Talking construction with Phil Holding

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Win sales scholarship training worth £9,600

Meet the woman keeping your business in good health

Is the Apprenticeship Levy working?

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Guess which business owner has switched to a Real Time Accountant?

Making Tax Digital for VAT
What does this mean?

By April 2019, businesses above the VAT Threshold will need to keep Digital records and from 2020 this should apply to all other businesses who will be updating HMRC quarterly for their corporation tax, Income Tax and National Insurance obligations digitally. It is a significant change for many of us and means the end of the annual tax return to be replaced with a digital tax account where all your information will be stored in one place.

This change in the way HMRC wants information from tax payers means that you may need to move from your existing desktop or manual record keeping and onto an online accounting package.

The good news is we are certified in the installation and operation of Online Accounting software which is digitally compliant and specifically designed for small and medium sized business.

Isn’t it time you switched to a Real Time Accountant?

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Business rumbles on

WELL, Christmas is a dim and distant memory, Easter eggs are gathering dust on the shelves, Spring is in the air (hopefully) and business rumbles on regardless – because that’s what business does, isn’t it?

Whatever life may throw at us and however the tide of life ebbs and flows, business is business and, here at BusinessTime in Essex, we’re not ones to let the grass grow under our feet.

Keeping up with the always frantically changing and developing business scene in the county is an enjoyable challenge and I am delighted this magazine is doing its best to be part of the frantic activity.

The development of BusinessTime in Essex Online is now all but complete and you can read about the very exciting opportunities this affords businesses on pages 40-41.

We’re also excited and delighted to be the exclusive local media business partner in this year’s Essex Business Excellence Awards which showcase the very best the county has to offer – more on page 57.

Elsewhere in this issue – well, where do we begin! News, views and information on the county’s business scene abounds. We take a look at how the much-heralded Apprenticeship Levy is performing two years down the line (pages 44-48), how you should look at financing your company car purchase (page 39) and how to combine living and working together (pages 16-17). We also offer one fortunate woman the opportunity to win a sales training package worth nearly £10,000 (page 13).

I hope you enjoy this latest 72-page bumper issue. As I always say, none of it would be possible without your support so a most sincere thank-you to everyone who is embracing what we are trying to achieve (a mutually beneficial Essex business community) and to those not yet converted, well there’s always the summer issue!

Peter Richardson
Publishing Editor
If you have a business dispute worth between £10,000 and £25,000, you can count on Birkett Long to fix the fee from the outset. We’ll take you through the process and tell you about any additional costs that might crop up (like court fees for example). If we can help you avoid issuing court proceedings, we will.

Resolving a dispute can take considerable time, effort and money that you could better use to operate, manage, or grow your business. Birkett Long will help you to resolve the disagreement as cost effectively, and with as little damage to relationships, as possible.

Contact Perdeep Grewal about our fixed fee litigation service
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SOME THINGS NEED TO BE FIXED
JOIN Essex Chambers of Commerce for its Annual Golf Day at Langdon Hills Golf & Country Club on Thursday 9th May and see if you can walk away with the coveted Claret Cup.

The day will start mid-morning with bacon rolls and tea & coffee, before teeing off for 18 holes of competitive golf. The course itself is set in glorious undulating parkland and has a number of water hazards to make the round more interesting. Not only will you enjoy a day in the beautiful countryside, you will have spectacular panoramic views of the London skyline and the Thames basin.

You can play as either a single player or a team of four to represent your organisation and all golfing abilities are welcome to play. Golf buggies and pull trolleys can be ordered from the venue directly if required.

Following the golf there will be networking and a two-course carvery, with the traditional presentation of the golf-day awards. Along with the Claret Cup for the winning team there are other prizes for various competitions including the ‘Longest Drive’ and ‘Nearest the Pin’. Sponsorship opportunities are also available to give you the chance to raise the profile of your company.

From as little as £55 plus VAT to attend it’s a day not to be missed! Visit www.essexchambers.co.uk for more information or to book your place. Alternatively please get in touch with Ellie Cairns on 01268 209052.

Come and have fun at golf day

RAINtREE District Council has revealed more details about Horizon 120, the business and innovation park planned for Great Notley in Braintree which aims to create more than 2,000 jobs.

The 65-acre site located next to Great Notley Country Park has been purchased by the council with a vision to create an employment site fit for the future which attracts exciting new firms into the district and offers residents more opportunities for high calibre jobs and training.

The park is already attracting interest from a number of sectors including professional services, research, digital and development sectors and advanced manufacturing.

The council is also exploring options to include the best accompanying facilities, such as gyms, retail, restaurant and childcare provision, which will add to the experience for the employees working on the site. A hotel is also being considered to support the needs of businesses likely to move to the site.

The park will be future-proofed by offering the best fibre-optic connectivity, Wi-Fi hotspots, electric vehicle charging points and flexible accommodation. It will also benefit from views over open countryside with paths and jogging trails linking to Great Notley Country Park.

Cllr Tom Cunningham, Cabinet Member for Economic Development at Braintree District Council, said: “Horizon 120 offers an opportunity for businesses to secure well connected, state of the art, bespoke new premises within a quality environment, making it the place to do business now and in the future. We’ve already had huge interest from businesses in our district that need to expand and from businesses outside our district looking for future-proofed locations. The park is an ideal location for many businesses because it is next to the A120 and well connected to Stansted Airport, the Harwich port, London and Cambridge.”

Business park to create 2,000 jobs
‘It’s all about people!’

Every year, running a business gets tougher. How many times have we heard the competitive environment described like this: ‘It’s a war out there!’ So, it makes sense in times like these to make the best use of your resources, the most vital of which is your people. In spite of this, too often skills such as leadership, potential teamwork and decision-making don’t get the attention they deserve. Personal development is often left to individual initiative or outsourced to a course or lecture by the self-styled management ‘guru’. At Corporate Battlefields, we start from the premise that management skills are right up as the most important asset a company possesses. Nurturing these skills should be a priority for every chief executive.

We use historical examples of behaviour to illustrate the similarities between commercial life and military conflict. Unconventional as it may be, this background training is properly rooted in genuine relevance to today’s business environment. The lessons learned will draw on an emotional as well as pragmatic response. The experience will be enthralling as well as enlightening. The benefits will be both lasting and practical.

“There is no tougher place to take a team for leadership learning than a battlefield where experiential education delivers wider and deeper thinking in an innovative, unique, bespoke, proven and inspiring way… the battlefield is the platform not the purpose!”

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Employers urged to do more to help ease money worries

A CHELMSFORD financial adviser has urged businesses to be more proactive in helping employees with money worries in light of a report which claims 77% of employees say money worries impact them at work.

The inaugural Close Brothers’ Financial Wellbeing Index assesses the financial wellbeing of UK employees. After surveying more than 5,000 employees and more than 1,000 employers, it was found poor financial wellbeing is having a significant impact in the workplace. 87% of millennials, and 72% of those age 35-54 admit that money worries affect them while they’re at work. Those aged 55 and over are the demographic that suffer the least, but still almost half (47%) of this cohort worry about money while at work.

Employers understand that their businesses are suffering as a consequence, with around nine in ten (89%) larger UK businesses impacted by poor employee financial wellbeing. Organisations are already feeling the strain from the lack of financial wellbeing on multiple fronts including: reduced productivity (22%), loss of talent (22%), higher short-term and long-term absences (both 19%), reduction in retirees (17%) and higher healthcare costs (13%).

However, steps are being taken to tackle the issue with 45% of employers currently providing some workplace financial wellbeing strategies. In addition to reward and pensions, the top five benefits that employees are offered to help improve their financial wellbeing are: discount vouchers for lifestyle expenditure (17%), financial advice (13%, although only 6% funded/part funded by the employer), retirement seminars (12%), employee assistance programmes (12%) and workplace loans (6%).

Jeannette Makings, Head of Financial Education at Close Brothers said: “Money worries don’t just affect an individual’s financial health, they are also an issue for businesses, with lower productivity, higher absenteeism and higher staff costs which hurts business performance. Doing nothing is no longer an option.

“Employers are perfectly placed to play a significant role in making a difference to the UK’s financial health. Yet despite the growing awareness of the need for workplace financial wellbeing, organisations seem to be struggling to find clarity, transparency, and meaningful measurement on this issue.”

Professor Sir Cary Cooper, a leading expert in workplace wellbeing at ALLIANCE Manchester Business School, University of Manchester said: “Although many businesses have made great strides to look after the mental wellbeing of their employees over the past decade, not as many employers have supported their financial wellbeing. And given that employees have said their money worries are affecting them at work, this is a bottom-line issue.

“Providing advice and support for employees on their personal financial issues is not only the right thing to do, but also can deliver enhanced performance at work by taking away the money worries that can be a distraction from their daily work.”

Kevin Bray is Director of ECFS Ltd, independent financial advisers based in Chelmsford. He said: “Money worries are real and all-consuming to those who have acute financial issues whereas others may find their financial worries are more chronic. The problem is there but the levels of anxiety can fluctuate on a day to day basis. Either way, such worries are bound to impact on people’s performance at work.

“Employers often focus on the financials of a business and efficiencies in the workforce can make a significant difference to the bottom line. One way to ensure employees are highly productive is to enable them to concentrate on the difference they can make by helping alleviate their anxiety when it comes to financial worries.

“If a company has the opportunity to promote the various good works done by debt management specialists either by inviting someone in to talk to the management or even just putting a poster up on the staff notice board it shows, as an employer, you are aware and you care.

“Businesses need to be more proactive in addressing the issue, as worrying about finances is undoubtedly going to detract from their performance at work.”
The new home of innovation

Join our thriving business community on the University of Essex Knowledge Gateway.

Set to open its doors in 2019, our multi-million pound Innovation Centre will be the home for over 50 rapidly-developing high-tech and creative start-ups. The space will support fast growth companies to become sustainable commercial successes and will build upon the established business community on the Knowledge Gateway.

Located on the University of Essex Colchester Campus, the centre is at the heart of our Knowledge Gateway masterplan, in which we envisage 2,000 people eventually working here.

- Excellent business accommodation
- Academic to business support
- On-campus resources and facilities from the University of the Year
- Collaboration and funding opportunities
- Access to leading virtual and augmented digital equipment

The success of the Innovation Centre will help the University drive economic growth in the East of England as a globally recognised centre of excellence for data analytics, creative industries and innovative business.

Studio X

Alongside start-up space, the Innovation Centre will house a digital creative studio. This space boasts dedicated augmented and virtual reality equipment that will service the needs of both students and external partners to create and experiment with the latest technologies and thrive.

Talk to us about collaboration and joining our business community

Innovation Centre – Knowledge Gateway
University of Essex, Wivenhoe Park
Colchester, CO4 3SQ
T 01206 430266  E business@essex.ac.uk
www.essex.ac.uk/business
Attwells Solicitors merges with Colchester planning practice, LSR

ATTWELLS Solicitors has announced a merger with Colchester planning consultants and solicitors, LSR.

The merger follows the retirement from practice of Linda S Russell. Linda will remain a consultant with Attwells and all the LSR team will join up with Attwells.

LSR specialises in offering development site appraisals, planning applications, planning appeals, judicial reviews and planning law advice to its developer and local authority clients. LSR has the unique mixture of planning consultancy and law expertise to ensure all angles of planning have been considered.

Attwells Solicitors is a property law firm with award-winning customer service. Attwells secures for its property developers land for residential and commercial development and undertakes development finance and the fast and efficient conveyancing of plot sales. Attwells also acts for property investors, landlords, property agents and block managers.

LSR is currently based at 57 North Hill and from March 1 will move across the road to join the new Attwells Solicitors Colchester team at 18 North Hill.

Managing Partner, Nick Attwell said: “When I met Linda and the team, I felt a cultural match. I am proud to be trusted by Linda to look after her team following her retirement. Both firms strive to deliver excellent personal service to property people. Together LSR and Attwells can offer their respective clients a more complete property service in one place. I am really excited about talking to property developers about our end to end solution for their development needs.”

Managing Partner, Nick Attwell of Attwells Solicitors.
In an uncertain climate, be certain of Chambers’ support

WELL, 2019 is rolling by and, at the time of writing, we are still none the wiser as to what our relationship with the EU will be nor the impact it might have on businesses here, irrespective of whether you are an exporter or not.

What is certain though is that, whatever the eventual protracted outcome, Essex Chambers of Commerce will be working hard on your behalf. By the time you read this we will have met with the Secretary of State for Transport, Rt Hon Chris Grayling MP, to discuss the state of our road and rail networks in Essex. This is an issue that never seems to go away so we will be taking around 40 Chambers members and supporters to meet him armed with a long list of questions that we expect answers to. We’ll keep you updated on what we get as a response. As well as making our views known on what improvements need to happen to those networks, we also want to make sure that businesses get the opportunity to be part of any construction projects and bid for contracts that arise. We are talking to Highways England about how we can do just that for the proposed Third Lower Thames Crossing but there will be other projects around the county and we want to help members gain from them.

With this in mind, we are planning to launch a construction network later this year. It won’t just be the traditional networking events with a group of business people gathered in a room chatting over a cup of coffee and a bacon roll, but will feature updates from key people involved in some of the many projects that are being planned for the future. We will be meeting quarterly at Anglia Ruskin University in Chelmsford, nice and central for the county. Keep your eyes open for the announcement of our first meeting. Another issue where we have been taking the lead is business crime, or more accurately crimes against businesses. We all know these can cause major problems for businesses and their staff so we are working with Essex Police and the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner through a new joint board bringing businesses and the Police together to work collaboratively. Our first meeting this year was extremely positive and I was really pleased to see that the Police are establishing a dedicated business crime unit to focus on these crimes. We look forward to working with them in the future and I’ll update you on them in a future edition of BusinessTime in Essex.

As I write, our MPs have been tying themselves, and us, in knots over you know what, our future relationship with the European Union. As far as I can tell we are still leaving this year, probably on March 29, but whatever happens we will be here to support our members, whether exporters or not. We now have a Brexit section on our website where you can find information from a variety of sources and will be running a full programme of events aimed at exporters across the county throughout 2019.

Our more general events programme is coming together for 2019 and we think we’ll have some interesting meetings for you to come along to and network with fellow Chambers members and other businesses. If you’re a Chambers member, look out for details in your inbox, if not then have a look at our website – www.essexchambers.co.uk - and see what we have to offer.

Finally, my thanks go to Peter Richardson, publisher of BusinessTime in Essex, for the opportunity to tell you what we’re up to. Peter’s magazine goes to thousands of businesses across the county so why not take the opportunity to promote your business to others in Essex through it. You can find details of how to contact him on page 3.

That’s enough from me and I look forward to seeing you at one of our events in the coming weeks and months. Here’s to a successful 2019 for all of us.
MTD – minus one month and counting!

Making Tax Digital is revolutionary. For the average business, it aims to make tax management easier, no doubt alongside streamlining processes at HMRC as well. Not only will taxpayers benefit, but HMRC will be one step closer to achieving its ambitious aim of becoming ‘one of the most digitally advanced tax administrations in the world’.

Who will be affected?
From April 1 2019, most businesses that are VAT registered and have a taxable turnover above the VAT threshold (currently £85,000) will need to keep digital records and submit their VAT returns digitally using MTD compatible software. Some businesses will be exempt from this due to complex requirements and won’t have to comply until October 1 2019. These ‘deferred’ organisations include trusts, not-for-profit organisations not set up as a company, VAT groups, VAT divisions and local authorities. A full list of deferred categories can be found on the HMRC website.

Some businesses with a taxable turnover below the threshold chose to take part in a pilot scheme run by HMRC in late 2018 and these entities will need to continue to submit their VAT return digitally.

What if my taxable turnover is below the threshold?
You can continue to use the VAT online return system that is currently in place. I haven’t yet made any arrangements to become MTD compliant but my business has a taxable turnover of over £85,000. What do I do now?
If you have an accountant, contact them today. While accountancy firms will likely have the required MTD knowledge, responsibility lies with individuals and businesses to take the first step. Don’t have an accountant? There are numerous MTD compatible software suppliers that can provide you with the tools to turn your manual records or spreadsheets into an accepted, compatible format. The software won’t be free, but many suppliers cater for a range of budgets. Preparing for a digital way of work may be more challenging for some businesses than others. But, regardless of your taxable turnover, it’s highly recommended that you accounting records are held in accounting software (e.g. Sage or a bespoke programme), online accounting software (e.g. Xero or Sage One) or Excel spreadsheets.

Need more advice?
Rickard Luckin has an expert Making Tax Digital and online accounting team who can guide you through your options by reviewing your current records. The team can also provide training on most accounting software packages, including Xero, Sage and QuickBooks.

There’s now only one month to go until Making Tax Digital (MTD) for VAT is implemented. Affected businesses must take action now in order to prepare for the ‘go live’ date of April 1 2019. But first, what is Making Tax Digital and why is it so important? Ian Marrow, VAT Director at Essex accountancy firm, explains.

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Women offered chance to win year’s sales scholarship training worth £9,600

To celebrate International Women’s Day on March 8, BusinessTime in Essex and Sandler Essex have joined forces to offer a 12-month Sandler Sales Mastery Scholarship, worth £9,600, to one deserving winner.

Sandler Training is a global sales training provider. While many training companies employ trainers who may never have actually sold or trained, Sandler trainers have already had highly successful careers as sales and management professionals and now use the Sandler methodology in their mission to train and mentor others to be successful.

One such person is Rupert Miles, the vastly experienced Managing Director of Sandler Essex. He said: “We believe sales is a force for good. We also believe there are not enough women in sales or sales management positions. I am delighted to be linking up with BusinessTime in Essex to offer one woman this wonderful opportunity for first-class training.

“To qualify for this scholarship prize, you must be a woman over 18 years old with ambition and drive, living in Essex (training takes place in Chelmsford) who wants to carve out a great career in sales and has the commitment to do what needs to be done even when you don’t feel like it. No sales experience is necessary but if you have some, that’s not an obstacle either. Whatever your background, circumstances, career history, we are looking for the right candidate to train, coach and mentor into a fast-track sales career.”

To have a chance of winning this Sales Mastery Scholarship, eligible entrants should in the first instance email Rupert and, in no more than 500 words, explain why you think you would benefit from winning this great prize. Don’t forget to include a brief summary of your career to date and full contact details. The deadline for submitting your entry is March 31. Rupert will shortlist six finalists for a telephone interview to be carried out in April, with the chosen winner starting her training in May. The scholarship will comprise one day a week training in a group classroom setting for 12 months. Please email entries to rupert.miles@sandler.com.

BusinessTime in Essex Editor, Peter Richardson, said: “We are delighted to link up with Sandler Essex to offer this fabulous opportunity to women working in the county. This represents the chance to receive the very highest level of training in an area – sales – which is core to just about every business.”

International Women’s Day is a global day celebrating the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women, while also marking a call to action for accelerating gender balance.
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The Business and Local Government Data Research Centre, after five years of providing fully funded Data Analytics Innovation Vouchers (DAIVs) and training is changing the way it does business. Far from slowing down, the Centre is looking for even more partners to help improve the way the region “does data.”

