire, Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin that need to fund extensions, renovations or reconfigurations of commercial premises.

Robin added: "We found out about the grant from a local contact and then sought further information from the Marches LEP website. I'm so glad we did, as it's meant that we could not only expand sooner than we would have otherwise done, but it's also meant we could expand the size and scope of the project and our demonstration space is now twice the size it was.

Caroline Cattle, MBIG programme manager, said: "CMYUK identified a real gap in the market within which they operate.

"By developing their unique demonstration and training centre, they've not only provided customers with a unique environment in which to see the technology in action, but they've also successfully strengthened and extended those client relationships, creating the conditions necessary for this expansion."

LEP director Gill Hamer added: "CMYUK demonstrated a strong case for carrying out further expansion and refurbishment that would not only benefit their business, but also create jobs and add to the economic vibrancy of the area and supply chain in which they're operating. I look forward to witnessing their continued growth following this expansion."

Five new permanent jobs will be created within the first six months of the newly expanded facility, and additional exclusive distribution deals with suppliers are anticipated

"The support we received from the grant's team made the application process very straightforward. Of course, when you're seeking this level of investment you need to be prepared to put time and effort in to the application, but having already gone through a thorough business planning process, this wasn't overly onerous."

Five new permanent jobs will be created within the first six months of the newly expanded facility, and additional exclusive distribution deals with suppliers are anticipated with the expansion complete.

Open to businesses trading with other businesses, the scheme awards grants of up to 45% of the total project costs to a maximum £100,000 and are intended to cover conversion and alteration costs. They cannot be used towards purchasing property, equipment, or 'excessive' landscaping costs. Nor can they be made retrospectively.

Residential property is exempt from the scheme as are buildings used for agricultural, horticultural, retail or hospitality purposes.

Renewable energy plant has opened

Environmental experts at a Shropshire company have unveiled a brand-new addition to the business following an investment of £4.5 million.

Tudor Griffiths Group, in Wood Lane, Ellesmere, has launched TG Renewable Energy, to complement its existing service, as part of its TG Enviro Division.

To deliver the new service, the company has opened a new 3,000 sq m on-site biomass plant and drying warehouse which houses seven one-megawatt boilers.

Managing director Tudor Griffiths said: "Renewable and sustainable energy is a key objective for the TG Group and we are delighted to see the new plant up and running.

"It will play a key role in the Renewable Energy section of our TG Enviro Division, which also includes skip hire and waste management recycling.

"We are committed to producing the highest quality premium chip and Grade A



The newly opened 3,000 sq m Biomass plant at Tudor Griffiths Group, in Ellesmere

shred for the biomass boiler market and the new plant will help us to offer the very best products to our customers. Thanks to the size of the new facility, we can also offer a drying service at the site for timber, dry feed grains, pulses and contract woodchip drying."

The boilers are fuelled by shredded Grade A timber, which has been recovered

for recycling, and they heat the seven perforated floors to dry the products, to be supplied to the residential and commercial markets.

"We're constantly developing the services we offer to our customers, and the new biomass plant will be a welcome addition to our head office site," said Mr Griffiths.

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Berrys trio Amy Henson, Stuart Thomas and Emily Evans with Sharon Hutchinson



Peter Guy, Mandy Thorn and Chris Greenough

Celebrating the best of the best

Well, here we go again... the starting pistol has been fired on the annual Shropshire Chamber Business Awards, which are this year celebrating their 18th anniversary.

The 2018 event was officially launched at the home of the 2007 company of the year winner, Salop Leisure in Shrewsbury, and managing director Mark Bebb explained some of the rapid growth the company had enjoyed since then.

The awards, rebranded the Shropshire Chamber Business Awards this year, are organised by the county's chamber of commerce – and there are more categories to enter than ever before.

In response to feedback from the business community, the new and small business awards have both been split into two, in recognition of the differing size of workforces.

There is also an Environmental Innovation category for the first time this year, for businesses which have introduced or developed innovative environmental practices, processes or technology either for use within their own business or the wider marketplace.

A new stand-alone Manufacturing Award is also on offer this year, splitting it away from the Transport and Logistics prize.

The John Clayton Award, in honour of the former chamber chief, will again be awarded this year to someone who has given outstanding service to the Shropshire business community.

Shropshire Chamber chief executive



Mark Bebb, Richard Sheehan, Lyndsey Denning, Carl Jones and Sarah Offland at Salop Leisure

Richard Sheehan said: "The awards are open to all businesses in Shropshire – any size, any type of business, start-ups and of course, previous winners.

"You don't need to be a member of the chamber of commerce or any other organisation. There are 16 awards this year, so why not give it a go? Winning can be a real boost for you, your employees and your business.

"Over the last 18 years of business awards ceremonies it has been very clear that this is not just about businesses being recognised as success stories – It's about

business owners recognising the success that their employees bring."

Shropshire Business editor Carl Jones, who has been involved in the organisation of the awards since day one, will once again be master of ceremonies at the glittering prizegiving night, to be held on June 15 at The International Centre in Telford.

At the launch event, he interviewed Lyndsey Denning, HR and training manager at reigning company of the year winners, Telford waste management firm Reconomy, who spoke about how the title had significantly raised the company's profile



Lewis Benson and James Benson of Crown Wealth Management with Chris Golding, Electraphase, Sheridan Grady and Gavin Mills from Clear



Some of the 100 plus guests pictured watching the presentation at the launch of the Shropshire Chamber Business Awards 2018



Salop Leisure's marketing team handed out goodie bags to delegates



Mark Bebb talks to the crowd at the event launch



Awards categories:

- Company Of The Year
- **Business In The Community**
- Best Manufacturer
- **Transport and Logistics**
- International Trade Through Export
- **Best Online Business**
- Outstanding Customer Service
- **Tourism, Leisure And Hospitality**
- Technology, Enterprise And Innovation
- **Apprenticeships**
- Best New Business (1-5 employees)
- **Best New Business (6+ employees)**
- Best Small Business (1-5 employees)
- **Best Small Business (6-20 employees)**
- Environmental Innovation
- **The John Clayton Award**

locally, and been a huge boost to staff morale.

Sarah Offland from Barclays also took to the stage to explain why her company has been a committed sponsor of the awards for the past five years.

Carl said: "I know I speak on behalf of the Chamber when I say that one of the big frustrations is that many companies who enter the awards don't pay enough attention to the criteria.

"We often get applications from companies we all know are leaders in their field, but because they haven't answered

the specific questions requested in their category, they miss out on being shortlisted.

"I urge you to be specific when filling out your answers."

Entries are now open online, through www.shropshirebusinessawards.co.uk, and are free.

The closing date is April 20, and shortlisted finalists will be announced in early May.

Each shortlisted business will then receive a visit from a panel of judges, before the winners are announced at the Oscars-style ceremony on June 15.

There are still some sponsorship opportunities available, including award categories and other aspects of the prizegiving evening.

For full details, see the previously mentioned awards website.

Some of the big-name companies already on board with the awards this year include Nick Jones Wealth Planning, University Centre Shrewsbury, Global Freight, Barclays, Telford College, In-Comm Training And Support Services, The University of Wolverhampton . . . and Shropshire Business.



"If we are to make this country a success post Brexit, we need more makers, more value jobs," says Chris Greenough of Salop Design & Engineering

Year of engineering

This year has been billed as the year of engineering, but what does this mean?

To many people engineering and manufacturing are sectors that serve a purpose; someone must make things, but I believe that not everyone truly understands the importance of the sector for the UK economy or the wider importance in this Brexit time.

Without continued investment in manufacturing and engineering, we are at risk of being held to ransom by foreign companies who know the products we need to buy, and without a UK supply route this competition can name their price or reduce supply to push up the demand price.

With our current relationship with Europe, we need to enable UK manufacturers to make more home-grown product, we need a steel sector and supply chain that supports UK manufacturing, this includes skills and we need to enthruse engineers to stay in this country.

Engineering began in our region, with the first industrial revolution starting in Telford, and our county at that time being the world leader in invention and productivity. With the latest industrial revolution upon us, Industry 4.0 gives us the chance to once again lead the world markets and grow our economy. Industry 4.0 is all about connectivity, disruptive markets and information gathering to enable design and manufacturing to connect and aid productivity.

Engineers are sometimes compared



with scientists, but as Theodore von Karman said: "Scientists study the world as it is, engineers create the world that has never been."

Engineers are the dreamers and creators of thoughts, designers of product, taking the spark and making the goods. Without these requisite skills within our next generation we cannot achieve potential growth or success.

“ We are looking for the next engineers to make grand steps in innovative design, that will create product that sell and make money for our region and country. Engineering is a fantastic career and through value jobs, we can raise GVA and create wealth. ”

So, with this year of promotion of the engineer, how can we engage and enthruse the next generation...?

How can we inspire and invite more dreamers and creators into the sector...?

Where are the role models that can help be both looked up to, and looked upon as a route to success...?

We need more promotion of the sometimes eccentric, excelling thinkers. I see characters such as James Dyson and

Richard Noble as the ones who encompass these facets. They look to succeed where all around them fail. They dream big and think outside the box, indeed sometimes creating a new box to think outside of.

We are looking for the next engineers to make grand steps in innovative design, that will create product that sell and make money for our region and country. Engineering is a fantastic career and through value jobs, we can raise GVA and create wealth. We need to talk engineering in schools and promote STEM subjects, there are many students who will only truly achieve their potential through the vocational training route.

Some engineers are hands on, some work best through CAD and data manipulation, but all engineers think in a way that makes them question the norm.

If we are to make this country a success post Brexit, we need more makers, more value jobs. We need to make sure the year of engineering shows the careers and opportunities that exist.

We need to inspire engineers for a changing world.

● *Chris Greenough is director of Salop Design & Engineering in Shrewsbury and president of Made In The Midlands*



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Flaxmill Maltings is one of the investment opportunities available in Shropshire



Graham Wynn, OBE

So many investment opportunities on offer

Key investment sites planned for development to create homes and jobs across the Marches have been showcased at the biggest global property and real estate show in Europe.

The Marches Local Enterprise Partnership was part of the Midlands UK delegation at MIPIM in Cannes, where opportunities for investors in Herefordshire, Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin were highlighted.

Selling the region as “one of the best places in the UK to invest, live work and play”, the Marches LEP has worked with partners at the three local authorities to develop an exciting proposition for investors.

Development opportunities in the spotlight included the Flaxmill Maltings in Shrewsbury, Clive Barracks near Market Drayton, and the former Ironbridge Power Station site.

LEP chairman Graham Wynn OBE joined Midlands Engine chairman Sir John Peace, other LEP and local authority leaders in Cannes during MIPIM.

Mr Wynn said: “The Marches is one of the best places in the UK to invest, live, work and play. Our region is home to global players and established supply chains, demonstrated by the biggest single foreign investment in the UK in a decade in Magna Cosma in Telford.

“We have fantastic investment



Magna Cosma – biggest single foreign direct investment in the UK in a decade

opportunities in our region, one of the most attractive locations in the UK to live and work. Global players including BAE Systems, Caterpillar, and Heineken have already chosen to base their operations here, where we offer a first-class business landscape and an outstanding quality of life.

“MIPIM gives us the chance to showcase what Herefordshire, Shropshire and Telford has to offer investors looking to locate in one of the fastest growing areas of the Midlands.”

A promotional film showcasing the development opportunities and the outstanding natural environment has been

developed for MIPIM as well as promotional brochures detailing investment sites.

Shropshire is promoting its vision to creatively reuse its heritage buildings and estates for modern uses, making the county a unique and inspiring place in which to invest.

As part of this, it has chosen to highlight the Flaxmill Maltings – the world first iron-framed building – which will be available to the market by 2021, providing four floors and 25,000 sq ft of luxury office space.

It has also been showcasing development opportunities in Oswestry and Whitchurch.

Big plans for haulage firm

Expanding haulage company A J Maiden and Son has bought a 3.2 acre development site next to its Telford premises.

The company, part of Kinaxia Logistics, has taken on the plot at East Donnington Wood Business Park, where construction work on an expansion is due to begin this summer.

Meanwhile, the company has moved its existing yard into the site, to create additional HGV parking and circulation space.

It is great that the land deal has meant that a local company like Maiden's of Telford will be able to expand

The deal has been secured as part of the Telford Land Deal, an agreement between Telford & Wrekin Council, the Homes and Communities Agency and the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership.

It is part of the Marches Growth Deal, secured by the Marches LEP, which brings long-redundant plots of land designated for industrial use to market.

Receipts from the sale of this HCA land



Growing business – A J Maiden and Son is expanding its current site in Telford

will be reinvested locally, and a percentage of those will go to the Marches Investment Fund to support growth projects across the region.

John Maiden, managing director of A J Maiden and Son, said: "We are delighted that the availability of this land means that we will be able to expand our operation, and the fact that it is directly adjacent to our existing site gives us lots of flexibility for the future."

Councillor Lee Carter, Telford & Wrekin Council's cabinet member for economic development, said: "It is great that the land deal has meant that a local company like Maiden's of Telford will be able to expand.

"This is just another fantastic example of how we are successfully encouraging existing businesses to expand and other businesses to commit to new investment in the borough."

Gill Hamer, director of the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership, said: "Maidens is a well-known and well-established local business so it is great to see its continued expansion in the town. This will both safeguard and create jobs.

"Of course the fact that this expansion has been made possible by the land deal means that there will be a halo effect of benefit to the wider region given that the HCA receipts will be re-invested locally."



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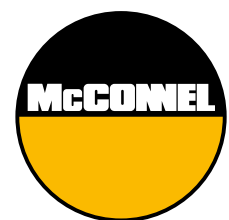
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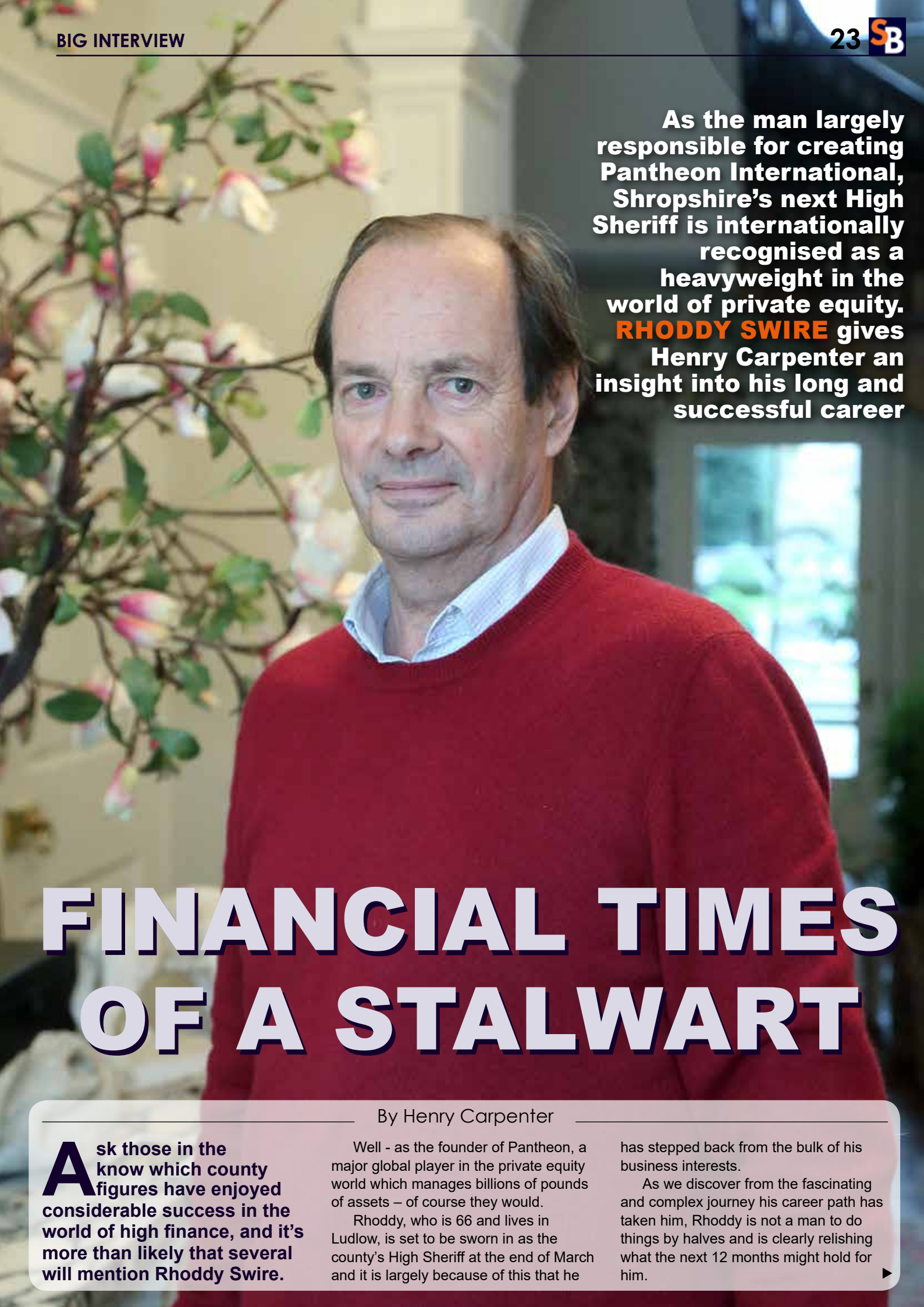


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QUALITY, INNOVATION **AND PERFORMANCE**



As the man largely responsible for creating Pantheon International, Shropshire's next High Sheriff is internationally recognised as a heavyweight in the world of private equity. **RHODDY SWIRE** gives Henry Carpenter an insight into his long and successful career

FINANCIAL TIMES OF A STALWART

By Henry Carpenter

Ask those in the know which county figures have enjoyed considerable success in the world of high finance, and it's more than likely that several will mention Rhoddy Swire.

Well - as the founder of Pantheon, a major global player in the private equity world which manages billions of pounds of assets - of course they would.

Rhoddy, who is 66 and lives in Ludlow, is set to be sworn in as the county's High Sheriff at the end of March and it is largely because of this that he

has stepped back from the bulk of his business interests.

