

SWINDON BUSINESS NEWS

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Monthly in print, daily on the web - www.swindon-business.net

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focus on
creative and
digital**

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**Coming soon ...
Celebrating 30 years
of Swindon Business
News**

TEN artworks representing Swindon railway workers through the ages have been unveiled in the GW Underpass – the tunnel which once served as the main entrance to the town's historic railworks.

The works, by artist Bruce Williams, were commissioned by Forward Swindon for one side of the tunnel. Large letters spelling out Swindon Works have been installed on the opposite wall. Full story P6

Power to the people as farm launches UK's first solar energy share issue

A unique opportunity for private individuals to invest in one of the UK's largest solar energy projects is to be launched near Swindon this month.

Organic farmer and green energy pioneer Adam Twine is offering potential investors the chance to buy shares in what will be the UK's first community-owned solar farm.

Westmill Solar Farm at Watchfield has more than 21,000 polycrystalline solar panels on a 30-acre site producing 4.8GWh per year - enough to power 1,400 homes.

Mr Twine wants to make the investment as accessible as possible to any individual or organisation. He says returns are likely to be attractive and is marketing the shares as a long-term investment with a minimum investment of £250 and a maximum of £20,000.

The share offer, which aims to raise £4m, will be launched on Saturday June 23 by Wantage MP Ed Vaizey.

Mr Twine, one of four directors of Westmill Solar, said: "We are very pleased that at last we can make wider ownership of Westmill Solar Farm a possibility.

"This will probably be the only opportunity to invest in a solar project of this scale and get this level of



Adam Twine

returns in the UK.

"We expect to be oversubscribed as it's not very often you have a chance to do something that is good for the environment and make money."

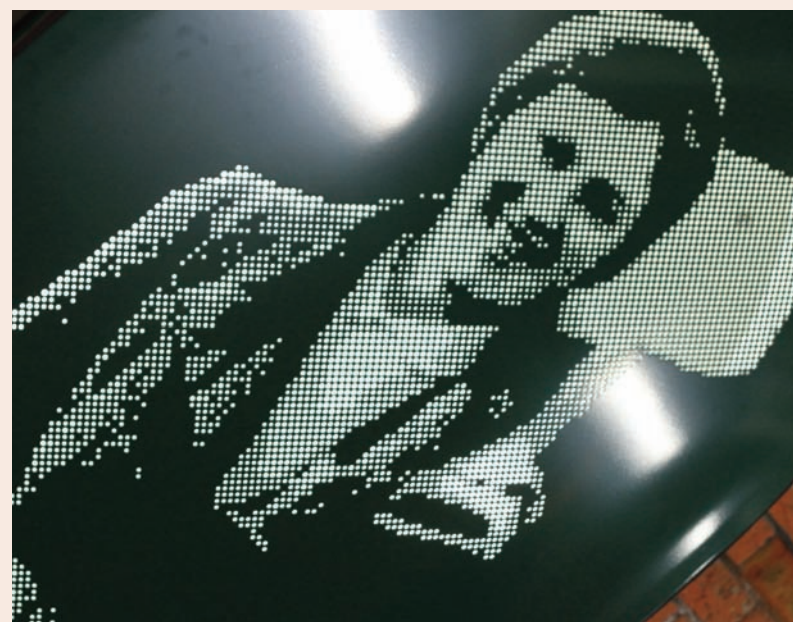
Part of the solar farm's income will come from its 25-year Government Feed-in Tariff contract. As the site was generating clean electricity before August 1 last year, it has the benefit of the highest level of payment.

Westmill Solar is working with investment bank Investec to secure a bond for the debt required to complete

the £15m purchase of the project from seed investor Blue Energy.

Mr Twine has a track record in tackling climate change at a local level. He's already created a successful cooperative-owned wind farm on the same site which raised £4.3m in 2007 and has 2,300 members. His fellow directors in Westmill Solar are Mark Shorrock, founder of Low Carbon Solar UK and who is involved in high-profile projects throughout the country involving wind, solar and tidal energy; Philip Wolfe, a pioneer of UK renewable energy industry, founder of Ownenergy and non-executive director of the Renewable Energy Association who has advised the European Commission and the UK Government on renewable energy issues; accountant and Centre for Alternative Technology member Mark Luntley and Nicola McConville, a partner at law firm Blake Lapthorn and member of the programme board for Low Carbon Oxford, which aims to reduce the carbon footprint of the city.

To register an interest in the shares or download a brochure visit www.westmillsolar.coop or email westmillsolarcoop@gmail.com. The share launch is part of a wider event, The Sustainable Energy Fair, which runs from 11am to 4pm.



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Tying the knot alfresco style

Chiseldon House Hotel staged Swindon's first outdoor civil wedding ceremony last month when Clare Campbell and James Saunders made their vows in glorious sunshine in its refurbished thatched summerhouse.

Owners Mark and David Pennells, who bought the 21-room Georgian manor house hotel last autumn, have invested heavily in upgrading the hotel's facilities.

Mark said: "It was a joy to see a previously unused part of the hotel being brought back to life."

Torrent of awards for Halcrow

Wroughton-based civil engineering group Halcrow's commitment to, and outstanding work in, waterway conservation and regeneration has been recognised with four winning entries, a runner up and a commendation at this year's Waterways Renaissance Awards. The awards, run by The Waterways Trust for the past 10 years, champion projects that have turned inland waterways into desirable places for living, learning and leisure.

Coming up next month ...

In July's Swindon Business News we focus on innovation by showcasing some of the area's most innovative firms and identifying the entrepreneurs who are shaping the businesses of the future. We also feature the benefits and possible pitfalls of franchising, look at employee engagement, leadership and business coaching, and highlight the success of Windmill Hill Business Park. Contact Anita Jaynes on 01793 615393 or email her at anita@swindon-business.net

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SWINDON BUSINESS NEWS

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People

- Shire Leasing, the UK's largest independent funding house for equipment leasing and asset finance, has appointed **Steve Croft** as its South West sales manager, taking in Swindon. Steve has already made his mark, winning a significant contract with Portishead, Bristol, firm Roy Ireland Espresso Services. The contract is enabling the firm, established in 2000, to offer its customers a new, affordable funding option, crucial in an environment in which access to finance remains constricted. Bristolian Steve joined Staffordshire-based Shire Leasing after a career that encompassed roles in GE Capital, BT and most recently a small Bath-based independent broker. He said: "I joined Shire Leasing because I wanted a new opportunity. The company is very entrepreneurial in spirit, continually looking for new ways to serve equipment suppliers and provide affordable funding options to their customers. This approach is being warmly received in this region and I am really looking forward to securing many more contracts like that with Roy Ireland Espresso Services."
- Prof **Ulrich Reimers** has resigned as a non-executive director of SciSys, the Chippenham-based specialist software



Steve Croft

- developer. A digital television expert, Prof Reimers joined the board of SciSys in January 2009. He is in charge of the Institut fur Nachrichtentechnik (IfN) at Technische Universitaet Braunschweig. He is also chairman of the Technical Module of the DVB. And has also worked as technical director for the German Broadcaster Norddeutscher Rundfunk (NDR) and for Robert Bosch GmbH in its television business.
- Stilo International, the Swindon-based software and services company, has appointed **Richard Alsept** as a main board director, continuing his executive responsibilities as chief financial officer and company secretary. A qualified chartered accountant, he trained with Touche Ross before spending a number of years in general practice, dealing with all aspects of owner-managed businesses. He then become a financial director in various industries and formed his own accountancy practice specialising in accounting, taxation and financial direction. He joined Stilo as chief financial officer in 2002 and was appointed company secretary in 2003. Having sold his practice in 2008, Richard took time to pursue other personal interests, prior to rejoining Stilo in 2010. Chief executive Les

- Burnham said: "Richard has been invaluable to the company in his role as chief financial officer and company secretary for many years and we are now delighted to welcome him to the main board."
- DIARY DATES**
- Cappuccino Connections** - An informal drop-in sessions for local business women providing them with an opportunity to network and spend time building those all important business relationships, over a cup of coffee.
- WHEN:** Friday June 22, 9:30am-11:30am
- WHERE:** Lydiard House, West Swindon from 9.30 to 11.30am
- CONTACT:** Rachel on 0793 262 7774.
- Managing Workplace Stress** - a free training session with experienced trainers Adrian Embling and Lisa Monis for the Swindon Mindful Employer Network
- WHEN:** June 21
- WHERE:** Menzies Hotel
- CONTACT:** 01793 433571
- smen@richmondfellowship.org.uk

Click here.

SBN

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FESTIVE CELEBRATIONS

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Reducing employee stress to be discussed at free training session later this month

Identifying stress among employees and reducing its impact are among the key themes of a free training session staged by in Swindon later this month.

Speaking at the Managing Workplace Stress event will be experienced trainers Adrian Embling and Lisa Monis of Richmond Fellowship WorkLife, which is hosting it for the Swindon Mindful Employer Network.

Richmond Fellowship WorkLife supports employees and employers in helping people suffering from stress, anxiety and depression back into their place of work.

Swindon Mindful Employer Network aims to increase awareness of mental health and wellbeing issues among local employers and arranges events, training and conferences which are attractive to Swindon businesses of all sizes and sectors.

The event takes place on June 21 at Menzies Swindon Hotel, whose general manager Hiren Varvadekar said: "Menzies Hotel takes the wellbeing of our staff very seriously."

"We take the view that supporting our people makes excellent business sense and I believe our customers see the difference this makes in the service they receive."

"We are particularly encouraged by the success and popularity of the network and look forward to working with Richmond Fellowship Wiltshire on this valuable training course on managing stress in the workplace."

Mr Embling, a senior employment advisor at Richmond Fellowship Wiltshire who has more than 30 years' experience working in the employment and disability sector for public and private organisations, said: "The fact remains that mental illness in the workplace is still one of the major issues facing businesses and employees today."

"With the added pressure of uncertain economic times – there is a growing urgency for employers to manage stress before it erodes the financial and performance base of their companies. This training workshop will give them some useful tips on how to meet these important challenges."

BBC Wiltshire broadcaster and producer Mark Jones will be taking part in the event. He said: "I believe employers need to devote more time to supporting staff who genuinely face mental illness associated with their employment."

Swindon employers interested in sending representatives to this one-off event should contact smen@richmondfellowship.org.uk



Synergy Health in £25m takeover of US sterilisation company

Swindon-based medical sterilisation group Synergy Health has hit the takeover trail again, paying \$25.1m (£16.2m) to acquire US firm SRI/Surgical Express – the leader in the \$2.9bn US hospital sterilisation services (HSS) market.

SRI employs 800 people across the US in 10 service centres and four distribution facilities which serve 434 hospital contracts.

It made a pre-tax loss of \$1.5 (£1m) on revenues of \$107.6m (£69.6m) last year.

Synergy chief executive Richard Steeves said: "SRI is an excellent strategic acquisition for the group providing Synergy with immediate access to the newly-developing HSS market in the US. With the combination of our recently purchased business in New York (MSI Surgical Solutions) and SRI, we become the largest

provider of outsourced hospital sterilisation services business in the US and create the opportunity to accelerate our local and global leadership."

Synergy expects the combination of SRI and MSI to generate combined HSS revenues of US\$42m (£27.2m).

The acquisition is Synergy's fifth over the past year as it continues its strategy of expanding the geographic coverage of its applied sterilisation business.

These takeovers have included BeamOne in the US, Sinagama II Technologies in Malaysia, and LEONI Studer Hard in Switzerland.

It also acquired MSI, a small hospital sterilisation business in the US, which effectively accelerating its plan to enter the US market a year earlier than anticipated.

These four acquisitions cost Synergy £84m, including deferred

consideration, and were funded from operating cashflow and an increased use of its existing debt facilities.