The Centre, which is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) has worked with private, public sector and charities the length and breadth of the UK to harness their data more effectively. Established to develop and provide academic expertise, the Centre’s staff and partners have provided dozens of example of no-fee services in big data and analytics. Centre Director, Prof Maria Fasli, has been leading the work in new techniques for data analytics and the effective use of data to support decision making. Currently a Professor in the School of Computer Science and Electronic Engineering her research focuses on artificial intelligence. Prof Fasli is also a Professor in the School of Computer Science and Electronic Engineering (CSEE) at the University of Essex. Commenting on the growth of data in all walks of business, she said that “never before have organisations collected so much data. Many organisations, particular those whose services are not explicitly data related, are unprepared to use this data effectively, and many do not know what additional benefits their data can bring. That is where we come in!” She added “There is a tremendous demand for data analytics skills and the services that the Centre provides can support organisations in a range of ways. More than ever, the regions of the UK and local economies are looking to Universities to provide academic expertise in real world settings. This allows both our academics to demonstrate research impact, and for the communities in which our academics live and work to see the benefit of their research.”

Operating as a partnership between the University of East Anglia, the University of Kent, the London School of Economics and the University of Essex, where the Centre is based, the Centre has provided professional data services to regional and national partners across many realms of public life. For example, Dr Shaomin Wu from Kent Business School worked with East Sussex Highways to explore an innovative research project. The projected developed a method for strategic assessment of road maintenance funding and policy decision, a method which has now been incorporated into the agency’s management system. Andrew Carpin, Data Systems Engineer for East Sussex Highways commented “The report has been pivotal in tracking trends in asset deterioration and has allowed us to optimise maintenance intervals. This has improved the efficiency in what we do and has saved us money in the long-term.”

Beyond research projects, the Centre has worked with partners to deliver training to staff, regardless of their background knowledge and expertise. Commenting after Essex County Council staff had undertaken a free data analysis training course, Stephen Simpkin said “Many thanks again for all the help and for the excellent training sessions over the last week. I imagine it is extra challenging when our group have such a mixed background and skillset, but it was so encouraging to see how quickly a lot of people picked this up... The content and delivery was fantastic!”

Evidently, the Centre has a proud track record of delivering across the region, but they aren’t slowing down now. Outreach and Engagement Coordinator Laura Brookes tells us that many potential partners don’t know the funded services are available on their doorstep. “Many organisations don’t know we are here, and when they do discover us, they aren’t sure how we might be able to assist. The best way to find out is to get in touch, attend one of our events or contact the team directly.”

Further, she said “Many organisations don’t know how they can better use the data and information they are collecting. Whilst businesses have company objectives, we can bridge the gap to bring their data to life. We provide data analytics and research to assist them in making business improvements, support innovation and measure impact. In addition to providing grant funded projects, we also identify skills gaps and deliver training to staff.”

The funding, available to SMEs, public sector and charities in the region, is available for a limited time. So get involved now to upskill your team, meet your data challenges and uncover new ways of using your data.

The ESRC Business and Local Government Data Research Centre is hosting a Centre Showcase and Celebration Event at Wivenhoe House, University of Essex, on the 13th March 2019 (4.00 p.m. – 6.00 p.m.). There are only selected free tickets available to this unique networking opportunity including drinks reception. Hear first-hand from the organisations already benefiting from the working with the Centre. Network with renowned academics and speak to centre staff about how you can work with us and benefit from the training and other services.

For more information on this event, and how to access the Centre’s funded resources, please contact Outreach and Engagement Coordinator Laura Brookes at Laura.brookes@essex.ac.uk or on 01206 873 859.
It has become more common these days for couples to work together in the same office. However, it is often a big challenge for couples to maintain a balance, both at home and office. BusinessTime in Essex Editor, Peter Richardson, spoke to Stuart and Jo Oldham of Billericay-based Clear Thinking IT to find out how they manage – or not! – to strike that all-important balance.

It can easily be seen that working together could make or break many a marriage and, undoubtedly, it’s not a scenario every couple would warm to.

Stuart and Jo Oldham, though, wouldn’t have it any other way. They met 19 years ago, married 13 years ago and, for the past six years, have worked together at Clear Thinking IT as well as being man and wife. Working together was a gradual process and nowadays Jo works three days a week, balancing her office life with bringing up their two children.

“I wouldn’t want to work full-time – three days is a perfect balance,” said Jo. “We both agree that my role bringing up the children is very important but I do thoroughly enjoy the challenge of helping Stuart develop the business.”

Jo and Stuart Oldham

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clearly works for this couple

I’m not saying my attitude to working together might be different if I was full-time, but it’s all about getting the balance right.

Stuart launched Clear Thinking IT ten years ago after tiring of working all the hours God sends and not being appreciated. At the time, the couple was living in Wimbledon and Jo was enjoying a career in TV production. After two years, they decided to relocate to Essex where Jo had family.

“Running the business was a sharp learning curve. When our first daughter, Jessica, was two, Jo suggested she got involved in the business, helping with marketing, events and generally generating new business. I really welcomed Jo’s help and it gave Jo a new focus – and it was certainly good for the business. I’m a bit of a techie whereas Jo is more of a people person so we have complementary skills,” said Stuart.

So, was there any big pow-wow to discuss how working and living together might pan out?

“No, we never sat down and discussed boundaries,” said Stuart. “Jo became more and more involved in the business over a period of time so everything seemed to happen quite naturally.” Jo concurs. “Stuart is the boss and I am very happy with that. I wouldn’t want to be full-time but I think we work very well together. We focus on different parts of the business and, in the working environment, we look upon each other as business people. We are very work-focused in the office.” But do office and home life inevitably overlap – and is this good or bad for a marriage?

“Of course, we will sometimes discuss business over the dinner table,” said Stuart, “but we are able to have very frank and honest discussions. We have to be very honest with each other and nothing is hidden.” Jo feels working together is a positive for their marriage. “I have a very good understanding of what Stuart has to cope with during the working day. For sure, Stuart can’t try the old ‘you don’t understand what my job’s all about’ line but I genuinely am aware of the pressures he faces running the company and I feel I am very well-placed to sympathise and help,” she said.

What they also agree on is the need for both of them to have some ‘me time’ away from each other. “We have our own interests outside of work – I love getting out on my cycle – and I think it’s necessary for us to do our own thing to have a little break from each other, but I think that’s true for any couple, whether or not they work together,” said Stuart.

So at work, one assumes it is all very professional – no pet-names or quick illicit cuddles? “Definitely not!” they echo.

Working and living together might not be for everyone but for Stuart and Jo it clearly works very well – a marriage of convenience in the nicest possible way!
New funding to connect innovative businesses with universities’ research power

Businesses are all set to harness the power of the latest breakthroughs in artificial intelligence, biotechnology and digital creative thanks to a new partnership between seven universities and colleges across the East of England.

The EIRA project – meaning Enabling Innovation: Research to Application – has been awarded £4.7m from Research England’s Connecting Capability Fund and is now open for applications from businesses looking to innovate by working with academics.

The aim of EIRA is to support the national Industrial Strategy by driving growth and increasing productivity in the East of England by transforming the way businesses connect with universities and colleges.

The EIRA network is led by the University of Essex working with the University of East Anglia and the University of Kent, fellow members of the Eastern Academic Research Consortium (Eastern ARC) which was established to encourage research collaboration and training.

The other EIRA network members are Harlow College, Norwich University of the Arts, the University of Suffolk and Writtle University College.

Artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and digital creative are the key focus for EIRA with the network allowing businesses to access both expertise and specialist facilities.

EIRA Director Kirstie Cochrane said: “Artificial intelligence is transforming all sectors of our economy, biotechnology is having an impact on everything from food production to medicine and the East of England is recognised as a centre of excellence in the digital creative sector. "EIRA is aiming to support the development of businesses in the East of England which are taking full advantage of the opportunities offered by these fast moving sections of our economy."

With a range of majority-funded grants available, EIRA will help businesses of all sizes develop new products, services, and solutions. The project supports businesses operating in, or seeking solutions from, the three key areas. Support includes Innovation Vouchers to fund access to academic expertise and Research and Development Grants. More opportunities are in development, with Innovation Internships and start-up microfinance.

Partners from industry, regional membership organisations, and local enterprise partnerships strengthen EIRA’s offering. They include BT, TechEast, AgriTech East, Digital Catapult, South Essex Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP), and New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership (NALEP).

Vanessa Cuthill, Director of the Research and Enterprise Office at the University of Essex and Project Sponsor, said: “As the lead institution, we’re excited that Essex researchers will have new ways to support businesses across all three key themes. With our reputation and experience in successfully connecting research expertise with business needs this project can be really transformational for our region.”

Dr Robin Gowers, Senior Lecturer at Writtle University College, said: “With both technology and politics offering huge opportunities and risks it is vital that local educational institutions play an active role with businesses to offer both insights and practical applications to grasp the upside potential and also manage any downside risk. With over 125 years operating in the land-based sector Writtle University College has the experience and expertise to help local enterprises understand what is going on and help to create future strategies to raise productivity and add value. We are delighted to be part of this exciting initiative.”

Businesses and academics interested in accessing EIRA funding for innovative projects can find out more at www.eira.ac.uk
A reminder to landlords of property tax changes

Relief for finance costs is now restricted. This tax change restricts the relief available for finance costs on residential properties to the basic rate of income tax.

This change has been introduced gradually from April 2017 and the final phase will end in 2020-21. Finance costs include:

- mortgage interest
- interest on loans to buy furnishings
- fees incurred when repaying mortgages/loans.

It means landlords can no longer deduct all of their finance costs from their property income to calculate their property profits. Instead, they receive a basic rate reduction from their income tax for finance costs.

So how is the relief obtained? In 2017-18, the deduction from property income was restricted to 75% of finance costs, with the remaining 25% available as a basic rate tax reduction. During the following three years, the direct deduction has reduced, and will continue to reduce by 25% each year until April 6 2020. At this point, all finance costs incurred by a landlord will be given as a basic rate tax deduction.

For landlords with significant residential property portfolios held in their own names, these changes are likely to generate much higher tax liabilities, therefore it’s essential that tax advice is sought.

The wear and tear allowance for fully furnished properties has been replaced with a new relief. This relief allows landlords of residential houses to deduct the costs they incur on replacing furnishings, appliances and kitchenware (excluding fixtures e.g. baths, washbasins, toilets). The relief covers the cost of a like-for-like, replacement, and any costs incurred in disposing of the item being replaced.

It means landlords no longer need to decide whether their property is sufficiently furnished to claim the new replacement furniture relief. This is because the relief applies to all landlords of residential dwelling houses, regardless of the level of furnishing. The measure applies to expenditure incurred on or after April 1 2016 for corporation taxpayers, and April 6 2016 for income taxpayers.

Landlords can claim up to £1,000 of deemed expenses when calculating annual rental profits instead of actual costs incurred. Taxpayers can claim either the lower of the rent received, or the full £1,000 allowance. This may prove efficient for landlords with minimal expenses.

The Rent a Room relief increase affects those who receive rental income from letting out a room or rooms in their only or main residential property. Rent a Room receipts include receipts for any meals and cleaning services paid for in relation to the use of the room. It could also be relevant where an individual rents out rooms in a guesthouse, bed and breakfast or similar, providing that this is their main residence.
SMEs are dynamic, unpredictable and fragile. Sustaining performance whilst developing new business and tackling the changes that come with growth provides a significant challenge for business leaders.

Recent research has found many attempts at business growth fail due to inattention to organisational attributes above anything else. Leadership is a topic of research, writing, study and practice the world over but is still subject to significant personal definition and endeavour. The lack of immediate, tangible impact makes leadership something that we can easily dismiss or be complacent about, and leadership development becomes a ‘nice to have’ rather than a business necessity. That is a mistake and one that can easily be rectified. The changing nature of work organisations involves moving away from command and control management and towards environments of team work, collaboration and empowerment. Extensive amounts of research highlight the trend between high quality leadership and key business outcomes, including product or service quality and customer satisfaction, in addition to your key financial indicators. Our simple definition of leadership is that of ‘creating a work environment where people can optimise their contribution to achieve your businesses goals’. High quality leadership depends on a clear understanding of the four key ingredients that sit behind this definition:

- leader attributes: the abilities, personality traits and/or behavioural styles of leaders
- follower relationships: the nature of the relationships between leaders and those they seek to lead
- destination and journey: a clear understanding and articulation of your business purpose or specific business goals and how your organisation will get there – maybe a plan of some kind
- business context: knowing what is happening in your market or business environment and how that impacts or contributes to your own business

If you’re able to understand these things about your own business, then you’re able to establish a clearer leadership proposition for your organisation and have a good basis for identifying ways in which leadership can be developed. Finding a good leadership course does not mean that course is right for you or your organisation. Identifying things that you or your team are not very good at does not make those things important for your business success; we don’t all have to be the best at everything to be successful. Identifying the key leadership attributes that will drive your business forward does not necessarily mean these are things that you need to spend time finessing.

If you can establish the leadership proposition for your organisation based on the four key ingredients above, then you can develop a rounded and objective assessment of the leadership capability within your team against those requirements and ascertain the level of mastery needed to achieve your goals. It suddenly becomes much easier to specify and prioritise actions intended to develop the right skills for your business and source educational or experiential development opportunities to meet these needs.

Matthew Emerson, Director of Blackmore Four, asks whether your business has a clear, valid and relevant leadership proposition? Do you invest time and money in developing leadership capability and if so, are you doing that effectively?
Can we resist the temptation of constant instant communication?

THERE is a great temptation in business (as in life in general) to treat something which was once inaccessible but suddenly readily available, as desirable. Just because we can do something or have it, we decide we must do that something or have it.

And do you know where succumbing to such temptation can lead? Tired, stressed-out, run-down and generally jaded business owners. The forbidden fruit of temptation to which I refer is the need/desire to be in touch with our business 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days of the year – and I have to hold up my hands here and say, yes, I am guilty of taking chunks out of that juicy forbidden apple.

The progress of mobile technology means we now never need be more than a few seconds away from being in touch with our business. Mobiles are rarely switched off which means you can call, be called and be bang up to date with email messages 24/7. How many of us sit there at night on the sofa, one eye on the TV (one eye too many most of the time) but one eye on the mobile to see who might be emailing us? The sad thing is, chances are there will be emails of interest because someone else is also having trouble switching off from work.

Roll back the clock 30 years and when the office door was locked at 5.30pm, most business owners could, by and large, forget about the business at least until the following morning. If the office burned down, you’d probably hear about it soon enough, but otherwise, nothing was probably that important that it couldn’t wait until the morning.

On a Friday evening, you could relax for the weekend with Monday morning nothing but a distant unwelcome dot on the horizon. And you could pack your suitcase in the summer and head off to the sun with your only thought to business continuity (if you were really organised) being to give your PA the phone number for the hotel you were staying in – just in case of an emergency before you start thinking otherwise!

Oh happy days!

Now of course, we are never away from work. Because we can be in constant contact, we have fallen into the trap of deciding that we must be in constant contact. I was talking to a fellow business owner the other day (almost as old as me!) who fondly remembered the days when people would send him a letter and expect a reply sometime in the next week or two. Now they send him an email and, if they haven’t heard back from him within a couple of hours, are sending him another email asking him if he received the first.

Many would say this is a great advance, that mobile communication has speeded up business and made it far more efficient. Which, in many ways of course, it has. But have we taken things too far? Should we not be taking advantage of these advancements during working hours but then, when the working day is done, accept that work has finished for the day and take the opportunity to use non-work time to recharge our batteries and actually ‘live’ our lives?

The sad fact is that, for many business owners and senior management, the working day is no longer ever fully over. The expectation is we are always on duty: evenings, weekends – even on holiday.

I long argued vehemently that I would never take my mobile on holiday with me and, for many years, stuck to my guns. Now I have to guiltily confess, I have crumbled. My mobile is as important part of my packing as the sun-cream and the latest best-seller. I finally decided that knowing what was going on in the business while I was away (not to mention the thought of not coming back to around 1,000 emails) outweighed my misgivings at having the mobile with me.

According to HSE stats, work-related stress is now increasing year-on-year. Is it any surprise when many people are finding it harder and harder to detach their working life from their non-working life?

Maybe it’s time we started a campaign to turn back the tide of 24/7 expectation on business owners. Don’t ask me how, mind. Once something becomes the norm, it is very difficult to turn back the clock. But let’s not forget that the purpose of being ‘your own boss’ is, supposedly, to afford yourself and your family a better quality of life. Those of us old enough to remember those halcyon days of pre-mobile communication might well smile ruefully that quality of life was maybe not too shoddy after all.

The only down-side was you didn’t have such a handy excuse to ignore the latest EastEnders storyline. Come to think of it, there probably wasn’t even EastEnders. Now, those really were halcyon days…
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A partnership of north Essex’s biggest players in the public and private sector has joined forces to drive investment and showcase the unique potential of the region.

The group, brought together under the name of the North Essex Opportunity (NEO), is seeking to develop a new economic strategy to accelerate economic growth across north Essex.

Located between the key UK commercial engines of Cambridge and London and between the international airport of Stansted and ports of Harwich and Felixstowe, north Essex nurtures a multi-sector growth economy. This, coupled with its world leading innovation in data and technology driven by the University of Essex, means it is exceptionally well placed to power business and growth.

Cllr Gagan Mahindra, Cabinet Member for Economic Development at Essex County Council, said: “We are pleased to be working in close partnership with some of the key players across north Essex to showcase the significant investment and business opportunities the area presents. Joining together in this way demonstrates how the vision between business and government has led to the current and planned creation of new homes and jobs, together with physical and social infrastructure – there has never been a more exciting time to consider north Essex.”

Among north Essex’s key selling points is the anticipated growth of the region. With the population of north Essex expected to rise by 190,000 by 2050, housing and infrastructure is at the forefront of the group’s priorities. North Essex Garden Communities Ltd (NEGC) has been set up jointly by the councils of Braintree, Colchester, Tendring and Essex to take forward proposal for new garden communities across the region including homes, businesses, schools, health facilities, green and transport infrastructure that are necessary for the region to thrive in the coming decades.

Speaking in conversation with Homes England Chairman Sir Edward Lister, NEGC’s Managing Director, Richard Bayley, said that in delivering the new garden communities, it will be important to engage and attract SMEs to work alongside contractors and housebuilders, adding that “a mixed economy, mixed tenure approach will give us the ability to achieve our aims and objectives.”

Sir Edward Lister added: “North Essex has some of the most ambitious homebuilding plans in England. This is already an area that is fantastically connected with thriving and innovative economies. The proposals make this area an incredibly exciting investment prospect.”

North Essex is already showing its potential as a hotspot for growth and innovation, with more than 350 acres of land now planned for specialist employment sites across the North Essex Corridor. The land includes a number of sites which range in size, with Horizon 120 in Braintree the newest, offering well-connected, state-of-the-art new premises for businesses and employers across 65 acres. There are also plans for further expansion of Colchester’s Knowledge Gateway, chiefly led by the University of Essex - one of the top 20 universities in the country for research - and Chesterford Research Park near to Stansted.