As we discover from the fascinating and complex journey his career path has taken him, Rhoddy is not a man to do things by halves and is clearly relishing what the next 12 months might hold for him. ▶

Rhoddy first worked in Hong Kong as an accountant in the 1970s. Pantheon International opened an office there in 1992



◀ You wouldn't necessarily have heard of Pantheon, or indeed Rhoddy individually as a businessman, because they operated from headquarters in London and offices in several continents. You might just have heard of John Swire & Sons though, the huge conglomerate which owns and operates businesses from a variety of sectors all over the world, particularly in the Far East, perhaps the most well known of which is the airline Cathay Pacific.

Rhoddy is part of this dynasty, even if in a small way, and as such you might say he had a head start. While it is partly true, as Rhoddy did indeed spend time in Hong Kong and Australia working for the family business, in many ways his connections made him all the more determined to forge his own professional path.

“After nine months with Peat Marwick I was asked to join the family firm as group accountant for the private side in Hong Kong”

Rhoddy is a true man of Shropshire. His great-grandparents lived at Longden, near Shrewsbury, and a year after he was born in 1951 his parents moved back to Shropshire from their home in London.

“The family business was facing challenges in China at the time, largely because of the rise of communism, so they bought secure assets, one of which was the Badger estate near Bridgnorth,” he explains. “My father, who was a land agent for Savills, was asked to manage it.



Rhoddy Swire in 2004. Pantheon International had become a major global player in private equity

“We were actually living near Ford and I was sent to pre-prep school called Stepping Stones in Shrewsbury, which is now the girls' high school, before going to Abberley prep school and then Eton.

“I went to Birmingham University to read mechanical engineering, economics and French. The one thing I learned was how to pass exams – engineers believed in setting exams.”

Just in case you were wondering whether Rhoddy harboured any ambitions while he was at university, he admits to having a dream of “creating a holding company with 10 subsidiaries each turning over £10 million and making one million in profit”.

It quickly became apparent that he was going to need more than an engineering degree to meet these lofty targets. So, on the advice of a family friend Michael Stoddart – the merchant banker and investor who has since become a good friend in his own right – he became an accountant.

“I joined Peat Marwick Mitchell rather late in their recruitment cycle where my toils at Birmingham University worked their magic – I was able to pass the endless series of accountancy exams. I had always wanted to work in Hong Kong, and I headed out there with Peat Marwick after qualifying.

“There was though a slight technical hitch. In the January of 1976 I was giving a young lady called Georgina Thompson a lift to a ball in Shropshire. By June in the following year we were married.

“We lived in Hong Kong and after nine months with Peat Marwick I was asked to join the family firm as group accountant for the private side in Hong Kong.”

Before long Rhoddy was invited to become the aide to the group's chairman in Australia, which he accepted, and found himself looking after the company's refrigerated storage and transport fleet, the largest in the country.

There was a niggling feeling though that he was still an employee of his family and that, combined with his own family's desire to be back in England, led them to return after five years away.



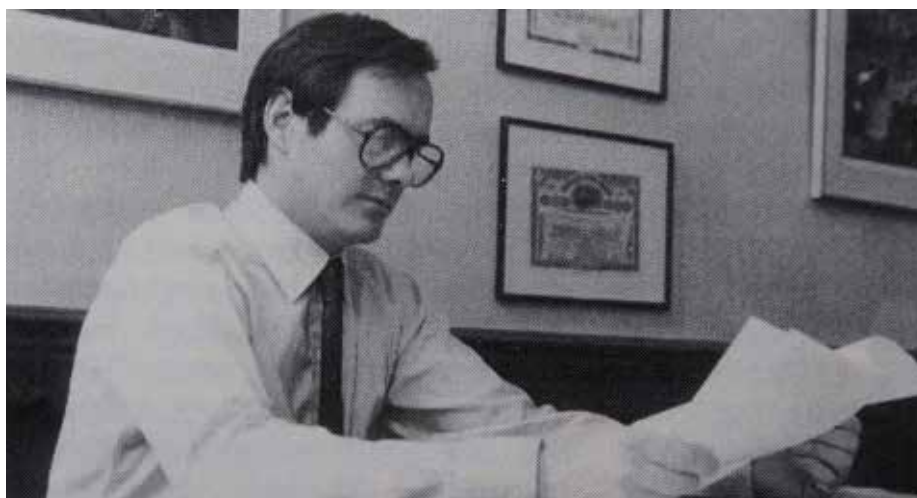
Rhoddy relaxing at home in Ludlow

He joined the “highly entrepreneurial” fund managers, GT Management. He was put in charge of unquoted investments “which comprised 74 different investments ranging from timeshare, oil and gas, a travel business, all sorts of things”, according to Rhoddy.

“All this was happening in the early 80s, a boom time in early-stage technology investments, particularly in Silicon Valley.

“The team, which I was responsible for building up, secured our first outside client in 1983 which was the IBM pension fund – and that gave us a pot of money to invest from scratch.

“It was my task was to put a structure and strategy around it, as well as making the investments. We developed a strategy not to invest in underlying companies but in private equity funds, specifically a fund-of-funds.”



Rhoddy at work with GT Management in 1982

“We raised £12 million which was enough to buy these investments and this became, ultimately, Pantheon International”

In 1987, by which time Rhoddy was on the main board, GT’s success attracted the attention of a third party.

Two investment trusts, which were managed by GT, owned a chunk of the business which the raider considered undervalued. In the ensuing attack GT decided to unite the trust.

Rhoddy explains: “We came up with the idea of creating a separate investment trust

which could acquire the unquoted assets owned by the two trusts.

“We raised £12 million which was enough to buy these investments and this became, ultimately, Pantheon International, which has grown to £1.3 billion net assets - a compound growth rate of 11% for 30 years by investing purely in private equity funds globally.

“The management team was able to buy this business in 1988 from GT and changed our name to Pantheon with £200 million under management. Pantheon now invests in various types of illiquid assets and the group has currently got some US\$36 billion under management, and as such is one of the pre-eminent private equity fund-of-funds in the world. It now has offices in London, Hong Kong, New York, San Francisco, Seoul and Bogota.

“I’ve stepped back from Pantheon but I’m still involved with various businesses.” Several in fact.

Today Rhoddy is chairman of a company which makes multi-channel headphones, he has various interests including a maggot farm in south Africa and sits on the board of Lewmar which makes equipment for boats.

He advises a wealth manager on private equity and is also chair of Hereford Cathedral’s Perpetual Trust.

The gap left by his day-to-day involvement with Pantheon will largely be filled with his duties as High Sheriff, and he seems intent on tackling the post with the same energy and vigour as he has the last 50 years of a varied and highly successful career.

It could be quite a year. **SB**

Supporting charity with technology

Communications specialists Pure Telecom has won the contract to provide mobile phones to one of the country's largest refuges for women and children.

Pure, which has its head office on Shrewsbury Business Park, has been awarded the contract by The Haven in Wolverhampton.

"We are pleased to have won this contract to support the charity in the essential work it does and ensure they have reliable connectivity working in such a critical and sensitive environment," said account manager Chris Smith.

The Haven employs 46 staff and supports women and dependent children who are vulnerable to domestic violence, homelessness and abuse. The new O2 mobile phone connections were required for on-call staff running the charity's 24-hour domestic abuse helpline.

"It was a pleasure to work with this very worthwhile organisation and we liaised closely with managers to ensure everything ran efficiently from day one of the contract," Chris added.

Jade Secker, senior community fundraiser at The Haven, said: "Pure Telecom came highly recommended to us and we have been delighted with the service provided. We are looking forward to working with the company further during 2018."



Jade Secker, senior community fundraiser at The Haven and Chris Smith from Pure

Be part of the celebrations

Businesses are being urged to help make 2018 a memorable year by getting involved in the Telford 50 celebrations.

The town is marking its golden anniversary this year with a celebration of creativity, innovation and ambition.

As part of Telford 50, the council is calling for borough businesses to play an active part, by showcasing their brand, the work they do and their commitment to creating a better borough.

Telford Business Board has launched 'Be Part of Telford 50', a guide listing opportunities for companies to get involved in the year's headline events. Full details can be found at www.telford.gov.uk/telford50

“The council is recruiting ‘Golden Event Makers’ for headline and community events”

Paul Hinkins, chair of Telford Business Board and managing director of Business Watch Guarding Limited, said: "Telford Business Board is really excited to be part of Telford's 50th anniversary.

"This is an excellent opportunity to celebrate the investment, skills and educational opportunities businesses are bringing to Telford and their major role in developing our town."

Balloon and Kite Fiesta, Carnival of Giants, Big Top and the Pride of Telford Awards are some of the events businesses



At the launch of 'Be Part of Telford 50': Richard Partington of Telford & Wrekin Council, Graham Guest, principal and chief executive of Telford College, Paul Hinkins, and Councillor Lee Carter.

could choose to partner. The council is also looking at other ways to work with local businesses to make the 50th year extra special.

This could be through goods and services, use of advertising space and collaborative projects to benefit people in the borough.

And the council is also recruiting 'Golden Event Makers' for headline and

community events – another way for businesses to support the anniversary year and demonstrate their pride in their community.

Councillor Lee Carter, cabinet member for economic development, said: "Local businesses and their employees are an integral part of our future, and we would like to involve them as much as possible in the celebrations."

All a flutter over our iconic flag

Do you proudly display the Union Jack on your products to maximise the global appeal of the 'Made in Britain' brand?

As we prepare to negotiate fresh trade deals abroad, new research shows that two fifths of international consumers would be more inclined to buy a product if it displayed our red, white and blue flag.

This was especially true for customers in Asia and the Middle East, who have stronger associations of quality with Brand Britain, according to the investigation by Barclays Corporate Banking.

Younger people are particularly swayed by the Union Jack – nearly half said this would encourage them to make a purchase, compared to a quarter of over 55s.

Food tops the list, with international consumers willing to pay 22% more for food labelled as British-made.

The fashion and automotive industries are also set to reap the rewards, with cars, clothes and alcohol among items that international consumers most consider worth paying a price premium for, if they are labelled as being British made.

John Pitchford, head of corporate banking for Barclays in Shropshire, said: "Brand Britain continues to have widespread appeal abroad, demonstrating the continued scope for UK businesses to trade successfully overseas.

"The picture continues to look positive for Britain's exporters, with international consumers going out of their way to buy British.

"Our research shows that some of the biggest opportunities lie in emerging markets, where British craftsmanship is most valued.

"The prize is substantial, and exporters should be looking to highlight the provenance of British products to take best advantage."

The report says it is reassuring that international consumers view British goods so favourably, with British cars and clothes hailed as the pinnacle of quality merchandise.



The use of the Union Jack in branding and products is seen as a plus

As export trade to non-EU countries increased 1.5% in the three months to December, the research found that the biggest opportunities for British businesses to grow exports in emerging, high-growth markets.

While the EU and the US remain the biggest trading partners for the UK, there are significant opportunities for British businesses to grow exports to less traditional markets.

Consumers in emerging markets, like China and India perceive British products to be more reliable and of a higher quality.

The research found that perceptions have a direct impact on the amount consumers are prepared to pay, which makes emerging markets a prime target for exporters.

Recognised as a future leader



Award-winner Steve Plant, head of operations at Grocontinental of Whitchurch

Grocontinental's head of operations, Steve Plant, has won a prestigious national award from the Food Storage & Distribution Federation.

The 33-year-old was unveiled as Future Leader Award winner after presenting his credentials and views on the future of the temperature-controlled storage and distribution industry.

As part of his award, Steve will join federation chief executive Chris Sturman to the International Association of Refrigerated Warehouses/World Food Logistics Organisation convention in Florida at the end of April.

Grocontinental's managing director Linda Grocott said: "We are all thrilled that Steve has won this national award. Not only is this great for Steve's profile in the industry, but we also hope his success will inspire the large number of young people he works with."

Steve oversees the Whitchurch company's warehousing, planning and distribution functions which includes 62 vehicles and 120 trailers, and a warehousing capacity of 197,000 pallets. He leads a team of over 250 people.



More than 300 job-seekers attended the event in Haybridge Road



Job-seekers try their hand on the Hawk Group's driving simulator

Time to build on success of event

A recruitment event to help tackle skills shortages in the Shropshire construction industry has been declared a huge success.

Hundreds of job-seekers attended the 'Careers In Construction' session at Telford College's construction centre, where some of the county's biggest construction businesses were exhibiting.

The event was run by the college in partnership with Telford & Wrekin Council, Jobcentre Plus, the Department for Work & Pensions, and the Construction Industry Training Board.

Exhibitors included two former Shropshire company of the year winners – McPhillips (Wellington) Limited and The Hawk Group. McPhillips brought one of its large diggers, while Hawk Group set up a simulator, putting job hunters in a 'virtual' driving seat.

Other exhibitors included Keepmoat Homes, Lovell Partnerships, Wrekin Housing Trust, Women Into Construction, Total People, NCS/Job Box, APT Group, Telford & Wrekin Council, the University of Wolverhampton, and Pave Aways Limited.

Carol Smith, director of employer engagement at Telford College said: "We were really pleased with the level of support – more than 300 people came through the doors.

"The exhibitors and partners all felt it was a very worthwhile day, and commented on the atmosphere and enthusiasm of the attendees. Our students and apprentices also enjoyed showing off their talents to employers and visitors."

Several employers left the event with names of people interested in job vacancies, and 16 signed up to Telford College's 'introduction to construction skills' programme.



Carol Smith and Trevor Oakley at the Careers in Construction event



Paving demonstrations taking place at Telford College's construction centre

Carol added: "We feel this event has certainly created a blueprint for the future, and we are already putting plans in place to repeat it around the same time next year."

Trevor Oakley, CITB adviser for the Marches, said: "We're delighted to be working closely with Telford College on this initiative, which we hope will be the first of many."

"In the West Midlands, construction

output is forecast to grow at an annual average rate of 1.8% between 2018 and 2022, and with an ageing workforce, we have thousands of positions that need to be filled."

According to the CITB, the greatest current shortages are for wood trades and interior fit-out staff, as well as labourers, electricians, bricklayers, painters and decorators, and installers.

An ace new centre for racket sport fans

A new tennis facility has been served an award for innovation - and will be replicated across the UK.

The Tennis Centre at Ellesmere College, which houses four full-size acrylic performance courts and changing rooms, won builders Rocklyn an Award for Excellence from the Sport and Play Construction Association.

Gareth Howe, sales manager at Rocklyn, said:

"The Ellesmere College project is the largest of its kind we've completed in England.

"One of the challenges we had was that the local planning officers wanted to change the plans by initially insisting on an opaque roof.

"We immediately arranged a meeting, explaining how a translucent roof ensures the centre benefits from natural light and has a positive effect on the playing environment and sustainability of the facility."



Blane Dodds of Tennis Scotland, Year 5 pupils Adam Jacques and Thomas Jacques, and Stephen Welti

The project also included the design and installation of an LED lighting system in compliance with Lawn Tennis Association specifications and the possibility to open the side and gable walls to a height of 3.8 metres, allowing air to flow through the building.

The centre took around nine months to complete. Stephen Welti, director of tennis at the college, said: "We are already working with the LTA to fit regular weekend tournaments into the calendar."

Burger brand is on its way back to the county town



Wimpy is returning to Shrewsbury

Fast food chain Wimpy is to return to Shrewsbury town centre.

The hamburger chain moved out of the town more than a decade ago but will shortly open a new restaurant at 9 Claremont Street, the former home of Johnsons The Cleaners.

The two-storey property is close to the Market Hall and main retail area of Pride Hill.

Toby Shaw, who handled the letting for Towler Shaw Roberts, said: "Fit-out works are due to commence very shortly to create the iconic Wimpy facility and brand."



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The family – Nic, Jane and Rachael

Furrows Ford



In the latest chapter of our Big Interview series, we profile a family-owned company which has marked its 100th year by smashing through the £100 million turnover barrier

CENTURY IN THE MAKING

By Chris Austin

Many companies can operate from anywhere – and many do with no hint of where they come from, or where they belong.

But for motor dealers Furrows, there is only one place to call home.

The family-owned firm is celebrating its centenary this year, and its very DNA is intrinsically linked to the county it has served since its launch and for so many decades.

Longevity

This success is no mean feat given the way the industry has changed so

dramatically since the year the First World War ended.

That longevity is credited by the current family owners to the dedication and commitment of the few families who have owned and run the business, but most importantly, to the many thousands who the company proudly call the 'Furrows Family'. ▶



The original site at Coton Hill, Shrewsbury. The business was not named after its owner, but because it originally sold tractors.

◀ In fact, Furrows has never actually been owned by anyone of that name – it started life in 1918 when Cyril Harrison-Watson, a young Londoner who had been posted to Shropshire during the First World War, decided to take on one of the early Ford franchises, and base it at the Shrewsbury Garage in Coton Hill.

He called it Furrows Limited – why? Quite simply, because he was selling tractors.

The current owners are the Coward family – Nic as chairman since the death of his father John Coward in 2016, together with his sister Rachael Downey, and their mother, Jane Coward.

Jane explains how the Coward family's connections to the business began: "My father – Reg Yaxley – was a partner in the firm Yaxley Davies, predecessor to the present day Dyke Yaxley, with Frank Davies, at their offices in Claremont Bank in Shrewsbury in the 1960s.



Former chairman John Coward



An early example of a Furrows branded vehicle that would have been seen on Shropshire roads last century



The Shrewsbury site was prone to flooding

“ **The company seemed a natural fit with our love of Shrewsbury** ”

“One of their larger clients was Furrows, and I remember when the owner John Whalley died, his son John took over, with Freddie Fry as the managing director.

“But son John died very soon afterwards, in tragic circumstances, and the business was in trouble. So Freddie, my father and Frank joined forces to take it on.”

Jane's husband John joined in 1969, having worked for Rolls Royce Shrewsbury as an apprentice and later as foreman and training manager. He was also works manager at FW McConnel in Ludlow.

“There were difficult times in the business in the 1970s, even though Ford was by far and away the biggest car brand in Britain with over 30% market share,” Jane recalls.

“In those simpler times, the company seemed a natural fit with our love of Shrewsbury, and being involved in lots of

local organisations and John's love of sport. So John took the helm as joint managing director in the 1980s alongside John Bennett, and together with the rest of the team built the business.

“John B celebrated his 90th birthday a few months ago and some of our current staff who worked with him all those years ago took him out for a meal – one small way which shows how much the Furrows Family relationships mean.”