The SRI deal came as Synergy reported an 11.6 per cent drop in pre-tax profits to £32.5m in the year to April 1 on revenues increasing by 8.6 per cent to £312m – although it stressed the fall was due to last year's pre-tax profits benefiting from an exceptional gain of £4.7m, due primarily to proceeds of an insurance claim.

Underlying organic revenue growth on a constant currency basis was 5.4 per cent.

Looking ahead chairman Robert Lerwill said: "We are in a strong position and well prepared to tackle the challenges ahead. Our decision to invest in Asia and the Americas has proved an effective strategy to offset more challenging conditions in the UK and Europe."

Two-star award for insurance broker

Insurance broker Bluefin, which has an office in Swindon, has achieved the Investor in Customers (IIC) two-star award after a survey of more than 25,000 clients and staff from its offices across the country.

The award recognises organisations that put the customer at the heart of the business and is the main driver for their processes, innovations and profitability.

Bluefin chief executive Stuart Reid said: "We are delighted to achieve this positive outcome at the first attempt and the results make interesting reading. There are repeated references to service, knowledge, professionalism, relationships and communication and much less mention of pricing issues than we might have expected."

"It's generated a wealth of information that has helped us to identify several areas for improvement whilst recognising our strengths in other areas and we look to taking part on an annual basis as we continue the quest for excellence in all areas."

Bluefin is owned by the AXA group and employs more than 1,500 people in 45 offices across the UK.

Free exporting event to help businesses survive and grow

Swindon firms will hear how exporting can help them survive and grow at a free event staged by UK Trade & Investment, the Government's overseas sales promotion organisation.

Supported by the Federation of Small Businesses and the European Regional Development Fund, the event takes place at Alexandra House, Wroughton on June 22 between 9am and 1.30pm.

Salisbury MP John Glen is among the speakers and will talk about the importance of international trade for Swindon and Wiltshire. Other topics to be covered are Government help for exporters and getting paid.

To register contact Mandy Brooman on 01275 370853 or email amanda.brooman@uktisouthwest.org

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Kilimanjaro challenge for business people

Intrepid Swindon business people are being challenged to help a local charity achieve an unusual hat-trick – by scaling Mount Kilimanjaro and unfurling a tablecloth at its summit.

The cloth, made by TWIGS – the community gardening charity which supports people with mental health problems – has already been to the 20,000 ft peak of Kilimanjaro twice with previous expeditions. Now a third is being organised for early January to achieve its hat-trick – and raise further much-needed funds for the charity.

TWIGS fundraiser Christopher Loveday – a chartered surveyor and consultant with Savills estate agents and auctioneers – launched the appeal at a recent meeting of the popular networking group Business Village. Chris said: “This will be the fourth expedition we’ve sent to Kilimanjaro to support TWIGS; 11 people have taken part so far and all successfully made the climb raising about £30,000 altogether.

“The tablecloth was made at TWIGS – it’s been up twice so we’d like to send it up again for this expedition.”

Christopher hopes 40 people will eventually reach the summit over a number of expeditions, and set up a Swindon Kili club.

Business Village is open to anybody to attend. There is no membership fee, and each meeting costs £10 per person, which includes breakfast. For more details www.businessvillage.org or contact Steve on 07816 998341.

Rapid Hire fined for unsafe work practices

Swindon-based equipment hire company Rapid Hire (Swindon) has been fined for continuing unsafe working practices and ignoring safety warnings from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

HSE served four Improvement Notices on the firm in October last year for failing to provide adequate training for forklift trucks operators and telehandlers and for failing to provide proper inspections for equipment available for hire.

The notices were issued to protect employees and customers from potential injury. But when an HSE inspector paid a return check visit to the company’s Devizes Road base three months later he discovered three of the notices had been ignored and dangerous practices were continuing. Rapid Hire was found guilty by Chippenham Magistrates of three separate breaches of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 for failing to comply with the notices and fined a total of £800 with costs of £1,215.95.

Arval wins fleet management award

Swindon-based Arval UK has won the Fleet Management Service Award at the 2012 Van Fleet World Honours for the service that its Technical centre provides to light commercial vehicle customers.

The honours are presented annually to the motor manufacturers, service companies and individuals who have, in the opinion of the judges, achieved the highest possible level of excellence in their sector.

Made up of experienced industry technicians, the Technical Centre is designed to save customers money, inconvenience and allow them to best meet the needs of their own customers by providing technical support to get their vehicles back on the road quickly.

Mohammed Imran from the centre collected the award at a special ceremony held at the Royal Automobile Club, Pall Mall.

He said: “The Technical Centre makes a big difference to our vehicle downtime performance and our ability to save money for customers. We have a real centre of excellence here.”

Hotel awards launch hailed a ‘success’

Swindon’s Menzies Hotel is celebrating success at the group’s inaugural awards lunch.

Receptionist/duty manager Joneta Fernandes beat 16 contenders to triumph in the Group Employee of the Year category and received a certificate and cheque from Menzies CEO Tim Pentter.

Meanwhile housekeeping assistant Patricia Bell was awarded a long-service award for her 32 years of service in at the four-star hotel. The awards were held as the group, which has 16 three and four-star hotels across the UK from Aberdeen to Bournemouth, undergoes a rebranding.

A major refurbishment programme is taking place at the 95-room Swindon hotel with the bathrooms being modernised to enhance and complement its bedrooms. There are also plans to refurbish its main bar and install a gym for hotel guests by end of this year, which will make it the only town centre hotel with such a facility.

The outside of the hotel has recently been given a facelift and pressure washed and painted while inside it can now offer two refurbished, air-conditioned function suites – the largest of which can accommodate up to 200 delegates. The hotel is also trialling a new sleep system and have installed new beds and mattresses in bedrooms on one of its floors. These beds will be installed in all Menzies hotels within the next 12-18 months.

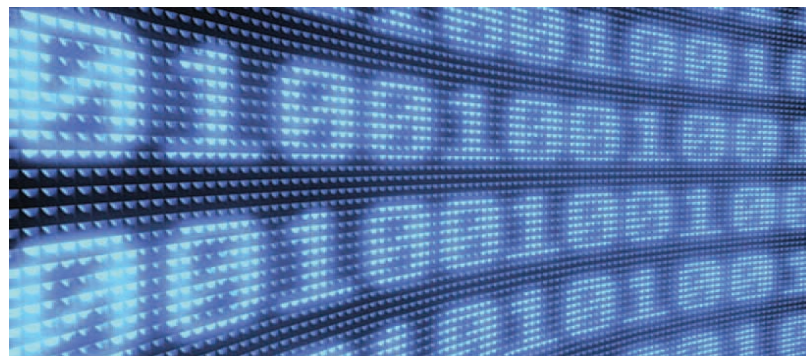
Software developer SciSys hints at acquisition in bullish trading statement

Specialist software developer SciSys has issued an upbeat trading statement suggesting it could soon return to the acquisition trail.

The company, which has its head office in Chippenham and a major base in Bristol, says it opened the year with a comfortable order book of £26.7m and the order intake for 2012 to date is in line with expectations.

SciSys, which supplies bespoke software and IT-based support services to the media broadcast, space, government and defence, environment and application support sectors, says its order book further improved to stand at £28.8m by the end of March, 8 per cent growth over the period. This excludes any material benefit from its expected participation in the Warrior Armoured Fighting Vehicle upgrade programme later in the year.

While the trading outlook remains positive, it says the government’s spending squeeze continues to make the outlook for potential UK public sector projects and programmes somewhat uncertain. Nevertheless, with 45 per cent of its business derived from outside the UK and with a broad spread of customers in other markets, SciSys remains confident that it is sufficiently resilient to withstand any



adverse conditions in the UK public sector. Hedging contracts are in place to protect its euro earnings from significant deterioration in the €/£ exchange rate.

It adds that first-half trading is more buoyant than originally budgeted due to a combination of contract wins, operating efficiencies and deferred costs. As a result, the anticipated imbalance caused by a weaker first half is expected to be less pronounced and the board is “increasingly confident of meeting expectations for the full year”.

SciSys remains cash generative and, despite having taken on debt to part-fund the £5m purchase of its Chippenham headquarters in May 2011, the company says it is now well placed to consider acquisition

opportunities. Meanwhile it granted a 10-year lease on part of its surplus office space in Chippenham in February which will generate income in line with market rents.

The company, which also has two centres in Germany and another in Reading, has a workforce of 430. Its blue chip and public sector clients include the Environment Agency, the Ministry of Defence, Astrium, Arqiva, Cable & Wireless, the European Space Agency, Eumetsat, the BBC, the National Archives and Transport for London. It raised its annual dividend by 10 per cent in March on the back of a rise in 2011 pre-tax profits from £1.57m to £2m and the directors intend “to continue with the progressive dividend policy introduced in 2009”.

Firms urged to ignore mainstream media ‘cynicism’ by Eden Project founder

Businesses should ignore the cynicism of the mainstream media and instead look at the huge opportunities that come from believing in the positive, the Eden Project’s co-founder Tim Smit has told West business leaders.

Taking optimism and hope as the theme of his speech to the West of England annual dinner of chartered accountants group the ICAEW, Mr Smit said: “I happen to believe that we are living in the most exciting time since humans walked the Earth.

“In Britain we always feel that the past was a better place. But we are wrong.”

The key was to stress the positives and remove negatives, Mr Smit told guests at the dinner, including a large number of Swindon and Wiltshire accountants.

The Eden Project in Cornwall – often called the ‘eighth wonder of the world’ – demonstrated that, he said.

Famously passionate about entrepreneurship and suspicious of accountants, Mr Smit pulled no punches when he addressed the several hundred-strong audience at Bristol’s Thistle Grand Hotel.

He spent 10 years working in the music industry before moving to Cornwall in 1987 where he met John Nelson. Together they ‘discovered’ and restored the Lost Gardens of



Heligan, now the most visited private garden in the UK.

The Eden Project followed in 2000, since when more than 6m people have visited the attraction, a pioneering scientific foundation and trailblazing social enterprise combining the best of public and private sector values.

The ICAEW in the West of England represents one of the largest concentrations of chartered accountants in the world and has more than 4,700 members in Bristol, Bath, Swindon, North Wiltshire, Gloucestershire and North Somerset.

The dinner was sponsored by top 100 law firm Thrings, which has its largest office in Swindon, Lloyds

Bank and Lexus. In continuation of a six-year partnership, it also raised vital funds for The Prince’s Trust – last night collected more than £2,000.

ICAEW West of England president Sarah Matthews-DeMers, of Melksham-based Avon Rubber, said: “The annual dinner is always the high point of the WESCA year and we are indebted to our generous sponsors for making it happen.

“I am delighted to be able to continue our six-year partnership with The Prince’s Trust, particularly since our guest speaker is also such a high-profile supporter, and look forward to hearing more about the fantastic work they do to encourage young people into the world of business.”

Stilo International takes advantage of global digital market growth with a range of successful product launches

Growth in the global digital publishing technology market has benefited Swindon-based specialist software company Stilo International.

Chairman David Ashman told the firm’s AGM the firm had been encouraged by very high levels of activity so far this year following a number of successful product launches.