Councillor Graham Butland, the leader of Braintree District Council, echoed the wider sentiments of those involved in the North Essex Opportunity, when announcing the deal for Horizon 120.

Councillor Butland commented that the move demonstrated the council’s commitment to growth, saying “we are playing our part in preparing for our growing district, by making sure that we have the right foundations in place to support that growth. Our investments are unlocking more from partners and private sector too. That adds up to health care facilities, better homes, improvements to the way we get around the district and more jobs.”
MANY of you may have read my article in December 2018’s issue: Is work stress affecting your performance and damaging your health? Find out! If you didn’t, see page 36 of that issue to work out just how well you are managing your stress and read: The secret to goal achievement in 2019 on page 56.

Whilst I am confident that if you did the Work Stress Questionnaire it would have totally resonated with you (as we all suffer stress to some degree or another, none of us are immune), I’d love to know how many of you have actually taken action since then? Because like it or not, nothing changes until you do!

Personal development is a life-long journey if you want to be the best you can be. You have to be prepared to invest in the most important person of all - ‘you’ - particularly if you are a business owner with or without a team of staff to support you, because if you aren’t healthy, fit and well there is no business.

You are the leader of the ship and if you aren’t able to sail it, it’s likely to lose direction and, worse case, go under. This is precisely why looking after your health and wellbeing is crucial to the success of your mind, body and business/career.

You see, I work with business owners and high achievers who are serious about maximising their performance, wellbeing and success and they all have one thing in common. They have big visions and missions for their business/career and that automatically creates stress because it takes them out of their comfort zone more often than most people on a regular basis. Why? Because it requires them to constantly raise the bar for themselves. With a never-ending list of goals to achieve, it requires them to focus on doing more, achieving more and being more which makes them more vulnerable to stress regardless of how strong, determined and tenacious they are. None of us are superhuman, even high achievers who others often believe make life look easy and have it all sorted. Yet, just like swans who always look calm and serene, they are actually paddling away like mad below the surface and this inevitably takes its toll over time.

Now I know what you are going to say next - that you don’t necessarily feel stressed. However, that doesn’t mean your mind and body isn’t stressed. High achievers are generally people who handle responsibility effortlessly and are able to take on a lot. It feels so instinctive and natural to them, that it can be hard to recognise the signs. Yet an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure! Plus, it is surprising just how much time one can make when things go wrong, which often proves far more costly than working smarter rather than harder from the off and investing in your mind, body and business/career before you get sick and find yourself in burnout or, worse still, with some other serious illness or disease. You only get one mind and body. So just like you wouldn’t go out on the road without having car insurance, tax, MOT, breakdown cover and regular services to ensure reliable, efficient, optimal performance, you shouldn’t neglect your mind.

Doing a High Performance Coaching Programme that focuses on mindset work for personal and professional development is your secret weapon and the soundest investment you could ever make to ensure you create and maintain a healthy, mind, body and business/career.

Yet it never ceases to amaze me how often mindset work is instantly dismissed and referred to as ‘woo woo’ or a non-essential business expense by many entrepreneurs and business people. It is a powerful tool that allows you to identify and overcome barriers to personal and business growth and success, so you can achieve your goals with ease and minimal stress in the process. When you work on your physical brain (also referred to as the ‘subconscious mind’) with an expert of the mind, it fast tracks your success and, more importantly, minimises the stress that inevitably comes with running a business or having a high-powered role in the corporate world. So why wouldn’t you want to invest in yourself and get ahead of the competition? It’s a no-brainer and those who are smart know this and use it for their benefit.

So, if you want to play and stay at the top of your game, just like all the top professional athletes you need a team of experts to support you in your business/career. More importantly, an expert of the mind is as essential as having a bank manager, accountant, lawyer, PR & marketing manager, business coach, sports psychologist, personal trainer/coach, physiotherapist, nutritionist, doctor or dentist if you want to be the best you can be.

The question is, are you prepared to do what it takes to invest in your health, wellbeing and success? If you’ve answered yes, then our High Performance Coaching Programme could be just what you need. For more information visit www.claierich.com Our Richer Life Programme could help you find the way to a healthier, happier, richer life!
**Business Focus**

Make it your business to address employees’ health

The importance of addressing employees’ workplace health has never been more important.

With the effect this has on performance, productivity and profit, the Government has stepped in, encouraging businesses to adopt a well-being approach with renewed emphasis on ill-health prevention.

Recent figures from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) advised 15.4 million working days were lost to work-related stress in 2017/18, compared with 12.5 million the previous year. Stress, depression and anxiety accounted for 57% of all working days lost in 2017/18, while musculoskeletal disorders represented 25% of working days lost. And absence attributed to mental health conditions saw a rise in the younger age group (25-34 years) increasing from 7.2% in 2009 to 9.6% in 2017.

So what does this mean for your business?

Managing sickness absence, whether this is long-term or regular short-term absence, is expensive for businesses. It not only impacts financially with higher staff costs but also has a knock-on effect on employees’ morale, motivation and performance. There are also other considerations such as reduced productivity, reduced customer satisfaction and increased management time to deal with absence procedures.

Catherine D’Arcy Jones is a registered general nurse and specialist practitioner in occupational health who runs Colchester-based OPA Health Ltd which offers a wide range of occupational health services for businesses of all size. Catherine said: “Healthy, happy employees give greater commitment to the workplace, increased productivity, performance, an increased motivation to succeed in work and are more engaged.”

While you may think your company is capable to deal with such problems, just take a few minutes to run through this checklist to see how much you have in place as a business to support health and wellbeing in your business:

- a health and well-being strategy
- a sickness absence policy with guidance from HR
- access to occupational health to provide advice on medical matters
- trained first-aiders including mental health first-aiders
- support for initiatives that encourage healthy eating and exercise
- good communication structure in place between senior leadership, management and employees
- an opportunity for employees to express their views and opinions
- access to counselling services to either maintain employees working or assist a return
- processes in place to make employees feel valued
- policies and processes to encourage a healthy work-life balance.

“Occupational health (OH), as provided by OPA Health Ltd, is a confidential advisory service that sits between the employer and the employee. It gives balanced advice when health matters affect work and provides guidance on adjustments or further support that is required to keep the employee in work. This is beneficial when employees are either diagnosed with new conditions, for example cancer, epilepsy, diabetes, musculoskeletal conditions or mental health disorders such as anxiety and depression.

“Employees may also be working with a pre-existing health condition that you may or may not be aware of. Often employees are not confident to discuss their medical history with their manager and will either struggle on or gain advice from a GP. It is difficult for busy GPs to provide comprehensive advice in their limited appointment and so often the employee simply gets issued a certificate, which neither helps the employer or the employee in resolving the sick absence.

As well as managing sickness absence, Occupational Health carries out routine health surveillance for those exposed to noise, dust or vibration. It also addresses the effects of employee stress on their capability to carry out the normal duties of their role. Perceived workplace stress accounts for a high percentage of employee stress-related absences and OH can advise on any medical barriers preventing resolution of the situation.

With the increased rise in mental ill-health, this area has seen a growth in OH referrals. One in four will experience a diagnosable mental health condition within their lifetime and this will have an impact on work. Depression is predicted to be the leading diagnosed mental health condition by 2030 (MHFA England 2016). Training managers and employees to recognise the early signs of mental ill-health, to feel confident to provide initial help, to prevent mental ill-health from worsening, to promote recovery by sign posting to appropriate treatment and help will not only reduce mental health stigmas at work but also help to maintain good mental health at work. The roll out of mental health first aid training is being promoted by the Government, with future proposals to make this mandatory within businesses. OPA Health are providing this training to directly to companies or as courses individual places can be booked into.

For employers, advice from OH will shorten long-term sickness absence, provide advice regarding adjustments to working practice and on required aids. It will also facilitate an absence to move through the company HR process quickly and will take away the medical barriers preventing a return to work. Referrals to OH meet a company’s duty of care to its employees.

For employees, OH provides a confidential source of advice to effectively manage a health condition in work, will outline other areas of support and make the employee feel supported by their company.”

An integral part of OH is assisting a company to adopt a pro-active approach to health and well-being at work through introducing health initiatives, monitoring trends in absence and providing training to both managers and employees.

OPA Health Ltd is able to provide the full remit of occupational health, tailored to our company’s individual requirements. To also find out more about our special two-day Mental Health training course, go to company’s website.

Contact Catherine on:
01206 700911 or 0755230805
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Sooth away your business stress with the ultimate spa experience

ORSETT Hall Hotel has taken over the management of the hotel’s spa. Newly appointed Spa Manager, Stacey Moore, said: “We have a beautiful spa and I am looking forward to introducing new health and beauty treatments which will bring an even greater guest experience. It’s the perfect place to ease away the stress of the working day.”

The spa facilities include a swimming pool, steam room, sauna, Jacuzzi, relaxation room, six treatment rooms and four manicure stations.

The hotel is set in expansive gardens which provide a backdrop to every occasion and are particularly popular with businesses hosting team-building events. With ample free parking and easy access from the A13, M25 and A127, it’s easy to see why Orsett Hall is the venue of choice for those demanding only the best from their corporate event.

Call 01375 891402 or visit www.orsetthall.co.uk for further information.
COMPANIES of all size are increasingly required to demonstrate environmental credentials through a formal management system. The free Steps to Environmental Management (STEM) scheme is designed for businesses wanting to demonstrate they are working to improve their environmental credentials.

Even with no prior experience, tools and information are provided to allow you to build an environmental management system (EMS) from scratch. It can help grow your business, build a brand and retain and access new customers through green procurement and a better understanding of environmental issues.

Gary Crooks, Business Liaison & Delivery Manager for LoCASE, which is overseeing STEM in Essex, said: “We strongly recommend the scheme to SMEs seeking to reduce their operating costs and wishing to stand out from the crowd as an environmentally sustainable organisation.

“The STEM scheme also provides an excellent opportunity if your business is looking to apply for tender opportunities with public and private sector businesses, which recognise the value of a formal EMS. It is one way of gaining an advantage over your competitors when pitching for these contracts.

“Many councils encourage suppliers to reduce impacts throughout their supply chains, and potential suppliers are often asked whether they have an EMS in the supplier application stage. STEM recognises that not all businesses are in a position to invest time and money in an externally certified EMS such as ISO 14001. STEM is a free, step-by-step approach to implementing an EMS in small or medium sized businesses.

“An EMS is also an important marketing tool, as well as a source of environmental improvements and cost savings. Moreover, STEM starts by identifying how your business is interacting with the environment and systematically continues through to identifying the changes that will reduce its negative impact and improve competitiveness.”

The free STEM BLUE workshops, due to take place in March & April 2019, offer a unique, free introduction to environmental management covering the following:

• management commitment: top management needs to be actively involved in order to set the right scene and drive any culture changes needed
• context: who to involve in the process
• baseline assessment: what compliance obligations and documentation is required
• environmental aspects and impacts: what exactly are you going to manage?
• draft environmental policy: setting out your commitment to environmental improvements
• data collection: If you can’t measure it, you can’t manage it.

Here’s what you will learn:

• an understanding of the environmental issues relevant to the core business and wider issues such as risk, legal compliance and stakeholder values
• scope and measure their environmental impact and performance
• practical steps to create and implement an environmental policy and environmental management system
• how to use environmental credentials and policies to create additional business opportunities in existing and new markets
• STEM is totally free and participating businesses self-certify their progress towards improving their environmental performance.

Benefits to your business include enhanced sustainability credentials, the use of the STEM Blue Logo on your business stationary and website etc, reduced costs by removing inefficiencies, assistance in maintaining a legal business and preparation for attaining the Carbon Trust Standard, BS 8900 or ISO 14001.

STEM SILVER and GOLD workshops will also be available in due course, they are also free to attend once you have completed the STEM BLUE.

Places on the free BLUE STEM workshops are limited. To reserve your place, register your interest by emailing business@thurrock.gov.uk For further information call 01375 652271.
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Considerations for landlords and tenants before entering into a business lease

There are a variety of typical disputes you may encounter during a business lease. For example, a landlord, at the end of the term, may find that the property has not been properly maintained, (this can be structurally or decoratively).

This would therefore incur the cost of instructing solicitors and surveyors to investigate the breach of repair obligations, and the chances of re-letting or selling the property would consequently be impacted. A tenant, on the other hand, could claim that there was ambiguity over what they were responsible for maintaining and to what standard. They, too, would need to instruct professionals and could run the risk of having to pay the costs for the required maintenance, any loss of rent suffered by the landlord, as well as the landlord’s costs. Fortunately, there are steps both sides can take to minimise the risk of a dispute at the end of a business lease.

For landlords
We have a number of recommendations for landlords to ensure the upkeep of their property. It is key to make your requirements clear at the start of the relationship. What do you expect your tenant to repair and maintain? Once this is established, you should instruct an appropriately qualified surveyor to inspect the property at regular intervals to check that the agreed maintenance is being done. If it isn’t, there are various methods you can use to encourage your tenant to comply with their agreement, but they will involve legal fees and you must follow the correct procedure to avoid any notices being declared invalid.

For tenants
Our key advice to prospective tenants is to take advice from surveyors and solicitors before entering into an agreement, so that you understand your obligations and can be sure that they are not unreasonable. Find out if you are responsible for maintaining the structure of the building, or just the interior. You should also be aware of any service charges due for the upkeep of the common parts of the building (if you share it with other tenants). You should instruct a surveyor to assess the existing state of the building before you take on the lease may help ensure that you aren’t blamed or found responsible for any pre-existing damage. Making a photographic record of the building at the start of the lease may also make it easier for you to prove your position in this eventuality.

As a tenant, you should be proactive in carrying out any refurbishments during the term of the lease and budget for these accordingly, documenting any work you do. You should also bear in mind that if you are not responsible for certain repairs, you want to be sure that your landlord is.

Taking professional legal advice before signing the lease is the best way for both landlord and tenant to enjoy a mutually beneficial business relationship.

Disputes between landlords and tenants are not uncommon, particularly when a commercial lease comes to an end, so it is important for both parties to understand their respective obligations before entering into the agreement. Aaron Cane, a Partner in the commercial property team at Tees’ Brentwood office, offers some advice for those on both sides of the deal.
Three steps to differentiate your accountancy practice

POSITIONING is the strongest differentiator for any accountancy practice and should be the first consideration when a practice is looking to set itself apart from the competition.

If you can readily and easily name your competitor in your local area (or worse still, you find you are losing custom to a competitor) then your positioning - in the eyes of your potential customers - is no different to that of the other practices you compete against. Lack of differentiation can lead customers to make buying decisions based on price, which in turn can force practices to compete on price - not something the expert practice needs to want to do.

So how do you avoid this common situation? The answer lies in evaluating your positioning statement. If you want to be a horizontally positioned practice that is considered 'the local accountancy practice', then educate your audience as to why you are the best choice in the area via regular blogs and social media.

Better still, consider vertical positioning to develop a deeper expertise. Cater for a specific industry sector, a client demographic, or specialise in a certain area of accountancy. There are many advantages to vertical positioning; it’s easier to be considered the ‘go to’ for your specialism, you reduce your competition, and (dare I say) you can command higher fees.

Secondly, once you’ve clearly articulated your positioning, you may find it appropriate to undertake a re-branding exercise. This is a great opportunity to step away from the cliched accountancy colours. Time to refresh your business stationery, beautify your social media profiles and display your confidence through some considered and deliberate design.

Your branding is, of course, much more than just your logo - the logo’s purpose is solely to identify. Your brand identity covers the entirety of how you present yourself through marketing, your choice of colours, your typefaces, your website design and your tone of voice.

Thirdly, to help bolster your practice’s reputation, make sure you’re publishing interesting and helpful blog posts, and try adding some useful tools to your website that can benefit your clients (how about printable tax cards or a tax calculator, for example?)

Thought leadership is about being consistent on social media, following that all-important mantra: Be Helpful, Be Interesting, Be Knowledgeable. It’s about giving something away, a little bit of insight, and stepping into your customer’s shoes.

Finally, three magic words, (no, not Making Tax Digital) - Google My Business. Register for it, complete it and post on it (and twist some arms for some reviews).

Get these these things right and you’ll be a shining star in your field of practice and your geographic area … and, of course, you won’t be worrying about what the competitor down the road is doing with its uniform logo.
Multimillion-pound boost to Colchester’s ultrafast broadband future

BUSINESSES and residents across a large part of Colchester are set to benefit from a £3.45m Government investment in brand-new ‘ultrafast’ broadband networks.

This ambitious project means Colchester is the first authority in East Anglia to secure funding from the Government’s Local Full Fibre Network Fund, which was announced in early 2018.

Currently, only 3% of UK businesses and households have access to ultrafast broadband of 1000Mbps (1Gbps) or higher. Businesses in Colchester town centre can already access ultrafast broadband because of the council’s deployment in 2016 of a new fibre infrastructure, for which it was awarded the 2017 EU Broadband Award for good practice.

The availability of modern broadband networks will help bolster inward investment and the attractiveness of Colchester to data-hungry and creative businesses. Independent benchmarking indicates the project will grow Colchester’s economy by 6% - worth more than £230m. Councillor Nick Barlow, Colchester Borough Council Portfolio Holder for Commercial Services, said: “It is fantastic news that Colchester has been awarded this huge sum to support our plans to deliver ultrafast broadband across the borough, particularly as the digital, creative and online sectors are some of the most important drivers of innovation and growth for Colchester’s economy. Future-proofing and investment in our infrastructure is key.”

The funding bid was managed by Colchester Amphora Trading, which will also oversee the project deployment on behalf of Colchester Borough Council. This is one of the highest-profile projects to have been undertaken by the council’s new commercial company, since it was established in 2018. Pre-works are underway, with network build due to start in April 2019.

The new networks will cover the whole of central Colchester, the Northern Gateway and provide links to Greenstead, Severalls Business Park and the Hythe. The networks will be expandable and capable of reaching the rural two-thirds in future, as funding allows.

Businesses and residents in Colchester are already making use of DCMS Connection Vouchers, which provide up to £2,500 for a business and £500 for a household to connect to gigabit-capable networks.

Promotion for Katie

KATIE Gibson-Green, a member of the Agriculture & Estates team at Essex law firm Birkett Long, is celebrating after being promoted to Associate.

Katie joined the firm in 2014 and specialises in probate, wills, trusts, tax and succession planning. Private client work hasn’t always been an area she had given any consideration to, and it wasn’t until she completed her training contract that she considered it as a career. Katie said: “I loved it so much that I ended up doing a double seat, meaning I spent 12 months in the team as a trainee instead of six months.”

The dedicated Agriculture & Estates team at Birkett Long is a team of specialist agriculture solicitors which advises on all aspects of law relating to rural law, property and agri-business.

Not just clean, Monthind Clean

Keeping your organisation safe and clean can be tough sometimes.

As the leading commercial cleaning specialist in Essex for more than 40 years, Monthind are experts in delivering solutions, for every type of environment.