Under John Coward's leadership as chairman from the 1990s, Furrows grew into a major business and employer in the

Shropshire area, winning many prestigious national awards - particularly for customer care.

The company has occupied many locations across the county and now has three dealerships: at Benbow Business Park in Shrewsbury (where it moved after selling the Coton Hill site for redevelopment); Haybridge Road in Telford; and Whittington Road in Oswestry. The century-old relationship with Ford cars and commercial vehicles remains at the core of the business, with a major presence at each of the sites.



Furrows provided a car for a skid-pan demonstration at MOTEC in High Erroll in 1990 attended by Princess Anne. Also pictured is road safety officer Colin Pettener, whose son Richard is now general manager of Furrows' Oswestry base

Thomas Simmonds (right) with Technician Nathan Rogers at Furrows of Oswestry. Thomas was just 14-years-old when he signed up to a training scheme

Over the last decade, the group has also added Kia at Shrewsbury and Telford, Mazda at Shrewsbury, and Skoda at Oswestry. Used car and commercial vehicles, a full after-sales operation and wholesale business complete the group.

Since John's death, Nic has taken on the role of non-executive chairman, working closely with joint managing directors Dave Farthing (25 years in the business) and Russ Smith (reaching 50 years' service in April), with sister Rachael heading up the now-significant property side of the business.

Nic says: "When we were young, Furrows meant being dragged into the office for 'five minutes' at the weekends – it never was just five minutes – and there was endless 'Furrows talk' around the dinner table.

"But it's the people who have always been the most important thing about the business, and our ability to take a long-term view.

"People talk about someone being a 'Furrows person' – it's not written down anywhere, it's just an understanding. To earn the accolade you have to be someone who works hard, and who is good to people.

"We are a Shropshire business, and we know that our customers and our community are the same thing. We want people to consider us as trusted experts – local people who will give great local service. And our 350 staff are of course our primary focus, as they are our greatest asset as a business.

"We also value the long associations we have with like-minded businesses and individuals, and we're hugely proud to have been with Barclays throughout our 100 years."

In fact, a quick survey at a recent senior team away-day revealed the average length of service with the business of the 12 people around the table was 25 years.

Nic continues: "We're very proud in our 100th year that Furrows has achieved a turnover of over £100 million for the first time, and we've achieved a record operating profit of £3 million – what great timing for our anniversary!



Steve Foden and Pete Hulland pictured with the 1976 Ford Fiesta



The commercial workshop at Furrows pictured in the 1970s



Joint managing directors Russ Smith and Dave Farthing



Furrows teased a big PR launch for its Oswestry expansion

"As a result, we have been able to invest, to give our team the support they need to grow the business. We've made major investments in new Skoda and Ford showrooms at Oswestry; and we've upgraded our Telford site to become a prestigious FordStore and a top-level Kia dealership, as well as creating a new Ford Transit centre in Shrewsbury."

The conversation, though, quickly comes back to people.

"Apprenticeships brought my father to Shrewsbury at Rolls Royce, and training has always played a huge role in our approach to business," says Nic.

"In the 1980s, during the recession, we stuck to this commitment to apprenticeships because having been one himself, dad thoroughly believed in them."

And that tradition is continuing to this day.

The team at Furrows of Oswestry are helping to build the workforce of the future by joining forces with Marches School to give students extended work placements at their dealership that could lead to a career in the industry.

The first candidate has already signed up to the scheme – Thomas Simmonds who is aged only 14. ▶



Cheers – the Furrows of Telford team at the start of this year, commencing the celebrations of the company’s 100th anniversary

◀ “The aim is to support students who are considering a career in the motor industry by giving them the chance to spend a day a week with us over a period of two years, working alongside our team,” Nic continues.

“This way they get the chance to learn about the practicalities of the industry and to take part in hands-on experience to help them prepare for their future career. It’s a great opportunity for the students and for our industry too, as there is a real need for apprentices and technicians so this is an arrangement that benefits both partners.”

And Furrows isn’t stopping there when it comes to building even stronger relationships with the local community. “We’ve launched a new programme with the University Centre Shrewsbury, where people can apply for funding for community projects that will involve students running the project or contributing to the scheme in some way.”

Such community projects have been a real running theme throughout the history of Furrows. Jane shared John’s deep interest in local politics and was mayor of Shrewsbury in 1990-91, receiving an MBE for services to the local community in 1997. She was heavily involved in the Girl Guides, local youth clubs and the probation service.

Nic and Rachael have spent most of their working lives in very different sectors and often away from the county, gaining experience which they are now bringing to the family business.

Nic qualified as a solicitor with international firm Freshfields, before a career in the world of sport. He was general secretary of the Premier League, chief executive of the British Horseracing Authority and the Football Association, and a director at Wembley Stadium.

He is also now chairman of England Golf and heavily involved at the England and Wales Cricket Board, as well as a sports business consultant. His is working with Star TV in India to grow the sport of Kabaddi, and football projects regularly take him to Turkey, China and India. He is a director of a New Zealand based firm Oritain too, leading the way in proving the origin of food and textiles.

Rachael worked in radio and television at the BBC, and in films, before moving into production roles in major events including the closing ceremony of the 2012 London Olympics. Her focus is on building the property business, and this year will see the completion of the redevelopment of former maltings buildings at Prospect House in Bellevue, Shrewsbury.

Yet despite their travels and their success on the worldwide stage, there’s



Presenting the police with a new fleet of cars, at St Chad’s in Shrewsbury



Dave Farthing cuts the 100th birthday cake



They don’t make them like that any more



The former Furrows site at Ditherington



Senior management team at the 75th anniversary event

always something that brings the Coward family back together to Shropshire – and to Furrows.

“Family-run businesses really are very special,” says Nic. “The culture, and the customer focus that was the hallmark of the business under dad’s leadership is evident across the business. It’s the Furrows way.”

“Our approach has been to take that on into what is a fast-changing market. Our aim in business will always be to provide great products and great service to our customers, that never changes.

“Like the many similar businesses across the county and the whole country, we will hold on to the values and tradition that our customers know and love, but we’ll be adding to the ways we communicate with them – particularly in the digital world – and introducing more technological approaches to our business as a whole.”

● *To find out more about the Furrows’ centenary year of celebrations and the UCS/Furrows community project, visit the website www.furrows.co.uk*



An example of the rooms at The Baron at Bucknell

Naturally a top choice

Aboutique hotel in south Shropshire has expanded its offering with the support of a six-figure sum from HSBC, creating three bespoke garden rooms and a natural swimming pool.

The Baron at Bucknell, owned by Phillip and Debra Wright since 2006, has used the funding to replace the former campsite at the rear of the country inn with three luxury garden rooms, adding to the five rooms already situated inside.

Complete with a feature glass wall, the modern 7 x 6 metre rooms enable visitors to look out onto the Shropshire Hills from their accommodation.

The funding has also been used to create a natural swimming pool adjacent to the garden rooms, where guests can bathe in chemical free, naturally-cleansed spring water.

Phillip Wright, co-owner of the Baron at Bucknell, said: "We're delighted to be taking our hospitality offering in a fresh direction with our bespoke garden rooms, all made possible with the support from our HSBC relationship manager, Alison Talbot.

"The funding has given us the opportunity to offer our guests a unique experience which complements Shropshire's beautiful natural surroundings."

Martin Lyons, HSBC's area director for North and Mid Wales, added: "Phillip and his family have lots of experience in the hospitality industry and identified an excellent opportunity to tap into a new market.

"We're delighted to have supported the Baron at Bucknell in its latest venture and look forward to working with them again as they continue to grow."

The Baron at Bucknell features an original 18th century cider press and mill stone.



A natural swimming pool is available to guests of the garden rooms

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Life made better is aim of new brand

The Shrewsbury entrepreneur behind a big-money acquisition of Guardian Assurance, an established name in the insurance sector, said the new brand “is taking shape nicely”.

Simon Davis is the chief executive of insurance group Gryphon which bought 200-year-old Guardian Assurance Limited for an undisclosed sum at the end of last year.

Mr Davis and Gryphon had to raise £180 million to bring a new protection business to market which will operate under the Guardian brand name.

He added: “Our brand promise is: ‘Life. Made better’ and we are determined to improve protection for families across the UK.

“We will be distributing life protection products, including term assurance, critical illness and income protection.

“Term assurance pays a lump sum in the event of death, critical illness pays a lump sum on the diagnosis of a critical illness such as cancer, heart attack or stroke, and income protection provides replacement income where the customer is unable to work due to ill health.

“Acquiring the name of Guardian was an extremely important step for us and gave us a compelling brand name that fits with our values and goals”

“Our ambition is for every family to have protection that they truly believe in.

“Acquiring the name of Guardian was an extremely important step for us and gave us a compelling brand name that fits with our values and goals.

“This name, combined with our culture and fresh approach to technology, is allowing us to create a really exciting business.

“We’re planning to breathe fresh life into the brand with a new look which will reflect our intention to continuously rethink and reinvent protection for the better.”

Mr Davis said the former Bankhall and Skandia UK CEO Peter Mann is joining the business as chairman.

“Peter’s vast knowledge – both adviser and provider side – will be a huge asset to Guardian as we look to take our new protection business to market,” he added.

“Advice is crucial to our vision to protect more families and Peter’s credentials as an ‘adviser champion’ cannot be rivalled.”



*Simon Davis,
chief executive of
insurance group
Gryphon*



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County connections

The first customer on Connecting Shropshire's new Airband superfast broadband project has gone live.

The project is part of an £11.2 million contract to extend superfast broadband to 14,000-plus local premises by 2020.

IT security manager Andrew Lee and his wife Sulayma, who live near Shifnal, are the first customers to be installed under the first phase of the project.

The connection has been delivered by Worcester-based internet service provider Airband, ending the couple's four-year wait.

"We live in a tiny village with just 46 houses, close to Cosford airbase but our communications have always been poor," said Andrew.

"When BT upgraded the exchange in Albrighton it didn't make any difference to us, so we were really keen to get a better connection.

"Before our Airband connection, we had download speed of 2.5 Mbps. Streaming stuff was awful - it was always buffering, and working from home was almost impossible. Now we have 30 Mbps and I am able to work from home when I need to."

Dave Lloyd, project manager at Airband, said: "Rural Shropshire suffers with some



Andrew and Sulayma Lee are the first customers to be installed with Airband Superfast broadband in the first phase of a Connecting Shropshire project. Photo: James Greenoff-Cairns

of the poorest broadband speeds in the UK, and we are delighted to be playing a significant role in turning this situation around.

"This key milestone highlights the progress we're making to help connect rural residents across the county. The project will be going live in five phases.

"Phase 1 of the project is due to complete in spring and involves 28 transmitter sites. During this period, Airband will be making superfast broadband available to 7,000 homes.

"Further areas will be going live

incrementally as the network is created."

Nic Laurens, Shropshire Council's cabinet member with responsibility for Broadband, said: "The first live customer on the new Airband network is a landmark that we feel very excited about."

It comes just weeks after Connecting Shropshire and Airband announced the live launch of the first transmitter site, serving over 300 homes and businesses. The transmitter provides superfast broadband connectivity of 30Mbps to parts of Sheriffhales and Shifnal parishes, and other communities further east, such as Tong.

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Lifestyle – 20 Round – Membership Now Available



Business chamber chairman Valerie Edwards, a partner at Hatchers Solicitors introduces the panel, Stuart Thomas, Howard Thorne and Charles Howell



Members and guests enjoy a buffet and network at the beginning of the event, held at Berrys' offices

Constructive talks

Construction was the topic when Shrewsbury Business Chamber held its latest networking evening and buffet at Berrys' offices on Shrewsbury Business Park.

Around 50 people heard presentations from Charles Howell of Cooper Green Pooks, Howard Thorne of Shropshire Homes, and Stuart Thomas from Berrys.

Charles Howell discussed aspects that should be considered when relocating premises, from reasons for moving through to publicising the new location.

Howard Thorne described the current housing crisis, presenting statistics for increased demand and reduced supply, and introducing possible medium-term solutions, while touching on planning legislation.

Stuart Thomas, previously Shropshire Council's area planning manager, then provided an introduction to 'Planning, Policy and Decision Making – the Rules of the Game'.

This was a broad overview of the planning system in Shropshire, focusing on the issues and opportunities for housing and employment land in the county, and detailing the planning policies which would influence the council's decision making over the coming years.

Shrewsbury Business Chamber has been representing businesses in the Shrewsbury area since 1903, and has a dedicated executive committee which meets every month.

Its next networking event is on March 22 at Origins Restaurant on London Road, from 6pm, when cybercrime will be the topic. Presentations will come from event sponsor Henshalls, plus Barclays, and PC



Stuart Thomas gives a broad overview of the planning system in Shropshire

Net Solutions. And on April 11, a Severn cruise is on the agenda, courtesy of Sabrina Boat, and a presentation from Pete Lambert of the Shropshire Wildlife Trust, who will talk about the environmental issues of the river.

Martyn Rowlands, managing director of Pipekit and Shrewsbury Business Chamber's events committee chairman. "We've a packed programme of events throughout the year for business networkers, old and new."

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Princess Anne meets delegates at Stallion AI



A tour of the Whitchurch site was included



An introduction to staff in the laboratory

Extension opened by princess

Princess Anne has officially opened a £1.5 million new extension at a multi award-winning north Shropshire business.

Stallion AI Services has built a new field stud on a 30-acre site near Whitchurch.

The fast growing company, which won two titles at the 2017 Shropshire Business Awards and now employs 25 staff, has become a global centre of excellence for the collection, freezing and export of horse semen.

In addition to selling to more than 20 countries including Brazil, Israel and most recently Kenya, the company also works closely with the Rare Breeds Survival Trust, using cutting-edge technology to help preserve native breeds which are in a precarious position with dwindling numbers.

Tullis Matson, who founded the company in 2000, invited the princess to unveil a plaque to mark the opening of the Chapel Field Stud, after she was given a guided tour.

The princess told an audience of invited businesspeople she recognised the scale of both the investment, and the knowledge which the Stallion AI Services team had amassed.

She said: "As an owner of quite a number of rare breeds myself, I'm really grateful."

Mr Matson added: "We are a small and



Princess Anne with Tullis Matson as she unveils the plaque at Stallion AI Services

unique company with a big heart and a global outreach.

"We have invested £1.5 million in a world-leading, state-of-the-art facility, collecting and preserving semen from hundreds of stallions, from rare breed ponies to Olympic legends.

"Our team is passionate about what we do, for the international sport as well as for the preservation of some of our rarest and most valuable gene pools.

"By doing what we do here, we continuously push the boundaries, to make the impossible possible."

Enjoy lunch with Xavier - former stock exchange chief executive

The former chief executive of the London Stock Exchange Group will be speaking at a business lunch in Shropshire.

Xavier Rolet, who is also an acclaimed winemaker, will discuss 'The connection between the EU debate, Brexit, Bitcoin, AI and the rise of China' at the Moreton Hall Business Lunch on March 14.

The Moreton Hall Business Lunch is an annual event which, over the last eight years, has become a firm fixture in the business diaries of Shropshire and regional business leaders.

Past guest speakers include Old Moretonians Zanny Minton Beddoes, editor of The Economist and Fiona Marshall, brand marketing director of ASOS.

Moreton Enterprises, the business venture run by the Year 12 girls, will also give their annual business presentation outlining their sales strategy for the year.

The event involves networking and drinks at 11.30am followed by a luncheon and presentations from speakers at 12.30pm. To book, please contact Megan Ford on formd@moretonhall.com



Xavier Rolet is the former chief executive of the London Stock Exchange Group



GDPR: Have you got anything to be worried about?

By Carl Jones

The Russians have probably already infiltrated our most classified and sensitive information, and are biding their time until the law allows them to use and abuse it.

Not only that, but other nefarious activities are going on in cyberspace right under our noses, on the mysterious 'dark web', where hackers are poised to entrap unsuspecting victims.

Phew. And these revelations were just in the first two minutes of the seminar. Talk about getting your attention...!

Some 250 businesspeople had packed into the Sovereign Suite at Shrewsbury Town Football Club for a half-day session to examine the new GDPR rules, and



The GDPR seminar at Shrewsbury Town FC was attended by approximately 250 businesspeople

spectre of cyber crime. Jointly organised by Shropshire law firm Lanyon Bowdler, cyber security experts Zepko, and cyber insurance providers Jelf Risk Management, it was the latest in a series of seminars across the county looking at sweeping new changes to data protection. The fact that virtually all of them have been full to capacity shows how seriously businesses are currently rating the issue.

While cyber crime is a growing menace for businesses of all sizes, it is the new GDPR rules – General Data Protection Regulation – which have proved the real talking point at this and other Shropshire sessions. ▶



The half-day seminar at Shrewsbury Town FC had three keynote speakers, including Brian Evans



Brian Evans of Lanyon Bowdler

◀ It comes into effect on May 25, and marks the biggest overhaul of data protection regulations in more than two decades.

Officials insist it's going to be an evolution, rather than revolution – but companies which breach the tougher rules could pay a very stiff penalty. How much? Potentially up to 20 million euros, or 4% of turnover – whichever is the higher.

Brian Evans, managing partner at Lanyon Bowdler, was one of three keynote speakers at the half-day Shrewsbury seminar.

“One of the biggest changes with GDPR will be for companies which use mailshots”

“The problem with the current data protection regulations is that they pre-date the likes of Google, LinkedIn, and Twitter – and the way we use data has moved on a lot over the past 20 years.

“The idea of GDPR is that it creates the same playing field for all data use across the whole of Europe.

“It is scaremongering to say that the large penalties being mentioned will be handed down to employees at small businesses for minor breaches, but it is vital that all companies put measures in place to prevent them from happening in the first place.”

One of the biggest changes with GDPR will be for companies which use mailshots to either existing, potential, or previous customers. Mailchimp, perhaps, iContact, or one of the many other similar services.

For years, there's been a requirement to include an 'opt out' tick box giving recipients the chance to be removed from a list they find themselves on – but that all changes with GDPR.

From May 25, instead of being given the chance to unsubscribe, people must be invited to opt into all forms of marketing communications. And if they haven't, sending them unsolicited emails is against the law.