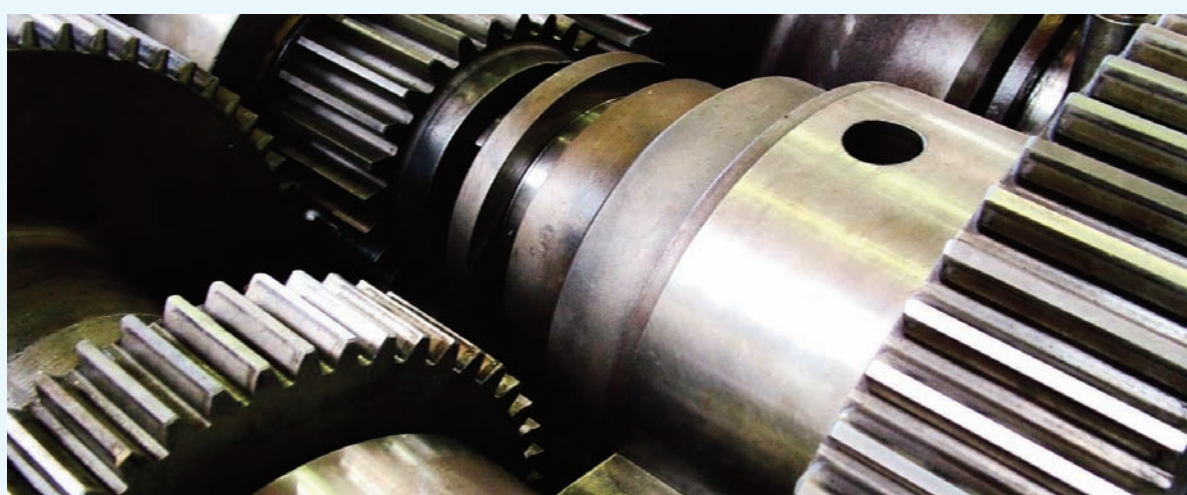
In February it released version 10 of its OmniMark content processing platform to better enable customers to build high-performance XML (Extensible Markup Language) content conversions.

Stilo Migrate, the world’s first cloud XML content conversion service, continues to enhance its

reputation in the XML DITA (Darwin Information Typing Architecture) publishing market, he said.

“Recommendations have been received from IBM and significant new corporate customers have come on stream in 2012,” he said. “Migrate continues to evolve, and new XML conversion capabilities have recently been announced, expanding the range of source document formats that can now be converted using the service.”

Stilo, which is quoted on the London Stock Exchange’s AIM market, had cash of £986,000 at the end of April – 5 per cent up on the position at December 31.



Euro crisis and weak UK markets hitting manufacturers prospects, survey shows

Manufacturers in the West of England are continuing to take advantage of growth opportunities in emerging markets and the strength of the aerospace and automotive industries, according to the latest sector survey released this month.

However, the continuing problems in the eurozone and a lack of domestic demand are leading to a mixed forecast for the next three months at least.

Results of the second quarter manufacturing outlook survey by the EEF, the manufacturers' organisation, and business advisers BDO show output and orders remained firmly in positive territory over the past three months at +25 and +31 per cent respectively.

But they are both expected to be more or less flat for the next three months.

There is better news for jobs, with recruitment intentions remaining strong at +44 per cent in the past three months and +27 per cent in the next three. This continues a positive trend on recruitment in manufacturing companies stretching back to the beginning of 2010.

Following a sharp contraction in manufacturing output at the end of last year, the sector is forecast to show a small year-on-year contraction for 2012 of -0.1 per cent with GDP growing at just 0.2 per cent.

However, according to EEF forecasts, there will be a recovery in the second half of this year which will gain further momentum through next year. Barring any further shocks, the EEF forecasts a rebound in manufacturing growth next year of 2.2 per cent with GDP growth of 1.8 per cent.

EEF regional director Paul Knight said: "Manufacturers are holding steady and displaying the

resilience and agility they have displayed in response to a number of unforeseen events in recent years. Despite the problems closer to home they are building on successful strategies to access growth opportunities in new markets.

"However, the main risk to activity is still rooted in the on-going eurozone crisis. While the growing political and economic uncertainty in the region has not significantly dented confidence as yet, it is far from clear what or when the end game might be. This could delay positive investment intentions being translated into a sustained recovery in capital expenditure, at least in the short term."

BDO manufacturing specialist in Bristol, John Talbot, added: "The results from this latest survey show that UK manufacturing remains surprisingly resilient in the face of the combined headwinds of renewed eurozone uncertainty and a very tight lending market. Exports seem to be holding up reasonably well supported by increasing trade with emerging markets which may well be critical as the eurozone continues its downward spiral. Over the next few years the success of the sector will almost certainly depend on how quickly we can switch our export focus to the emerging growth markets and this will require a shift in thinking amongst many manufacturers."

"The results also show that the economic uncertainty appears to be hitting smaller companies hardest, causing cash flow problems amongst those with the shallowest pockets. Measures to help protect and support these companies must be made a priority or else we face the prospect of losing the type of innovative engineers for which the UK has become globally renowned."

New mobile website for business owners and FDs

A new mobile website has been launched by Haines Watts, a top 20 firm of chartered accountants, for business owners, FDs and financial controllers, giving instant and continuous access to the latest accountancy, tax and business information on their smartphones.

"With over 40% of all phones in the UK being smartphones and estimates that by 2013 more people will use mobile to get online rather than a PC, we know that smartphones are essential in a day to day life" said Mike Lloyd, senior partner at Haines Watts, Swindon.

"We know that for business owners time is money – and our mobile website makes it faster and more efficient to access important information. We want to continually make life easier for our business clients. Last year we launched our iPhone and Android tax rates apps before all our Top 20 competitors, this year we launch our UK mobile website before the other Top 20 firms of accountants."

Mike added: "The mobile website is a simplified version of our main desktop site, with uncomplicated

navigation for smartphone screens. The site contains up-to-date business news and views on our blog and useful information such as key tax dates, tax rates and tax tips."

We have made it easier for people to find and contact their local Haines Watts offices by utilising mobile location services and Google maps.

Samantha Davies, marketing manager at Haines Watts, said: "With our partners, being business owners themselves, we know how much they rely on their phones to access information – we know that other business owners would be doing the same. This is just another step in the process of driving efficient and more convenient accountancy and business services."

"No other Top 20 UK accountancy firm has a mobile site. At Haines Watts we make sure we give business owners what they want, when they want it – smartphone technology is the ideal way to do this."

To speak to Mike about this or any other matter, you can contact him on 01793 533838 or email: mlloyd@hwca.com



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Ask Peter B

Small Business advice from Peter Bromiley ACA
Technical Director at AMS Accountancy Ltd.

Q: What are "Payments on Account" and why must I pay them to HMRC every January and July?

A: Normally, Income Tax (other than PAYE) is paid by January 31st. For income over £1,000, HMRC will 'assume' you will earn the same next year and ask for payment of 50% in advance in both January and July. These are called Payments on Account (POA).

Example:

January 2012: Jim's 2010/11 tax bill was £1,000. But he had to pay £1,500 because a 'POA' of 50% was collected to pay toward his Tax bill for next year which HMRC 'estimated' will again be £1,000.

July 2012: Jim pays the second POA - £500.

January 2013: Jim's tax bill for 2011/12 is actually £1,200. The POAs of £1,000 are deducted leaving £200. Add to this the POA of £600 (50% of £1,200) and the total to pay in January 2013 is £800.

July 2013: Jim pays a further 50% POA of £600....

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Banks celebrates growth with successful move and lavish party

More than 70 clients and contacts attended celebrations to mark Banks Chartered Accountants' move to their new office. The firm relocated to Vicarage Court, Ermin Street, Stratton, after outgrowing its Old Town office where it had been based since it set up in 1996. At 4,800 sq ft, Vicarage Court is double the size of the previous office. The firm plans to grow from 22 to more than 40 staff.

Guests at the opening party joined directors Richard Mathews and Neil Elsdon and their team and got a chance to tour the new facilities.

Richard said: "The feedback we have had from clients and our team has been excellent."

Stand out from the crowd

Jobs and investment priority for Forward Swindon

Forward Swindon, the economic regeneration company, has set itself ambitious targets to bring new jobs and investment to the town over the next year despite signs that the national economy will remain in the doldrums.

The company, owned by Swindon Council but run as an arm's length organisation, has adopted a new annual delivery plan which priorities economic growth but will also deal with issues which could prevent businesses staying and flourishing in the town.

With some regeneration work in the town centre underway – and in the case of the flagship 17-acre Union Square scheme about to start – Forward Swindon is now further developing its marketing strategy to bring inward investment to the town while also helping businesses already here.

The five-year plan adopted by Forward Swindon when it was launched two years ago says it will help create up to 5,000 jobs in the town – a challenging target given the state of the economy but one chief executive Ian Piper is confident of meeting, although the annual delivery plan targets are in terms of financial investment rather than employment.

Mr Piper said: “We’ve set ourselves some ambitious targets this year, but with the resources and clear direction to meet them.

“The regeneration work in the centre of town is very important to everyone living and working here, but we also need to ensure that we help build a strong economy of businesses and workers who can benefit from these new facilities.”

Regeneration priorities cover large scale schemes such as the redevelopment of the Oasis and North Star as a national leisure destination, along with Union Square and Swindon Station

forecourt, which is nearing completion. The new masterplan for the whole town centre is also a high priority and will set out improvements to the central area in the short and longer term.

Mr Piper is confident the new business investment service – launched in March as part of the new www.swindon.uk.com website – will lead to more firms looking to open in Swindon.

It comes against a tough backdrop for inward investment. Inquiries from potential inward investors fell sharply last year to just 14 compared to 92 in 2007.

Forward Swindon has a target of 20 for next year – which it hopes to beat it. “Inquiries are starting to pick up again and the new website will give us information on where the inquiries are coming from,” said Mr Piper.

“We can then target those areas and we will also soon be targeting individual sectors.

The business investment programme will seek to attract businesses wishing to invest or locate in Swindon from elsewhere in the UK or overseas, and stimulate private sector investment worth £10m. The team will also establish strong relationships with the top 80 companies in Swindon to address any barriers to growth and provide support as needed.

The Forward Swindon board, which reports into Swindon Council as its shareholder, has been revised to make it more private sector led. Councillor Garry Perkins has left the board and Swindon Council chief executive Gavin Jones has stepped down as chairman to be replaced by Robin Bailey who recently retired from Nationwide as divisional director savings and investments. He has extensive experience on other Boards, with expertise in marketing and strategy development.

Board member Mark Beard, of Swindon construction firm Beard, said: “The board is keen to see Forward Swindon going out there and engaging with businesses both in Swindon and outside. “Swindon has great advantages as a place to run a company, and the new business investment service will help promote the town to anyone considering relocation or expansion, and support them in making their plans come to fruition. Swindon should be their first choice.”

As part of the drive to encourage economic growth in the town, two experienced senior members of staff have joined Forward Swindon to direct the business investment team.

As director of business support, Clive Parkinson will look after Swindon-based companies, while Phil Young, the new director of investment will encourage businesses to relocate or invest in projects here.



Plans for UTC drawn up after bid is accepted

Swindon could once again produce some of the country's finest engineers following the decision by the Department for Education to accept a bid to open a University Technical College (UTC) in the town.

The Swindon UTC will go ahead subject to a funding agreement with the Government.

Joint sponsors Swindon-based Johnson Matthey Fuel Cells and Oxford Brookes University submitted a bid earlier this year to host the college for 14-19 year olds.

The bid was fully supported by Swindon Council and Swindon College and both were involved in the detailed planning.

The council has approved a £500,000 investment to help set up the UTC while Swindon College will continue to be directly involved in setting up the engineering studies.

Johnson Matthey and Oxford Brookes' Faculty of Technology, Design and Environment will now design a college with an engineering focus, supported by business and enterprise, to meet the needs of local employers for technically-skilled employees.

It will also place Swindon at the forefront of a leading-edge

development in technical education provision and give young people more chances to gain a higher education qualification or apprenticeship.

Students will combine practice and theory to learn in a very practical way, integrating academic requirements with the technical and practical elements.

The college ethos and curriculum will be heavily influenced by local and national employers who will also provide support and work experience for students, including BMW, Halcrow, Honda, Intel, Nationwide RWE npower and the Ministry of Defence.