Our range of professional contract cleaning, high-reach window cleaning, biohazard cleaning and additional services can be tailored to fit your organisations’ needs.

Contract and specialist cleaning services to the highest quality for the best price.

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www.monthindclean.co.uk
IN 2017, Sport England announced a once-in-a-generation pilot to help tackle inactivity in the most deprived communities in England and following a rigorous selection process, Essex was chosen as one of 12 regions in the country to share a pot of around £100 million to boost participation in sport and physical activity.

Currently, 27% of the population in Essex is considered inactive, with a high proportion from low-socio-economic areas, older people, families and those with mental health issues.

The first step was to research our target audiences and understand the tiered system of governance across the county. These findings were published in our Chapter One report, Getting Ready for System Change, which outlined our findings and established seven strategic priorities.

Fast forward to 2019, the delivery team at the Essex LDP has developed the strategy on how to address and tackle the issue of inactivity in Essex, focusing on the test areas of Basildon, Colchester and Tendring. This strategy has been well received by Sport England which, at the start of this year, announced we would receive an investment of more than £10 million. With funding now confirmed, we have been able to publish Chapter Two, the Strategic Investment Plan, which sets out what the pilot will deliver during the next three years.

An important part of the strategy will be to engage with the business community across the county to ensure regular physical activity is embedded in our workplaces. We believe this will result in a healthier and more productive workforce. This element of the pilot will be led by a dedicated active workplace coordinator who will work with employers, HR and occupational health teams to provide a range of support. This will include providing information, advice and health coaching as well as organising staff discounts for local gyms, activity challenges and connecting employers with local leisure providers.

All the learnings and successes from the pilot will be scaled up and shared Essex-wide which will supercharge Active Essex’s ambition to get one million people active in Essex by 2021.

As the pilot progresses, we have a strong foundation to be able to tackle the stubborn inequalities that keep the levels of physical inactivity so high. The Essex LDP will be led by the guiding principle that the investment from Sport England will work to open doors to system leaders, challenge existing systems and bring different sectors together to collaborate and increase the positive impact that physical activity can have on our communities.

For more information, to register for the Essex LDP newsletter and to read both the Chapter One and Chapter Two reports, please visit www.activeessex.org
One in five people still risk travelling uninsured – don’t be one of them

WHETHER you are travelling on business or for pleasure, travel insurance is imperative. According to the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, last year, Brits made approximately 50 million trips abroad. The Association of British Insurers (ABI) states that the number of travel insurance claims is rocketing, and claims totalled £385 million in 2017/18, that’s equivalent to one claim every minute. ABI members (i.e. insurance companies) pay out an average daily figure of £1 million to help cover the costs of medical treatment abroad, cancelled trips, or other travel troubles.

Falling ill or getting injured overseas can be extremely expensive if you do not have travel insurance, especially in countries where healthcare is expensive or in situations where medical evacuation is necessary.

Despite the potentially astronomical cost of treatment abroad, more than one in five people still risk travelling uninsured.

Essex-based Leisureworld is launching a new travel insurance scheme for people travelling overseas. In most cases, it can offer insurance for people who might have a pre-existing medical condition. Leisureworld’s Peter Collins said “Choose your travel insurance company with care – the cheapest premium price does not mean the best level of cover or best customer service. Travel insurance plays an essential part in ensuring you are able to travel without worrying what might happen should bad luck befall you.”

Peter offered the following tips before your travel:

- for up-to-date advice, follow @FCOTravel on Twitter and FCOtravel on Facebook
- in case of emergency, find out where your nearest British embassy or consulate is
- leave contact details, insurance policy details and itinerary with people you trust and store them securely online.
- ensure you have access to funds to cover emergencies and unexpected delays. Take more than one means of payment with you (cash, debit card, credit card).
- invest in a good travel guide to help you plan your trip and consider using online travel forums for more details about your destination.
- check with your service provider to make sure your mobile phone works abroad. Make a note of your phone’s IMEI number to help block or locate the phone if there’s a problem.
- beware of roaming data charges for accessing the internet and use Wi-Fi whenever possible.
- if you are going to be driving abroad, make sure your licence is current and valid and be aware of the driving laws in the country you are visiting.

Business culture varies in different countries – don’t make a fool of yourself in a meeting by checking our business etiquette in advance at the FCO website https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice

- there are heightened risks associated with doing business in certain countries. Here’s the UK Government’s advice: https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/overseas-business-risk
- please read the small print in the insurance documentation and make sure that it meets your requirements. If in doubt please check.

Further info can be obtained at www.leisureworldgb.com/contact-us/01702 200222 sales@leisureworldgb.com

We work with you to ensure your business is protected.

We deliver bespoke programmes for more complex business risk coverage. We work with shareholders, investment funds and banks to ensure their interests are protected.

Our management team has many years’ experience, across multiple sectors, having advised a diverse range of clients from large PLCs, corporate funds, overseas governments, high net-worth individuals, through to private owner managed businesses.
Top tips to avoid exploding the HR minefield

HR relies upon evidence. If you cannot demonstrate to a reasonable level of certainty that something did or did not occur, then as an employer you are at a severe disadvantage.

If you do not keep timekeeping records, how can you reasonably demonstrate that an employee was late on several occasions? If an employee claims you underpaid their holiday pay and you do not keep holiday records or itemise holiday pay on the payslip, a relatively simple job suddenly becomes far more complex and time-consuming. Ensure you obtain the information managers rely upon to effectively manage their staff.

You should regularly review your personnel files. It can be a helpful practice for businesses to routinely audit and reflect on what staff information they do and do not record and the advantages and disadvantages of this. If you record data but don’t use it, do you really need it? If the same issue keeps occurring but you have insufficient records and information to action a solution, should you consider implementing a process to obtain this information? Do not forget you must tread ever more carefully regarding what information you do keep relating to staff due to your obligations under GDPR.

Keep it simple: HR normally need not be complex or time-consuming. If, for example, you are considering implementing an appraisal process for the first time, it is not advisable to institute monthly reviews, utilising a 12-page form with 25 ranking criteria, simply because of the lost productivity and management time involved in administering it.

If you’re implementing a new bonus for your sales team that your accountant cannot understand, ask yourself if there is a simpler method. Start by keeping things manageable and simple and assess how the process has worked. You can always develop and refine from this point.

Document managerial discussions: if you’re a busy manager you do not want to have to make copious transcripts of every informal meeting you have with a member of staff. Nor do you want to lose the impact or record of the conversation you have had. In these cases, employ the ‘further to our discussion’ email, with a brief summary of the salient points of discussion and agreed actions. This helps reinforce your managerial message and provides both parties with a record of that discussion.

The staff handbook is a management tool. My colleagues and peers over the years have invested copious hours into producing countless bespoke policies and procedures for businesses. Not wishing to invent an HR catchphrase a-la Roy from Channel 4’s the IT Crowd but, ‘have you tried looking in the staff handbook!’ Communications could have a wider audience. This applies to all forms of written and electronic communication. There are circumstances such as in an Employment Tribunal claim or a Subject Access Request under GDPR when internal emails may be disclosed to a wider audience, including the subject of the communication themselves. Be careful and professional at all times when expressing opinions, otherwise a potentially hard, embarrassing and costly lesson could await.

...there are some certainties.

We believe in giving our clients time in order that we can understand their priorities and challenges. Above all, we aim to give tailored advice - both to businesses and individuals - that has impact and value.
**Demon Xtreme Sports buys Rollerworld**

DEMON Xtreme Sports has taken over Colchester’s Rollerworld and has set its sights on turning the iconic venue into a principle location for skating sports events in the UK.

Demon Xtreme’s Colchester store has now been relocated to the venue, renamed DX’s Rollerworld, as it looks to become an all-inclusive iconic sporting venue hosting some of the UK and the world’s premier roller-skating events, such as the World Roller Artistic Skating Championships.

Jason Khan, Founder of Demon Xtreme and new owner of DX’s Rollerworld, said: “We have the most amazing world-leading facility right here in Colchester and we need to make the most of it.”

Andy Starr, Managing Director of Rollerworld, said: “It’s been part of my heart and soul for a long time and I’ve enjoyed the journey along the way. It was important to me to see succession take place and the only people I could imagine sharing my vision and future of progression for the venue are Jason and Anne at Demon Xtreme. We have been all year in the planning of how this will work and their connections within the skating industry will ensure that this much-loved venue is in safe hands and has an exciting future.”

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**This time it’s personal(isation)**

In the previous edition of BusinessTime in Essex, I talked a bit about marketing buzzwords and here’s another one that is essential for any marketing campaign – personalisation.

**What is personalisation?**

The Cambridge Dictionary definition of ‘personalisation’ is: “the process of making something suitable for the needs of a particular person.”

Personalisation, in the marketing world, is achieved by utilising a database to add specific information to a communication or webpage. The simplest format is adding a name and address to a letter or a name to the subject line of an email. Even these simple acts of personalising a communication can result in increased response rates.

However, personalisation can be much more exciting and create more impact.

**Tailored content**

Consider this scenario. You’re looking to buy a new car and visit the local dealership. Having talked to them about the model, colour and accessories you go home to consider your options. A couple of days later a lovely brochure for the exact model and specification you viewed drops through your letterbox. Maybe it contains a link to a PURL (personalised webpage) showing images of your chosen model, content specifically for you and all forms pre-completed with your details.

Importantly for the dealership, they can track who has visited their PURL and can follow up accordingly – maybe via automated email or another printed direct mail. It’s powerful multiple channel marketing but, most importantly, it’s personalised and relevant.

**Create an impact with personalised images to boost response rates on your next campaign**

You may have seen these types of image where your name is written in the clouds or in the sand to tempt you into booking a holiday with your favourite travel company. But we would advocate an approach where the text is in a place you are expecting to see it - maybe a car number plate or the side of a yacht.

Using personalised imagery can be achieved across all channels of your campaign to maintain consistency and enhance the user experience.

**WIIFM?**

You should never over-estimate your audience’s interest in you. It’s a harsh truth but your product or service is only of interest if it solves a problem, serves a purpose or has some tangible benefit. Your prospect will ask themselves, What’s In It For Me? (WIIFM?)

Once you have identified your audience and determined their needs, you can use personalisation to create tailored content to provide a solution to their ‘problem’ and present it via their preferred communications channel.

**Your next campaign**

Consider the goals for your next campaign and how including personalisation could add impact and relevance to make it more successful. Think beyond ‘name and address personalisation’ and create a powerful, personalised multichannel marketing campaign across email, print and PURL.
Building faith in an uncertain world

Business Time in Essex Editor, Peter Richardson, talks to Phil Holding and Steve Tilley, shareholding directors of Colchester-based Horizon Construction, about the state of the all-important construction market and discovers the glass is very much half-full - or maybe half-empty!

BREXIT (there, we’ve gone and mentioned it) and a skills shortage – two issues, one hopefully short-term and one seemingly longer-term, which are currently bedevilling the construction industry.

However, despite this apparent duel-headed monster stalking the building sites of the land, Managing Director Phil Holding and Commercial Director Steve Tilley are far from downcast – nor should they be when you consider the growth of their own construction company during the past 20 years. They’ve experienced peaks and troughs and one full-blown recession in that time but, in the process, have grown Horizon Construction into a £20 million annual turnover business, directly employing 45 staff. These are figures which suggest they know what they’re talking about in the world of construction.

And it appears you can’t talk about construction now without talking about Brexit. “I think the Brexit-effect has been a bit a bit of a slow-burn but there’s no doubt that these past six months or so have seen the air of uncertainty really impact on people’s thinking. It is the uncertainty that’s been the issue. People are reluctant to commit to major investment in a project when they are so many what-ifs to be considered,” said Steve.

“The looming end-date has been fazing people for the past six months or so. They’re not saying no to a project, but neither are they giving it the green light. In one week recently, we made three tender bids worth a total of £4 million which remained awaiting a definite yes or no. That’s the sort of market we are currently working in – one of nervousness and uncertainty.”

Frustratingly for Phil and Steve, they feel the underlying market conditions are strong. “The economy is not in a bad shape. When we’ve had crashes in the past, there’s been a lack of money and, particularly, faith in the economy. What we currently have is an uncertain Government. We have faith in the market and are backing our own judgement, but backing is not coming from the top,” said Phil.

A large percentage of the goods Horizon Construction purchases is from abroad, so uncertainty (there’s that word again) over future import duties looms large now. “The sooner we know what is happening and when, the sooner people will feel more confident in making decisions. We work in an industry of large investment and if there’s one thing people desire, it is minimising the
risk which goes hand-in-hand with an unclear future.”

Whilst Brexit is a reasonably recent interloper, casting its shadow on the construction scene, the skills shortage has been one of its most significant concerns for many years now – and despite numerous initiatives to encourage young people into the trades, a skills shortage remains the industry’s single biggest challenge, said Steve.

“There’s no denying that – for socio-demographic factors we could bat back and forth all day – we have far fewer young people who want to go into the trades and work in construction. Personally, I think expectations are so much higher now among young people. So many more go to university and don’t expect or wish to come out the other end as a brickie or chippie. A very good tradesperson is worth his weight in gold and can earn a very good living – so good he can afford to put his children through university who then, when they come out the other end, think working on building sites is not for them.

“What we need to do is encourage more vocational education so that young people can learn the practical skills which are core to the needs of the construction world whilst, alongside these, learn a broader range of skills, useful to perhaps a future management career path,” said Steve.

Phil added: “Despite the skills shortage, we have learned to manage the issue. For instance, it’s not unusual for us to book brickies three months in advance. It’s what you have to do if you want the best people working on your projects.”

So, all things considered, where is the construction world as we pick our way through 2019? “I would say we’re in a small trough – but only a temporary one and one in which we could easily spring out with some gusto,” said Steve. “The market hasn’t stopped – far from it – but it is challenging to keep it moving forward at a pace we feel the economy should be dictating.”

Horizon Construction has evolved from a construction management business into an established principal contractor. As well as its 45 directly employed Essex-based staff, many of whom have been with the company since the beginning, it has five staff at its London-based sister company, Horizon Construction London.

The team works closely with specialist design teams to procure a wide variety of projects in the commercial, automotive, education, healthcare, residential, bars and restaurants, and sports sectors. The key directors and senior management team are members of the Chartered Institute of Building, and the company is registered and qualified with Contractors Health & Safety Assessment Scheme, Construction Line, National House Building Council, Premier Guarantee and BLP Insurance.

The company’s first job was a restoration project on the Barn Brasserie, just outside Colchester, an early example of Horizon Construction’s adaptability. Subsequent projects have included the Porsche showroom in Sidcup, Ingrebourne Valley Golf & Leisure Club, Mercedes Benz & Harley Davidson showrooms Lakeside, Silk Mill residential conversion Chelmsford, Southend High School for Boys and Bilney Residential Care Centre.

“We are very flexible in the nature of the project we are able to undertake but the common denominator is our adherence to quality. We always aim to be competitive but we will not compromise doing a job properly and offering our clients the very best value for money. We like to meet clients as early as possible so we can input into a project’s journey and identify potential issues before they even become an issue. We are very proud of the testimonials we have received from companies, developers, architects and project managers we have worked for,” said Phil.
BUSINESSES are being challenged to demonstrate their entrepreneurial money-making skills in the Birkett Long £50 Challenge in aid of St Helena Hospice.

This year’s challenge will be launched on April 1. Registration will then open for companies to enter and to start preparing to raise vital funds to enable St Helena to help more local people face incurable illness and bereavement.

The challenge takes place between Saturday June 1 and Monday September 30. Each team receives £50, kindly supplied by sponsors Birkett Long Solicitors, to jumpstart their fundraising. They then have four months to turn £50 into hundreds, or maybe even thousands of pounds. Raising £1,000 could pay for the running of St Helena’s advice line, SinglePoint, for two days providing patients and their families’ expert advice and support 24/7.

Lizzie Deed, St Helena’s Corporate Fundraiser, said: “The Birkett Long £50 Challenge provides the perfect platform for you to promote your business and network with other participating companies. It can also help enhance your profile through engagement with your suppliers and customer base, as well as with family and friends. Taking part encourages innovative thinking, team building, and a bit of healthy competition!

“Over the years, we’ve seen fundraisers from BBQs and plant sales, to quiz nights and bike rides and even teams taking on the Three Peaks – there are no limits. We look forward to seeing what ideas people come up with this year!”

Since its inception in 2012, the teams taking part in the Birkett Long £50 Challenge have raised more than £255,000. This could pay for the St Helena Community Nurse Specialist team for two and a half weeks, allowing them to deliver personal care, symptom management, advice and support day and night to those who need it.

Jennie Skingsley, Associate, Marketing Manager from Birkett Long said: “Birkett Long believes in supporting the local community. St Helena is a cause which we have had a close attachment with for many years. The £50 Challenge is an event we look forward to every year. It’s an exciting way for us to meet new local businesses and hear about innovative fundraising ideas, as well as showing our support for St Helena. We hope to see many new faces, let’s make it a bumper year!”

BusinessTime in Essex is doing its bit to support the Challenge. In the June, September and December issues, the magazine will be offering participating businesses the opportunity to advertise in a special Birkett Long £50 Challenge promotional feature in an issue or issues of their choosing. They can do so either at a 25% discounted rate or can pay the normal rate and BusinessTime in Essex will donate 25% of the advert’s revenue to St Helena.

Further details of how to enter can be obtained by calling the St Helena Corporate Fundraising team on 01206 931468 or by emailing Lizzie at ldeed@sthelena.org.uk or Sarah at swilson@sthelena.org.uk
Perk of the job?

In ‘the good old days’, the company car was a wonderful perk for executives. Essentially the tax was based on the car’s engine size, together with the number of business miles driven in the tax year.

The key figures were an engine under 2000cc and driving more than 2,500 business miles in each tax year. All the big car manufacturers produced 1999cc ‘luxury’ models aimed at executives, who hardly used their cars for work other than carefully setting up a handful of business meetings or conferences in faraway locations just to get in those vital 2,500 miles.

And for those who genuinely had high business mileage, such as sales executives driving more than 18,000 miles, the tax break was even more attractive.

Of course, such an arrangement was too good to last. The opportunity to raise serious amounts of tax revenue, while simultaneously polishing his green credentials, was too much for any Chancellor to resist and in 2002 the way company cars were taxed was changed beyond recognition.

The key criteria for calculating company car tax were now based on the car manufacturer’s list price, (not the discounted price you might be able to negotiate with a dealer); the fuel type (with an additional surcharge if you drove a diesel, now 4%); and the level of carbon dioxide emissions.

As a result, the company car quickly lost its status as a tax-efficient perk and the position has arguably worsened since. Many people have moved towards taking a car allowance as part of their salary and financing a car personally which has its own pros and cons.

In 2018/19, Benefit In Kind (BIK) tax rates have gone up across the board meaning you will pay even more tax on your company car. It is entirely possible that during a period of four years you could pay tax on 116% of the list price of the car you are driving – numbers that are quite staggering, especially as during the same period the car will typically depreciate by 50 to 75%.