Consent can't be implied by silence or a lack of action, either; there has to be a positive and properly documented response. And people can withdraw their consent at any time, with no notice, and demand that you



Human resources expert Ishbel Lapper

send them a copy of all the information you hold on them, and their company.

It's fair to say that some companies are taking a more radical approach to this than others. Pub chain JD Wetherspoon, for example, has deleted its entire email mailing list and says it will simply stop sending any kind of newsletters via email.

Other big names are spending a fortune trying to untangle and rebuild their systems with the help of expert consultants.

The change of emphasis with GDPR certainly means that, if you're thinking of buying a mailing list, you might want to investigate the opt-in situation very carefully before handing over any cash.

Some companies may also need to review the contracts and other arrangements they have in place when sharing data with other organisations.

Brian Evans told the Shrewsbury seminar that the new rules would require businesses to be able to show lawful reasons for processing data, but that there would still be what the regulations class as 'legitimate interests' for direct mailing a client database.

Lanyon Bowdler's next seminar is at its Telford office, Hazledine House, on March 21 between 12.30pm and 2.15pm.

So just how worried should companies be? How much time – and money – should they be expecting to put aside to ensure they're fit for purpose in a GDPR world?

Human resources expert Ishbel Lapper, who runs Telford-based HR Solutions Shropshire, says the new law will inevitably lead to increased costs for local firms.

“The GDPR covers all aspects of the way organisations store data about their staff and customers.

“It is being introduced with a so-called hard landing – meaning companies will have to comply from day one. It's vital that employers and HR professionals take steps now to ensure they are prepared.”

The law applies to any company providing services in any member state, or monitoring any web browsing behaviour within the union.

And don't think the big boys will be immune from the spotlight as the system preys on smaller fry. Supermarket giant Morrisons, for example, has just been taken to court after disgruntled staff members leaked payroll details online. The GDPR police would have a field day with that one!

Julia Fitzsimmons, of county law firm FBC Manby Bowdler, says the case emphasises how vital it is for bosses to be up to speed with the rules.

“This judgement is of huge importance because Morrisons was held liable for the criminal misuse of third party data by an employee.

“The impact extends beyond the claims for compensation from employees, it's also the impact on reputation and the financial and physical resources involved in dealing with the data breach.”

“It is believed Morrisons spent more than £2 million in responding to the misuse. Data breach is a growing worry for businesses, whether relating to employees or customers.

“The Government has said that GDPR compliance will be the minimum standard in UK law post-Brexit.

“Any employer who hasn't already started on the journey towards GDPR needs to do so as a matter of urgency, as every business and organisation must be able to demonstrate they are complying, not just dealing with problems after they occur.”



Neil Hambley with senior business growth officer Emma Chapman, right, and business growth officer Anna Sadler

Under the new law, many employers will need to review how they collect, hold and process personal data, as well as how they communicate with any individuals about that activity.

Organisations must provide more information on what data they hold and how they use it, and be able to demonstrate their compliance to regulators – in the United Kingdom's case, that's the Information Commissioner's Office.

“One of the first companies to hold a GDPR seminar in Shropshire was Martin-Kaye Solicitors”

Shropshire Chamber of Commerce has just held its third GDPR information seminar in a matter of weeks, in response to dialogue with members which revealed a strong demand.

Chief executive Richard Sheehan says: “The concern about how GDPR will impact local businesses has been on our agenda for a while, as well as having been highlighted by our members.

“This is why we felt it was hugely important to tackle this head-on and host dedicated seminars on the legislation and what it means.”

One of the first companies to hold a GDPR seminar in Shropshire was Martin-Kaye Solicitors, which welcomed Jane Sarginson, a specialist barrister from Birmingham who is an accredited EU General Data Protection Regulation Practitioner, to its Telford office.

Senior partner Graham Davies said: “It will be crucial for organisations to review the methods they use to collect clients' consent. It will have to be an active opt-in approach where they individually agree to you holding their information.

“Some companies are so worried about falling foul of GDPR that they are already scrapping their entire email marketing lists, so it's clear that accurate and relevant information is the key to navigating this minefield.”

Paul Bennett of Aaron & Partners in



Jane Sarginson at the Martin-Kaye seminar with Graham Davies and John Mehtam

Shrewsbury, an employment law specialist and chairman of the county's new Professionals Partnership, has also been sharing his GDPR wisdom, speaking at an event organised by Rockford IT.

Tom Sykes, from the technology company based at Grosvenor House in Telford, says: “Now is not the time to underestimate the potential ramifications.

“If your business works in the EU and you process EU consumer data in any way, the GDPR raises the stakes considerably for your IT and data storage practices.

“There is a huge amount of work for organisations to do to begin complying with all areas of the GDPR.”

Neil Hambley is a Shrewsbury based data consultant with over 20 years' experience working with start-ups and SMEs through to top brands like Halfords, Land Rover, Time Warner and Capita.

He is currently running a series of workshops helping businesses prepare for the GDPR – the next session is a breakfast briefing at the Guildhall in Shrewsbury on March 20.

Neil says: “Last year KPMG reported that most businesses 'have no idea what to do about the GDPR and don't want to grasp

the nettle'. Brexit offered a potential get-out clause and convenient excuse to turn a blind eye.

“Grasping the nettle is now vital! Wading through 200 pages of legislation is not everyone's cup of tea but deconstructing the regulations can bring clarity and a structured approach for crucial changes.

“Responding to the GDPR was never going to be easy, but a structured approach now could solve a lot of problems come May. There is still time.”

He says: “Self-assessment is a logical starting point. The GDPR is as much a business ethos as a set of regulations. Organisations need to develop a long-term, 'data culture' from the boardroom down. Not just structures and processes, but training and education at all levels.

“Defining roles and responsibilities helps establish awareness. From, 'Data Protection Officers' at the helm, 'Controllers' with strategic and managerial responsibilities through to 'Processors' working with data.”

Contact rights is a particularly thorny issue. Neil adds: “Organisations must define their right to contact individuals - even existing customers - most likely through 'consent' or 'legitimate rights'.”



Paul Bennett speaking at a Shropshire Chamber seminar




The Rockford IT event at the Park Inn, Telford

◀ “The GDPR demands that individuals be treated as individuals and it’s easy to forget that how businesses manage data is as important as the data they manage.

“Every day 1,600 people die, 18,000 move house and 240 businesses move

premises. The average business estimates that 22% of its contact data is inaccurate, resulting in a 12% loss of yearly revenue.

“Maintaining clean records, removing duplicates, and unnecessary data isn’t just a requirement but a huge benefit, saving

money and increasing efficiency. It also helps businesses maintain a clearer view of customers, build trust and remain close to customers that want to be customers. Quality data should be a considerable business asset.” 

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GDPR: A 12-POINT CHECKLIST

Awareness:

Make sure decision makers and key people in your organisation are aware that the law is changing and appreciate the impact this is likely to have.

Information you hold:

Document what personal data you hold, where it came from and who you share it with. You may need an information audit.

Communicating privacy information:

Review your current privacy notices and put a plan in place for making any necessary changes in time for GDPR implementation.

Individuals' rights:

Check your procedures to ensure they cover all the rights individuals have, including how you would delete personal data or provide data electronically.

Subject access requests:

Update procedures and plan how you will handle requests within the new timescales and provide any additional information.

Lawful basis?:

You should identify the lawful basis for your processing activity in the GDPR, document it and update your privacy notice to explain it.

Consent:

Review how you seek, record and manage consent and whether you need to make any changes. Refresh existing consents now if they don't meet the GDPR standard.

Data Protection Officers:

Designate someone to take responsibility for data protection compliance and assess where this role will sit within your organisation. Consider whether you are required to formally designate a Data Protection Officer.

Children:

Start thinking about whether you need to put systems in place to verify individuals' ages and to obtain parental consent for any data processing activity.

Data breaches:

Make sure you have the right procedures in place to detect, report and investigate a personal data breach.

Codes of practice:

Familiarise yourself with the ICO's code of practice on Privacy Impact Assessments and latest guidance from the Article 29 Working Party, and work out from this information how it impacts on you.

International:

If you trade across EU borders, determine your lead data protection supervisory authority. Article 29 Working Party guidelines will help you do this.

Sharing expertise with group

Members of the Thomas Telford chapter of Business Network International (BNI) have been briefed on the implications of GDPR.

The group meets at the town's Ramada Hotel every Thursday morning to share referrals, network and grow.

One member gets the chance to deliver a 10-minute presentation each week, and Ian Ross of Severn Business Solutions in Ironbridge shared his insight into how the rules will impact on SMEs.

"I have been giving seminars on the subject of GDPR for months now, more often than not jointly with Christine Thomas Ltd," says Ian.

"The regulation is there to protect you, not work against. It can seem to be a minefield of what not-to-dos, but in reality it is the opposite.

"Providing you follow the simple guidelines that have been set out, everything else should simply fall in to place."

Ian is a long-time advocate of the BNI system, saying: "I have generated thousands of pounds of business over my tenure and can't recommend it enough.

"Only one person is allowed per profession in each group, so if your category is not currently represented, go along for the meeting and stay for the referrals."



Ian Ross, of Severn Business Solutions, gave fellow BNI members an insight into GDPR

Would you like to increase your business by 20%?*

We are all members of the Telford-based group of BNI and have passed more than £240,000 of business in the last 12 months.

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For further information contact Zoe on 07854 004351 or Paul on 07914 304504.

* BNI members, on average, increase their business 20% the first year. See www.bni.co.uk for more details.



IS THE NEXT CHAPTER FOR YOUR BUSINESS

Communication is key to success

Business communications provider Network Telecom has revealed that it increased its profits by more than 90% in 2017.

The rapidly growing communications company, which has its headquarters at Hadley Park in Telford, has seen its figures increase five-fold since 2014, now exceeding profits of £3 million.

Following a complete website re-design and rebrand early last year, the company, which has been operating for over 20 years, says it is winning increased business from both new and existing customers.

"It's been a great year to be a part of the Network Telecom team," said head of marketing Chris Parkes.

"From being named one of the London Stock Exchange's '1000 Companies to Inspire Britain' to hiring some exciting new talent, we're looking forward to keeping up the momentum in 2018.

"We've invested in a suite of innovative new technology, and are proud to have been named one of the fastest growing companies in Shropshire.

"Having invested significantly to streamline our internal processes, we are continually improving our customer service experience and are confident that we can



Communication House, Network Telecom's headquarters at Hadley Park in Telford

build on what has been our best financial year to date."

Network Telecom offers hosted voice systems, packages to integrate business phone networks with mobile connectivity, bespoke line and call deals, and IT services.

It has plans to move further into IT services, with a continued focus on hosted voice and an office extension in progress.

The company has also just achieved Microsoft Gold Partner status for small and midmarket cloud solutions.

Variety inspires Tristan



Voodoo Design in Wellington is marking 30 years in graphic design and in that time Tristan King has built a sizeable portfolio of work

Tristan King has been reflecting on the changing face of the graphic design industry as he marks 30 years in the business.

Tristan, who runs Voodoo Design in Wellington, says: "It's impossible to show three comprehensive decades of work in a portfolio, as there's not much I haven't designed!

"From aircraft graphics to gin labels, there's been plenty of weird and wonderful projects in between, from caravan importers to educational board games. It's the variety

of work that keeps it all exciting - across all budgets and industries."

Reflecting on the way his industry has changed over three decades, he says: "Digital print has meant small print runs have become financially viable and technology has improved what's available to designers these days, like fluorescent and white inks and even foil through digital presses.

"Designers have had to adapt logos as there are far more applications today than decades ago. For example, a panoramic logo that only really had to go on a 2ft cardboard box now also has to work in a tiny square on social media or as an app icon.

"Decades ago, the more colours you had to print, the more expensive it was. Nowadays, printing full colour is cheaper and far more widespread than say two spot colours . . . if, in fact, you can even find a spot colour printer!"

Tristan, who has also illustrated both fictional and factual books, adds: "One down side to my job is when I have to play 'ghost designer' for trade customers - much like a ghost writer.

"It's on behalf of a third party and the end customer doesn't even know I exist. There's a lot of design work out there in Shropshire and beyond that's mine, and even if I'm really proud of such creations, I'm not allowed to shout about it!"

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Aico is now a subsidiary of Ei Electronics, an Irish electronics giant based in Shannon, which is where the alarms are manufactured

Company with all the bells and whistles is flourishing

By Henry Carpenter

Their white plastic alarms protect millions of homeowners throughout the length and breadth of the UK, so to describe Aico as an undiscovered jewel in Shropshire's commercial crown would be something of an inaccuracy.

But this is a company which has, so far, refused to shout about itself so we could all be forgiven for not knowing that Aico is tucked away on Mile End Business Park on the edge of Oswestry.

No, you need to look at the statistics to recognise that Aico is an extraordinarily successful business by anybody's standards: it has a 90% market share of all smoke and carbon monoxide alarms across the country; last year alone it sold 4.5 million alarms across the UK; each year, for the last 27 years, has seen record results without a single downturn or plateau; in 2017 it reported a £92 million turnover and



Neal Hooper, managing director

in five years' time we can expect that figure to have risen to £150 million.

Aico is now a subsidiary of Ei, an Irish electronics giant based in Shannon, which is where the alarms are manufactured.

The sales, marketing, distribution and administration is dealt with by the 60-strong workforce in Oswestry.

All this is explained by the firm's managing director, Neal Hooper, from the glass-walled conference room at the Oswestry offices.

Neal describes himself as a bit of an outsider at Aico, given that the vast majority of the workforce come from Oswestry, but he is clearly enormously proud of the team, insisting that a huge amount of credit for the company's success "goes to those exceptional people", pointing to the bustling and noticeably youthful office. But more of the staff later.

To say that Aico has come a long way since its launch in 1990 is something of an understatement.

"Aico was set up by Ken Ainsworth who wanted to sell to electrical distributors," explains Neal, who joined as managing director in 2014.

"He responded to an advert placed by the Irish giant Ei Electronics, initially operating from the garage in his home.

"By the early 2000s turnover had reached £20 million. It was around this time that it seemed natural for Ei to take the company over, and this duly took place in 2004. ▶



The Centre of Excellence - a facility for the wider community, in particular schools and colleges from the towns and villages of Shropshire



A soldering robot pictured at work on an Aico alarm



Aico, the market leader in smoke and carbon monoxide alarms

◀ “After Aico become a wholly owned subsidiary of Ei the sales continued to escalate and when I joined four years ago had just done £59 million, and last year’s total was above £90 million.

“It is a point of fact that it is the only major European manufacturer but this hasn’t happened by accident. An enormous amount of time and money and expertise in invested into producing the best quality alarms possible.

“Yes, our alarms are the most expensive you will find in the UK, but we believe they are excellent value and when people’s lives are in the balance, no amount of investment and time into designing the best product is too great.

“We are basically a sensor manufacturer, purely domestic, with all the devices made in Shannon, and sold solely through electrical distributors. They are extremely sophisticated; hard wired with battery back-up, they have radio link interconnectivity and transmit data to a cloud.

“Every product is tested four times – again, we are manufacturing life safety devices so quality and reliability are absolutely paramount – so nothing is left to chance.

“We have 90% market share with the registered social landlords throughout the country. There are some 850 registered social landlords in the UK with 5.5 million properties - over 5 million have got Aico alarms, often throughout multiple rooms. So, it is just a fact that we dominate the market - but we don’t shout about it.”

The statistics would be the envy of almost any business. But there is room for improvement, he admits, not so much in the black-and-white sales and profits figures, but in the company’s role within the close and wider community.

Every year all Aico employees select an individual charity for Aico to support, ranging from national to more local. By these methods Aico has donated hundreds of thousands of pounds to various charities – around £70,000 a year in fact - but Neal and team are looking at instigating a much closer link between the company with young people, especially from Oswestry but also the wider region.

And there are two areas which he believes Aico can offer something of potentially great benefit to local individuals and organisations – its Centre of Excellence and the talents of its staff.

“We are committed to education and training - to date we have trained over 17,000 people, including more than 4,500 last year alone”

“We are very, very lucky,” he continues. “We work for a fantastic company with genuine market dominance and we believe we have a responsibility to put something back. It is not for monetary gain – simply, we are a Shropshire-based company which wants to give back to the community and support the growth of Shropshire as a whole.

“The charitable stuff is all well and good, but we’ve got all these schools and colleges on our doorstep who we want to engage with, and so we’ve embarked in an exercise to talk to education partners, B2B groups and other allied partners.



The history of Aico can be viewed in a timeline at its Oswestry base

“We want young people to come to learn from our team who can in turn help and develop them. We are committed to education and training - to date we have trained over 17,000 people, including more than 4,500 last year alone.

“We have had our own professional training scheme for installers of our products since 2008, created the Centre of Excellence as a central hub for training and education along with mobile units covering the entire UK.

“We want to extend this training and education to all, not just installers of our products. I learnt that the more you enable, support and empower people – and make them better than they are – then you can achieve fantastic results.

“There are cracking people in every seat here, all sharing the same beliefs and goals – why wouldn’t young people want to tap into their knowledge? And the Centre of Excellence is sitting there, all paid for, so we can make it available free of charge. It’s a million-pound investment – why wouldn’t students and other partners want to make use of it?”



Informative - educational screens in the Centre of Excellence

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Staff at the Aico site in Oswestry. Many of the team are local to the market town - something the company is proud of

◀ Why not indeed. This is a state-of-the-art, multi-purpose training facility which offers so much more than a look-and-learn attitude.

It is much more interactive than that and encourages visitors to learn through proper involvement in an up-to-the-minute environment with all the comforts and mod cons of the 21st century. It also contains unique features such as a chamber to demonstrate how alarms respond to different fire types

Neal remembers how his curiosity for business was stimulated through a stint of work experience after he left school, and it goes some way to explaining the determination he and his team have for making a contribution to the professional lives of others.

“Those two weeks of work experience



A talk in progress at the Centre of Excellence fundamentally changed my life,” he admits.


“I had originally been lined up to study for a double honours degree at university but I was absolutely hooked by the experience of seeing things bought, manufactured and sold for profit.

“What a world, I thought, if we can pass on that passion and expertise, we could

make someone sit up and think I’ve found my vocation, then that is a legacy which we would all like to leave.

“We’ve got all these schools and colleges on our doorstep who we want to engage with, and so we’ve embarked in an exercise to talk to education partners, B2B groups and other allied partners.”