Johnson Matthey Fuel Cells director Dr Jack Frost said: “We are delighted to be the main employer sponsor with Oxford Brookes University and to support this unique engineering college.

“We are excited about its future and confident that the Swindon UTC will develop and provide high quality engineers to support local and national industry. This example of vocational balance in education will prepare students for work in industry and will produce better skilled engineers that are attractive to employers.”



From left: Forward Swindon chief executive Ian Piper, artist Bruce Williams and councillor Garry Perkins, Swindon Council cabinet member for regeneration and culture

Artist gives tunnel vision of the past

For decades it was the main entrance to Swindon's historic railworks - at one time the largest industrial complex of its kind in the world.

Thousands of workers – from fitters and engineers to clerks and managers - made their way through the tunnel from Bristol Street under the railway line every morning into the huge site and out again every evening.

When the works closed for good in 1986 the gloomy underpass became a route to nowhere as the famous workshops, sheds and offices of the GWR were abandoned and the site sealed off.

The tunnel reopened following the arrival of the Designer Outlet Village, STEAM museum and offices and homes on the site renamed as Churchward – providing a link between it and the town centre.

Now the underpass has been given a facelift with 10 artworks celebrating Swindon rail workers alongside redecoration and new lighting.

The works, by artist Bruce Williams and commissioned by Forward Swindon for one side of the

tunnel, were unveiled earlier this month. Large letters spelling out Swindon Works have been installed on the opposite wall.

Mr Williams, who works almost exclusively in the public realm and has produced artwork for other locations around Swindon, said the idea was to recognise the men and women who worked ‘inside’.

“The characters you can see would probably have used the route under the tracks themselves on their way to and from work,” he said.

“These are regular men and women, who worked on the trains in war and in peace time, come rain or shine.”

He used seven photographs from the STEAM's archives and three images are of people working in the industry today.

The unveiling was attended by Mr Williams, Forward Swindon chief executive Ian Piper, councillor Garry Perkins, Swindon Council cabinet member for regeneration and culture, and representatives of local history groups.

Mediating for success - and avoiding conflict - at work

Conflict Masters, the Wiltshire consultancy that helps organisations tackle conflict in the workplace, continues its series of articles by director Sarah Crayford Brown by looking at how mediating early can avoid confusion and conflict later.

Are you a glass half full or glass half empty type of person? Depending on which it is will affect the way you approach a new project.

Some people involved in a new venture feel enthused and optimistic about the prospect and can't wait to get going. Mediating for success is a way to stop that positive energy being diverted into avoidable conflict?

Generally, I am called in to mediate when a conflict has reached crisis stage and there is already palpable damage to the individuals concerned.

The conflict has often been going on for months, if not years, and the trust and respect between the parties has long disappeared; each party has stopped thinking or caring about how

the conflict is affecting the other party and is blinded by their own hurt. Inevitably, productivity is affected. My role as a mediator is to help the parties to understand and empathise with the other person's perspective so that the real issues behind the conflict are identified and the parties can work together and find practical solutions.

Mediation usually works but can be a painful experience as it requires us to examine and take responsibility for our own contribution to the conflict.



Sarah Crayford Brown

Recently, some perceptive leaders have asked me to mediate at the start of a new working relationship; on each occasion it involved a major new project and at least one of the parties had previous experience of a damaging conflict.

Their leaders recognised that a proactive approach should avoid destructive conflict developing later - and they were right. It was so much easier to talk through potential concerns and risks and explore the 'what if' situations before they actually happened: the discussions were open, frank and establish deep empathy and trust. How much easier it is to explain to someone how you like to work and what really irritates you when you are still positive and enthused about the potential success of a new project rather than tiptoeing through this when you are both ravaged by the negative emotions of conflict.

The parties summarised what they agreed in a document and revisit it every few months. If

a concern which was previously feared has arisen, the solution can now be put into rapid action.

The original openness also empowers the individuals to raise previously unanticipated concerns. After only a few sessions, this level of openness is ingrained in the way the parties interact and permits them to navigate successfully through potentially awkward and difficult conversations while maintaining the original high level of motivation for the project. It encourages the parties to own and take responsibility for the solutions from the start; productivity remains high; and the time involved is low and only a fraction of the time that would be spent on a serious conflict. I wonder how differently the handling of the euro crisis would be if they had adopted this approach?

For more information go to www.conflictmasters.co.uk or call Sarah on 01249 859417

Free training for local companies

Swindon training company Fast Forward has secured funding to help local organisations train staff with low levels of skills or qualifications.

Project manager Mary Scott said: "We're delighted because it means we can get training to the places where it will have the most impact."

"There are lots of organisations in Swindon and Wiltshire that employ people who haven't had the opportunity to get some really good, work-related training under their belts."

"It's this kind of training that can mean the difference between success

and failure - not only for the employee but also the business, especially if it's small."

Fast Forward is planning to kickstart the project this month by offering a 'pick and mix menu' of courses designed for different sectors of the local business community, including retail, catering, logistics and general business and customer service skills.

Organisations can choose short, sharp training sessions in critical skills such as dealing with difficult customers, food safety and using email.

The funding, drawn from a European bid in the South West, is designed to pay the full cost of training for staff who have no qualifications above Level 1 (anyone who has GCSEs below grade C or no O Levels).

Mary wants interested employers to call her as soon as possible on 01793 732848.

"We only have a certain amount to spend, so it's critical that businesses get in touch as soon as possible," she said.

"We don't want any of these vital funds to go unspent."

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From left: David Partridge, Summerfield Developments, Nick Russell, RG Spiller, Nigel Hounslow, Summerfield Developments, Philip Goodman, Bechtel Direct, Andrew Howard, RG Spiller, James Napp, Bechtel Direct and Jonathan Jarman, Angus Meek Architects

Topping out ceremony at Methuen Business Park

The traditional 'topping out' has taken place of Summerfield Developments' latest project in Chippenham – a 8,220 sq ft office scheme for IT equipment reseller Bechtel Direct on Methuen Business Park.

The ceremony marked the construction of the highest part of the building which Bechtel Direct, currently based on the town's Bumpers Farm business park, has taken on a new lease.

The building completes the final phase of Summerfield's Methuen Business Park development which includes Wincanton Logistics' headquarters, Herman Miller's European HQ and offices for Fleet Support.

Jonathan Jarman of Bristol architects Angus Meek designed Bechtel Direct's building with RG Spiller the main contractor. The property has been sold by Summerfield subject to the occupational lease with Bechtel

Direct. Summerfield senior development surveyor Ben Trickey said: "We are delighted to have reached this milestone in the process and are keen now to press on construction, including installing photovoltaic panels on the roof to generate electricity."

Property agents James Gregory of Alder King's Swindon office and John Mulholland of Jones Lang LaSalle in Bath acted as joint agents to secure Bechtel Direct as leasehold occupier.

Bechtel Direct managing director James Napp said: "The building is taking shape really well and we are eager to be in occupation."

"The move will be a great boost for Bechtel and our staff as well as being a great place to invite our customers for seminars and events."

"With the efficient layout of the office, the team can continue to be highly competitive in this tight market."

Landlord targets new tenants with £500,000 refurbishment scheme

Private investor PFC is carrying out a £500,000 refurbishment at Greenways Business Park in a bid to bring new firms and more jobs to the town.

The latest phases of refurbishment being the former Inland Revenue regional administration centre and Reuters offices are being completely refurbished to create the best office accommodation for business.

Murray Walker of Keningtons, joint marketing agent for Greenways said: "The quality of accommodation is key to attracting new firms to the Park in what remains a difficult market. The fact we can offer high quality refurbished offices from 2,000 to 20,000 square feet is helping us to attract interest in the Park. We want to boost activity and create jobs in Chippenham."

The substantial contracts with builders Powells and Mitchells are a major investment by PFC and is part



From left: Natalie Bennett from Hartnell Taylor Cook, John Laundon from Workman, Matthew Percey from Powells Rosalia Tranchina-Percey, from Powells and Murray Walker from Keningtons

of a rolling programme of constant refurbishment which is helping the Park to maintain its edge as the business park of choice in Chippenham.

The high quality landscaped parkland of Greenways provides a unique campus style environment. The Park is located just off the two

lane section of the Chippenham bypass providing excellent access to Junction 17 of the M4 motorway avoiding the town's rush hour congestion.

Greenways Business Park is marketed jointly by Hartnell Taylor Cook and Keningtons' Swindon office.

Record annual growth for software company Preactor International

Specialist software firm Preactor International, based in Chippenham, has bucked the economic downturn with record annual growth.

Net sales climbed by 17 per cent compared to 2010, which in itself had had been a record year for the firm, whose world-leading planning and scheduling software is used by manufacturers and logistics firms.

The firm credited its 2011 success in part to companies prioritising return on investment in order to survive the current economic climate. Its software is frequently integrated with supply chain management

solutions to reduce costs.

Preactor's breakthrough technology is used by more than 4,000 small, medium and large multinational companies located in 75 countries.

Nearly 1,000 more firms began using Preactor products last year, including 350 which bought licences for the full product and nearly 650 signing up to use the free starter product, Preactor Express.

Founder and chief executive Mike Novels said: "The financial crisis has had a significant impact on manufacturing companies across Europe and they are looking for solutions that will give them a fast return on their investment."

"The past year has been a very difficult one for many businesses in the sectors we target. Despite this, they have continued to recognise the benefits they can obtain by using Preactor to manage their production in a more agile and efficient way, even when demand varies from week to week. We are also fortunate in that Preactor is flexible enough to be used across almost every sector and business process, so when one sector has suffered badly in the downturn we have been able to focus our efforts on other types of businesses."

Preactor's family of applications, which range from mid- and long-term capacity planning to detailed scheduling, are targeted at manufacturers who are continually

looking to reduce inventory levels to cut costs yet still being able to respond to shorter lead times to satisfy customer demand.

Last year's success was also bolstered by growth in Preactor International's global network.

More than 30 new companies around the world signed up with the firm, increasing its partner network to more than 400. These partners provide local, expert advice and support to businesses using Preactor in 75 countries. They are a key part of the firm's business model, being the main route to market for the Preactor software products round the world.

The firm, whose headquarters are on Chippenham's Bumpers Farm business park, increased its network of international offices by opening in Dallas to increase visibility in the North American market.

Subsidiaries are already operating in Lyon and Bangalore, both of which achieved 40 per cent growth last year.

It also has offices in Brazil and China.

The company was set more 20 years ago by Mike Novels, one of the leading experts in planning and scheduling technology in the manufacturing sector, following a management buy-out from BTR (now Invensys).

The Chippenham office houses its development centre, support team and conference and training centre.

Prestige office gets to the heart of Chippenham's business community

HPH Commercial Property provides a range of quality office, retail, leisure and industrial workspaces in Chippenham and throughout the South West.

From large office spaces such as Bewley House, to smaller flexi-offices at Station Hill House, the company has a wide portfolio of properties to accommodate a range of businesses, and offers much more than a standard tenant-landlord relationship.

Managing director Lindsay Holdaway explains, "Our aim is to provide our tenants with a comprehensive network of support across many different areas of

building and services management, delivering extra value and helping our clients to save money in a variety of ways.

"Our flexi-office suites offer a highly managed environment at a much lower cost than the fully serviced equivalent and are available on flexible lease terms."

Bewley House is a prime example, boasting super-fast broadband, on-site parking, and close proximity to the M4 and Chippenham's high speed rail line to London, making it an attractive prospect for any business looking for fast and reliable access. Visit www.bewleyhouse.co.uk

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Making office fit-outs fit for purpose

Established for more than 15 years and with a management team possessing a combined experience of 70-plus years, Calne-based Elm Workspace is proud of its skill base - and it shows in its successful client list.