Currently we have some of the highest tax charges for company cars we have ever seen. A typical diesel car with emissions of 119 grams of CO2 (not particularly ‘dirty’) will have a tax charge of 28% this tax year and next year this will be 31% - rates that were previously reserved for gas guzzlers in the good old days. And it could get worse. The new rules on real-world testing (WLTP) coming in next year will most likely push up CO2 ratings. This uncertainty combined with the continued demonisation of diesels means the future of the traditional company car remains unappealing.

So are there any alternatives to a ‘traditional’ company car?

Understandably the Government wanted to encourage more low-emission vehicles on to our roads and, to achieve this, the BIK tax percentage was a lot smaller for vehicles with ultra-low emissions. OK, so initially there was a definite stigma attached to such vehicles and a reluctance to drive one. After all, a company car was supposed to be a perk of the job wasn’t it?

The choice available has improved and the take-up of such vehicles has been much greater but during this period we have seen these company car drivers hit harder and harder in terms of tax.

For the 2016/17 tax year, the BIK tax percentage for such green vehicles was 7% and this rose to 9% for 2017/18. For the current 2018/19 tax year it has jumped to 13% and it will increase again this April to a massive 16%, more than double the rate it was three years ago.

But there is some good news as from 2020/21 the rate will be slashed to 2%.

This could make electric vehicles very attractive as company cars. Hybrids emitting no more than 50g of CO2 per kilometre will have a similarly low rate provided they have a ‘big’ range of more than 130 miles when on electric power only.

The range of such models being made available by the major manufacturers continues to grow, plus the Government is making a huge investment in electric cars, so whatever your view might be, more of these vehicles are coming. That’s a certainty, even if you cannot see yourself driving one.

But will the attractive BIK tax rate of 2% last? Or will the Government move to plug the ‘tax gap’ and raise this rate when we see an anticipated increase in the take-up of electric cars?

What else could you do?

As the option that saves the most money is usually the preferred route when deciding whether to take a company car or finance one personally, it may be helpful to work out the most cost-effective route for you.

At the end of the day, as with most aspects of driving, it is all about personal choice and which factors matter the most to you. You will need to consider your personal needs, financial situation and other tax liabilities so it is important to research both options before making a decision.

In summary there is no general rule to help you decide between a company car and a private car, because everyone’s car use is different, but here are a few initial thoughts:

- for companies that are run and managed by the same person, or companies with only a few employees, it might not be tax efficient to offer a company car. Sometimes claiming mileage for business-related travel is a better option.
- for a family company, you should also consider the cost of running the car for the company
- if you do very little business mileage it may still be better to have a company car.

BRANDON HAWLETT, director of Colchester-based accountancy, Wood and Disney, steers you through the company car taxation maze.
The new, ultimate and incredibly exciting way to Showcase your business online

BusinessTime in Essex Editor, Peter Richardson, waxes lyrical about the newly launched Business Showcase directory, the jewel in the crown of the relaunched BusinessTime in Essex website.

However modest or grand your marketing budget, you really do need to allocate the first £200 to this – our new online Business Showcase.

This is a directory like no other seen before. In fact, it does it a bit of a disservice to even refer to it as a directory as this is so, so much more. As its name suggests, this is an opportunity to showcase all the good things about your business to the county’s largest business community for the ridiculously reasonable price of £200 a year or, if it’s friendlier on your budget, just £20 a month.

This is what the Business Showcase will offer you:
- your company brand/logo and business profile banner
- 300 words summarising what your business is all about
- product/service gallery feature
- company/product video feed
- facility to tell others about your USPs and why they should buy from you
- location map and contact details
- links to your website and chosen landing pages.

It’s an intuitive, flexible and easy-to-use platform which enables you, via a unique login, to input your own material within the Business Showcase design template and then to edit as often as you choose. You can update it to publicise a special event or business promotion.

In effect, you have your own live, mini website sitting within a directory which will be the integral part of BusinessTime in Essex Online – the digital hub of the county’s only business magazine.

The Business Showcase will be constantly promoted via print and social media advertising to ensure it is regarded by the Essex business community as the place to look if you are wanting to do business with other Essex businesses.

The Business Showcase will be category indexed. You can select under which category you wish to be listed and the whole Business Showcase will be Google search compliant.

All of this will be available from March when the Business Showcase goes live. Following very simple instruction, you’ll be able to do everything from selecting your preferred payment method and creating your bespoke account, to inputting your content.

Then, you can sit back safe in the knowledge that at least £200 of your valuable annual marketing budget has been most wisely invested.

For further details, go to www.businesstimeinessex.co.uk

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Showcase your business in style...

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For more information, contact: T 01206 843225 or 07778 067614, or email Press@businesstime.co.uk

Talk to us now
The Business Showcase is a very exciting element of our new website but it’s far from the be-all and end-all.

BusinessTime in Essex Online enables us to make the 72-page printed magazine available to the whole Essex business community – great news for those who enjoy keeping up with the latest news, views and information on the county in which they do business, but also great news for businesses advertising in the pages of the magazine. The number of people reading the magazine and hence, your advert, is growing by the month. Very importantly, BusinessTime in Essex Online allow us, when running new stories, to shed the restrictions of four deadlines a year. We can now run a story and share it with our thousands of online visitors the minute it breaks, rather than having to wait up to three months for the next printed issue. Quality content drives the new digital venture but, as with the print version, it is the willingness and enthusiasm of you, the Essex businessman and businesswoman, which determines just how exciting a vehicle it is as a business news sharing platform. Naturally, there are also advertising opportunities afforded by the website – though not too many! We don’t want to be one of those websites where you drown in a sea of maddening flashing, jumping adverts. So, if you want to snare one of our exclusive prime slots, don’t delay!

Take it to the wire

Another element of BusinessTime in Essex Online is Business Wire in Essex, a fabulous new platform which will enable all types of organisations, particularly PR and marketing agencies, to share company news and announcements with the Essex business scene.

Business Wire in Essex offers you the opportunity to enjoy guaranteed coverage before thousands of Essex businessmen and women of your company news stories and announcements. It ensures all your hard work in compiling Press releases is rewarded with guaranteed coverage on the county’s leading digital platform. For ease of navigation, Business Wire in Essex has 24 subject categories in which stories can be placed – and any given story can be selected for inclusion in up to three categories, so maximising exposure among readers.

A story can be up to 500 words and include an image and contact details including a hyper-linked website address. Business Wire in Essex is not a stand-alone platform on which to post Press releases. It is an integral part of BusinessTime in Essex Online which is dedicated to being the county’s premier business information community.

Talk to us now

Business works best when it communicates. If you share my vision to create a ‘business community’ here in Essex which becomes the envy of the country, a model for others to emulate, then let’s talk. If you’d like to know more about the opportunities afforded by BusinessTime in Essex Online, why not give me a call on 01206 843225 or 07778 067614, or email me at peter@pjrcommss.co.uk
Birketts announced as The Legal 500 UK Awards winner

Birketts has been named ‘Transport Firm of the Year (Outside London)’ at The Legal 500 UK Awards 2019.

The Legal 500 UK Awards recognise and reward the best in-house and private practice teams and individuals, with more than 50,000 interviews conducted to ascertain the winners.

Birketts’ Transport and Logistics Team combines the expertise of the Shipping and International Trade Team (headed by Nicholas Woo), the Regulatory and Corporate Defence Team (headed by Laura Thomas) and other specialists acting for this industry (including Employment and Commercial Property). The team advises both international and domestic clients and works closely with the British International Freight Association and is a member of the Road Haulage Association.

According to Legal 500, clients said of the international work done by the Shipping Team that, “the quality of service standard compares to renowned London City shipping law firms, response times are quick, the industry knowledge is good, the advice is always thorough and excellent value for high quality service and City expertise delivered on a more personal basis.”

The Regulatory and Corporate Defence Team was recommended for contentious advice and regulatory matters, with clients remarking they are “attentive, proactive, approachable, understanding and knowledgeable.”

Laura Thomas, who sits as a Deputy Traffic Commissioner and was previously a board member for the Freight Transport Association, said: “I’m thrilled our work has been acknowledged by this national award. Birketts’ multidisciplinary team is committed to understanding our clients’ complex transport and logistics needs to ensure we deliver effective commercial solutions. We assist with transport specific issues such as tachographs, licensing, terms and conditions, logistics contracts and liens, to more general areas of law such as health and safety, employment, immigration, corporate and property.”

Nicholas Woo, added: “Likewise, we are very grateful for this recognition for our efforts and the comments from clients. We are committed to providing high client service standards and technical excellence to owners, charterers, logistics providers, cargo interests, commodities traders, and their respective insurers, from all over the world. In addition, being based outside London, we are also determined to offer good value.”

Laura Thomas

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Adrenaline rush in the morning makes office workers more productive in the afternoon

OFFICE workers who took part in adrenaline-boosting activities before work felt similar benefits to those linked to exercise, according to a study led by the University of Essex.

Researchers discovered that taking a 40-second ride down the world’s tallest and longest tunnel slide - the XelorMittal Orbit at London’s Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park - improved levels of happiness, productivity, creativity, energy and focus in workers.

The experiment saw more than 100 office workers tackling the 178-metre slide – which involved a 40-second ride down the UK’s tallest sculpture with riders reaching speeds of 15 miles an hour in the 80cm wide tube.

After the activity the researchers found workers’ average stress levels fell by 25%, productivity rose by 20%, creativity by 22% and energy levels rose by 32%.

By 4pm, six hours after the taking part in the activity, stress levels of the participants remained 25% lower than before the activity and productivity remained 12% higher.

The impacts of exercise on wellbeing have been well-documented, however, this is the first time research has shown that similar affects can be achieved from a quick adrenaline-boosting activity.

To measure the psychological impact of the adrenaline rush, participants in the study completed a questionnaire immediately before and after their trip down the slide. This measured factors such as stress, motivation, creativity and productivity. Participants repeated the survey throughout the day to measure how long the impact of the slide lasted. Results were compared with a control group who did not take part in the activity.

The research was commissioned by International Quarter London (IQL), the new London neighbourhood at the gateway to Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, designed to promote improved employee health and wellness.

Dr Valerie Gladwell, Senior Lecturer at our School of Sport, Rehabilitation and Exercise Sciences, who led the study said: “This research suggests that an adrenaline rush in the morning may help to reduce perceived stress levels for the rest of the day. This was one small study and while the results were positive more work needs to be undertaken to further these finding and fully understand the benefits of an exhilarating activity for workplace wellbeing.

“While an adrenaline rush might not be for everyone, other research we have conducted suggests that undertaking exercise within areas such as the green spaces at IQL may also help reduce stress levels and thus help overall wellbeing. Encouraging businesses to be proactive about wellbeing is essential in today’s world for both employers and employees.”

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**Invest ESSEX welcomes SME Samuel Brothers**

A year on from the bolstering of Invest ESSEX’s SME support, through the recruitment of three SME Business Managers, a multitude of companies have benefited from the inward investment and business support agency’s expertise.

One such thriving business is Samuel Brothers, whose Essex base is in Harwich. Established in 1830, the bespoke tailors focused on military clothing at the outbreak of the First World War and was commissioned by the War Office to produce the first waterproof coat for Officers of the British Army. In 2017, the company was appointed with a Royal Warrant.

Although Samuel Brothers has its main headquarters in Aldershot, the Essex site – set up in 2007 – has become increasingly important for the business. In 2015 the tailors closed its Leeds production and moved everything to Harwich, increasing its workforce at that point to 14.

Samuel Brothers is intent on producing new staff through apprenticeships, supported by the development of a relationship with Colchester Institute (following an introduction from Invest ESSEX), whose second-year graduate class visited Harwich for its first Masterclass in January.

Invest ESSEX has provided support to Samuel Brothers in a number of ways, including assisting with developing a robust business plan and financial budgets, securing appropriate finance and funding as well as PR and showcasing.

Managing Director Lee Dawson is delighted with the help provided to the business during the past year. He said: “We have had great continued support from Invest ESSEX who have, quite frankly, been exceptional, and really understand our business. At a time when we are all busy, I have appreciated the sincerity of staff at Invest ESSEX, who have taken the time to learn about our business, and as a consequence they understand and appreciate our challenges. I have been amazed at the resources that have been made available. For me, it is about the long-term relationship and not a ‘short fix.’

Invest ESSEX’s SME Business Managers are committed to offering fully-funded impartial advice and business support, at a time when small business growth has been restricted as access to finance and funding has become difficult.

For further information on how Invest ESSEX can help businesses call 0800 970 8981 or visit www.investessex.co.uk
WHEN the levy and the wider apprenticeship reforms were introduced in April 2017, we knew there were going to be ‘interesting’ times ahead. So, as we approach the levy’s second anniversary how ‘interesting’ has it actually been?

It’s taken nearly two years for everyone to get their heads around the levy and the reforms - a roller-coaster with plenty of ups, downs, twists and turns. It’s been frustrating at times but there’s definitely light at the end of the tunnel. As with any new system or initiative, it takes time, energy and, on occasions, tears to make it work.

The levy has changed the apprenticeship landscape somewhat with more existing employees taking up programmes to support new job roles or promotions.

We have seen new apprenticeship standards being developed to support levy usage and career paths that are traditionally associated with university, for example, nursing and law.

There is, however, still a lack of new level two apprenticeship provision coming through which is hindering levy spends on recruitment in some areas: childcare, business admin and accounting instantly spring to mind. The rate for these old apprenticeship programmes is nominal and what we draw from an employer’s levy account for these apprentices barely makes a dent in it.

There have been numerous challenges along the way which we will continue to face head on and overcome. The 20% off-job learning requirement has definitely been a stumbling block.

An apprenticeship is multifaceted – it’s not just about going to a college one day a week and writing up lots of case studies. Those undertaking a programme will have a learning plan made up of a variety of components that support the 20% requirement – some will be led by the training provider and some by the employer. This could include taught sessions, online learning, virtual learning, research projects, attendance at conferences and events, meetings and one-to-one sessions. An apprenticeship is an investment where new skills are developed and embedded over a period of time. From day one, employers are an integral part of the programme.

Uptake from levy-paying employers has been a fairly positive experience for us. Businesses we have contacted have been interested to find out what they can do with their levy. That said, there will sadly be unspent levy funds heading back to the treasury from this April onwards as each payment into the levy account only has a shelf life of 24 months. We implore those employers with unspent funds to contact us so we can support them to utilise their levy.

Disappointingly, we have seen a decline in the number of SMEs taking up apprenticeships. We are keen to engage with employers not paying into the levy to discuss the programmes and opportunities available in Essex.

We still have some ‘interesting’ times ahead and a way to go before everything settles down completely. Let’s see where the next 24 months take us.
VIDEO is leading the way in technology and is helping increase business productivity and efficiency. Being a Gen Z, video communication has had a huge influence on my learning style as I have grown up with it being the most accessible form of communication and way to learn new things. At the click of a button you can find the answer to your question and a solution to your problem.

When I was invited to have an interview over video, I was extremely excited as this is something I had never experienced before. Yes, I have used Facetime and other commercial forms of video communication but never had I used it in a formal setting. This was completely new to me and something I was eager to experience. The interview process was great. I was able to speak to the company director who was miles away in a different office. The process was just like a normal interview and so seamless that it was easy to forget that it was even over video. During the interview I was even able to share some of the work I had done in my work experience on screen with the director. At the click of a button, my work was on screen and we were discussing how the skills I used in my previous role would benefit their business and my new role.

I was offered an apprenticeship. After I had finished my in-house induction and met the rest of the team, it was time to re-meet my director who I would be working closely alongside. We continue to communicate regularly using video in a seamless and agile way. The video quality is amazingly high and makes it feel as though we are in the same room.

Support and teamwork are an integral part of my apprenticeship being successful and video conferencing makes my job a lot easier and a lot more efficient. Whenever I need immediate feedback on something I am working on, rather than sending an email and wondering if the receiver has seen it, I am able to give them a quick video call via Lifesize and share my work. This allows me to make live changes immediately and effectively. I very quickly benefited from leveraging my time effectively and saving time that would be spent waiting for email replies by jumping on a video call.

I whole-heartedly recommend finding a company who will support you in your apprenticeship, learning and growth. Technology is a great way of bringing people together, engaging and collaborating with colleagues near and far.
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Levy support group launched

In order to cut through the confusion associated with the apprenticeship levy, Chelmsford College has launched the Levy Support Group - a no-obligation helpline and email support service to help employers in Essex understand their entitlement, get clear advice on their options and help them work out their training needs.

Sarah Hamilton, Director of Business Services at Chelmsford College, said: “It’s been two years since the Institute for Apprenticeships was launched and during that time we’ve seen a drop of nearly a quarter of an apprenticeship starts in the UK, a predicted overspend of £0.5 billion this year and a change in employers’ levy contributions from 10% to 5% for small businesses. The amount a large employer can transfer from their levy payment to a small employer has also changed, from 10% to 25%.

“There has been a lot of apprenticeship change in the last two years, with more on the horizon.

“T Levels will be introduced in September 2020, to follow GCSEs and be the equivalent to three A Levels. Designed to be a mixture of classroom learning and on-the-job experience to include a three-month industry placement, they are expected to become one of the main technical education choices for young people after GCSEs.

“Whilst the number of 16-18 year-olds starting apprenticeships and level two apprenticeship programmes is undersubscribed, management qualifications such as team leader/supervisor and level five operations/departmental manager standards have seen a huge boost, with these higher level apprenticeships responsible for 14% of the 76,300 starts on standards so far in 2018/19. These higher apprenticeships are often attributed to the predicted overspend, leading Ofsted Chief Inspector Amanda Spielman to remark in December 2018 that levy money is not being spent in the intended way.

“The levy was designed to encourage employers to invest in high quality apprenticeships, at all levels, to ensure organisations and staff had the training opportunities they needed to help their businesses grow and to inject higher quality in-demand skills training into the UK economy.

“In short, the Government committed to three million apprenticeship starts in England by 2020. The levy was created to fund this commitment and to encourage employers to help address the skills gap in the UK.

“You’d be forgiven for thinking the new apprenticeship and levy system is a minefield. It wasn’t intended to become so complicated, but as explained in April 2017 some key details have changed more than once and many large employers have now resigned themselves to writing off their levy tax rather than transferring it or making use of it.

“This really could be an opportunity missed because the current landscape represents an ideal time to upskill existing staff with higher level qualifications and to grow your business with new staff, supported by established training providers in level two and three qualifications.

“That is why we have created the Levy Support Group, which is completely free of charge,” added Sarah.

The hotline number to call is 01245 293119 and the email address is levy@chelmsford.ac.uk. You can find out more at www.chelmsford.ac.uk/levy

Coming to terms with the levy

BACK in May 2017, new apprenticeship standards were introduced with a different set of rules and regulations. This has affected the provision of apprenticeships for all businesses, whether small or large.

For large businesses, the Government has introduced an apprenticeship levy which has placed an additional financial burden on employers.