So, we are invited to watch this space. There is almost an inevitability that Aico as a firm will go from strength to strength – the firm is “on the acquisition trail and will reach £150 million in sales in five years’ time,” according to Neal.

But by that time, if Neal and his team have his way, Aico will have become much more of a byword for excellence amongst the schools and communities in and around Oswestry. 

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Put your business in pole position

Shropshire-based motor sport, automotive supply chain, transport technology and plastics and composites companies have the chance to join a trade visit to Le Mans, home of the world's oldest active motorsport endurance race.

Organised by West Midlands Chambers of Commerce, the visit will take place between June 12-15, and is aimed at small to medium enterprises.

Andy Smith, international relationships manager for the EU/DIT co-financed SME International Growth Project, said funded places were available for eligible SMEs, which have the opportunity to win business through a series of high-profile B2B meetings with some of the Europe's leading automotive and transport companies firms.

"This is the perfect opportunity for the innovative motor sport, automotive and supply chain companies in our area to showcase their expertise to a global market," he said.

"The West Midlands region has a long and proud heritage in this industry and we'd love to see more businesses introducing their products to markets across the world. These B2B events around the iconic Le Mans race provide an excellent platform for them to do so"

The programme includes up to 12 timetabled one-to-one meetings as part of the International Business Days Le Mans 2018, networking opportunities and conferences covering topics such as additives and automotive /mobility innovation.



A trade visit takes place at Le Mans, home of the famous race

There is also a parallel one-day multi-sector plastics and composites event Plasti-Ouest, which will cover aerospace, packaging, construction, medical and automotive usage of these materials.

Places are strictly limited and to receive a funded place, applicants must be eligible under the DIT's SME International Growth Project. To find out more, go to: <https://tinyurl.com/eventbrite-lemans>

Company's high quality training acknowledged

Law firm FBC Manby Bowdler has picked up another national award – this time for its outstanding commitment to training.

The company, which has offices in Shrewsbury, Telford and Bridgnorth, as well as Wolverhampton, was recognised for going above and beyond the usual remit for staff development, at the Modern Law Awards.

Judges praised the company for its unique approach to learning and development across a range of methods including coaching, mentoring, and formal training for staff at all levels.

The Modern Law award is the latest in a string of awards picked up by FBC Manby Bowdler for its commitment to its employees.

It was given a two-star rating by staff in its latest Best Companies assessment, in which it was labelled 'outstanding', and voted independently as the Best Place to work in the Shropshire Star's 2017 Excellence in Business Awards.

The firm was also named Best Employer at the recent British Excellence in Sales Management Awards.

The Modern Law Awards celebrates and identifies sparkling talent and success in entrepreneurship, market development, business management and best practice in the modern legal services arena.

Managing partner Kim Carr said: "We recognise that our people are our biggest asset and, by committing to a



Sales director Neil Lloyd and marketing manager Laura Jones receive the Outstanding Commitment to Training Award at the Modern Law Awards

defined training pathway for their personal development, we are cultivating a modern law firm with a clear vision that can deliver the stellar service we are known for.

"We have developed bespoke learning

opportunities and believe our unique approach is, in part, what helps us attract top talent.

"We pride ourselves on having an amazing team."

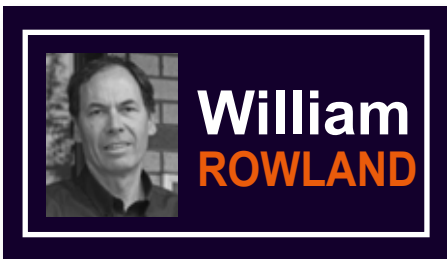


The customer-focused team at Connexis, Pearson Road, Telford



Connexis is based at 5 Pearson Road, Telford

Ultra-fast internet connectivity is everything in business today



William ROWLAND

Without doubt the Internet is the biggest development in communications for a generation.

Whether that be at a social level for chat & gossip, sharing experiences and photos etc or at a business level for sharing information such as documents and images or gaining and giving information.

A lot has been made in the press recently about Openreach doing enough to roll out highspeed internet (10Mbps +) to all, including those hard to reach areas such as rural locations.

Believe it or believe it not there are still parts of Central London that cannot get decent internet speeds without spending £200.00 plus per month on a service, so it's not just the rural areas. Openreach are getting there but it does seem to be taking a time.

Some people are taking matters into their own hands where small communities are clubbing together and digging their own trenches and installing fibre cable etc. themselves, such is the demand and need.

Indeed, high speed internet connectivity is now considered by many as an essential utility in today's society, just like water and electricity.

All is not lost and Openreach and others are endeavouring to provide what is required. Unitron, a Telford based company and business partner of Connexis provide high speed wireless internet access via the mast on top of the Wrekin.

One area where some providers are plugging the gap is in offering FTTP and an emulated FTTC service. We at Connexis installed an FTTP service into our offices last month.



Improve your connection – Unitron, a Telford-based company and business partner of Connexis, provides high speed wireless internet access via the mast on top of the Wrekin

FTTP (Fibre to the Premise), or a direct fibre connect to the building.

FTTC (Fibre to the Cabinet) means exactly that, fibre to the street cabinet nearest your premises then good old-fashioned copper wire from the cabinet to the premise.

An emulated FTTC service means although the fibre cable is direct to the premise the cost is the same as FTTC.

In certain situations, this is more cost effective for Openreach to provision than FTTC, and means they are fulfilling their obligation to provide high speed internet for all.

Further up the scale where companies are paying a few hundred pounds per month for Fibre Ethernet or Leased Line more are now considering Gigabit speed connectivity, rather than Megabit speed.

Furthermore, there will shortly be a subsidy or grant available for any organisation considering Gigabit connectivity to offset the additional connection fees.

● For further information on the many, many options of high speed internet connection please contact Connexis on 01952 528000

County connections

A unique industrial collective, featuring a sub-contract machining specialist from south Shropshire, is casting aside the shadows of Brexit by recording its best ever year, with a £10 million increase in sales - paving the way for 125 new jobs.

The Manufacturing Assembly Network, which comprises eight sub-contract manufacturers and an engineering design agency, has taken full advantage of the positive exchange rate for sterling and a desire to tap into British innovation to win contracts across the automotive, aerospace, electronics, renewables and medical sectors.

All nine firms, including Muller Holdings of Cleobury Mortimer, have experienced growth over the last 12 months and have benefitted from sharing best practice, purchasing power and working together to target new clusters.

The expansion now means that MAN employs a 1,000-strong combined workforce across 15 factories and boasts an order book that is fast approaching £90 million, with 40% of that turnover sent overseas.



MAN is made up of Muller Holdings, Alucast, Barkley Plastics, Brandauer, Grove Design, KimberMills International, Mec Com, PP Control & Automation and SMT Developments

"I am a firm believer in the power of collaboration and that is exactly what has helped us to grow the collective and our individual businesses over the last year," explained Rowan Crozier, CEO of Brandauer and the new chairman of the network.

"We were all together when the results of the European Referendum vote were announced and we were shocked. That feeling lasted for about 10 minutes and then, like typical manufacturers, we decided to roll-up our sleeves and see how we could make the most out of the situation. The fall in the price of sterling has certainly been a big help."

He continued: "This is only one element though. The UK is a great place

to manufacture and we are becoming increasingly competitive with our international rivals thanks to a renewed focus on training, investment in automation and a willingness to innovate.

"Those are the true ingredients behind our success."

The Manufacturing Assembly Network is made up of Muller Holdings, Alucast, Barkley Plastics, Brandauer, Grove Design, KimberMills International, Mec Com, PP Control & Automation and SMT Developments. Adam Cunningham, from the Shropshire company, is the new deputy chairman.

It is also currently working with Warwick Manufacturing Group to improve processes and commercialise new technologies.

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A triple whammy for cash handlers



Ray
HICKINBOTTOM

It is a fact that cash-based transactions remain vital to the well-being of local communities, businesses and economies throughout the country. That is certainly the case in Shropshire.

For example, while the vast majority of our businesses use online banking, many - especially smaller firms - still value the in-person support that they receive at branches, particularly when it comes to completing complex transactions and making big financial decisions.

Then there's the fact that some areas of the county are still blighted by poor broadband services. So accessing online banking is a real challenge at best, or a complete non-starter at worst!

I think it is disappointing then, that the rate of bank branch closures continues apace. Just a couple of months ago, we heard about the latest round of closures from The Royal Bank of Scotland and NatWest. Bank branch closures then, is the first of the 'triple whammys' challenging cash-handling businesses.

The second is the fact that our cash machine network is under serious threat. Recent research from Which? suggests that more than 100 UK postcode districts currently lack a cashpoint. That's 100 locations where the cash machine network is already failing communities and small businesses.

However, the problem is, once again, especially acute in rural areas and tourist hotspots and looks likely to worsen. Because at the beginning of this year, LINK announced that it was planning to reduce the fee paid by card providers to cash machine operators.

LINK's proposals may actually result in parts of the cash machine network becoming less viable, and could leave yet more high streets and villages without access to a cash point.

This would be bad for consumers and bad for businesses so it is important that decisions on this are made responsibly and with full transparency.

Specifically, I struggle to see how LINK expects to achieve its stated goal of



Our cash machine network is under serious threat. Recent research from Which? suggests that more than 100 UK postcode districts currently lack a cashpoint



It is an inescapable reality that cash transactions are still the basis of a great deal of trade

improving access to cash if it reduces the financial viability of cash machine operators to provide the service.

The Payment Systems Regulator, Treasury Committee, major rural cash machine providers and Which? have all raised concerns about LINK's proposals for interchange fee reduction.

Following LINK's private consultation, we now need a full, public consultation where all of those potentially impacted by these changes can have their say. This needs to happen before any changes take place.

The third of the triple whammys concerns new EU regulations which mean that small firms will no longer be able to charge customers for using credit and debit cards.

The interchange fees demanded by card companies are only the start of the costs that small firms incur when they process a card payment. They also have to foot the bill for compliance, set-up, authorisation fees and payment system operating costs. The changes make insisting on payment by cash all the more appealing to smaller

businesses. So there you have it - the 'imperfect storm' for small businesses: access to cash restricted by a rapidly diminishing bank branch network; threats to ATM funding and coverage; plus new regulations forcing them to absorb the costs of processing card payments.

As things stand, many small businesses now find themselves between a rock and a hard place when it comes to handling customer payments, delivering good customer service and maintaining operational efficiency. As per usual, it's a situation felt most acutely by those that are most vulnerable.

It is an inescapable reality that cash transactions are still the basis of a great deal of trade in our local towns and villages. It may seem outdated in the modern world, but for many cash is still king. As the moment, there's no revolution that can overthrow this particular king whilst providing smaller businesses with a credible alternative.

● Ray Hickinbottom is chairman of the FSB in the West Midlands



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Chris Meredith from LondonOffices.com said: "Most experienced business owners will be able to pin-point at least one questionable decision"

Ten of the biggest business blunders

Even the biggest companies make mistakes . . . and now researchers have come up with what they believe could be the ten biggest business blunders ever.

The Royal Mail, Blockbuster and even Mars Inc, are among some of the multi-million pound companies named on a list of detrimental business moves over the years.

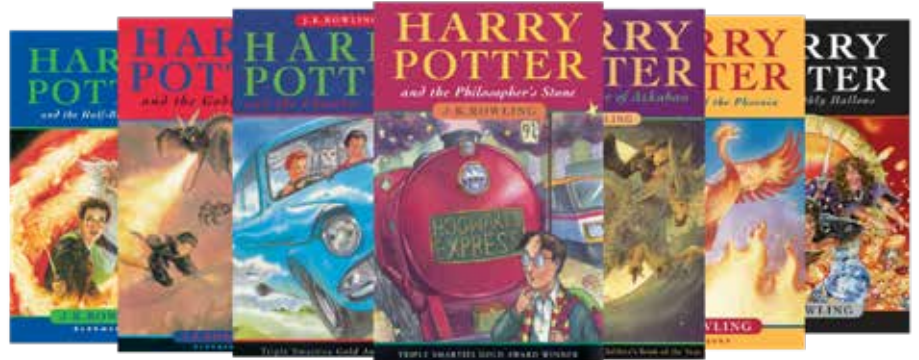
From passing up on lucrative deals and opportunities, to misjudging some questionable marketing decisions, even the most profitable businesses have suffered – but survived – terrible blunders.

Chris Meredith from LondonOffices.com which compiled the list, said: "Most experienced business owners will be able to pin-point at least one questionable decision they've made at some point during their career, but few will measure up to any in this list.

"In some cases, the blunders in our list have come as a result of businesses trying to branch out and try new things, and in others it's due to the business lying dormant and refusing to adapt to the changing times.

"This just goes to show that there's never a right answer for these kinds of things, and it all comes down to the individual circumstance and accurate judgement.

"Otherwise, we've simply recognised the businesses that have passed up on deals that would have been incredibly profitable – but hindsight is of course 20/20!"



Harry Potter's wizarding world was turned down by dozens of publishers prior to Bloomsbury

London publishers reject Harry Potter

J.K. Rowling took her first book, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, to dozens of publishers including HarperCollins and Penguin hoping to hit the big time, but none of the publishing big dogs were convinced by Rowling's wizarding world, and rejected it outright. Instead, a small and lesser-known publisher named Bloomsbury agreed to take it on, after the CEO's eight-year-old daughter begged her father to print it. 20 years later and Pottermania is at an all-time high with the franchise worth around £19 billion, and the publishers who were approached initially probably aren't too happy about it.

Decca Records rejecting the Beatles

Two executives for Decca Records invited the Beatles to an audition in 1962

but they weren't impressed. They informed the band's manager they wouldn't sign up the group, exclaiming: "Groups are out; four-piece groups with guitars particularly are finished." The Beatles, who at this time were touring the UK and played several venues in Shropshire, instead joined EMI Records before going on to become one of the most well-known and successful bands of all time.

Royal Mail rebrand as Consignia

Royal Mail decided to rebrand itself in early 2001 to coincide with the new millennium. The name Consignia was designed to describe the full scope of what the company could do, but within just 18 months, Consignia as a brand was thrown to the kerb, the then-chief executive John Roberts left, and more than £2 million was wasted by this blunder.



Blockbuster declined the opportunity to buy Netflix in the early 2000s. Netflix now produces its own programmes, including The Crown.

Excite passing on Google

In 1996, former Excite CEO George Bell was given the chance to purchase Google when it was still very small, for a reasonable and very meagre price of just \$750,000. However, he wasn't too excited by the company and declined the purchase. Unfortunately for Bell, Google has gone on to dominate the world and is the most valuable brand in the world, worth over £180 billion.

Microsoft's chatbot failure

Keen to be at the key player in the Artificial Intelligence narrative, Microsoft developed a "chatbot" to interact with humans via Twitter. Named "Tay," the bot was meant to demonstrate how A.I. can learn from humans. The whole concept took a disastrous turn as Microsoft hadn't considered the racist and sexist views often expressed by Twitter users. Tay promptly learned to use foul and offensive language, and its Twitter account was suspended within 16 hours of launch. It's unclear whether the incident caused any lingering damage to the brand.

Blockbuster Video passing on Netflix

Before Netflix, home video rentals were king, and Blockbuster Video ruled with an iron fist. When given the opportunity to purchase the budding Netflix in the early 2000s for \$50 million, Blockbuster declined, and this decision ultimately led to the company's demise. Netflix, on the other hand, has come on in leaps and bounds, while the home video rental market has since been relegated.

New Coke failing

According to blind taste tests undertaken in 1985, Coca-Cola learned that customers actually preferred the sweeter taste of their main competitor, Pepsi. On this fact alone, Coca-Cola decided to change its 100-year formula and create "New Coke", which inevitably crashed and burned. Fans were not happy with this newer, 'better' formula,



No thank you - New Coke was a disaster

and demanded the old one back. After a while, New Coke was taken off the market, never to be seen again.

M&Ms passing on E.T.

Amblin Productions approached Mars Inc. for the permission to use its popular bite-sized M&Ms in its upcoming film, E.T., but were promptly rejected. It's unclear why

the decision was made, but many possible explanations have been offered through the years, including a rather mundane one claiming Mars had reached its advertising budget limit. Instead, Reese's Pieces were used by Elliot to lure the little alien out of hiding, and the chocolate has since become one of the most popular of the past three decades, partly due to this cameo.

EA issuing illegal weapons

EA, one of the biggest American video game companies, sent out gold brass knuckles in a wooden box as part of a promo for video game Godfather II. An interesting and relevant gift, if not for the fact that brass knuckles, or 'knuckle dusters', are illegal weapons in many of the US states to which they were posted. EA soon realized the error in sending out brass knuckles, and all packages were promptly sent back to EA.

Motorola failing to keep up with the times

Motorola's thin and stylish Razr phone dominated 2006 with a market share of 22% at a time when smartphones were first passing their litmus test with the public. However, the tide changed quickly, and by the time Motorola released its first update to the Razr, iPhone and BlackBerry had taken over as market leaders. Motorola's lack of innovation caused shares to fall more than 90% within six months, and they've never been able to reclaim the throne since.



During the promotion of video game Godfather II, EA illegally sent out knuckle dusters

Don't let government delays postpone your future retirement plans



**Nick
JONES**

Now that auto-enrolment for the self-employed isn't expected until at least 2022, the onus is on business owners themselves.

Inertia is clearly a powerful tool.

Since the introduction of auto-enrolment in 2012, the number of those enrolled in a workplace pension scheme has risen to more than 9 million.¹ Although forthcoming rises in the minimum contribution could yet encourage people to opt out, the current rate of uptake is already far in excess of what had been hoped for.

Inertia among salaried employees has been crucial to ensuring that the introduction of auto-enrolment wasn't greeted with a wave of opt-outs.

“If your business is incorporated as a limited company, you can make pension contributions straight from your company as an employer contribution. This counts as an allowable business expense.”

Yet for the self-employed, government inaction is having the opposite effect, leaving them without automatic workplace pensions help until at least 2022. (Some argue that this breaks a manifesto commitment to include self-employed pensions as part of new pensions legislation.)

Arguably, the self-employed should have been the priority. After all, the unpredictability of self-employment creates extra reservations about putting money into a pension as, until you reach 55 years old, you can't then get it back if finances become strained.