Elm doesn't just sell office furniture - it is a turnkey supplier offering a comprehensive design-and-build facility within commercial and educational premises which allows it to offer a full supply.

The business, which is based in The Space Centre on Porte Marsh Road, has three distinct markets - furniture supply to offices, to educational institutions and commercial fit-out works.

Elm is built on the core values of its people, service and the environment. Its commitment to ISO 9001 and environmental supply chains are vital to this principle.

A spokesman said: "No job is too big or too small for us. We are in the business of building customer relationships and our financial stability is testament to all these principles."

"We are proud of the way we provide the right products and the right thinking to create amazing commercial interiors."

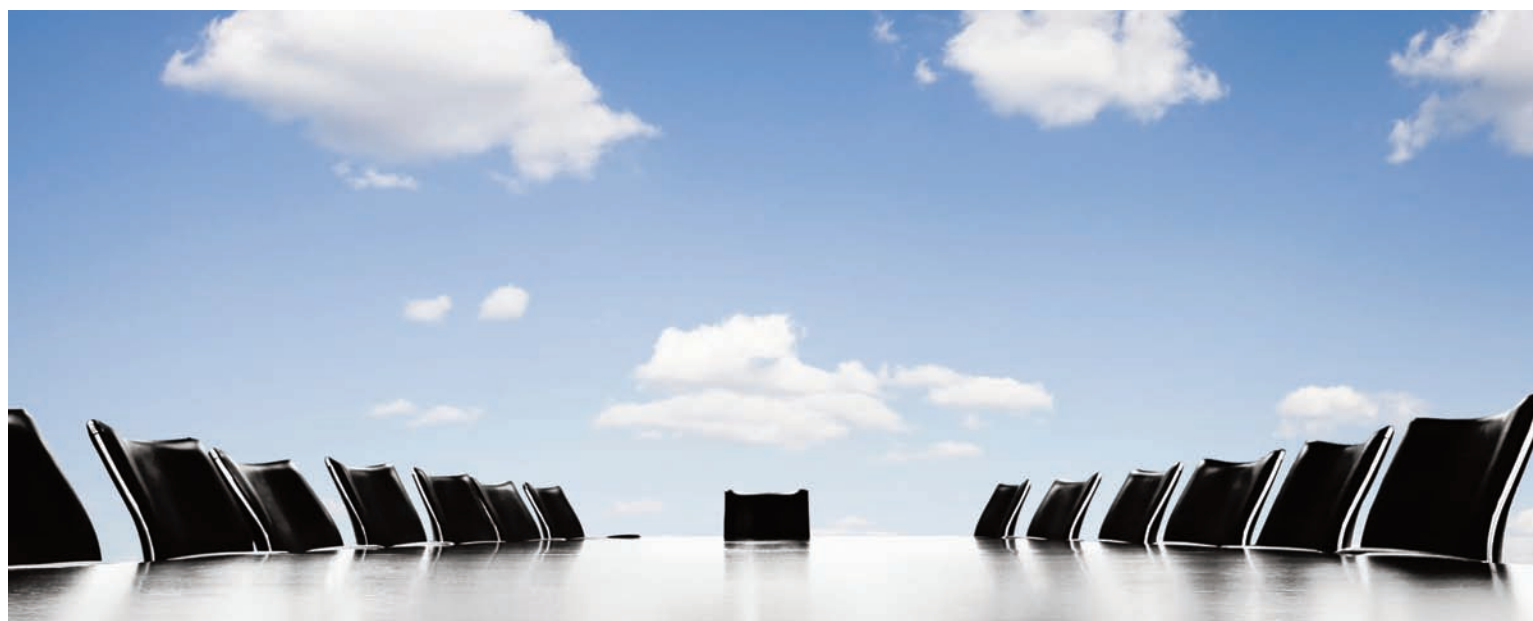
Elm's full turnkey solution goes from technical drawing provision to handover of the entire project. The company project manages the entire interior fit out, including gaining all necessary statutory regulations to ensure the new working space will conform to the latest regulations.

The design team considers all aspects of the new build including available space, number of staff, breakout areas, furniture layouts, carpet options through to colour finishes. Each client has a dedicated designer who will work with them from initial concept through to completion.

When it comes to the environment, Elm's impact is minimal as it does not manufacture the products. However, through its environmental management system it monitors its suppliers closely to ensure the effect on the environment through the whole supply chain is kept within acceptable levels - from using wood from sustainable forests to re-using the oil in delivery vehicles.

The firm also has initiatives in place with its manufacturers aimed at reducing packaging materials. "Indeed, any packaging from the products we deliver are returned by us to our warehouse where it is compacted and collected by reputable recycling companies," said a spokesman.

"Furthermore, we have programmes in place to increase the life span of the products which can be returned, broken down into components and then re-used."



Elm Workspace's sister company Elm Greenspace, part of the Elm Group, is dedicated to helping the environment by eliminating redundant educational and office furniture from landfill with a primary focus of re-using it.

The firm collects furniture from large buildings to single offices and then repair and re-deliver it as quality used furniture to alternative businesses and educational authorities.

This year has already proved a successful one for Elm. Project director Nick Clarke said: "Although the commercial office market has been challenging over the past few years, our teams have adapted to the market place and this has brought us into several new and exciting sectors. We are involved now with fitted furniture into schools and lab furniture into high-tech environments."

"Within academies and large school projects all the same project experience is needed including mechanical and electrical skills which we have transferred over from the once buoyant office fit-out market. The loose furniture teams are still intact and indeed have expanded with the addition of our new 12,000 sq ft warehouse facility."

"The commercial fit out of office premises has seen some buoyancy this year particularly with boasting our largest single project with a £3m price tag and covering 60,000 sq ft for a single office building. Indeed this was one of the largest project on the M4 and M3 corridor."

Planning is critical in education projects, Nick says. While space is at a premium in every working environment, in educational establishments the demands can be time-tabled to

change several times a day.

To capitalise on this working environment, an efficient planning process is critical to ensure the success of the change.

Nick highlights the points to consider.

"A lack of communication can have huge detriment on the success of a project," he said. "More than this though, developing understanding and trust is highly important. Know who the key drivers are within each department, how the discipline is trying to deliver its work and what it needs to be successful."

"Greater success can sometimes be achieved by thinking outside the box and considering more than the space needed, but also understanding what stimulates the pupils. Consider what space is available, is it big enough, how does the light work in the area, how will the furniture function, can it be easily re-arranged, will it survive?"

Nick says an early survey and space analysis is essential when agreeing what is achievable, especially if the plan is to turn classrooms into a technical area.

"The result of not acting early enough could mean your plans are not achievable because of monitoring and evaluation restrictions," he said. "Knowledge is essential when you are planning."

"Test your planning process at every stage. Change in space or in working practice is often resented. We all know the old adage 'a change is as good as a rest', but bear in mind that it may take some individuals or pupils time to adapt and consideration to their needs, as people, throughout the project life will almost certainly aid with the move into the new facilities."

Creating an executive team who are fully aware of all the project requirements, regular design meetings, setting up 'key milestones' are all effective tools in the delivery of projects, says Nick.

"Newsletters, web site forum pages for comments, exhibitions of designs and photographs are again vital in getting the project message across to the end users, thereby ensuring that everybody starts to feel ownership of the new facilities," he said.

"Work with someone who has a true understanding of FF&E schemes, test their knowledge comes from experience not from a catalogue. Trust them to deliver the result that you want and you will deliver a project that will stand the test of time."

Elm was recently commissioned by Cowlin Construction to refurbish the Café West Restaurant on the Bath University's campus.

A number of Olympic teams will train for the 2012 games on the campus and the restaurant area will become its centrepiece.

The new designs were contemporary, using both new and traditional building methods.

An extensive lighting gantry was incorporated containing more than 350 lighting units - both LED and low voltage down lighters.

Health and safety was also a key factor in this project as the site was still under development.

Elm's health and safety representatives were regularly on site to ensure all teams went through the necessary on site inductions and followed the strict health and safety standards they implemented.

SWINDON BUSINESS NEWS

NEXT MONTH . . .

An exclusive feature on Windmill Hill, Swindon's prestige office park with profiles of its major occupiers and details of available buildings.

This is the latest in a series of targeted features showcasing Swindon's business parks, office locations and industrial estates.

For more information and to discuss advertising and editorial opportunities, please contact Anita Jaynes on 01793 615393 or email her at anita@swindon-business.net

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Swindon Business News is the area's most-prestigious source of business news, features and information.

Launched in 1982, it has become essential reading for anyone in business in Swindon and the surrounding area.

With a distribution of more than 8,000, including many senior executives, and 30,000-plus unique visitors a month to its website, it is the ideal platform to promote yourself to key individuals and firms in the area's business community.

01793 615393

Jazzbones creates high-profile Swindon website

Swindon creative agency Jazzbones is playing its part in attracting businesses to the town by working with economic regeneration and inward investment company Forward Swindon.

Its recently-launched website - www.swindon.uk.com - is the latest in a number of innovative marketing initiatives designed by Jazzbones.

The website gives businesses interested in relocating to Swindon everything they need to help them make the town their new home.

It is part of a high-profile campaign by Forward Swindon to encourage more businesses to set up in Swindon in competition with other centres along the M4 corridor.

The website promotes some of the town's most attractive features to businesses such as its affordability, existing business sectors, proximity to major cities via the M4 and rail links.

It also highlights Forward Swindon's new business investment service which is actively promoting the town to business groups and inward investment organisations, and provides advice to both start-ups and more established businesses as well as guidance on schools, shopping and



Nathan Sandhu

leisure. Jazzbones creative director Nathan Sandhu said: "The new website gives businesses from across the UK and abroad all the information and tools they need to relocate to Swindon – and delivers them in an easy-to-use and intuitive format."

"With everyone from cutting-edge start-ups to household names like Intel, BMW and the National Trust already thriving in Swindon, the new website is set to ensure the town goes from strength to strength."

PR and digital specialists team up to help businesses get online

Two North Wiltshire businesswomen are collaborating to help small and new businesses get up and running online.

Jo Smyth of Upper Minety PR consultancy Word Worker and Rose Somerset of Ramsbury-based Snowballworks, which specialises in website content, are offering a cost-effective package to businesses which will give them a simple website, text, bespoke photography and a press release about their business.

The website copy and press release will be written by Jo while Rose, a professional photographer, will take the pictures and build the site. Businesses will also be given training on how to use their website, so they can manage it themselves.

Jo, a former newspaper journalist, said: "We came up with this idea because we could see so many businesses out there needing to raise their profile with a website, original photography and really good copy, but there wasn't one place they could get all of that within their budget."

"At Word Worker, my services include copy and press release



From left: Jo Smyth and Rose Somerset

writing. Through Snowballworks, Rose offers fantastic photos and simple websites. By putting the two together, we can offer a start-up or small business a complete package to get going online and create awareness."

Jo and Rose's Get-You-Going online package starts at £549.

Rose said: "The package is perfect for businesses that need to show what they can do."

"For example, a florist or a carpenter will want to show real images of their work on their website. Stock images just won't do the job, but until now professional bespoke photography may have seemed too costly an option."

For more information about the Get-You-Going package, visit www.wordworker.co.uk or www.snowballworks.com or contact Jo on 01666 861149.

Swindon IT support company continues to grow



Complete I.T.'s business development team, from left: David Eyres, Sam Morris, Kimberly Bracewell, Jodie Patchett, Ryan O'Shea and Ryan Harper.

Despite the backdrop of continued economic gloom, local IT company Complete I.T. has continued to grow its support operations at Shrivenham Business Park. The company now supports more than 50 local businesses in a wide range of market sectors and has seen the local team grow to include 22 business and technical specialists.