All organisations with a wage bill greater than £3 million now pay 0.5% into a levy account which they can use to fund apprenticeship training. Non-levy organisations with more than 50 employees must now make a 10% contribution towards the cost of apprenticeship training to their training provider. This 10% level is due to change to 5%, though the Government has yet to confirm the switchover date.

For employers with fewer than 49 employees - and where the apprentice is under 19 years of age - apprenticeships are 100% government-funded. Any organisation, irrespective of the number of employees, is entitled to an incentive payment of £1,000 from the Government if they sign a young person between the ages of 16 and 18 onto an apprenticeship programme.

As a training provider, Chelmsford College controls large aspects of the apprenticeship process. Sarah Hamilton, Director of Business Services at Chelmsford College, said: “The process ranges from the initial meeting with the employer all the way to an end point assessment undertaken at the completion of the apprenticeship.

“At the beginning of the process, we will help employers and prospective apprentices through the ‘start-up’ period to ensure the sign-up process is seamless. We will also issue the contract between training provider and employer, monitor funds received from employers, pay incentive payments to employers and of course undertake large aspects of the apprenticeship training. The end-point assessment is a new facet of the apprenticeship scheme, but we will guide you through this new aspect too. The end-point assessment, as the very end of the apprenticeship, usually comprises a written test followed by a practical assessment to demonstrate the apprentice has learned the skills required during the course of the apprenticeship.

“During the past year, it has become apparent that larger companies have only used some of their apprenticeship levy, while some haven’t used any at all. There are many reasons why this may have occurred, including new Government rules which state apprentices must spend 20% of their contractual hours completing ‘off the job’ training and be paid for it. Some colleges and employers plan apprenticeships so that apprentices attend college for one day a week which means the apprentice works four days. The apprentice must be paid for five days.

“Since the launch of the ‘New’ apprenticeships in May 2017, large employers used just 10% of their levy funds in its first year. The low up-take of apprenticeships led to a Government rethink and, from May 2018, it allowed levy-paying organisations to transfer up to 10% of their annual levy fund to other employers. Nonetheless, this change has not had the required effect as recent figures suggest organisations haven’t really reacted to the 10% levy. This might be due to the perception that the levy is overly complicated.

“Irrespective of organisation size, large, medium or small, if you would like to know more about apprenticeships, or if you are a student considering an apprenticeship, please call David Cornwell on 01245 293119 or email him at Cornwell@d@chelmsford.ac.uk.” added Sarah.
HERE at CI Business Solutions at Colchester Institute, we have found both levy and non-levy employers are increasingly choosing to invest in training for staff already in-place through an apprenticeship, but are reluctant to recruit apprentices from outside of the company.

By using levy funds to upskill existing staff members through an apprenticeship instead, organisations are providing a platform for them to develop and evolve within the organisational structure, aiding progression into senior roles.

Apprenticeships are an excellent way of increasing the skillset of your current workforce and providing on-the-job training for someone you already know has the potential and motivation to go further in your business. Whilst apprenticeships are more commonly thought of as for young people, a recent Apprenticeship Statistics England Report published in January 2019 states that people aged 25 and over accounted for 46% of apprenticeship starts in 2016/17. This emerging trend shift supports evidence that the perception of apprenticeships is changing. Established assumptions that apprentices can only be recent school-leavers or labour-intensive workers on entry-level programmes are evolving.

With the employer-led redesign of apprenticeships and the subsequent introduction of standards, apprenticeships are highly respected as training and education routes which emphasise the quality, knowledge and practical skills intended to meet employer needs.

An existing member of staff could undertake a Higher Apprenticeship and achieve a Bachelor’s degree in a dedicated subject, something which would not only be of benefit to their growth within the business but their value to the company.

Through working collaboratively with employers and providing them with a training needs analysis, one of the primary concerns CI Business Solutions at Colchester Institute has identified is that many businesses lack understanding surrounding the requirement that 20% of an apprentice’s time has to be spent ‘off-the-job’.

Helping companies to understand that apprentices don’t necessarily have to be physically away from an organisation for 20% of the time has enabled employers to better educate their workforce and implement a learning culture that supports and embraces apprenticeships as a training method for current employees.

Most businesses recognise how this is applicable to a newly recruited apprentice, but not how it will relate to or affect a current employee. In short, they just need to be undertaking a task that doesn’t form part of their typical day-to-day role. This can include helping with a different project in the workplace, shadowing other colleagues to broaden their learning or as study-time for the qualification aspect of the apprenticeship.

In short, when upskilling existing staff, the term ‘apprenticeship’ should not be underestimated - it represents a demanding and rigorous training opportunity for both businesses and their staff.
When can you terminate a commercial agreement?

If you are looking at your commercial agreements in the hope of finding some answers, here is a basic guide to get you started, or alternatively to prompt you to seek legal advice, if necessary.

In most circumstances, an English contract can be terminated prior to the end of its term only in accordance with specific termination provisions within the contract. In other words, only examples and circumstances listed in your termination clause may give grounds for early termination.

Immediate termination may be possible under common law in limited circumstances (and provided that the contract has not excluded common law rights). However, such circumstances must be so serious so as to amount to:

- repudiatory breach – where a party has been deprived of substantially all of the benefit of the contract, or, in other words, where the breach frustrates the commercial purpose of the contract/venture (likely to include a series of repeated breaches);
- renunciation – where a party refuses to perform the contract;
- breach of condition – where a party is in breach of provisions such as “time is of the essence” or statutory implied conditions for quality under the supply of goods legislation.

Coming back to contractual rights, set out below are circumstances which can provide grounds for termination only if they have been expressly provided for within the termination clause in the contract (which they usually are):

- material/substantial breach
- insolvency
- change of control (of the other party)
- convenience or contract is no longer profitable; the specified event must include the expiry of a specified termination notice period (this does not include fixed term contracts)
- force majeure
- frustration.

I have been asked how useful a force majeure clause can be in a Brexit scenario. Assuming this clause has been expressly included in the contract (since there is no concept of force majeure in English common law), it can effectively relieve a party from liability for what would otherwise be a breach of contract in the event of terrorism, civil war, flood, earthquake, strike or similar. If triggered, parties are likely to be under a duty to communicate and take action to reduce the impact of the particular force majeure event. Whether this clause can be triggered by a Brexit-related event will largely depend on how force majeure has been defined in the contract and whether it can be interpreted to cover the particular set of circumstances.

In the absence of a force majeure clause, where the party is unable to perform their obligations due to what might otherwise be regarded as a force majeure event, such non-performance will either amount to a breach of contract whereby the other party can claim damages and may have the right to terminate the contract under the common law, or the contract will be frustrated.

A contract is frustrated when its performance has become physically or legally impossible. The contract ends automatically without any action by either party. If a party has suffered loss as a result, it will have limited statutory remedies.

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Recruitment challenges reinforce need for SELEP Skills Strategy

The urgent need for a sustained focus on securing the skills required by industry has been highlighted by a survey produced by the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC).

The findings of BCC’s latest Quarterly Economic Survey have led to concern and calls for greater backing for skills and training from the South East Local Enterprise Partnership and the area’s accredited Chambers of Commerce.

The BCC survey highlights the extent to which labour shortages have risen in the UK and are impacting on productivity. Currently more than four-fifths (81%) of manufacturers reported difficulties in finding the right staff – the joint highest level since the survey began in 1989. In the service sector, the level of recruitment difficulty was at 70%, hovering close to the survey’s high recorded in the previous quarter (72%).

Christian Brodie, Chairman of SELEP, said: “These results reflect the trends we are hearing from local employers and reinforce the importance of our Skills Strategy which we developed with the area’s business community and partners.

“In light of the tightening labour market, coinciding with the falling numbers of EU27 nationals now coming to the country to work, we need to redouble our efforts and ensure that our further and higher education partners and Government continue to work with business. “Workforce skills must remain high on everybody’s agenda as access to skills underpins the productivity of every business – and must be a priority.”

Denise Rossiter, Chief Executive of Essex Chambers of Commerce, added: “We know from talking to our members that finding potential employees with the right skill sets remains a challenge that needs to be addressed. “We very much welcome the work that is being done by the South East LEP, and the Essex Employment and Skills Board, to bring together business and training providers to increase the skills of potential and existing employees, which will be all the more important post-Brexit.”

SELEP’s evidence-based skills blueprint, which supports the Government’s Industrial Strategy and new national Careers Strategy, sets out a series of priorities that are being take forward to address these challenges. These include:

• increase apprenticeships and industry relevant qualifications for all ages, particularly in priority sectors and at higher and degree level
• simplify the skills landscape for employers, stakeholders and individuals
• build an inclusive economy and provide employment opportunities for all
• raise awareness of jobs and growth across SELEP and the area’s size, scale, national and international significance
• foster and support the spirit of pride, entrepreneurship, innovation and enthusiasm across SELEP to bring about change.

SELEP welcomes the recently announced package of support for Skills Advisory Panels (local partnerships between public and private sector employers, local authorities, colleges and universities) to assess what skills are needed in their local area. SELEP is using the network it has created with local panels in its area, known locally as Skills Advisory Boards, to ensure a strong business voice is directly influencing future provision and that courses available help match skills directly to jobs.
Grow your business through wine

Do you know it costs a company five times more to get a new client than it does to keep an existing one, and it’s 50% easier to sell to an existing client than to a new prospect?

The pressure comes when deciding how to entertain those existing clients. Well, you can’t go far wrong with wine! But with such a huge choice of wines, how do you know what to offer?

The first thing to remember is that wine preference is completely subjective; the heart wants what the taste buds love. You cannot please everyone all the time but, you can make most people content with some good choices. Try to widen your selection so you are meeting as many tastes as possible.

What types of red and white wine? To start, try a Shiraz (The Hedonist Shiraz, Waitrose £14.99 / Grande Classique Crozes Hermitage Waitrose £15.99) and Merlot (Errazuriz Estate Series Merlot, Majestic £8.99) for the red wine fans and a Sauvignon Blanc (Forrest Estate, Adnams £12.99) and Chardonnay (Juniper Crossing, Adnams £11.99) for the connoisseurs of white wines. Something else to consider is the wine region. You may want to mix wines from both New World (outside of Europe) and Old World (European regions). With a blend of both you are sure to appeal to most people’s taste.

So, what would be the best bottle to serve with various food? Consider what you are serving. The type of wine that goes with dinner completely depends on the food. Usually, it is best to start the evening with white wine, which is lighter. A good bottle of Sauvignon Blanc will go nicely with salad or light finger food. If the main courses call for something a bit richer, you can continue to serve white wine as it won’t dominate the flavour of the food. Red is more robust and is a good match with the main courses. Merlot goes well with chicken or pork while Pinot Noir pairs well with creamy sauces. Serving Italian food? Then a good bottle of Barbera Barbera d’Alba, Nadia Curto, (Wine Society £11.50) or a Tuscan red. Red meats are best paired with a full bodied wine such as a Shiraz or Cabernet Sauvignon.

Remember to serve the wine from white to red and from light to heavy. Keeping it casual? That doesn’t mean you have to stick with beer! As I always say, wine goes with everything! Try a Malbec (my favourite Malbec is Flores Malbec, Bodegas Gougenheim, Adnams £16.99) with your BBQ burger. Pizza? Well, it’s Italian, so go with a Chianti (Melini Chianti Reserva, Waitrose £10.79). The perfect pizza wine!

What about the question of Champagne? Personally, I think Champagne makes the perfect aperitif and pairs very well with smoked salmon, scallops, lobster, prawns and, of course fish and chips! One of my most popular tastings is sparkling wine, Champagne and fish and chips. The high acidity of the sparkling wines balances out the oiliness of the food. Sparkling is always a great way to celebrate that special occasion so make sure you have a few bottles handy if you are celebrating an important milestone.

A cheese and wine pairing is always great fun but can be fraught with difficulties. Ask most people what the best wine is with cheese and most would choose a full-bodied red. But is it really the best pairing? It depends on the wine, it depends on the cheese and it depends on you. If you love red wine with cheese, nothing is going to put you off the experience, but generally speaking, a white wine will go better with most cheeses than a red. That may surprise you but think of the fruits that you serve with cheese such as apples and pears. Their fresher flavours are reflected in white wines rather than red.

There are many pitfalls in organising an event that includes wine. Using the help of a wine expert is the best way of avoiding those pitfalls – and think how much you’ll learn about wine in the process!

As a life-long wine enthusiast, Neil Bull decided to develop his interest and started studying with the Wine and Spirit Education Trust (WSET), whilst still working in the city. He completed level 2 and 3 and then graduated with a level 4 diploma in 2011. Wanting to share his enthusiasm on the subject, and with a natural talent for teaching, Neil became a WSET approved programme provider in levels 1, 2 and 3 making him one of only 600 people in the world to be able to do so. He set up the Essex Wine School in 2014 and has led a number of highly successful courses, both private and corporate in numerous locations around the region. Here, he suggests how you can grow your business through wine – wonderful thinking!

Special offer for readers of BusinessTime in Essex

Neil has very graciously said he would be very happy to offer any advice, totally free of charge, to readers of BusinessTime in Essex. What’s more, if you would like him to organise and host an event for you, he can offer you a 10% discount. And if you would like to attend one of his evening or Saturday tastings, he can also offer you a 10% discount. Simply call Neil for details on 01371 267260 and quote BusinessTime in Essex. Further details on what Neil offers can be obtained at www.essexwineschool.com
Finding the right venue for a corporate hospitality function can be challenging – plenty of choice but few actual options is a common complaint from those tasked with sourcing that ‘different’ location.

The good news though is that one corner of Essex is making a real virtue out of its difference. From its Town Hall’s traditional elegance, the impressive conference facilities at Charter Hall and the respective history and beauty of castle and park, Colchester is staking a claim to be the county’s hospitality hub – somewhere businesses can entertain staff and clients, confident of leaving a lasting impression.

Colchester Events Company, since 2018, has been part of Colchester Amphora Trading, one of Colchester Borough Council’s three new commercial companies. It is responsible for organising events at the town’s unique venues.

BusinessTime in Essex Editor, Peter Richardson, caught up with the Colchester Events Company team, who told us more about their unique offerings.

“Whether you need a flexible space for networking or exhibitions, a stage to deliver an important seminar, a formal board meeting or an inspiring brainstorming session, Colchester Events Company has the ideal venue. Our portfolio of exceptional spaces has the ideal solution to accommodate your needs with our convenient and accessible central Colchester locations.

“Built in 1898 and located perfectly in the middle of the town centre, the spectacular Town Hall is rich with history. From the moment your guests arrive they will be in awe of the beautifully decorated rooms with ornate and original features such as stained glass windows, oil paintings and murals. Many these unique spaces are still used for their original purpose today during Mayoral and Civic events.

“The grandeur of this impressive building, combined with a central location with plenty of free parking for all event attendees, makes Colchester Town Hall the ideal backdrop for your corporate event or function.

“Constructed when Colchester became the first Roman capital of Britain, Colchester Castle is the largest surviving Norman Keep in Europe. It is home to 2,000 years of historical artefacts and exhibits, from treasure to mosaics and ancient pieces of art, and provides a fascinating and memorable backdrop for the most formal of corporate events or parties and celebrations alike.

“The chapel is by far the most popular event space within the castle, and rightly so. With an impressive vaulted white ceiling giving a fantastic atmosphere, the natural light which fills the room is tinted through the stained-glass windows, adding to the charm of the space.

“Named after Charles Gray himself, the Charles Gray Room is another popular private space within Colchester Castle to hold a function or gala dinner. It holds up to 80 seated guests, making it an appealing and flexible space for your corporate event requirements.

“In addition to the rooms available at Colchester Castle, the historic grounds of Castle Park offer a hidden gem for boutique outdoor networking events or teambuilding. Offering stunning views over the manicured gardens, and situated at the end of a stately tree-lined walkway, the Summer House provides the perfect setting for a corporate event with a difference. It was built by Charles Gray whilst renovating the Park in the 18th Century and was constructed to replicate a Roman temple. The Summer House is ideal for smaller events, or even for reception drinks followed by dinner or dancing within the iconic Castle itself.”

“Whether it’s to mark an important company milestone, a team building exercise or hosting a conference with hundreds of delegates, Charter Hall has all the key elements required to make your event a success.

“Take advantage of our corporate hospitality available for the huge range of top comedy shows, live music, sporting events and more. Charter Hall has a fantastic line-up to entertain you and your clients or colleagues all year round.

“We also know how important finding the right venue is for your birthday party, family gathering or a reunion of friends. The vast capacity of Charter Hall easily allows for large numbers of guests, and with our modern facilities, you will not be disappointed.”

The atmospheric Moot Hall within Colchester Town Hall.

Russell Watson in concert at Charter Hall.
Why you need a full-service cleaning contractor

There are a number of advantages to using a cleaning contractor that provides a broad range of services, particularly if they are a large, established firm.

Whilst small contractors may promise the ‘family-firm’ level of service, a limited number of operatives can create issues in the event of unexpected staff absences, such as having to sub-contract to cleaners who are unfamiliar with your contract and unknown to you.

At Monthind, we believe it is imperative that our customers can rely on the same team of operatives who can integrate into the business and become part of the team. You still get that ‘family-firm’ service, but with the back-up of East Anglia’s largest cleaning contractor. As they get to know you, and you them, your team will be able to suggest ways of improving your contract. This may be a simple matter of changing a few processes to be less intrusive to your staff, or it may be to include ad-hoc services such as carpet cleaning to extend the life of your flooring. Using a company that has a pool of specialists available, in the event of an emergency, makes things much simpler at a time when you just want things sorted. Bio-hazard cleaning is a perfect example. If you need the services of a bio-hazard team the chances are something extraordinary and possibly traumatic has occurred. The last thing you want to be worrying about is the credentials of the cleaning company whose immediate services you need.

A full-service cleaning contractor isn’t just a bonus in an emergency though. Whether it’s a monthly window clean, a bi-annual gutter and fascia clean, outside maintenance and gardening, graffiti removal, clinical waste, general waste and recycling, IT asset disposal, solar panel cleaning, carpet cleaning, hard floor restoration and maintenance or janitorial supplies, services can be added to an annual contract or purchased on an ad-hoc basis.

As an existing client, you will have a rapport with the contract manager along with confidence in their service delivery. From an administrative perspective, risks assessments will have already been carried out that would cover part, if not all, of additional services, saving time and expense. Customers do not have to go through the time-consuming, laborious task of sourcing a new provider or going through the tender process for each additional service; they can just pick up the phone and ask us to add it to their schedule. Managing business premises is always a challenging task, even when things are running smoothly. Employing the services of a contractor that can carry out a vast number of facility management tasks predominately proves to be more cost-effective than managing a team of employees in-house, on both a day-to-day basis and for occasional or emergency tasks.

When you are choosing a contract cleaning provider, it is worth checking the range of services that they are able to provide. Simon Biggs, Monthind Clean LLP Partner, looks at the benefits of employing a full-service cleaning contractor even if you only envisage needing a daily office clean.

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New addition to the TSP employment law team

THE Thompson Smith and Puxon employment law team is a Legal 500 Top Tier practice in the Essex region, one of only three firms to be awarded this much sought-after recommendation in October 2018.