The Government may be happy to delay auto-enrolment but small business owners should be aware of the cost of inertia. Pension contributions have the greatest effect made early.

You also have to organise it all yourself, and do so without the financial incentives offered by many employers.

Yet official figures published by HMRC last September show that the number of self-employed workers contributing to a personal pension fell from 950,000 to 350,000 between 2006/7 and 2015/16.²

Taking action

Despite the lack of an automatic scheme, the self-employed still benefit from the allowances included in a personal pension. For example, tax relief is available on contributions, usually up to £40,000 per year, albeit subject to limitations. For every 80p you contribute to a pension, the government automatically adds 20p in tax relief. Higher earners can claim extra tax relief through their annual tax return, meaning that a £1 pension contribution can effectively cost just 60p.

Moreover, if your business is incorporated as a limited company, you can make pension contributions straight from your company as an employer contribution. This counts as an allowable business expense, making it eligible for corporation tax relief; thus the company could save up to 20% in corporation tax. Moreover, employers are exempt from National Insurance Contributions on pension contributions.

Nevertheless, there are several HMRC rules covering such usages that complicate the picture for those seeking to use employer allowances. Moreover, it is not always easy to know which pension to choose. It is worth taking advice from an expert to be sure you

are making use of your allowances, without falling foul of any of the rules.

The greatest danger, however, is delay. Pension contributions have the greatest effect the earlier they are made. The Government may be happy to delay, but small business owners should be aware of the cost of inertia.

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● *Nick Jones is the Principal of Nick Jones Wealth Planning in Shrewsbury, a Senior Partner Practice of St. James's Place Wealth Management. The Senior Partner Practice represents only St. James's Place Wealth Management plc (which is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority) for the purpose of advising solely on the Group's wealth management products and services. The 'St. James's Place Partnership' and the titles 'Partner' and 'Partner Practice' are marketing terms used to describe St. James's Place representatives.*

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-publishes-ambitious-plans-to-give-millions-a-more-financially-secure-retirement>

² https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/647545/September_2017_Pensions_publication.pdf

Developer serves up sponsorship of tennis aces

The Shrewsbury Club's successful performance programme for promising young tennis players has attracted the support of Galliers Homes.

The company has agreed a deal to sponsor the programme, which helps develop the game of up and coming tennis

aces from around the county and further afield.

Dave Courteen, managing director of The Shrewsbury Club, said: "It's fantastic that Galliers has recognised the quality of our performance programme and are now involved."

Danielle Goffe-Wood, marketing manager at Galliers Homes, added: "We are always delighted to support young talent.

"We look forward to helping the club's performance programme become even more successful."



Park View Business Centre near Whitchurch has expanded further



Fresh look - the latest brick pillar barn includes large glass sheets

New premises at business centre

A rural business centre near Whitchurch has expanded once again with the conversion of more redundant farm buildings into offices.

Park View Business Centre, on the

Combermere Abbey Estate, has completed its latest phase of growth with the release of three new premises.

The latest brick pillar barn has been converted using massive glass sheets to revive the look of the original agricultural structure, with views over the countryside.

The owners have also upgraded internet speeds, taking it up to 100mbs. Peter

Beckett, director of Park View Business Centre, said: "Providing a fantastic working environment pays dividends with employees.

"With good broadband and a telephone, people no longer need to endure painful commutes to congested cities. We are passionate about bringing working people back into the countryside as this also benefits the local economy."



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Merlin Entertainments, the owners of Alton Towers, were fined £5 million following a catastrophic accident on the "Smiler" ride in June 2015

Lasting effects of flouting H & S



It hasn't been long since the introduction of new legislation that has radically changed the approach to sentencing for those found guilty of health and safety offences.

Prior to February 2016 the only sentencing guidelines available were for cases involving the death of a person and charges for Corporate Manslaughter, where the recommended fine was a minimum of £500,000.

For other health and safety offences involving a fatality a starting point for fines was set at £100,000.

Interestingly, in all cases, the sentencing

guidelines specifically prohibited the courts from fixing a fine in relation to the turnover or profitability of the defendant. That all changed in February 2016 with the introduction of new sentencing guidelines which have resulted in some of the biggest and well-known companies in the UK receiving huge fines for health and safety related offences.

“The associated bad press and publicity, that always accompanies such cases, can also have a negative impact on the organisation”

A very clear message is being sent to the boardrooms of UK businesses that they will be severely punished when they are found to have failed to protect people harmed by their business activities. Since the introduction of the sentencing guidelines last year there have been 19 fines over £1 million in 2016. This compares with only three in 2015 and none in 2014.

The 20 biggest health and safety fines resulted in the following costs to those businesses punished: £38.6 million in 2016;

£13.5 million in 2015; and £4.3 million in 2014.

It is not only the financial impact that companies need to be aware of. The associated bad press and publicity, that always accompanies such cases, can also have a negative impact on the organisations brand, image and reputation.

Recent high-profile health and safety cases include:

- A university in the north of England was fined £400,000 and had to pay costs in excess of £25,000 following an experiment that went wrong. Two students were given a caffeine solution that contained over 100 times the intended quantity of caffeine. They became violently ill and had to be rushed to hospital.

- Merlin Entertainments, the owners of Alton Towers, were fined £5 million following an accident on the "Smiler" ride in June 2015 which resulted in two young women each having a leg amputated and 14 other people being seriously injured in the crash. The accident received more press coverage than the Shoreham air crash that happened three months later and involved multiple fatalities. Visitor numbers to Alton Towers and revenues were badly affected as a result of this tragedy.



Risk was enough for oil and gas giant ConocoPhillips to receive a fine of £3 million over gas leaks on its Lincolnshire Offshore Gas Gathering System

- JCB were fined £375,000 and their contractor, DHL, were fined £266,000 following injuries to a DHL auditor on a JCB site. The auditor was first hit by a forklift truck before 770Kg of hydraulic ramps came crashing down onto him. He received multiple serious injuries and was very lucky not to have been killed. Investigations discovered poor traffic management, inadequate risk assessments and a totally unsafe system of work. Both companies also had to pay the full prosecution costs.

Organisations can still be severely punished even when no injury has occurred. Oil and gas giant ConocoPhillips was fined £3 million over three gas leaks on their Lincolnshire Offshore Gas Gathering System; no one was hurt, though 66 people were put at risk.

You should carefully assess all the risks that are present within your business and produce documented risk assessments

So what should you be doing to ensure that you comply with health and safety legislation?

1. Safety leadership. Good health and safety performance starts at the top. The Board/senior management team should lead the way in health and safety by ensuring that it is an integral function within the operations of the business and that health and safety performance is regularly monitored and reported on. There should be clear policies on health and safety management and accountability.

2. Organisation for health and safety. There should be a clear health and safety structure within the organisation where



DANGER
Hazard area



Do not enter

Clear signage and ensuring that staff receive adequate health and safety training is vital

managers/supervisors are made responsible for the health and safety performance of their departments. For this to be done effectively they will need to be suitably trained and competent in health and safety.

3. Competent safety advice. To comply with the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 (Regulation 7), companies should have access to "Competent" health and safety advice. This person/organisation must have the necessary knowledge, understanding, skills and experience to be able to offer suitable and relevant advice.

4. Risk assessment. You should

carefully assess all the risks that are present within your business and produce documented risk assessments (if you employ more than five people). Assessments should clearly identify the risks to health and safety and the control measures that are to be implemented to remove or reduce those risks to an acceptable level.

5. Training. You should ensure that your staff receive adequate health and safety training to enable them to work safely and without the risk of harm.

- Rob Matthews heads the Shrewsbury office of national insurance broker Lycetts

In brief...

- Sentinel Care Services in Telford, has launched a campaign to bring together businesses and individuals with the aim of setting up a new charity fundraising group. The plan would see group members supporting each other in fundraising efforts throughout the year, meeting regularly to pool information and share ideas. The idea has been put forward by the company's Stephanie Bodkin.
- Farming minister George Eustice has announced the launch of a new £60 million grant scheme for farmers to buy new equipment. "The new Countryside Productivity Small Grant Scheme is different to its larger counterparts due to the fact it uses an online application process and is targeted at supporting investment for specific pieces of agricultural equipment," says Harriet Matthews, a surveyor at the Shrewsbury office of Berrys.
- Recruitment agency Encore Personnel, which has a 13-strong office in Telford, has attained audited status with the Recruitment & Employment Confederation for a seventh time. The initiative is run by the REC, the professional body for the UK's £31 billion private recruitment industry.
- Commuters in an east Shropshire village have been offered a respite from the morning rush hour after a local micro pub opened a café on site. The Platform Ale House at Albrighton Railway Station set up a month's trial to see if there is enough demand from residents and regular train users to make it a permanent fixture.

More business on way to Ellesmere?



The site at Ellesmere is well-located commercial or industrial land and is being offered for sale by informal tender

Ellesmere Business Park could be poised to expand, after a 16-acre neighbouring site was put up for sale.

James Evans of Halls Commercial Property, which is handling the sale, said it provided an excellent opportunity for building commercial premises in an ideal position.

The price of the land is available on application. "The site is well-located commercial or industrial land and is being offered for sale by informal tender," he said.

"It's a substantial commercial development opportunity for someone with the vision to start with a blank canvas and create something for the future.

"It is currently agricultural land and is accessed off the road leading to Ellesmere Industrial Estate and has existing planning consent for commercial use.

"Outline planning permission was granted for the land five years ago for proposed extension to the business park.

"This is an ideal time for companies to take advantage of an exciting opportunity to put their own stamp on the area by taking part in its development."

Bringing new life to pre-loved furniture

Upholsterer Una Labistour decided Shropshire had it covered when she was looking to relocate her business from France.

Deuxième Vie, which specialises in giving new life to distinctive chairs and sofas from the mid-20th century, is now based in the heart of the county, at Longnor.

Una says: "France is beautiful and a lovely place to live but I was never sure that the process of acquiring and revitalising furniture was appreciated commercially or creatively; the French can be conservative in taste.

"I live and breathe chairs and cannot pass a second-hand shop without savouring its contents in the hope of spotting something special tucked away in a corner.

"I love post-war modernist pieces from the 1950s and 60s - think BBC Four's 'Mad Men' series for furniture heaven, timeless designs and clean lines.

"Shropshire is as lovely a place to live with beautiful countryside, a great variety of fascinating independent shops in every town and people here are so friendly. I really hope that they will like my work."



One of Una's 1950s wingback armchair creations

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Expanding membership is Sandy's new role

A legal expert has stepped up to take the chair at one of Shropshire's longest running business networking groups.

Sandy Edwards, a senior associate at Aaron & Partners in Shrewsbury, will head up Shropshire Chamber of Commerce's breakfast club in Oswestry.

She was previously the group's vice chair for two years – a position now

taken on by Ian Follington, from Business Doctors.

Sandy said: "This networking group plays a vital role in bringing the local business community together and I've seen first-hand how it can help organisations of all shapes and sizes grow and prosper.

"I'll be focused on building on the great work that's come before me and hoping

to expand the membership to ensure we continue to showcase the fantastic range of businesses we have here in Shropshire."

Teresa Rowe, head of events at the chamber, added: "Sandy brings a fantastic personality and specialist knowledge to the club. She is a true advocate of the networking group and she's passionate about business in Shropshire."

Restoration produces a property to be proud of

A project to transform one of Shropshire's oldest and most iconic buildings is now complete.

The major renovation of Bishop Percy's House in Bridgnorth, owned by Maria Allen, has finished after four years of meticulous planning and careful restoration.

Vic Johnson, of Johnson Design Partnership, drew up designs to convert the 16th century half timbered property into a tea room and holiday apartments.

The project also includes the construction of two separate contemporary homes overlooking the river, for owners Maria and Reg Allen of Stourbridge, which are due to be finished by Easter.

"Bishop Percy's House is a striking town centre landmark and we are thrilled with the way it has been brought back to life," said Vic, whose firm, based in Station Lane, Bridgnorth, has worked with contractors Three Pines Builders of Wolverhampton.

"The main premises were completely stripped back and acoustic and thermal upgrades made to the fabric of the timber frame. Obviously as this is a Grade I listed building we worked carefully with the conservation officers and it is very exciting to see it transformed.



Bishop Percy's House proprietor Maria Allen and Richard Couatts of Johnson Design Partnership

"This is an important initiative for Bridgnorth and for Johnson Design Partnership as it incorporates refurbishment and remodelling of the historical building and an innovative, modern element to the rear - it is a bold blend of ancient and modern."

Maria Allen, who owns the building with her husband Reg, said: "I am thrilled at the outcome of this difficult project and to be opening the tea room and apartments to provide jobs and an interest to the Bridgnorth community."

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Experts in Business



Reconomy was named company of the year at the 2017 Shropshire Business Awards, in Telford

Important acquisition

Shropshire's reigning company of the year, Reconomy, is on the acquisition trail again.

The fast-growing business, based at Stafford Park in Telford, has taken over nationally-operating waste management broker, Waste Check Ltd.

Based in Bromsgrove, Waste Check specialises in the compliant disposal of clinical and chemical waste materials for businesses operating across numerous business sectors, including healthcare, retail and care homes.

This latest purchase by Reconomy follows the acquisition of Cory Environmental's waste brokerage businesses in 2016, along with both Countrywide Waste

Management Ltd and Network Waste in 2015. By continuing to follow a path of acquisition and organic business growth, Reconomy is predicting revenues of £135 million by the end of 2018.

Chief executive of Reconomy, Paul Cox, said: "This is an important acquisition for Reconomy, which enables us to extend our waste management offering into a broader range of industries and commercial sectors.

"We will continue to expand our business portfolio and invest in the companies we acquire to enhance both their technological and waste reporting capabilities. This will help ensure our customers receive the best possible service.

"Waste Check is a family-run business with an established reputation for delivering excellent customer service, so its culture will align very well with that of Reconomy.

"We are looking forward to a long and prosperous future together."

Reconomy was named company of the year at the 2017 Shropshire Business Awards, at the International Centre in Telford. It was one of 10 awards which the company was shortlisted for, in 2017.

The business provides recycling and waste management services to many of the leading names across the housebuilding, commercial construction and infrastructure sectors.

Last year, the company managed over three million tonnes of waste on behalf of its client, diverting 93% of this away from landfill.

It co-ordinates more than 12,000 waste movements every week and works with SMEs through to large blue chip companies, supported by a network of over 1,000 pre-approved supply chain partners.

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Scholarships for talented musical trio



Scholarship – Freddie Faragher

Careers in the music industry could be beckoning for three Shrewsbury High Prep pupils after they were awarded top music scholarships.

Reuben Lindsay-Bowen and Elliot Inger have both been offered scholarships at Shrewsbury School for September.

And Freddie Faragher is celebrating a place at The Purcell School in Hertfordshire, the oldest specialist music school in the country whose patrons include The Prince of Wales, Sir Simon Rattle and Dame Kiri Te Kanawa.

Feedback from the school described saxophone and clarinet player Elliot as 'a young chap whose focus and determination impresses when it comes to his music'.

Reuben was described as 'fearless on the French horn, with an impressive, attacking style'. And Freddie's family said



Reuben Lindsay-Bowen and Elliot Inger have scholarships too

they were delighted by the way his talents had been encouraged, developed and nurtured by the school.

Hatfields Scholarships are available to boys entering Year 7 at Shrewsbury High Prep, and the school will be holding its next open day April 19.

Is your financial house in order?

We work hard all our lives, but don't always pause to make sure our financial house is in order for retirement.

And with the issue of care home fees rarely out of the headlines, Shropshire lawyer Jeremy Charlton says careful planning has never been more important.

Jeremy, from Terry Jones Solicitors, says: "I have lost count of the number of times I have heard people say 'I must come in to see you to make a new will'.

"The wife of a good friend of mine who has just retired after 10 years working in a local hospice commented how distressing it was to hear so many people say that six months ago they were perfectly fit and healthy. It makes good sense therefore to prepare for the unexpected.

"Care home fees seems to be the hot topic at present. Alongside the problems faced by the NHS in an era of an increasingly ageing

population, this goes hand in hand with an increasing number of us who will be living in a care home of one description or another before we die.

"It is increasingly important therefore that anyone of middle age or over should give some thought and seek professional opinion to steps they can take to account of the future possibility of care home fees.

"In addition, as more of us are living longer, more of us will at some stage suffer from some form of dementia. It is important therefore that family members are not left in a situation where they have an elderly relative who no longer has capacity and no longer has the ability to manage their property and financial affairs.

"It is equally important for anyone in business that the partners have Lasting Powers of Attorney in place in case the unthinkable happens. If a business partner dies or is incapacitated, the business could face serious and unnecessary problems in signing legal and financial paperwork."



Jeremy Charlton, from Terry Jones Solicitors

Producing the next generation

Fabweld Steel Products of Telford has launched its latest programme to produce the next generation of its workforce to support its long-term ambitions for growth.

The manufacturer has started the year with three apprentices in training and is currently actively recruiting up to three more apprentice welders and fabricators and another for its administration team.

Two members of staff are being supported to pursue degrees and the firm has also appointed a dedicated in-house training co-ordinator to drive up skills across the board.

Kacper Zasacki and Ashley Guerra-Rigby are undertaking welding apprenticeships through In-Comm Training with Jack Loftus, following a sales apprenticeship at Telford College.

Production scheduler Chris James is studying for a degree in manufacturing engineering, while design engineer Dan Brown is following a degree course in product design. Both are studying at the University of Wolverhampton's Telford campus on day release from their jobs at FSP.

Norman Carter has taken on the new role of training co-ordinator and is also overseeing other staff training through



Sales apprentice Jack Loftus with his supervisor Chris Corbett

Shropshire Chamber's 100% funded training scheme that offers free courses in sales, leadership, online marketing, customer care and health & safety to SMEs.

FSP, which makes steel access covers and drainage products at its factory in Madeley, has a strong tradition of supporting staff development. Its operations director Wayne Carter began his career on the shop floor as an apprentice.

The firm has grown from a two-man partnership to one that now employs 35 staff and has an annual turnover of more than £3 million.

Managing director Richard Hilton said: "We are committed to bringing on young talent and giving our staff the opportunity to develop their careers and improve their skills."

"It not only benefits our business on a day to day basis but it underpins our long term plans for strategic and sustainable growth."