The company recorded 15 per cent growth last year and has a similar target this year as it competes in an ever-growing market. Complete I.T. was established in Swindon in 2008 and has enjoyed consistent growth from day one. The company provides bespoke IT support services to businesses of all shapes and sizes.

One of Complete I.T.'s clients is local legal services company, Permits2Work, whose director, Matthew Passmore, was involved in the initial choice of Complete I.T. He said: "They are very approachable, competent and experienced and always demonstrate a real

commitment to helping our business grow. The Helpdesk support has been exceptional and is fully committed to solving our problems and making our users happy."

Teamwork is a major facet of Complete I.T.'s growth and its business development, technical consultancy and helpdesk staff continually work together to deliver first class IT support to its local clients. General manager, Neil Hamilton, said: "We've successfully attracted many new clients and have grown substantially in the past year so we simply had to expand our office in Watchfield. Our goal is to fully understand our clients' business and to develop close working relationships so we can deliver the IT that they really need. It's great to hear the positive feedback from our clients and to know that our hard work is making a real difference." To find out more about Complete I.T., contact Jodie Patchett/Neil Hamilton on 01793 688597.

Prune costs with free print assessment

When businesses are trying to increase profitability, their overheads deserve as much scrutiny as their pipeline.

As a result Orchard Press is now offering a free, no-obligation 30-minute consultation on print needs to Swindon firms and organisations.

Sales manager Jason Grubb said: "In the current economic climate cost savings are all, and we all know that by ordering larger print runs the unit price of print can drop very dramatically indeed."

"However, many companies understandably balk at ordering large supplies of brochures or mailings because it can be a problem storing

them. The Orchard Online system allows Orchard Press's customers to benefit from the economies of scale of ordering print in bulk, without requiring them to take delivery of the material in one go. Instead, Orchard Press store the unused print materials at their own safe and secure site, so that it is immediately available when the customer requires it – but doesn't clutter up their offices when they don't. Jason says customers also tell him they are experiencing further cost savings because of Orchard's expertise in print. "We've got a mass of print expertise that customers can tap into, and can advise on cost benefits all along the line – for example,

on using paper sizes in the best way to double up volume or cut down on waste, all of which can affect price," he said.

"That's why at Orchard Press we are offering businesses and organisations in this area a completely free print audit and assessment."

"It will cost them nothing, apart from half an hour of their life, but if they don't already buy from us, we guarantee that we can save them money on their current print bill."

To book a free print assessment and learn how much you can reduce your print bill by, call Jason on 07967 480653 or 01793 864 305, or email

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Food sales help South West exporters gain a bigger slice of the market, but the longer-term picture remains mixed

A steady rise in overseas sales of food helped West exports bounce back strongly at the end of last year, latest research shows. But the long-term export picture for the region remains mixed.

The findings emerge from the 2012 Osborne Clarke South West Export Barometer. It shows that the region's exports slumped in the middle of 2011 but then bounced back strongly at the end of the year to the extent that in the final quarter volumes were 12 per cent up on the same period in 2010.

The research, conducted for law firm Osborne Clarke by specialist research organisation Acritas, captures some of the effects of the world's political, economic and environmental uncertainties since 2010.

As well as the ups and downs in recent export volumes, it shows that growth in mature markets in Europe has trailed that of non-EU markets such as China and Hong Kong.

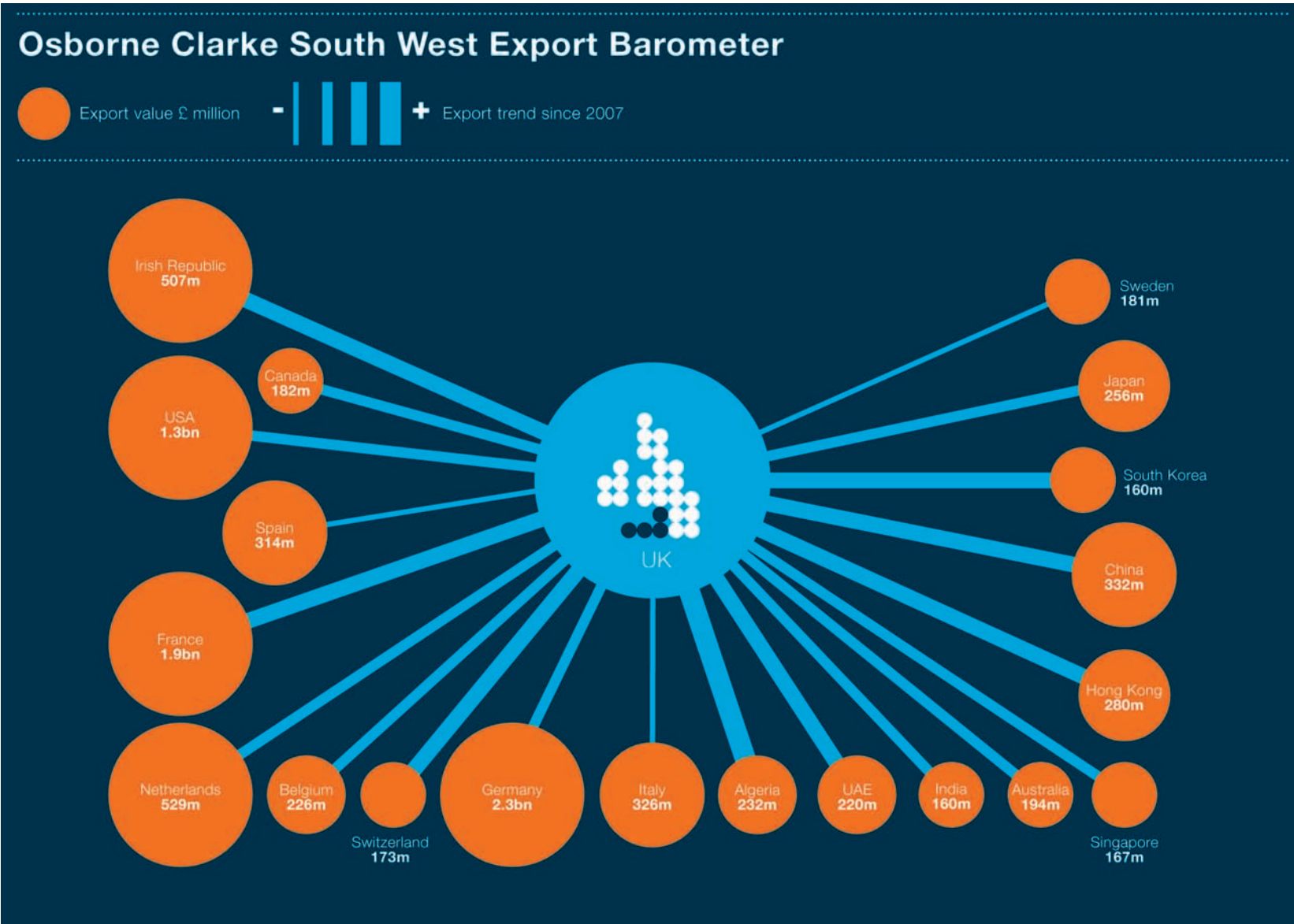
Osborne Clarke partner Paul Killen said: "It's been a bit of a rollercoaster year for our exporters, with economic problems, natural disasters and conflicts all impacting on them."

"Despite that, there have been some real success stories with new markets opening up and some export categories really taking off."

"As the uncertainty continues over the next couple of years, exporters are going to have to be even more flexible and resourceful. Companies considering starting to export shouldn't let that put them off, though – there are still great rewards to be had from expanding into new markets."

Events and developments to affect the global economy in recent years range from the Japanese tsunami and nuclear leaks, revolutions and civil wars in Africa, the wars in the Middle East, oil prices to the efforts to tackle the UK's budget deficit and environmental and sustainability challenges.

But the research found that export levels have remained surprisingly unaffected by these challenges. Aerospace and defence – both key sectors for Swindon and North



Wiltshire – still dominate exports and accounted for 63 per cent of all overseas sales in 2011. However, at the same time, food and live-animal exports are up a striking 61 per cent since 2007 as food producers continue to build on the region's world standing as a centre of excellence.

Fast-developing export destinations include Algeria, Malta, Chile, Latvia, Ghana and Slovakia – all doubled their imports from the South West between 2007 and 2011.

But despite being hotspots, these countries still accounted for less than

3 per cent of overall exports last year. The dominant export markets for the region remain Germany, France and the US, which between them make up 45 per cent of export volumes. As a result, the region's exposure in particular to the recent economic problems in Europe is there to see in the graphic below.

Yet the report also shows opportunities remain that could do much to boost the region's overall export record, which last year stood at £12.4bn of goods and services in 2011 – or 6 per cent of England's total.

This is the same as 2010's export figure and equates to a rise of 15 per cent growth between 2007 and 2011. While this growth rate sounds good it is way below the 35 per cent achieved UK-wide in the same period.

The upturn in West exports in the second half of last year – and particularly the final quarter – is encouraging, says the report, while the scope to grow exports from service-sector companies is also clear, as the region accounts for just 5 per cent of the UK's total service exports.

Mr Killen said: "The South West

has a huge pool of talent but this is not demonstrated in the level of service exports from the region. The region's service providers need to continue to leverage their expertise and look for opportunities to export services to more industrial economies."

While the challenge remains, respondents to the survey struck a positive note about the overall export opportunities. Most are still convinced that overseas sales prospects are good and still see exporting as an excellent means of building value in a business.

CASE STUDY: EXPORTING SUCCESS FOR TRAINING VETS

Improve International, which delivers training for vets and veterinary nurses from its Wroughton headquarters, has built up business across Europe that now delivers half its turnover.

Managing director David Babington says overseas expansion was a logical step to take and reckons Swindon companies shouldn't be shy about grabbing a similar opportunity, even if they need to tread carefully.

"We have opened offices in Portugal to service the veterinary training market in southern Europe, and formed partnerships in Denmark, Norway and Sweden to deliver courses in Scandinavia," he said.

"We have always funded each new country opening out of capital reserves, partly because we think it right for us to grow conservatively and partly because our insight into the local market is hard to translate into a story that the banks would be willing to fund."

"If any overseas expansion is partly about weighing up risks, sometimes those risks are easiest for us to measure and understand, and that's how we've approached the challenge."

Extra care also needs to be taken in the current financial climate, he added.

"Since we derive half our turnover from Europe, I'm concerned about the current financial instability in some European countries."

"Our office in Portugal offers a lower-cost solution in terms of below-the-line costs and is currently a great place to recruit, but the financial uncertainty gives cause for concern."



From left: David Babington with fellow Improve directors Rui Lobao and Heber Alves at the Southern European Veterinary Congress in Barcelona, October 2011.

"We have money deposited in both Portuguese and Spanish banks, and, unlike the UK, there are no government-backed guarantees should these banks or the euro collapse."

"Although it's unlikely that Portugal and Spain will leave the euro, it is still a possibility. If it were to happen we would all be in uncharted waters."

"It's not a situation that should put companies off European expansion necessarily - but it's definitely a risk you need to understand."

The firm was established in 1998 by a group of veterinary surgeons from across the UK, including a number of recognised experts. Its head office is in a wing of Alexandra House, purpose-built conference centre set near Wroughton.

EXPERTS

How to get your team to start collaborating

Swindon-based Peter Mayes is a specialist executive coach who has worked with companies all over the world to enable them to get the most from their employees.

Here, in the fourth of his exclusive articles for Swindon Business News, he reveals his top 10 tips for promoting collaboration within a team.

Peter says: "Some of these tips might seem very obvious but in my experience teams don't pay enough attention to them and by ignoring them, they cost themselves, time, frustration and run the risk of miscommunication which can be costly, damaging and disruptive."