At the beginning of 2019 the team has been further strengthened by the addition of Jolyon Berry. Employment Solicitor Jolyon is the Director of Jolyon Berry Ltd a partner in Thompson Smith and Puxon, and his appointment brings the total number of partners at the expanding Colchester and Clacton-based firm to 12.

Jolyon started his career at a Magic Circle firm and joins the TSP employment law team from Birketts where he had been a partner since 2006. He has more than 18 years’ experience and advises clients on all aspects of employment law, delivering solutions-based advice and supporting clients in the day-to-day management of their people, legal issues and risk.

Working on a strategic and operational level on both contentious and non-contentious matters, his work includes advising on contracts of employment, disciplinary procedures, the enforcement of restrictive covenants, employment policies and procedures and settlement agreements. He is a trained commercial mediator and makes effective use of these skills assisting employers with employment disputes, in the workplace and in the boardroom, and is particularly experienced in the defence of employers facing claims in employment tribunals. Clients also benefit from his advice on the management of collective consultation projects prior to a work relocation, redundancies or transfers of employment.

He frequently delivers in-house training as well as hosting regular seminars for clients and HR professionals on the ever-changing area of employment law. Whilst working on a strategic and operational level on both contentious and non-contentious matters, he will be based in TSP’s Colchester office, Jolyon regularly travels to meet clients and prospective clients at their business premises.

Jolyon said: “I have long-admired TSP and its business services team and am well aware of its reputation for offering an effective service for clients. I am really looking forward to helping it build on its current success and expect that my background and experience will fit well with and complement the firm.”

TSP Senior Partner, Mary Anne Fedeyko, added: “The TSP employment law team is an integral part of the holistic service for business that TSP offers its clients. The addition of Jolyon’s wealth of experience and expertise will be a huge asset to the team as we continue to grow. On behalf of the partners and staff at Thompson Smith and Puxon I would like to welcome Jolyon to the firm and wish him every success in his new role with us.”

National award for Colchester agency

COLCHESTER Business Enterprise Agency (Colbea) was announced winner of the Enterprise Engagement Award at the National Enterprise Network (NEN) Annual Conference.

The awards were established in 2007 to recognise excellence in the delivery of enterprise support. Colbea took home the Enterprise Engagement Award for its In the Market for Success (IM4S) initiative, a funded start-up programme for aspiring female entrepreneurs.

Ashleigh Seymour-Rutherford, Colbea Chief Executive, said: “This award serves as recognition for the hard work of our team throughout the year in supporting and growing a burgeoning community of inspiring new entrepreneurs.”

The awards’ judges labelled Colbea as, ‘an organisation able to demonstrate truly effective excellence and creativity with client or stakeholder engagement. Colbea tackled head-on the issue of keeping the new businesses engaged using a range of creative, supportive and innovative tactics. Colbea’s “In the Market for Success” programme was engaging, creative and delivered real impact’.

£500,000 funding to study crop growth

PLANT biologists at the University of Essex have secured £500,000 of funding to get a better understanding of how crops respond to different levels of stress in the environment.

The three-year project is part of ongoing research at Essex looking into the interaction between plants and their environment, focusing on how light and drought-stress affects crop yield and a plant’s biological timer, which regulates when it grows and flowers.

As pressures on water supplies increase due to climate change, researchers are seeking to maintain or improve crop yield whilst limiting water use.

Led by Dr Matt Jones, from the School of Biological Sciences, part of the research will focus on dehydration stress using a series of controlled chambers to create environments with varying levels of drought-like conditions to see the effect on the crops. “Plants respond to stress differently throughout the day and if we are to fully exploit the potential yield of crops it is vital that we understand how plants interact with their environment, especially during stresses such as drought which limit yield,” explained Dr Jones.

Plants have to cope with a range of different stresses in the environment – from bright light and varied temperature to disease and insects – which are linked with certain times of the day. These regular patterns have driven the evolution of biological timing mechanisms that enable plants to anticipate stress at particular times.

The research project, funded by the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council, is hoped to improve the understanding of the link between the metabolic changes in plants due to different stresses, and the corresponding knock-on impact on its biological timer – known as the circadian system.

“If we are to understand how crops respond to dehydration we need to see how these changes affect plants’ biological timers,” explained Dr Jones. “We can then work out how to change the genetic makeup of the plant to make it more drought-tolerant while not reducing yield.”

The research team is also looking at light stress and will focus on gaining a better understanding of the link between light signalling and dehydration stress.

Business Time in Essex
Business coaching – a waste of money?

It's a strong statement, but the fact is, business coaching has to realise a return on investment, with defined KPIs from the outset. To make that happen, you need to be ready to make significant changes in the underperforming areas of your business. It's all about the bottom line, and if you're working with a business coach, you should expect to achieve significant returns in profitability and performance.

You'll need to be open to making tough decisions around operations, staff and processes. If you're not ready to do that, you'll never know what your business can achieve. That's not to say you've done everything wrong; often, when a business sees rapid growth, it's easy to lose track of profit and loss.

That's where my unique Orbit Map comes in. It's one of the first methods we work through, from the painful process of seeing exactly where you're underperforming, to the exciting part of seeing how even small changes can release significant profits.

Until you know the stark truth of your financial situation, you cannot realistically set achievable goals or track your progress. Business is about profit, so identify what makes you money, and what doesn't. It is all too easy to keep a customer or contract that guarantees you monthly income, but if it is only producing a small profit, or as is all too often the case, actually costing you money, then it's time to review! Once you know where your profit is, you can decide how to increase it. It may be through capital savings, it may be through a change in pricing structure or even streamlining your products or services.

As I said, it can be an uncomfortable process. I started working with a regional marketing company in 2018, and the managing director described the initial financial review as akin to undressing in front of the doctor. Within eight months, and a process that saw the business streamline its more profitable services, staff and fixed costs have stayed the same, but profit and residual business have increased by more than a third.

In the client's own words: “Stuart says, ‘turnover is vanity, cashflow is reality, and he is absolutely right. We have made transformational changes that have seen our retained business double in value, and our profits increase by a third. Most importantly, we have new business processes that ensure every contract works to the same value and is profitable. What’s great is that we have also released time savings that enable me as the business owner to work strategically on the business. It’s worth mentioning that I have also taken more time off in the past few months than I have been able to in the past five years.”

To go back to my first point, business coaching isn’t an expense, it’s an investment. Expect to achieve a more resilient, more profitable business, with a clear roadmap of your three to five-year plan. If you aren’t making significant, tangible changes then it’s not working for you.

Are you ready to have a more streamlined, more profitable business? Get in touch on 01206 523394 to find out how Stuart can help, or head over to his website at www.stuart-allan.co.uk to see case studies and access business planning tools.
INTERESTINGLY, it is the things in life we least like that we take the longest to do. Putting off calling a fairly cold lead, not following up a client, or avoiding attending a networking event. Ultimately it saps our energy and feeds our negative self-talk. If you wait to feel ‘up for it’ you will never do it. You need to just do it (act as if you can) and your belief that you can will grow. Even better, the more you do it, the more your technique will develop and this too will increase your success and confidence. Behaviour (doing it) drives attitude (believing that you can) and not the other way round.

Prospecting is about finding and separating out the prospects (people who need what you do) from suspects (people who don’t need what you can offer them). People who fail at sales do one or more of the following:

• too little prospecting
• stick with just one prospecting approach
• are not consistent
• do not set and monitor their prospecting plan and targets.

If you work out the metrics carefully (how much of each activity leads to a sale) you can predict - to a level of accuracy that will astound you - the sales you will achieve.

Most of us are in business because we are committed to what we do, do it well and know that it can help people. This means that we are often caught up in our product or service and feel emotionally attached to it and/or to the sale and thus sell its benefits rather than listen to the needs of the potential buyer.

This does not work. If you look, sound or act as a sales person you will create barriers which prevent you - and your prospect - from jointly establishing whether - or not - it makes sense to do business together. A simple rule of thumb - if other sales people are doing something, do the opposite.

Think about this: you walk into a store and a sales person enthusiastically rushes up to you and says, ‘can I help you?’ For many of us, our instinct is to say, ‘no thank you, I’m just looking.’ Read this response to mean, ‘I feel that you are trying to sell to me and I am uncomfortable.’ When selling we need to separate ourselves from the product or service and become a trusted adviser, facilitating a discussion about whether or not this is right for both the buyer and the seller.

There is an interesting dynamic going on here. Ultimately, we are engaged by prospects because of their confidence in our expertise but during the sale itself an over-reliance on expertise can be counterproductive. This can complicate or prolong the sale, or lead us to do too much unpaid consulting. As a rule of thumb, when with a prospect you should aim to talk no more than 30% of the time.

There is a point in the client acquisition process when we need to move into the expert role but this is much later than we usually think. We absolutely need to differentiate ourselves from our competitors but this is better achieved through asking better questions than telling people what we can do to fix them.
Be part of the excellence of Essex

NAMES including Invest Essex, James Hallam, Thomas International, Futures Group, Prettys, The Lord’s Taverners, RSM and Business Time in Essex, are among the key supporters of this year’s Essex Business Excellence Awards.

These generous sponsors have snatched up the opportunity to be a part of this important business event which is due to make its return on September 26 this year, with nominations opening mid-April.

This year’s event, which has seen a new partnership formed with The Metro and Mail on Sunday, will be held at the Essex County Cricket Club and marks the second time the venue has provided the backdrop for this event.

It was here last year that Stansted-based motor transport business, 24x7 Ltd, scooped three awards. The business was recognised for its Special Needs Holiday Trust in the Not-for-Profit Organisation of the Year, and, Director, Andy Mahoney was named the Business Entrepreneur of 2018. Its biggest success of all though, was walking away with the most coveted award of the night, the Company of the Year award.

With the business community already getting ready for the event’s return, let’s take a look at how and why the awards have become a wonderful occasion for people to celebrate, recognise and motivate key individuals and businesses in the county of Essex.

The Essex Business Excellence Awards were launched as a platform to recognise business success and shine a light on some of the names that have, during the course of 12-months, made significant strides on one or more area of business.

Since then, the event has become a genuine highlight on the regional business calendar and, more importantly, has become essential in ensuring the longevity of the business community.

Currently, 90,000 businesses actively operate in Essex from big names with a global presence to those that do business on a smaller scale but make a significant impact on the economy.

And, each year it’s the job of the Essex Business Excellence Awards to make sure no business falls under the radar by highlighting a handful of achievers.

With the world of business constantly moving and developing, it’s important that an event that celebrates business reflects those changes.

Committed to bettering the awards year upon year, organisers have raised the bar further in recent years as more inclusive categories have been introduced, celebrity hosts have been brought on board to add star-quality to the evening and significant investment has been made into the awards’ marketing activity.

At last year’s event, Essex was described as ‘a powerhouse economy in the south east’ for the sheer diversity of businesses the region is home to. This is mirrored in the 12 categories introduced in 2017 and will be once again up for grabs in 2019.

Entrepreneur of the Year, Sales & Marketing Award, Excellence in Innovation & Technology, New Business of the Year, and the stand-out Company of the Year are just a few of the categories that now present an opportunity for all businesses to enter.

The awards may reach their climax with an exciting awards evening, but the campaign runs for five months prior to the main event and during this time there is plenty going on to the benefit of those involved.

A Champagne and canapés evening was introduced in 2017 as part of the event’s changes, and brings together sponsors and their chosen finalists. Hosted a month prior to the awards’ night, it presents yet another opportunity to network.

During the years, the awards evening itself has also become a resource for networking. While the crux of the night is to applaud the winners, with representatives from some fantastic businesses in attendance on the night, it’s also a place where some innovative new relationships could be formed.

A night that is all about giving something back, the business awards has always provided a valuable opportunity to raise money for local charities.

Since 2017, leading youth cricket and disability sports charity, the Lord’s Taverners, has benefitted from the evening’s proceeds. The charity, which is on a mission to enhance the lives of disadvantaged young people through recreational sport, is again the charitable beneficiary this year.

The Essex Business Excellence Awards has made fundraising fun and interactive through stand-up bingo and a silent auction where many sought-after items such as sporting memorabilia and experiences are up for grabs.

Business Time in Essex publishing-editor, Peter Richardson, said: “We are thrilled to be supporting these awards as the exclusive local media business partner Essex, as all who work in it know, is an amazingly vibrant and entrepreneurial county. These awards are the perfect platform to demonstrate this so don’t miss the opportunity to put your business on the pedestal it deserves.”

For more information about this year’s awards, including sponsorship opportunities, please contact Ashleigh Kerr at Champions (UK) plc on 01509 85 29 27 or email akerr@championsukplc.com
Home from home comfort when business takes you away

There are many components that go towards making up business life, but one that is often overlooked, and particularly relevant for those who travel a lot or who work away from home, is your accommodation when the working day is done.

Budget hotel chains are often the perceived solution to business accommodation needs. But one Essex couple believe busy business people deserve better. In fact, they felt so passionately about it they created a business to deliver an alternative.

Stephen and Catherine Turner created Pure Luxury Living four years ago to ensure all travellers could enjoy a home-from-home experience, no matter how long their stay. They now offer luxury serviced apartments at 18 locations across Essex.

"The apartments are ideal for corporate use, offering a relaxed environment in which to work while travelling away from base. It’s an excellent alternative to hotel accommodation for getting the best out of your employees when working away and for reducing ‘eating out’ expenses from your employees,” said Stephen.

The business idea was also driven by a desire by Stephen and Catherine to find a means of working which didn’t result in them running around in ever-decreasing circles asking themselves what they were in business for.

“We started our business for freedom - financial freedom, time freedom, location freedom – to create an asset that can be handed down and to give back. We’ve grown the business so that it takes us, as business owners, four hours a week to run from anywhere, and has given us the opportunity to give back. Each of our serviced apartments have been ‘toilet twinned’ with toilets in developing countries, helping save lives by providing clean toilet and sanitary facilities,” said Stephen.

Their very first apartment in Chelmsford, Catherine lived in as a child through to adulthood. The couple painstakingly managed its development during three months from a family home needing some TLC to a luxury serviced apartment.

“Since 2015 we have welcomed numerous guests thorough our doors, including directors of supermarket chain Aldi, employees from restaurants such as Wagamama and Las Iguanas, professors from colleges and universities, contractors and travelling staff from PWC.

“From the beginning we knew we wanted to create luxury apartments - not bland hotel rooms with no soul, but a place where people could instantly feel at home. It was also important that all the amenities provided were eco-friendly and cruelty-free.

“Our aim is to offer a hassle-free experience, the chance to spread out across a whole apartment that can become your home, a 24/7 hotline, all the amenities you need so you can just relax, plus the personal service you get from a family-led business, not a faceless corporation.

“We offer a space you can actually live in, rather than just surviving out of a single hotel room; to stay with family and friends and all have your own space; to live like at home, but in a new town or city and enjoy the new experiences on offer,” added Stephen.
Sky’s the limit at airport business park

The first sale of the exciting new business park next to London Southend Airport has been announced.

The first occupier of a 125,000 sq ft building is IPECO Holdings which specialises in the manufacture of high-quality aeroplane and pilot seats currently being used all over the world. IPECO is a major employer in Southend and is now planning its relocation from a number of its existing buildings nearby. It intends to move into its new facility around Spring 2020.

Airport Business Park is the largest commercial development in the Southend area for more than 40 years and is offering the enhanced business space just at the right time for some of the expanding companies in and around South East Essex.

A great deal of groundwork and infrastructure has been taking place during the past two years quietly behind the scenes. In addition to high-spec industrial and warehouse units, it is expected the Business Park will have a drive-through branded coffee operator, a good quality hotel and a family pub/restaurant all on site.

The overall development includes around one million sq ft of business space and has attracted circa £20 million of Government funding towards the necessary infrastructure to ensure delivery of this project. Kemsley LLP and Dedman Gray are marketing agents on behalf of Henry Boot Developments, a national developer which was selected for this joint venture with Southend Borough Council.

The freehold and leasehold space includes a selection of industrial units and office buildings ideal for the headquarters of regional businesses. Enquiries are being received from the high-tech business community.

Facilities of this kind give employers the opportunity to create a unique working experience, enabling them to attract skilled employees who can then enjoy working in an area with excellent on-site amenities.

Public transport, electric charge points, shuttle buses and private priority taxi links are all being planned as part of this new working environment. Cycle and footpath routes are very much part of the culture, with strategic green space in the heart of the scheme known as the Green Spine.

Details are soon to be released about the Launch Pad which will be a state-of-the-art innovation centre in the heart of Airport Business Park. The innovation centre will encourage research and development, creative thinking and be a gathering of like-minded, go-ahead businesses working closely together.

Companies from areas such as Colchester, Chelmsford, Brentwood, Basildon and Romford are considering Airport Business Park as a serious option for their future due to the facilities on offer, excellent train links to London and also its convenience to London Southend Airport which has been voted the UK’s favourite airport for ‘best experience’ five years in a row.

On an employment basis, it is a challenging task for firms in Essex to recruit and maintain highly skilled and experienced personnel as many choose to work from various parts of London.
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Q. What made you merge with PROCAT?
A. It was primarily around the strategic strength of our joint offer in our engineering and construction provision. We wanted to combine our staff expertise and state-of-the-art, industry standard facilities to improve our offer for students, business and the wider community. We also wanted to meet the Government agenda of creating larger financially resilient colleges to help us meet the increasing funding cuts in the further education sector.

Q. Obviously both colleges have a wide range of relationships with employers; how will this change?
A. Existing relationships will be maintained and contacts/contractual arrangements will stay the same but, in the future, we will combine the best of both offers to provide even more opportunities to help employers grow their workforce of the future.

Q. What will your joint offer be?
A. We will continue to offer apprenticeships in a diverse range of specialisms including all aspects of engineering (including maritime), building services and construction trades. We will also combine our commercial offer including an increased provision for courses such as driver CPC, CSCS cards, tunnelling and electrical testing.

Our vision is to become a ‘one stop shop’ for employers to develop the skills of their workforce in the Thames Gateway. We are building a curriculum offer which will support the thriving Thames Gateway business community to become a powerhouse of technical skills and creativity.

We will continue to offer courses at the PROCAT sites in Basildon and Canvey but in addition, as part of the merger, we have also created a new specialist motor vehicle, engineering and construction centre at Stephenson Road, near Progress Road in Southend.

Q. What does the college need from business?
A. The college is very keen to work with business and industry to understand the skill needs for those already employed with you, who wish to progress in your company or for new recruits to help you grow and expand your business.

We are happy to develop new programmes to meet your needs, bespoke apprenticeship programmes and work alongside you to help address any skills shortages you may have. We would like you to work alongside us, advise on our curriculum offer, help us develop new programmes and, if possible, provide work placements for young people and/or adults and share your up to date industry skills with our staff and students.