"We want to offer more people a career path like Wayne where they can progress from a skilled role into management and would love to hear from anyone interested in joining our team."

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Daniel Kawczynski and Jacqueline Champion



And action . . . Jacqueline Champion selling on QVC with presenter Claire Sutton

Life is sweet for county's business awards finalist

Confectionery firm **Champion & Reeves** is flying the flag for Shropshire in the finals of the West Midlands FSB 'Celebrating Small Business' awards.

The Shrewsbury-based company is one of four finalists in the family business of the year category, where it is up against Worleys Swan Limited of Stourport-on-Severn, Open Study College in Birmingham, and David Manners Group from Oldbury.

The winners will be announced on March 16 at The National Conference Centre, Birmingham, where Telford-based Global Freight is among the event sponsors.

Category winners go through to the UK national finals, to be held in London in May.



The Shropshire delegation at Westminster, with MPs Daniel Kawczynski and Philip Dunne

“ We were given a platform to introduce our unique range of expertly produced Shropshire products ”

It has been a busy few weeks for Champion & Reeves managing director, Jacqueline Champion, who has appeared as a guest presenter on TV shopping channel QVC, and led a group of Shropshire food and drink producers on a trip to the House of Commons to showcase their wares.

She said: “Thanks to Shrewsbury MP Daniel Kawczynski, we were given a

platform to introduce our unique range of expertly produced Shropshire products to other members of parliament. We are all passionate about the provenance and heritage of our products.”

Other producers on the trip included Image on Food, Hobson's Brewery, Great Berwick Organics, Lajina Masala, Real Coffee Bag, Buy From Online, Shropshire Spice Company, Oak Apple Caterer, Chilton Liqueurs and Petton Preserves.

Bridgnorth Endowed School also showcased their Tanzanian Coffee beans, with proceeds of sales going to a school in Tanzania.

Mr Kawczynski and fellow Shropshire MPs Mark Pritchard and Philip Dunne visited the stall, and said they were proud of the fabulous quality and range of county product on display.

Champion & Reeves makes 100% natural confectionery with no artificial additives or flavourings, which are gluten free and palm oil free.

The company has started supplying shops at Westminster, with nougat and butterscotch sold in The House of Commons and butterscotch and their new dark chocolate and sea salted almonds for sale in The House of Lords shop.

Support an inspirational row

The boss of a Shropshire charity is bidding to become the first adaptive athlete to row single-handed across the Atlantic – and is appealing to the local business community to jump on board.

Kelda Wood, who lives near Shrewsbury, hopes her ambitious 'Row To Raise' challenge will amass over £50,000 for charity.

I now want to support others to find the same confidence and self-belief that I've found

Kelda runs Climbing Out, a charity that offers five-day outdoor activity programmes aimed at rebuilding confidence and self esteem in young people facing life-changing injury, illness or trauma, and she hopes the challenge will enable the charity to reach even more young people in the future.

After playing netball at national level and riding horses professionally, Kelda suffered



Kelda Wood. Picture: Geoff Ward Film & Photography

a life-changing leg injury in 2002 when a haylage bale weighing nearly a tonne fell on top of her.

Determined not to allow this to halt her love of sport and activity, she became a member of the GB paracanoe squad, almost making it to the Paralympic Games in Rio.

But she admits that the transatlantic mission, part of the Talisker Whisky Atlantic Challenge which begins at the end of this year, is going to be another huge learning curve.

"I've been on a huge journey since my own life-changing injury: a journey that's included being a member of the GB Paracanoe squad, setting up Climbing Out, and summiting Aconcagua, the highest peak in South America.

"I now want to support others to find the same confidence and self-belief that I've found through my journey . . . and that's why I'm going to row the Atlantic!"

Each day she is on the ocean, Kelda will be rowing for a different young person, sharing their stories and links to relevant charities and organisations that provide support.

Charities such as The Teenage Cancer Trust, Kidney Care UK, Limbpower and Help for Heroes will be nominating people for Kelda to row for, and helping to create a network of support.

"The aim now is to raise awareness of the challenge as much as possible, to make sure it is on the radar of potential supporters and sponsors."

Kelda is still on the lookout for sponsors, and mentors, to join her team.

She said: "I hope that Row to Raise will reach many young people that are currently feeling isolated and alone, give them hope, inspire them to contact support networks and begin to move forwards."

More information about Kelda's challenge can be found on the campaign website, www.rowtoraise.com

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Contract retained



Barleyfield House in Monkmoor, run by Coverage Care Services

A Shrewsbury care provider has retained a contract to provide respite residential care for adults with learning disabilities.

Shropshire Council retendered the contract at Barleyfield House in Monkmoor, which has been run by Coverage Care Services for the past 10 years. The five-bed home currently supports 50 families, providing holiday and respite care to adults with a learning disability.

Coverage Care has retained the contract.

The agreement will run for two years with an option

to extend at the end of the existing term.

Trish Owen, registered manager at the home in Crowmere Road, said: "We have a small dedicated team who work closely with families to ensure that time here is as enjoyable and relaxed as it can be and that we cater for an individual's specific needs."

"We deliver a high standard of person-centred care, as recognised by the CQC inspectors, and we are very pleased that we are able to go forward into our next chapter with the Council in such a strong position."

It's time to enjoy a spot of leisure

With caravan parks opening up for the new season, a Shropshire-based leisure company says there are positive early signs of another busy season ahead.

Tony Bywater, chairman of Salop Leisure, which has caravan and motorhome sales centres in Shrewsbury, Machynlleth and Stourport-on-Severn, believes 'staycationing' is still as popular as ever with the British public.



Tony Bywater – Salop Leisure chairman

“We feel that 2018 is going to be a great year of opportunities for our company and other tourism businesses”

“We were a bit concerned about the impact of the wet end to last summer, but the disappointing weather has not dampened enthusiasm for caravan holiday homes, motorhomes and touring caravans which allow people to get away whenever they wish to a location of their choice,” he said.

“The bills for rents and rates for the forthcoming season have gone out to caravan owners and there are very few that have decided to pack up their caravan, except through illness or bereavement.

“That’s a good sign that it’s going to be a very good year for sales of caravans and motorhomes. We feel that 2018 is going to be a great year of opportunities for our company and other tourism businesses.”

He predicts that the devaluation of the pound against other currencies and the increased expense of flying abroad will persuade even more British people to staycation.

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Why businesses need to embrace the rapidly evolving world of 'End to End IT'



Agility is the key to the successful fulfilment of business strategy. Working collaboratively, using the latest socially-driven tools and technology, can make a significant contribution to the speed and effectiveness of business responses.

Within today's challenging economic and business environment we're seeing a constant evolution of individuals' preferred means of communication.

Trends such as the rise of mobile working, and the use of multiple social channels, all highlight the critical importance of effective collaboration within and between businesses. Companies that embrace

such tools to work together effectively can leverage a distinct competitive advantage.

These are our top tips for ways to become more agile as a business:

- **INCREASE YOUR REACH AND SPEED UP GROWTH**

Collaboration provides wider access to geographically dispersed groups and brings integration and uniform methodology to business practices. This increased integration can help your company grow faster and provide mutual support networks between organisations and internal departments. This rise of productivity leads to innovation that creates competitive advantage through knowledge, good practice and information sharing.

- **INCREASE INTERACTION WITH CUSTOMERS**

Collaboration makes it easier for employees and customers to interact at any time, from anywhere, and to share and exchange information in real-time. Flexible and successful businesses provide a variety of collaboration tools and services to their customers to engage with them when they need to.

- **FLEXIBILITY FOR WORKFORCE**

The key to flexible business is the ability to create work areas within your company that foster collaboration, employee engagement and innovation. This makes it easier for employees to work from multiple locations with highly secure access to

resources and provides the workforce with a stronger united voice with the capacity to replicate success.

- **REDUCING COSTS THROUGH COLLABORATION**

Unified Communications (UC) can consolidate all communication, including telephony, email, voicemail, instant messaging and video conferencing, into one seamlessly integrated offering. Businesses no longer need to pay for and support individual tools, products, or equipment.

Companies using video conferencing can also avoid spending money on travel to face-to-face meetings with colleagues, clients, or prospects, which can prove to be expensive. UC also allows companies to optimise their use of office space, reducing costs. The major challenge for businesses today is investing in the right technology infrastructure to support a flexible, secure, multimedia collaboration environment and see a return on this investment.

A cloud infrastructure offers the flexibility and scalability required to be agile enough to trial and then deploy new applications into a business quickly and efficiently.

From the start of April this year, we will be able to offer a complete range of cloud-based services, taking us into the 'Unified Comms' arena.

● *Matt Sandford is managing director of Pure Telecom in Shrewsbury.*

FACTS AND FIGURES

39% of SMEs are leaning towards cloud-based Unified Comms Solutions and this is expected to rise to 100% by 2020. Out of 200 mid to large enterprises 45% are now using video conferencing as a means of cutting back on travel overheads.



'Big data' revolution

By Chris Austin

What difference would it make to your business if you could see all of the moving parts presented in one place, in real-time?

Imagine a 'dashboard' that shows you the numbers that matter the most, allowing you to act on them straight away.

It could contain the number of orders, as they come in. It might show the level of stock you hold, the most popular products today, the level of profit you're running at or the number of staff hours lost (and therefore the cost) because your most troublesome machine is down again.

It's hard to think of many businesses that would not benefit from being able to see their most crucial figures pulled together and presented in meaningful ways.

“One of the companies leading the way internationally in this fascinating and burgeoning field is based right here in Shropshire. Purple Frog Systems is based in Wellington.”

Many organisations do not actually recognise the value and depth of information that they generate all the time and could be using to improve efficiency – and therefore profit.

But we live and work in exciting times, where the technology and skills exist to identify, collect and process all of this information. It's not something that happens widely yet, at least not in meaningful ways, but it is the direction of travel that will be taken by the firms which will be the most successful tomorrow.

The biggest blockage to making this a reality is the expertise to extract and interpret and combine the data. It's quite a specialism, which then has to be allied with the technological know-how to present it in reliable and understandable ways.

One of the companies leading the way internationally in this fascinating and burgeoning field is based right here in Shropshire. Purple Frog Systems, based in Wellington, is recognised throughout the IT sector for managing and using big data, to the point where computing giant Microsoft has identified two of its consultants as 'Most Valued Professionals' on the global stage.

Founder and principal consultant at Purple Frog Systems, Alex Whittles, travels the world presenting on the intricacies of his specialism and the company runs popular conferences on what is known as data



An aerial view of Microsoft's Redmond campus in Seattle



We live and work in times where technology and skills identify, collect and process data

warehousing. He and his colleague, Paul Andrew, can often be found on Microsoft's Redmond campus in Seattle.

Alex says: "Because we live in a digital world, there is data everywhere, about almost every aspect of what a business does. It's not always obvious, sometimes far from it, but even the most simple process or interaction could have a massive impact if you can gather, analyse and read the data. That sounds obvious, but the information most businesses hold comes in a multitude of different formats, very few of which are designed to talk to each other or be directly relatable.

"That's where we and the tools we use come in. Our specialism is identifying the data, being able to reliably extract it and understand it, relate it to other sources of information and then present it, often in real time, to our clients."

One of the hardest things about handling data, Alex will tell you, is that if you interpret it wrongly or misunderstand what it's telling you at any stage, you will end up spitting out bad data at the other end of the process, so experience in understanding the pitfalls is crucial. Fortunately, Alex is a member of Mensa.

"When we come to presenting the data it's been through a number of processes, from being extracted – perhaps from some obscure, task specific manufacturing system – to being combined with other sources of intelligence and then, essentially, made readable by anyone," he explains.

"By the time it reaches the production manager, the finance director or the CEO, the hard work is done and they are able to look at straightforward, often graphical representations of the inner workings of their organisation."

is around the corner



Founder and principal consultant at Purple Frog Systems, Alex Whittles

“Realisation is dawning for many business leaders, Alex says, but the bottleneck is likely to be skills. “Specialists with the right credentials need to be behind interpreting and presenting the data and they are going to be increasingly in demand because such skills are not a tap you can simply turn on.”

“From that they can make rational and timely decisions.

“The things you can learn and the way data can be used are essentially endless. One great example is a national FTSE250 chain of retail stores that we work with. Their point of sale systems, the tills, record when a product is sold and that data all goes back from each shop to head office in realtime.

“When a particular line gets low, or perhaps is showing itself to be more popular than others, that information can be acted on very quickly to ensure there are no sales lost through running out of stock. If it’s in the warehouse it can go straight on a lorry for the next resupply, or an order can go to the supplier for more to be ordered, perhaps even automatically.

“In the past this might have relied on store managers filling in forms or

spreadsheets. Literally weeks would be lost across the course of a year.”

Purple Frog Systems has also worked extensively with financial organisations, including Principality Building Society.

Alex says: “We were able to provide them with definitive, accurate numbers, quickly made available to senior management and anyone else who needed them. On top of this, the system provides a full audit trail and transparency in the calculations used. And because the information is in one place and known to be high quality it means that all of the regulatory returns they are required to make are available and ready to be filed weeks before the regulators demand them.

“We’ve reached a point now where more people are understanding the value of their data, which is collected all over the place. Having the technological tools to pull that

detail together and process it meaningfully and, critically, in an affordable way, is what has really changed.

“It used to require massive, expensive mainframe computers to do this kind of work. Now anyone can access the power of cloud computing, where you can turn on the processing power and storage you need on demand and only pay for what you use. No need for technicians to maintain your servers or for expensive capital replacement programmes, just rent the capacity you need. That puts it in everyone’s grasp.”

Realisation is dawning for many business leaders, Alex says, but the bottleneck is likely to be skills.

“Specialists with the right credentials need to be behind interpreting and presenting the data and they are going to be increasingly in demand because such skills are not a tap you can simply turn on.”



Received a nasty - if expected - bill following a costly festive period?



Store and credit cards got you through Christmas, but now what?

Pay your cards right

TV's money-saving expert **Martin Lewis** writes for Shropshire Business



Letterboxes can be particularly dangerous during the first few months of the year, as the cost of festive spending lands on the doormat, and has to be untangled. So if your plastic still has a festive hangover, don't ignore it.

There are three key rules to sorting your existing debts:

1. Stop borrowing more.
2. Cut the interest rate. This means your repayments clear the actual debt rather than just profit the lender.
3. If you've more than one debt, prioritise repaying the one with the highest interest rate first – as it's growing fastest – and just pay the minimums on everything else.

The key weapon to cut interest is a balance transfer

This is where you get a new card that repays debts on existing credit or store cards for you, so you shift the debt and owe it, but at no interest cost. And there's another 'rule of three' here to get the right card.

1. DON'T APPLY WILLY-NILLY, FIRST SEE WHAT YOU'LL BE ACCEPTED FOR.

When you apply for a credit card they do a credit check. Banks are the type of organisation that'd lend you an umbrella when the sun shines and ask for it back when it rains. So those in most need of



A key weapon to cut the interest you are paying on credit and store cards is a balance transfer

cutting their existing debts tend to be those who struggle most to be accepted.

Worse still, just applying for a card marks your credit file, which has a marginally negative impact, so if you're rejected, being accepted elsewhere gets slightly tougher. To help, use an eligibility calculator, like mine at www.moneysavingexpert.com/BTEligibility.

2. GO FOR THE CARD WITH THE LOWEST FEE IN THE TIME YOU NEED.

Most balance transfer cards charge a one-off fee on the amount of debt transferred up to 3% (so £30 per £1,000 shifted).

In general the longer the 0% period the higher the fee, so you should aim for the card with the lowest fee but ensuring the 0% period is long enough. So calculate how long you think you'll take to clear the debt, add a bit for safety, then pick the lowest fee

within that time. If you're not sure play long and go safe.

The longest current 0% card at time of writing is www.barclaycard.co.uk at 'up to' 38 months 0% with a 1.4% fee (19.9% rep APR after). The longest fee-free card is www.halifax.co.uk at 'up to' 29 months 0% (19.9% rep APR after). Full best buys at www.mse.me/balancetransfers.

3. WATCH FOR 'UP TO' CARDS.

As you'll note those best buys are 'up to' cards. They tend not to say this overtly but you will spot it in the small print. This means, depending on credit score, some who are accepted will get a shorter 0%. Frustratingly there is no way to know this beforehand.

However, in general if you do an eligibility check and the only cards showing up that you have a decent chance are

● Martin Lewis is the Founder and Chair of Money Saving Expert. To join the 12 million people who get his Martin's Money Tips weekly email, go to www.moneysavingexpert.com/latesttip



A balance transfer can save you a lot of cash

'up to's' then you're likely to get a shorter 0% with all of them. The longest non-up to 0% card is www.sainsburysbank.co.uk at 36 months 0% with a 2.89% fee – so if accepted that's what you get and it also offers a non-up to fee-free option for 28 months 0% (both are 18.9% rep APR after). If you've a decent chance of getting those, then they may be worth plumping for.

The balance transfer golden rules...

Getting the right cards only half the job, once you've got it you need to ensure you use it the right way.

- Always clear the debt on the card or transfer again before the 0% ends or you pay the high APR.
- Never miss the minimum monthly repayment or you can lose the 0%.
- Don't spend or withdraw cash on the card. It usually isn't at the cheap rate.
- You must usually do the transfer quickly, most cards limits are 60 – 90 days to get the 0%.

Balance transfer common questions (and the answers too, obv's)

Q. Can it clear multiple cards? Yes, if the new credit limit's big enough.

Q. How big will the credit limit be? Lenders tend to look at how much you earn and how much other debt you have. It can be anything from £100 to £25,000. You can usually transfer up to around 90-95% of it.

Q. My credit limit is not big enough. What should I do? Shift as much of your most expensive debt to the card as you can. At least you'll save on that. When done, follow the process above again to see if you can get a second card for some more. Though each subsequent application can get more difficult as each marks your credit file.

Q. If my best chances of acceptance are only say 30% should I bother applying? That means 3 in 10 of those in your position will get accepted. If cutting this debt's cost is your priority (i.e. you're not about to get a mortgage the next week) then you may as well try, one application won't hurt that much, and this is what you build up your credit score for anyway.

● All recommendations and best deals correct at time of writing

Taking the energy out of those tales

I want to play a little game of True or False with you over a series of popular energy myths. See how many you get right...

TRUE OR FALSE. The cheapest way to pay energy bills is by direct debit?