1. Work co-operatively with your fellow team members to achieve the goals of your team. Have this as an explicit stated aim for everyone.

2. Prepare thoroughly for each team meeting so that everyone's time is not wasted.

3. Attend every team meeting regardless of other pressures, (short of personal emergencies). Look to opt into a meeting rather than opt out if there is something you can contribute.

4. Master the problem-solving, decision-making and other skills you have and share your expertise so everyone moves forward.

5. State opinions and feelings openly, honestly, clearly and frankly and be willing to discuss and explain what your thinking is behind what you say.

6. Actively listen to, and seek to understand, the opinions and feelings of every team member. This can be tough as we tend to prefer the sound of our own voice.

7. Protect the confidentiality of team members and avoid gossip no matter how juicy it is.

8. Support decisions of the team, even when you are not in total agreement with its conclusions. A team decision is just that - pull together or you will pull each other apart.

9. Carry out assignments delegated to you by the team, do what you have been asked to do.

10. Treat team members as respected peers, as you would like to be treated, and seek to understand not judge.

Getting the business edge: IT simply applied

Ray Smyth of Swindon's The IPstore says, "The cloud is a business tool and a disruptive technology. It can deliver innumerable benefits to any business in any market cycle, but it is not an out-of-the-box option and to get what you need, an experienced supplier is needed."

From what I have said in my last two articles you should be getting the idea about the cloud. The idea that:

- It's not a like-for-like replacement for what you already have.

- You should assume nothing and go back to square one on every front.

- Data ownership and compliance requires detailed attention.

- The current (inherited) legal framework, nationally, in Europe and worldwide is inadequate.

- For most organisations, a hybrid approach between the public and private cloud will be best.

It would be far too easy to conclude that the cloud is far too difficult and not for you and this in my view would be a shame. Cloud computing is still in its very early stages and it is precisely because it is easy to deploy and that it is internet based that it is skipping a crucial development phase. This phase - the early adopter phase - allows the more savvy organisations and those with qualified staff to work with suppliers in the full knowledge that there will be problems, working to mature the products or service.

One thing I have not yet mentioned in this context is energy and corporate social responsibility (CSR). Depending on how you set up your cloud services and the partners you select, you should be

able to improve your organisations green credentials. Depending on your business, this may be more or less important, but make no mistake, it will be noted. Greenpeace - renowned for their action based protest - are on the case. Gary Cook, Greenpeace International Senior Policy Analyst recently said, "...companies like Apple, Amazon, and Microsoft are building data centers powered by coal and acting like their customers won't know or won't care. They're wrong." In the future new business may be won or lost based on the decision you make about the cloud.

There has to be a bottom line and here it is. Your business cannot afford to ignore the cloud because your competitors won't; equally your business will not survive the inevitable consequences of an ill-considered and clumsy adoption of the cloud. Without doubt, any transition or adoption needs to be taken in the context of where you are and your existing pre-cloud IT and business plan.

You will need advice and help, and you will need to plan. With the right kind of supplier you should be able to get the balance between advice, solutions supply and cost. Consultancy will always help but mentoring from a trusted supplier will unite the needs of your business with the best solutions available in the most cost-effective manner. Good luck and see you in the cloud.

Logistics

Wincanton secures warehousing and distribution deal with Sainsbury's

Wincanton, the Chippenham-based supply chain specialist, has secured a three-year agreement with supermarket giant Sainsbury's to provide it with further warehousing and distribution services in London.

Under the deal Wincanton will expand its operations to include the retailer's Thameside Distribution Centre (DC) in South East London - it already manages Sainsbury's distribution centre in Greenford, West London. As a result, starting early next year Wincanton will collectively manage logistics for most of Sainsbury's Local stores across London.

The contract builds on Wincanton's long-established relationship with Sainsbury's. It also operates the supermarket chain's DCs in Northampton and Sherburn, Yorkshire, as well as being the sole provider of its port-to-DC container movements in the UK.

Wincanton said its success in winning the deal was its stated aim to focus on shared management of the Local stores across London with a single transport fleet to gain maximum efficiency from its vehicle fleet and



warehousing operations.

As well as boosting efficiency, the plan also demonstrated how the arrangement would minimise Sainsbury's impact on the environment and cut congestion in the capital through improved store delivery schedules.

Wincanton chief executive Eric Born said: "We have a strong pedigree of operating within the UK grocery retail environment and believe our extensive knowledge will continue to offer exciting opportunities for new

and potential customers as we evolve our approach to supply chain management to meet the demands of today's challenging market environment."

Sainsbury's director of logistics operations Chris Marrow added: "Wincanton has a reputation for not only providing excellent customer service, but also for creating innovative and market-leading solutions that enhance and complement their customers' operations."

Smiths scoops government quality award

Swindon-based newspaper and magazine distributor Smiths News has been awarded the Silver Government Quality Mark Award for its Payroll Giving scheme, which enables staff give a regular monthly donation to charity via their pay.

The symbol of excellence is only awarded to businesses offering and actively promoting the Payroll Giving scheme to its employees. Smiths News communications executive Rebecca Hedges said:

"Qualifying for the Silver Award is a great achievement. It just shows how well our employees have responded to the scheme." The firm now has more than 5 per cent of its 4,200 employees giving through their pay.

The Quality Mark and Awards scheme is funded by the Government and recognises and rewards businesses for making Payroll Giving available to staff.

More information is available at: www.payrollgivingcentre.org.uk

IT playing an integral role in growing and moving logistics into new markets

Information technology is playing an ever-increasing role in the logistics sector and for Swindon-based SKU Logistics it is enabling the business to continue to grow and move into new markets.

The firm operates from an 80,000 sq ft modern warehouse on Swindon's Europa Park from where it offers very flexible storage and fulfilment services for customers of all sizes.

Originally a subsidiary of Swindon-based newspaper, magazine and book distributor Smiths News, it has been taken private but has been able to leverage the significant investment its former parent company put into its IT capability.

That has enabled it to boast accurate and efficient processing of high volumes of individual units in a data-rich environment driven by robust systems.

A spokesman said: "The company is driven by our in-house IT capability which enables us to quickly and competitively design and implement handling operations to accommodate our customer demands."

"This core knowledge enables us to provide tailor-made solution to the most complex handling requirements. We have combined this systems knowledge with a high level of understanding of the online market place to be able to offer a holistic solution to online retailing."

"At SKU Logistics our philosophy is to work with our customers to ensure we fully understand their business requirements thus enabling us to deliver every order to their exact specification."

SKU's in-house IT capability enables the firm to quickly design and implement the most complex handling operations.

Not only does the system ensure extremely high picking accuracy, as every product is scanned as it leaves the warehouse, but it also provides full visibility to the customer.

"No matter where our clients are in the world, they are able to access a suite of comprehensive real-time reports through a secure online login, enabling them to view every single activity or transaction to ensure they

have full control over their business," said the spokesman.

SKU Logistics have combined this experience in online sales fulfilment with its sister business The Returns Company and can now offer the ability to receive, process and sell online returns and end of line stock.

Its website www.skusales.co.uk has top-rated seller status on ebay and 100 per cent positive feedback through Amazon.

For more information contact Tim Wait at tim.wait@sku.co.uk or call us on 01793 825465.

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MAN Truck & Bus saddling-up for Transaid

As part of its 20th anniversary celebrations, MAN is saddling-up for a charity bike ride on Saturday June 23rd. Everyone is welcome to take part as MAN seeks to make this a truly successful event.

The family fun day out will raise much-needed funds for MAN's transport charity partner, Transaid. MAN has supported Transaid for well over 10 years now, and in 2012 the aim is to raise over £30,000 for transport needs in developing countries.

Happy anniversary

Over the last 20 years, MAN Truck & Bus UK has established itself as a major player in the highly competitive UK commercial vehicle market. With a 13% market share, MAN boasts a UK network of 69 dedicated dealerships. And, with seven International Truck of the Year awards under its belt, MAN is also recognised as a leading exponent of the latest manufacturing technology, producing some of the safest, most economical and reliable trucks available today.

On your bike

Four routes have been laid out for the MAN / Transaid charity bike ride – a 40-miler for the more serious cyclist, two off-road routes of 35 and 20 miles, and, for families, a less strenuous seven mile route.



Win, win, win!

There's also a chance to win two top quality MAN mountain bikes! You can

either enter the raffle (winner to be drawn on 23rd June, with various other prizes on offer) or, you can win a mountain bike by raising the highest

amount of money for Transaid. Contact lucy.haywood@man.eu for more information. Go to: www.20yearcyclride.man.co.uk to

download entry forms, participant packs and to learn more about Transaid's life-saving work. Book your places now to join in.



SADDLE-UP FOR TRANSAID

Join us for a charity bike-ride around Swindon on Saturday, 23rd June

WIN WIN WIN



Two fantastic full-suspension MAN mountain bikes are up for grabs.

There are two ways to win:

- Just drop in at MAN in Swindon to buy a raffle ticket, or contact lucy.haywood@man.eu. The winner will be drawn at random and will be announced after 5pm, 23rd June. Further prizes include tickets to Newbury Races, MAN merchandise and runners-up prizes.
- Raise as much money as you can for Transaid. Whoever raises the most, wins a bike!

As part of MAN Truck & Bus UK's 20th anniversary celebrations, we're saddling-up for a fun-filled charity bike-ride around Wiltshire. Our aim is to raise £30,000 for Transaid; money to fund a variety of essential transport projects in Africa, helping bring relief to communities and improving the quality of life for thousands of families.

There are four routes; for the serious rider, there is a forty mile road route. There are two off-road routes of 35 and 20 miles. Or, if you'd like to include the family, or just fancy something less strenuous, there is also a seven mile route. Whichever you choose, Saturday 23rd June is the date when you can join hundreds of other riders, and help make a real difference to the lives of the poor and needy in Africa.

For an entry form and participant pack, please go to: www.20yearcyclride.man.co.uk

MAN Truck & Bus UK Ltd., Frankland Rd, Blagrove, Swindon, SN5 8YU



Office building bought by nursing firm

First City Nursing Services, the Swindon-based care and nursing staff agency, has bought Rowan House, a two-storey office building in Stratton St. Margaret, from Avon & Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership.

The business, which supplies nurses and care assistants for private individuals' home care and to nursing and care homes, is to use the 2,353 sq ft building as a head office and training centre for its 400 staff.

Property agent Keningtons' Swindon office acted for the Partnership, which sold Rowan House as part of its strategy to reduce the size of its estate to make revenue savings and to modernise services.

Keningtons partner Jeremy Sutton said a number of inquiries were received for a variety of uses for the building, which is close to the Sandlewood Court hospital complex. First City, previously based in Victoria Road, bought it following a best-bid process.

First City operations director Stephen Trowbridge added: "We have been looking to purchase a freehold office property for some time but wanted something which would give us our own identity."

"First City has gone from strength to strength over the past two years, providing health and social care services to individuals in their own homes as well as short and long-term staffing solutions to establishments around Swindon and Wiltshire."

A sister Company, First City Training, is one of Swindon's sector-based work academies with Government contracts to offer apprenticeships to young people looking for a career in care."

Keningtons was instructed by Capita Symonds, retained property consultants for Avon & Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership.

UK town centre developments are being delayed, according to research

More than four in 10 town centre redevelopments in England and Wales are delayed, halted or permanently stalled, new research shows.

At the same time a third of councils have no schemes planned at all.

These initial findings emerge from a survey of local authorities by property adviser GVA. Its latest research bulletin, Unlocking Town Centre Retail Developments, shows a number of common factors are responsible for the delays including development viability (in 45% of cases), problems with site assembly (28%), weak occupier demand (23%) and problems with development financing (21%).

The survey also shows that, of the schemes progressing with an original opening date, almost three quarters are anchored by a food store.