Q. Aside from courses for apprenticeships and courses for 16-19 year olds, what else does the college offer?
A. We offer a range of higher education courses which are validated by two of the country’s leading universities, the University of East Anglia (UEA) and University of the Arts London (UAL). We also deliver courses for adults returning to study, which include a range of free courses for those who need to gain skills to find employment, and for adults who wish to upskill to progress at work, many of these are online programmes you can study at home. For those looking to start a new hobby, we have a wide selection of evening and weekend courses too. We have something for everyone, so have a look at our website at www.southessex.ac.uk to find the course for you.

Q. When will the Basildon campus be open and what will be run from that site?
A. We have just appointed the developers to start work on the new campus in Basildon town centre, which is scheduled to be ready for the start of the 2020 academic year. We are building a digital technologies hub, focused on meeting the needs of this exciting and expanding industry in Essex and the wider Thames Estuary.

Q. How can someone get in touch?
A. If you would like to find out more about the College and the courses we offer, visit our website at www.southessex.ac.uk, email learning@southessex.ac.uk or call 0845 5212345.
Bringing the team to the battlefield

If you think you’ve experienced everything management training can throw at you and that one more day team-bonding by swinging along zip-lines in tree tops will be one swing too many for your teetering sanity, an Essex company could make you think again.

Corporate Battlefields is a small, unique company offering something radically different in terms of learning and development. Its programmes deliver solutions to management teams on battlefields by correlating the outcomes of battle to today’s client-required solutions. Its different approach to management training has secured it a place among the county’s top 50 companies for innovation on the Innovation 50 programme, judged by Essex County Council and Anglia Ruskin University.

MD Graeme Cooper said: “We illustrate by Essex County Council and Anglia on the Innovation 50 programme, judged training has secured it a place among the battlefields by correlating/uni00A0the outcomes of solutions to management teams on development. Its programmes deliver different in terms of learning and

throw at you and that one

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STEM offers an excellent opportunity for a business looking to apply for tender opportunities with public & private sector businesses who recognise the value of a formal EMS, it is one way of gaining an advantage over your competitors when pitching for these contracts. Places are limited. Register your interest today! business@thurrock.gov.uk

The LoCASE project is part funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).
ONE of the newest businesses in Essex is taking its inspiration from days gone by, when quality was valued and the personal touch appreciated.

Penny Smith is heading up a family business, Pantry 61, making bespoke and traditional cakes and desserts. Working from her brand-new purpose-built facility just outside Colchester, Penny is putting her years of cooking experience to good effect, creating mouth-watering works of art which she believes will be enviously eyed by businesses looking to impress when hosting corporate and hospitality functions.

Since completing her chef training at Colchester Institute, Penny has gained a wealth of experience and was previously pastry chef at the renowned Le Talbooth restaurant. Her wish has always been to have her own business where she can cook food for others to enjoy. Now, she’s achieved her aim.

In the three months since Pantry 61 was launched, word has spread fast within the local business community and Penny has gained a reputation for offering the highest quality without the inflated prices often associated with high end cuisine.

“I want to be able to put my own individual mark on my work and offer businesses something which will leave a real lasting impression,” said Penny. “Part of what we offer here is taking the time and trouble to work with clients, so they receive something very special. We’re not into mass-produced, cheap and cheerful – we want to work with clients who appreciate quality and a very personal service.

“We welcome customers to visit us, see our facilities and sit down with a coffee (and cake of course!) to chat through their specific requirements. Within reason, we can cater for very bespoke requests,” said Penny.

She is assisted by her my mum, Beverley, while her grandma, Maureen, who was responsible for Penny falling in love with cooking at an age when she still needed steps to reach the worktop, still pops into the kitchen to keep an eye on things.

Penny added: “We make a wide range of cakes and desserts, some of which are year-round favourites while others are seasonal treats. Whatever we make, we only use the highest quality ingredients and we source them locally whenever possible – you really can taste the difference. What makes us different though is our ability and passion to create exactly what the customer wants.”

Everything is made from scratch on the premises, which also boasts a shop which has proved very popular, with customers coming from near and, increasingly, far as word spreads of the treats available.

Desserts range from old favourites such as cherry crumble pie and lemon meringue pie, to more modern creations including millionaire shortbread and a wide range of mouth-watering cheesecakes such as chocolate brownie and raspberry ripple. Cakes, all made with large helpings of TLC, include Viennese whirls, vanilla and chocolate cupcakes, and chocolate cherry almond tiffin to name but a few.

“We can accommodate very small orders right up to larger functions but our forte is those very special occasions when only the best will do, whether that be a business event or a private party celebration.”

Contact: 01206 272100 penny@pantry61.co.uk www.pantry61.co.uk

Bringing the personal touch to cake-making
ESSEX Ecology Services Limited (EECOS) has been operating under the ownership of Essex Wildlife Trust since 1993, providing advice and support through the application of extensive experience and knowledge within the field of ecological conservation.

Its clients are diverse and varied and range from large developers and utility companies to private individuals looking for ecological guidance to advance their developments. Its simple yet professional approach enables clients to progress their projects at pace.

It is based at Abbots Hall Farm, the head office of Essex Wildlife Trust near Colchester. Most of its work is carried out across Essex, East Anglia and the South East, but it can carry out our work anywhere in the UK.

Karen Dixon, Corporate Coordinator at Essex Wildlife Trust, said: “We are members of The Wildlife Trust Consultancies, a trusted network of local experts in ecology, land management and landscape design and operate to the standards and principles expected from the group. We have the conservation and promotion of wildlife at the heart of our core values and work with clients to achieve conclusions where all stakeholders accomplish fantastic outcomes.

“Our extensive portfolio of services is designed to meet customers’ requirements in the most efficient way. Our services include ecology surveys, protected species surveys, habitat creation and management, as well as the design and delivery of training by our own in-house experts.

“From initial site assessments and surveys for legally protected species, to mitigation plans, method statements, licences and ecological site enhancements, we guide our clients through the process as smoothly and efficiently as possible, from pre-application scoping assessments to discharge of planning conditions.

“We provide advice and support, facilitating pragmatic and responsive solutions to risk management and planning obligation tailored to local conditions. All profits are used by Essex Wildlife Trust to carry out the great work they do in improving habitats and promoting the conservation of wildlife.

“We understand how crucial the timely completion of survey work is, especially as clients are often reliant on receiving our reports before they can progress to the next stage of their project. Our clients can be assured that the surveys we recommend are those which are appropriate to their proposals and no more. Equally, we ensure that our mitigation schemes are bespoke, designed to be specific to our clients’ sites, rather than over-engineered schemes which go beyond what is necessary.”

Further information can be found at www.eecos.co.uk
SELEP agrees economic strategy for next 10 years

The South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) has agreed its new Economic Strategy Statement, outlining its priorities and aims to drive a more productive and prosperous economy for the area over the next decade.

Titled Smarter, Faster, Together, the plan is a key part of SELEP’s approach to support long-term growth for Essex, East Sussex, Kent, Medway, Southend and Thurrock, ensuring the area continues to play a pivotal role in the future growth of the wider South East and the UK as a whole.

The strategy, which will provide a context for local priorities for investment of Government funding for improved transport infrastructure, regeneration, skills facilities and business premises, has been agreed and adopted by SELEP’s Strategic Board.

The strategy is informed by detailed, high quality evidence and extensive consultation during the past year. It provides a clear and concise articulation of the shared priorities of the communities across the South East. The strategy will make the best possible case for investment in the area for future Government funding and for priorities in SELEP’s £561 million Local Growth Fund, and £160 million European structural and investment programme.

Outlining the challenges that the strategy aims to meet, Christian Brodie, Chair of SELEP, said: “In the short term, the immediate economic outlook is one of some uncertainty, particularly associated with Brexit.

“But we face longer term challenges as well. Productivity is lower than it should be, rapid population and housing growth means greater pressure on infrastructure. While new technology presents major opportunities for innovation and business growth, it is also disruptive and presents challenges in building a workforce and business base that is fully equipped to respond.”

The Strategic Economic Plan outlines three aims, which are to:

- work smarter to increase productivity in the SELEP area, with the aim of bridging the gap in GVA per filled job between the South East and the rest of the UK
- deliver faster by accelerating housing and infrastructure delivery to meet planned growth
- work better together by collaborating across the Greater South East, with Government and with business.

To achieve these the plan sets four priorities and outlines strategies for future success for each.

The priorities are to:

- create ideas and enterprise by encouraging businesses with the capacity for innovation and high growth to scale up; increasing the adoption of new technologies and processes; supporting the process of knowledge transfer between universities and businesses; responding to the increasing need for workspace flexibility; and ensuring the South East is Britain’s gateway for trade and investment
- develop tomorrow’s workforce by increasing industry-relevant qualifications for all ages; simplifying the skills landscape for employers; raising awareness of the wide range of career and job opportunities that exist in the SELEP area; and supporting capital investment in further and higher education capacity
- accelerate infrastructure delivery by securing sustained improvements in the area’s national transport infrastructure, including the delivery of the Lower Thames Crossing and strategic road and rail networks and connections to ports and airports; securing investment in local infrastructure that unlocks housing and jobs growth; investing in digital and advanced technology to support sophisticated communications networks; and sustaining efforts to drive up levels of housing and commercial development
- create places by putting the area’s towns, cities and rural communities on the front foot in responding to new technology and changing work patterns; supporting quality of life and quality of place; and supporting businesses’ role in the community

Christian Brodie added: “This is an important and detailed strategy, one that is required of us by Government, and one that will guide the work of the LEP over the next five to 10 years. It will help keep us focussed on continuing to deliver funding for high quality projects and programmes that help unlock growth, jobs and opportunities across our area.

“It will also help us maintain our all-important dialogue with Government, enabling us to continue to build our case for future infrastructure, economic growth and skills solutions. It provides a sound foundation for the work of SELEP in maintaining and driving the South East’s position as a major contributor to the UK economy for years to come.”

For more details on SELEP and its work, visit southeastlep.com
How to make social media work for you and your business

Are you overwhelmed trying to keep up with all your social networks? Confused about what to post and when? Not sure what platforms you should be on - all of them or just one of them?

Perhaps it’s time to redefine and review your social media strategy. Think of your social media feed as a hungry beast which needs to be fed regularly. Use a content calendar to plan which business activities should be included in your feed, how often those activities will be shared and through what type of content (blogs, video including ‘live’ formats, imagery, infographics). Decide what percentage of your content will be added-value compared with sales-focused. The general rule is 80% of company/industry-focused content versus 20% of sales promotion.

After you’ve nailed the ‘what’, you’ll need to look at the ‘when’. Analyse what time of the day and day of the week you tend to get the most engagement, then test and test again until you have frequency nailed. Each platform has its own insights section for you to get valuable data which can be used to inform future campaigns.

Social media has seen all sorts of changes since its inception and while it has grown into an incredible opportunity for business owners, it has also grown ten times more complicated, with more platform options than ever to choose from.

My advice is to focus on the platforms that offer the best potential for reaching your ideal audience but also the ones that you feel comfortable with. If Facebook is what you know and navigate best, start off there. Some good news - your average SME does not necessarily need to be on Snapchat! Keeping up with trending hashtags will not only make sure you’re on top of your social media game, but will also keep your business in front of your customers’ and prospects’ minds.

The best part? The platforms have done the heavy lifting for you. By searching by hashtags on each platform, you’ll be able to see who’s talking about your industry, product or service. Jump into the conversations, add value with your expert knowledge and within no time, you’ll have established your social media authority.

Oh, and on the subject of hashtags, try to keep up with trending hashtags. Not only will it keep your content fresh, but it will also keep your business in front of your customers’ and prospects’ minds.

We look to reduce your energy costs so you can get on with running your business.

We work on your behalf to offer competitive procurement for your business gas, electricity and water. With more than 30 years’ experience, 5000+ clients and 92% client retention, we are trusted by big name companies such as Costas, Boots, BMW and Jamie’s Italian with their business and you can too. We can fully fix contracts for up to 5 years and up to 12 months in advance so you can take advantage of today’s prices. We will do all the pre-contract work, switching and monitoring over the contract time and advising the best possible time to renew.

Energy efficiency is a service we can provide by assessing your usage and audit your efficiency, identifying cost cutting opportunities. PLH Utilities is also affiliated with a major UK utility infrastructure company and able to offer a cost-effective turnkey solution to any utility infrastructure project. Our in-house design, construction and maintenance team can handle large or small (commercial or residential) projects.

Call Paul Hughes on 0800 954 5117
www.plh-utilities.co.uk
University of the Year accolade for Essex

THE University of Essex has secured the title of University of the Year at the Times Higher Education (THE) Awards 2018.

The awards, now in their 34th year and widely referred to as the ‘Oscars of higher education’, shine a spotlight on the exceptional achievements of individuals, teams and institutions working in our sector today.

One of the Times Higher Education Awards judges said: “This is a university that is putting people first. The gender pay gap exists everywhere, but this university said what no one else dared to say: ‘There is an easy way to get rid of the pay gap – spend the money necessary to get rid of it. And do it now’.”

This observation touches on one of the numerous bold initiatives taken by the university as it reconnected with its founding vision and values.

Chancellor Professor Anthony Forster said: “This award recognises the impact of our amazing staff and students, the quality of our relationship with our Students’ Union and the strength of our national, regional and global partnerships.

“Founded as a progressive university, at Essex we are prepared to stand out from the crowd – and challenging convention is in our DNA. We are a community of talented, committed people, a university that is putting our staff and students first, and home to those who want to make the world a better place. I am delighted the award of University of the Year recognises these values and the achievements of our community of members.”

“Our strategy has drawn inspiration from our history of being on the side of the ‘radical’, of not falling victim to ‘group think’. Our focus on teaching and learning is transforming the lives of a growing student body of whom more than a third are from families with an annual income of less than £25,000.”

Students’ Union President Tancrede Chartier said: “This award recognises the incredible qualities and achievements of Essex students, past and present, and the unique partnership between the Students’ Union and the University to put students at the heart of everything that happens at Essex.

“The University has the most brilliant, daring and bold students – students that are prepared to challenge the status quo and fight for what’s right – and we are all feeling justifiably proud today.”

The judges felt Essex has every right to claim to be a “home for staff and students who want to make the world a better place.”

THE editor John Gill said: “At a time when universities face challenges and headwinds, when politics and social attitudes can seem to call into question many of the things that they stand for and hold dear, it is particularly important to champion the values, creativity and dedication of those who live and breathe higher education.

“As ever, our shortlists represent the best of the best, but our judges also reported that this year’s entries were the strongest that they could remember, so all those honoured should be incredibly proud. It’s THE’s great honour to help celebrate their success.”

See what we’ve achieved in the last 6 months

Ambassador programmes

This Girl Can AllTogether Essex

HELPING OVER
1000
WOMEN TO GET
MORE ACTIVE

164% MORE AMBASSADORS
RECRUITED

12 NEW ORGANISATIONS
SIGNED UP TO CAMPAIGN

School Games

DAYS OF
COMPETITION

ACROSS 20
SPORTS

40 YOUNG LEADERS
UPSKILLED

4860 PUPILS
ENGAGED

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20 APPRENTICES
INVOLVED IN

4,607 COACHING
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In no more than 100 words, detail your career to date...
After leaving school at 16 and spending six months as a local authority YTS placement, my career started as a part-time laboratory assistant with a major food production company in Cumbria ending up, via quality, technical and operations roles, as Site General Manager 13 years later. I then joined Cumbria’s newly formed Inward Investment Agency in 1998 as Food Sector Specialist before taking up a Senior Business Development role with East London’s Inward Investment Agency, Gateway to London, in 2003 ending up working on numerous Olympic project-related business relocations and major regeneration projects before joining Invest ESSEX in 2012.

Childhood career ambition...
I wanted to join the Royal Air Force either as navigator or in the RAF Police. Neither of those materialised.

Best piece of career advice you’ve given...
Do something you enjoy and don’t be afraid to have fun.

Best piece of career advice you’ve received...
Be passionate about what you believe in and don’t forget, be careful who you upset on the way as you may well meet them again wearing another hat.

Your two perfect dinner guests, one business, one pleasure...
Sir James Dyson and Graham McPherson (aka Suggs)

The secret of running a successful business is...
Don’t be a busy fool!

If you weren’t in your current profession, what might you likely be...
A ‘hotel inspector’ of 5-star hotels around the world.

If you had a magic wand and could change one thing in business, it would be...
Right now it would be wind the clock back to 22 June 2016, delete all the lies, fake propaganda, misinformation and false predictions and allow the British public to vote in the referendum in a fully informed, honest and respectful manner. That way I would suggest the outcome, and hence our current business environment, would be very different.

Networking as it should be!
The must-attend business event of 2019!
Make a note in your diary – March 27!

It’s the date Networking Essex, the county’s fastest-growing networking group, will be hosting what is very likely to be the biggest networking event in the county this year. Held at Chelmsford City Racecourse, we aim to have more than 100 businesses exhibiting, 1000 visitors and excellent networking available on the day.

The event will be the highlight of an incredibly busy year of networking for members and guests. Our meetings (currently held in Chelmsford but soon to spread to Colchester – see our website for updated info) regularly attract 100+ people. The meetings are paid for by the members and the events are FREE for non-members to attend – not just the first meeting, but as many meetings as you like! Naturally, there are added benefits to becoming a member – one of which is free membership of Networking Essex Directors Club. The Directors Club is more focussed on decision-makers with a maximum of 40 at an event, held at prestigious locations.

For further information on all Networking Essex events, including our big March Expo, check out details on our website or give Aaron Desmond a call.

Call Aaron Desmond on 07802 807197 or email aaron@networking-essex.co.uk • www.networking-essex.co.uk

Networking Essex is kindly offering BusinessTime in Essex readers a opportunity to attend a future Directors Club meeting to experience for themselves how the event unfolds. It’s a great opportunity to mix with fellow directors/business owners, talk business in a relaxed environment and meet valuable new contacts. These exclusive guest places will be limited at each meeting and need to be booked in advance. To find out dates and venues of upcoming meetings and to reserve your place, quoting the code BTENW, call Aaron Desmond on 07802 807197 or email aaron@networking-essex.co.uk

Hobbies/interests...
Live music and travelling the world experiencing other countries, cultures and environments.

Favourite ever book/TV programme/film/meal/country visited...
Blackadder, Schindler’s List, Thai food, Kenya.

Tell us something about you that might surprise people...
I once DJ’d for Will Carling (England’s former rugby captain) when he was a student!

If I ruled the world, the first thing I’d do is...
Make world leaders, politicians and business leaders fully responsible for their actions and more importantly their inactions, the majority of which have directly resulted in wholly unsustainable, capitalist practices and ways of life that are destroying the environment, the oceans, thousands of native species and the global ecosystem that was present for many millions of years before homo sapiens existed on this earth.
Are you ready?

Making Tax Digital affects VAT registered businesses from 1st April 2019.

With only 1 month until the deadline, now is the time to act if you are currently VAT registered, and are forecast to have a turnover of £85,000 or more by 1st April 2019.

Our expertise in online accountancy software means we can guide you through the process to compliance.

- Speak to our Making Tax Digital specialists for a free initial demo of the software available and details on how our team can assist you and your business.
- To find out more, visit https://www.rickardluckin.co.uk/making-tax-digital
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