True (but specifically it needs to be monthly). Then suppliers offer discounts of around 7%. Yet while you pay less in total, as its estimating your usage, if it overestimates it could ask you for more cash – leaving you in-credit – or worse, leaving you underpaying, and in debt with it. So ensure you always give regular meter readings to get accurate bills. And if you think its estimate is wrong, you've a right to challenge.

TRUE OR FALSE. It's cheaper to leave the heating on low all day than to have it turned off and on?

False(ish). Just pay to pump energy in as and when is needed, as to keep pumping it in constantly isn't efficient. Using a timer's best, because your thermostat is designed to turn your heating on and off to keep your home at the temperature you set it. This is the view of both the Energy Saving Trust and British Gas, so in general I'd stick with that. Yet some heating engineers argue that keeping all the radiators on full but with the boiler down can reduce condensation, whereas on and off can make it worse. As condensation helps conduct heat outside the home – you lose heat more quickly and will use more energy as a result. So if your house is prone to condensation, you may want to think about it.

TRUE OR FALSE. Renters can't switch energy provider without their landlord's permission?

False. You have a right to switch energy provider in your home even if you only pay the rent. There are two exceptions:

- If you don't pay for energy yourself, it's all included in your rent
- If you're looking to switch meter, eg from prepayment to a credit meter, as that's a physical change to the property that needs permission. So feel free to do a comparison. Just plug your details into my website found at www.cheapenergyclub.com or any other www.ofgem.co.uk - approved comparison site and it'll tell you the best deal for you. Just make sure you select 'all



If you switch energy suppliers you may be entitled to a refund

True (now anyway). If you pay by direct debit and when you leave an energy firm you're in credit, then since 2014 you should automatically get this back. But track it and if the supplier doesn't, call it and ask for the cash. If you switched before 2014 and think you might have been in credit then call to check as they operated a 'don't ask don't get policy' and you can still ask. Like Aston, who emailed: "Eight minutes work calling my old energy suppliers, got £140 refunded after leaving in credit. Why don't more people do this?"

TRUE OR FALSE. When you change energy supplier, someone will need to visit your home?

False. Nobody usually visits your home. Your pipes don't change and your gas and electricity won't get cut off. You don't even need to contact your old energy supplier to tell it you're switching. The only thing that changes is the price and service. It's so easy to switch. It isn't a big deal.

TRUE OR FALSE. I must get boiler cover with my energy provider?

False. Many energy firms use our fear of losing heating to charge hefty insurance costs. They also want us to think there's some link between our energy provider and our boiler cover. There isn't - you're not locked in, so if you do need it, go elsewhere.



Ensure you give regular meter readings for accurate bills

tariffs' as some comparison sites now default to only show you the ones that will pay them (my cheap energy club doesn't do this). If the landlord says it's written into your contract that you can't switch, challenge it. Preventing a tenant from changing energy suppliers may be viewed as an unfair term in a tenancy agreement.

TRUE OR FALSE. If you're in credit when you switch energy provider, they must give you the money back?

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Blog



Is your cash in the right place?

Martin Lewis offers tips to ensure your money is earning its maximum



Motor insurance affected by career choice

Accountants pay least in premiums, according to

survey



Why equality matters

HR professional Ishbel Lapper offers advice to employers

Features & Analysis



People



Twitter





Sarah Mallard and Stephen Farrow of Savills rural department

Two team members

The Savills rural department in Telford has been boosted by the appointment of two new team members.

Associate director Stephen Farrow will transfer across from the Lichfield office to head up the estate management team, whilst Sarah Mallard has been appointed as an associate to join the rural professional team.

As a graduate of Harper Adams University, Stephen started his career with a national firm of chartered surveyors in 2005, based in his home county of Lincolnshire, and then returned to Shropshire in 2012 to manage property portfolios on behalf of private, institutional and commercial landowners.

After graduating from the Royal Agricultural College in 2008, Sarah has worked in Staffordshire and Shropshire for over seven years.

Ian has joined the panel

Experienced family law solicitor Ian Yates is celebrating his admission to the Law Society Family Panel. He said: "Having only recently joined Terry Jones solicitors, I was delighted to gain accreditation as a family law specialist from the Law Society."

Panel membership recognises solicitors who have achieved a proven level of competence and knowledge in a specific subject area, and I am very proud to become one of only a handful of Telford-based solicitors to achieve this distinction."

Ian concentrates upon resolving financial and other issues arising from divorce or separation.



Ian Yates

Expanding the business



Tania McGee



Edward Nutting

Law firm Lanyon Bowdler is expanding its commercial and agricultural property team. Tania McGee has 17 years' experience as a commercial and agricultural property solicitor and as an associate at the Oswestry office.

The team will be further strengthened with the addition of Edward Nutting as a partner in April.

He is currently Head of Agriculture at Hibberts LLP, where he established the firm as a Legal 500 top tier firm for agricultural work.

Emma Wilde, who heads up the Oswestry commercial and agricultural property team, said: "Their addition reflects the significant ongoing demand we are seeing from clients both in Oswestry and across the border into Wales."

Rentals appointments

Charlotte De La Motte, 19, from Lightmoor, has been appointed as a rentals negotiator by Harwood The Estate Agent at their Broseley office after she completed a 12 month apprenticeship.

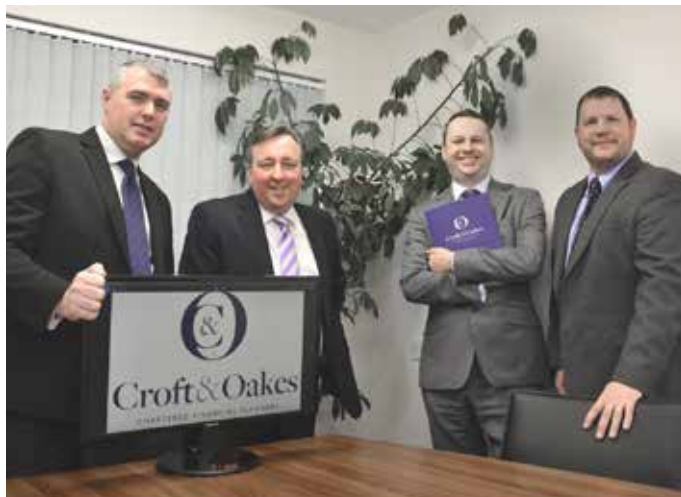
A second newcomer to the rentals team is Gill Ford, 60, of Broseley who is a former Harwood client and former Broseley shop owner, having run a mobility business in the town for 16 years.

Gill is now involved in property maintenance, inspections and administration having experience in the sector.



Charlotte De La Motte and Gill Ford

Financial planners



Alex Bound, Ian Holmes, Chris Oakes and Keith Croft

A financial planning company set up by former work colleagues has appointed two new staff members.

Keith Croft of Telford, and Chris Oakes of Shrewsbury launched Croft & Oakes Chartered Financial Planners from the Business Development Centre on Stafford Park in Telford in 2016 and have now moved to larger offices within the centre.

Recently appointed as new business manager is Ian Holmes, from Oswestry, who has 25 years' experience in financial services, and chartered financial planner Alex Bound, from Gloucester, who has over a decade's experience in finance and will be based in that area, helping to provide a wider client portfolio.



Mark Briegal, a partner and member of the executive board at Aaron & Partners pictured with head of marketing Christos Kottis

Executives taken on via training academy



Alex Charmbury and George Robinson from Pure Telecom

Multi-talented Christos

Shrewsbury legal firm Aaron & Partners LLP has appointed Christos Kottis as its new head of marketing.

A chartered marketer since 2003, Christos joins the firm with over 20 years' experience in marketing and business development across a range of B2B sectors.

Most recently Christos, whose areas of expertise include renewable energy, industrial (MRO) distribution and publishing, worked as a management consultant and trainer, supporting businesses with their growth strategy and management skills training. He also speaks fluent French, Greek and English.

Christos said: "I'm incredibly honoured to have been given the chance to join the team at Aaron & Partners at a time of real growth for the business.

"I am passionate about creating marketing strategies that achieve sustainable and profitable growth."

Two new executives have been taken on at Pure Telecom as a result of its new 'training academy' programme.

The expanding company, based in Shrewsbury Business Park, has introduced the post graduate initiative in order to recruit the highest quality candidates to its team and deliver a professional service to firms requiring mobile phone, fixed line and hosted telephone solutions and digital services.

Applicants were invited to Pure's offices for a day of assessments and interviews and as a result George Robinson and Alex Charmbury were offered roles as business development executives.

Managing director Matt Sandford said: "By establishing a sales academy within our business we can ensure recruits receive solid training in telesales and business from the very start of their journey with us.

"They will also benefit from continued professional development throughout their careers here."

George, 25, is a graduate from the University of Central Lancashire, who was previously a sales account manager for NWF Fuels in Oswestry.

Alex, 20, who also lives in Shrewsbury, studied networking, computer systems and business intelligence at Shrewsbury College and has worked in retail since.



Toni Mathieson, Sarah Cussen, Nicola Ward and Ann Thomas

New faces for law specialist

The private client team at Wace Morgan Solicitors of Shrewsbury has been strengthened with the recruitment of three new members of staff.

Private client executive Toni Mathieson has been working in the legal industry since 2009, at several Shropshire firms. She has experience in residential conveyancing and private client work, starting her career as a legal assistant and going on to specialise in private client work.

Nicola Ward first started working in the legal profession in 1990 as a trainee legal executive before going to university and then proceeding to qualify as a solicitor.

New secretary Ann Thomas has worked in solicitors' offices in North Wales and Shropshire for over 20 years as a legal secretary and legal assistant, gaining experience in a range of departments, including litigation, property, probate and family.

There has also been a new addition to the commercial department. Sarah Cussen started off working in law firms about 25 years ago as a legal secretary in both Oxford and then Liverpool and has recently relocated to Shrewsbury.

New post created at a regarded building firm

The marketing team at a leading Shropshire building company has been strengthened with the creation of a new post.

Baljit Johal joins the staff at Galliers Homes, based on Shrewsbury Business Park, which is developing sites throughout the county.

Baljit, who becomes a marketing executive with the firm, has spent the last 13 years employed by an agency and directly by clients as a media planner and buyer, working on platforms including radio, television, press, digital and social media.



Baljit Johal from Galliers Homes



Professor Ian Oakes with Angela Tellyn of Careers & Enterprise Company Ltd), Karen Banks, Shelley Robinson and Kim Hodgetts

An enterprising idea

Secondary schools and colleges across Shropshire will be given greater access to senior business leaders with the announcement that three dedicated 'Enterprise Co-ordinators' have been recruited for the Marches region.

They will work, voluntarily, with schools and colleges to develop and enhance their business engagement plans. Taking up the roles are Karen Banks in Herefordshire, Shelley Robinson in Shropshire and Kim Hodgetts in Telford & Wrekin.

Professor Ian Oakes, who chairs the Marches' Skills Board, said: "Engaging with young people to demonstrate the relevance of their studies and enable them to understand how it translates through to the world of work, is only possible when they're given the opportunity to engage with experts from within the workplace.

"There are many highly experienced people out there who possess a wealth of invaluable business knowledge and the role of our three new co-ordinators will make it possible for those experts to develop meaningful relationships with schools and colleges and provide them with relevant advice and guidance, as well as access to work experience opportunities."

Developing talent

Yarrington Limited, the award-winning marketing, graphic design, web, video and event management firm, based at Frankwell in Shrewsbury, has welcomed Stuart Bogle, a front-end web developer, to its growing digital team.

Stuart has a BSc (Hons) Interactive Multimedia Design from University of Ulster, Northern Ireland and extensive experience building PHP/MySQL driven websites, using

HTML5, CSS3 and various web scripting technologies and web standards. Yarrington is responsible for staging a host of high-profile events across the county, including the annual Shropshire Chamber Business Awards, and Shropshire FA Awards.



Stuart Bogle of Yarrington Limited

Dan's behind the wheel

Dan Foskett, the former sales manager at motor dealership Arthurs of Oswestry, has become dealer principal of the company's Peugeot dealership in Wrexham.

He could already be described as a 'veteran' of the motor industry.

The 43-year-old has a son, Luke, 10, who plays cricket for the Shropshire Development Squad, and daughter, Megan, 9.

Dan himself manages a football team, the Shrewsbury Up and Comers who play in the Under 11's Shropshire Junior Football League.



Newly-appointed dealer principal Dan Foskett at Arthurs of Oswestry

Rejuvenating a practice



Pauline Davies, Helen Barrett, Mike Surzyn, Ryan Bickham, Danny Smith and Nicola Pugh at PCB Solicitors

Law firm PCB Solicitors has announced the appointment of five new partners. The firm is based on Shrewsbury Business Park, with offices at Church Stretton, Craven Arms, Clun, Dawley, Knighton and Ludlow.

Stepping up are Pauline Davies, of Clun, who has 12 years' experience in the wills and probate department and is a member of Solicitors for the Elderly and the Society of Trust and Estate Practitioners; Ryan Bickham, of Telford, who specialises in litigation; and Danny Smith, of Codsall, who has worked in the crime department for a decade. Helen Barrett, of Knighton and Nicola Pugh of Bishop's Castle have been appointed joint head of conveyancing.

PCB managing partner, Mike Surzyn, said: "We are rejuvenating the practice by appointing these young and vibrant people who are all experts in their own field and who each have proven records, as we build on continued company expansion."

New recruit for agency

A Shropshire PR agency has begun its second year of trading by recruiting a new member of staff and landing another account.

Katie Love joins Star Public Relations, which operates out of Telford and

Wolverhampton, with 12 years of PR experience. The agency's newest client is Glowstone Ltd, which uses smart and connected technology to optimise everyday products. Katie said: "I think 2018 is going to be an exciting year." The agency is part of the Midland News Association, publisher of the Shropshire Star.



Star PR team - Cathy Dobbs, Sundeep Sehijpal & Katie Love



Five minutes with . . .

TIM BEECH has been editor of BBC Shropshire for the past 12 years – but says he's often reminded this still only makes him a 'newcomer' to the county!

EXPLAIN A TYPICAL WEEK IN YOUR WORKING LIFE:

There's really no such thing as a 'typical week', but running BBC Radio Shropshire involves managing budgets, contracts for staff and presenters, making editorial decisions, representing the station, and managing the relationship with the wider BBC. I try to spend as much time of it as possible with people – listening to them, talking to them and hopefully encouraging them to be the best that they can be.

WHAT IS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE FACING YOUR INDUSTRY RIGHT NOW?

Changes in technology have transformed the way we consume and use media of all sorts over the past few years. Keeping abreast of that is a huge challenge, which involves technical development, learning new skills and recognising the changing demands and expectations of audiences who now have so much more control over what they see and listen to – and when...

AND THE BIG OPPORTUNITIES?

Your content can reach more people, more quickly and in many more different forms than ever before. We're now seeing companies grow exponentially – Netflix's revenue was \$2.2bn in 2010. Last year it was \$11.6bn. It's found a business model based on the relatively recent ability of consumers to stream content on demand. They're spending around \$8bn on content in 2018; the BBC's total licence fee income in 2016-17 was around \$3.8bn. The chance to grow really fast, if you get it right, is enormous. But the risks of being left behind are greater than ever.

HOW DO YOU GET THE BEST OUT OF YOUR STAFF?

It's people who present the shows, create the content and make the workplace environment. I'm very proud of the way our staff surveys show up how much people love working at BBC Radio Shropshire, because I believe you can hear that spirit on the radio. We're very aware we have duties as a licence fee funded operation and we work hard, but there always has to be room for some fun.

WHAT WAS YOUR LAST MEETING ABOUT, HOW LONG DID IT LAST, AND WAS IT PRODUCTIVE?

We just had a staff meeting to generate ideas for content to go into new evening shows which are due to start later this year. It lasted around half an hour and we generated around 15 headline ideas, with lots of strands going off them.

HOW MANY EMAILS DO YOU GET IN A DAY, AND HOW MUCH TIME DO YOU HAVE TO READ THEM?

It's often well over 100 to me personally (and lots more to the station email of course). One of the biggest "crimes" is the cc button – people tend to copy others in to all sorts of emails which they don't really need to see.

DO YOU ANSWER WORK CALLS OR EMAILS AT HOME? WHAT'S THE RIGHT WORK-LIFE BALANCE?

I'll admit that I do and probably shouldn't so much. But radio's a 24/7 business. I think you need to impose some rules so that you have work-free time for yourself and your family.

HOW DO YOU HOPE YOUR COLLEAGUES WOULD DESCRIBE YOU?

Trustworthy and always approachable.

HIGHLIGHTS OF YOUR CAREER SO FAR?

I really wanted to be a sports commentator when I started, so covering cup finals at Wembley and European games were real highlights, as well as the chance to meet so many interesting and, in some cases, famous people. For instance, what a privilege to have met and interviewed at length the likes of Wolves' legends



Tim Beech, editor of BBC Shropshire

Stan Cullis and Billy Wright, or Albion's Cyrille Regis. And many more. I've been very lucky to have the chance to do a job that really started as a hobby.

PET HATES?

One thing I find very hard to accept is when people are treated with a lack of respect. Everyone deserves to be treated with the same level of dignity and kindness.

IF YOU COULD GO BACK AND GIVE YOUR YOUNGER SELF SOME WISE ADVICE, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

Live in the moment and worry less. The best and only time is now.

WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE IS SPECIAL ABOUT THE SHROPSHIRE BUSINESS COMMUNITY?

I've always had a sense that people want to work together and support each other. There's a feeling that we all come from the same communities, face many of the same challenges and if one business prospers it's more likely to help another one than to be at its expense.

YOU CAN TAKE ONE BOOK, ONE FILM AND ONE CD ONTO A DESERT ISLAND – WHAT WOULD THEY BE?

"The Lord of the Rings" – a rich story that bears re-reading, but it's the kind of fantasy you'd need to escape the reality of being on a desert island. And it's very long so would take ages to read it! I love film noir – maybe "Double Indemnity" – Edward G Robinson was an amazing actor. "Out of the Blue" – ELO. Nostalgia from the time when I was a teenager.

YOUR FIVE DREAM DINNER PARTY GUESTS, DEAD OR ALIVE?

Jesus, Charles Dickens, Elizabeth I, Marie Curie and Peter Kay.

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