Matthew Morris, director of planning, development and regeneration at GVA's Bristol office, said: "These findings illustrate the significant challenges that both local authorities and the private sector are

facing while trying to progress retail-led town centre development.

"Here in the South West there are major live schemes in Gloucester and Weston-super-Mare but we have also seen stalled schemes in towns such as Yeovil.

"However, the picture is not all doom and gloom. Councils have indicated that they are looking at a range of options in order to keep schemes on track, including revisions to the size or mix of development, as well as considering alternative funding methods.

"The food store sector is clearly playing an important role in supporting town centre schemes and is becoming increasingly common in order to ensure a strong occupier covenant.

"The crisis faced by many town centres and how to revive them, has been extensively debated over recent months. The Portas Review made a series of sensible recommendations, most of which have been adopted by ministers."

However, according to GVA's report, the measures recommended

by Portas are mainly palliative, and do not address the reasons why so many town centres are failing to achieve the meaningful new development and investment needed to secure their future. Matthew added: "The Government has restated the longstanding "town centres first" planning policy, but the clear focus of development activity remains out of centre, to complement on-line sales growth. Unless there is a pipeline of suitable, viable and available town centre opportunities, and the Government enforces its policies, this trend will accelerate.

"Given the critical importance of new investment in our town centres, it is vital that existing and new opportunities are re-evaluated. It is too early to write off our town centres as being in a "death spiral", but for some that is a very real risk without urgent action."

The survey results and GVA's latest research bulletin which explores how successful retail development can be promoted and delivered, is available from www.gva.co.uk

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Footfall up in Swindon despite April showers

Swindon was one of a handful of towns which found a silver lining in the April rain clouds with footfall up year-on-year, despite the April washout.

Springboard, the UK's leading retail insights specialists, reveals the most 'rain resistant' UK towns and cities, with Swindon standing up strong against the national figures with a 5.5% retail footfall increase year-on-year against a scorching April in 2011. The town was second only to Rotherham – the South Yorkshire town achieved a 8.8% increase.

Springboard research director Diane Wehrle said: "Swindon is showing that it is possible to buck the trend and grow the footfall onto the high street, in spite of economic turmoil and turbulent weather. There's no doubt it's been a tough quarter so hopefully things will be even better for Swindon over the next few months."

InSwindon chief executive Simon Jackson added: "A sustained campaign of events and activity, along with a reduced car parking rate of £2 for four hours have certainly been factors in achieving these very pleasing figures. Swindon town centre is a work in progress, and there

is still a lot more work to do, but it is encouraging to know that we are moving in the right direction."

As well as the popular car parking initiative and events programme, Swindon's success is also due to a number of visible improvements in the town centre. A new cosmopolitan look and feel and the arrival of London 2012 Olympic branding has made Swindon town centre considerably more appealing to shoppers – as borne out by these figures. This summer has already seen a screening of the popular opera La Bohème on the Big Screen and the arrival of the Olympic Torch Relay.

Steve Booth, CEO of Springboard, said: "These towns and cities are setting an example to retail centres across UK. Tactics to turn around their performance including enhancing the retail offering and hosting community events have clearly paid off with a trend for growing footfall over the past few months."

With the DCLG initiatives giving town teams the impetus to think about how they can improve town centre performance, now is the time to look at the success stories and ask how we can replicate their achievements elsewhere."

Haboakus suspends second housing plan in Swindon

Haboakus, the pioneering eco-home developer backed by Grand Designs presenter Kevin McCloud, has suspended plans for its second project in Swindon – a 240-home scheme at Gorse Hill.

The firm, which developed the award-winning 42-home Triangle scheme off Northern Road, said the Gorse Hill project had been halted following detailed discussions with Swindon Council.

The scheme has been strongly criticised by local people who claim it would block an access road covered by a 75-year-old covenant.

The council will now have to undertake a formal consultation to resolve the issue and decide what should be done with the land.

Project director Simon McWhirter at Haboakus, a joint venture between Mr McCloud's HAB (Happiness –

Architecture – Beauty) Housing company and Swindon-based Green Square housing association, said legal and financial issues contributed to its decision, adding: "not least that it is unlikely a scheme could be delivered in time to secure the necessary grant funding currently available from the Homes and Communities Agency".

He continued: "We are very disappointed that our proposals won't come to fruition as we still believe they offer major benefits to the community through the provision of very high quality housing, an improved park, and significant job and training opportunities for local people."

"We are committed to continue working with Swindon Council to provide the new homes – particularly affordable housing – new jobs, and community facilities badly needed in Swindon."



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In Gear



From left: Nathan Lawson and Dom Threlfall

Local apprentice wins national award

Pebley Beach apprentice Nathan Lawson has scooped top honours at the Suzuki UK Apprentice of the Year Championships.

Nathan, 21, from Cheney Manor, Swindon, is in his third and final year of his technician apprenticeship with Suzuki and Pebley Beach.

Having beaten the rest of his intake year at Suzuki's training academy to claim the title of Third Year Technician Apprentice of the Year, he then went head to head with two other Suzuki apprentices.

All three contenders were nominated for their excellent exam results, quality of work, portfolio progress and overall attitude.

They were given three practical tasks to complete – diagnosing a problem with an engine, a full calibrated brake inspection and a valve clearance.

For each problem the apprentices were judged on their technical and mechanical knowledge, success in diagnosing problems, how they used Suzuki's computer system and following the instructions.

Nathan landed the top award for his 'sound understanding of the job and logical approach' and because he 'approached the job like a time-served technician with a clear understanding of process', said the judges.

Nathan, the fifth Pebley Beach apprentice to win Apprentice of the Year, said: "I didn't expect to get through to the practical side of the competition, so was surprised when I found out. It was definitely an exciting day and I enjoyed the tasks as well as meeting lots of people from across Suzuki."

He chose an apprenticeship because he wanted a trade, a decent job and qualifications at the same time as earning, he said.

"I always knew a hands-on training route would suit me better than going to university and that there's always going to be a need for mechanics.

"Pebley Beach was also always my first-choice employer for my apprenticeship as the team is really friendly, everyone is recognised as a valuable member of the team and we all feel important to the company – I've found this to be the same approach at Suzuki as well."

Nathan's apprenticeship involved block placements at Suzuki's state-of-the-art training academy in Ruddington, Nottinghamshire.

Pebley Beach employs 10 apprentices at its Swindon and Cirencester dealerships.

Managing director Dom Threlfall said: "Our apprentices are known for their skill and dedication, which is why we've got such a good track record in winning these top accolades.

"Nathan has a very promising future and we're very pleased to have him on board and as a permanent member of the team once he's completed his course later this year."

Pebley Beach, Swindon's Suzuki and Hyundai new and used car specialist, has showrooms at West Swindon Motor Park and Love Lane, Cirencester.

It also offers servicing, maintenance and repairs to all makes of cars.

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Three Swindon companies in running for prestigious West of England Business of the Year accolades

The three Swindon firms competing for this year's prestigious West of England Business of the Year Award will find out later this month if they have been successful.

Construction firm Beard, fast-growing oak furniture retailer JB Global, and newspaper, magazine and book distributor Smiths News make

up half the finalists for the award – the region's most prestigious business competition, which has been staged for 24 years by accountants PwC.

They are competing against Bristol subsea cabling firm Offshore Marine Management, Cornish brewer St Austell Brewery Company and Swallowfield, the Somerset-based cosmetic, personal care and

household goods manufacturer in the category for companies turning over more than £25m or with 100-plus employees.

Shortlisted in the category for businesses turning over less than £25m or employing fewer than 100 employees is Valldata Group, the Melksham-based outsourcing partner for the charity sector.

The winners will be announced at a gala dinner on June 20 at the Bristol Marriott City Centre Hotel which will be hosted by ITV West & Westcountry presenter Ian Axton.

This year the awards will be supporting the NSPCC, which is raising funds to open state-of-the-art service centres in Bristol, Plymouth and Swindon offering pioneering

programmes at the cutting edge of child protection.

Swindon Business News is supporting the Business of the Year Awards alongside its sister websites Bristol Business News and Bath Business News. Other supporters are Beacon South West, ITV West & Westcountry and the Western Daily Press.

New president for Swindon Chamber is appointed

Heydar Faramarzi, managing director of Swindon IT support and software services firm Emnico Technologies, has been elected the new president/lead ambassador of Swindon Chamber of Commerce.

Mr Faramarzi has worked for GEC Marconi in London as a software engineer, AT&T in New Jersey as a senior technical manager and Alcatel-Lucent in Swindon as a research and development director.

He takes over as president from Gary Mealing of HSBC.

Mr Faramarzi said: "Having been a Swindon Chamber

member for the past few years benefiting from its services, I will make every endeavour to further promote the chamber's vision and focus to help and support the business growth in Swindon.

"I intend to work with the local business community to grow the Chamber's presence and role as the hub for all sizes of business from sole traders to multi-nationals."

Paul Briggs, chief executive of Thames Valley Chamber, which includes the Swindon Chamber, said: "I look forward to working with Heydar and the chamber council to grow the chamber in the area in the coming months."



Last chance to enter the PA of the Year Awards

Businesses have just under two weeks to ensure their best personal assistants get the recognition they deserve in the inaugural South West PA of the Year Awards.

Most businesses have at least one PA who goes the extra mile to help it reach its potential, who makes a real difference to their managers and who plays a key role in delivering excellence in the workplace.

Swindon Business News and its sister websites Bristol Business News and Bath Business News, have teamed up with the luxury Ston Easton Park Hotel, near Bath, to stage the these prestigious wards – the first of their kind in the region.

The winners in the three categories will receive an amazing range of prizes, including theatre tickets, luxury spa sessions, tickets to Ballet in the Park at Ston Easton, voice training and a business dress consultation as well as a unique Bristol Blue Glass trophy.

The closing date for entries is June 25 and the awards will be presented at a showpiece ceremony at Ston Easton Park on July 4

following a champagne tea on the hotel's beautiful terrace.

There are three categories:

- * PA of the Year
- * Newcomer of the Year (Open to those who have been employed in a PA role for less than two years as of June 25, 2012)
- * Best event organised by a PA (Entries valid for events between January 2011-June 2012)

Swindon Business News has assembled a top team of business experts as the judges for the PA Awards including:

Peaches Golding, former High Sheriff of Bristol and principal consultant at Moon Consulting executive recruitment & business consulting

Angela MacAusland of PA firm AMPMPA
Dawn Carey, Executive Personal Assistant at National Friendly and Hayes PA of the Year winner 2010

Linda Williams, sales manager at Ston Easton Park Hotel
Anita Jaynes, Swindon Business News business development manager

The full list of prizes are:

A three-hour evening spa session at Thermae Bath Spa for two people, including

- Complimentary use of towel, robe & slippers for two
- Two one-course meals from the Twilight menu, with two complementary glasses of house wine, beer or soft drinks.

Two tickets to a meeting at Bath Racecourse
Complimentary cocktails and canapés at Circo Bar, Bath

Two tickets to see Hysteria on August 8 Ustinov Theatre, Bath
A spa day for two at The Royal Crescent Hotel's Bath House

Two tickets to see Covent Garden Dance Company's Ballet in the Park at Ston Easton Park on July 20 or 21.
http://www.stoneaston.co.uk/events

Business dress consultation with Suit the City and a discount off a purchase of your choice

Voice/telephony training by Joanne Crosse at MetaMedia.

For more details on the awards, sponsorship opportunities and information on how to enter go to www.swindon-business.net

South West of England PA of the Year Awards

*Calling all PAs and their
bosses . . .*

*We are seeking the region's
top PAs*

Date: July 4, 2012 Venue: Ston Easton Park Hotel

**For full details go to:
swindon-business.net**



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