

SWINDON BUSINESS NEWS

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**Just the job -
Swindon MPs visit
apprenticeship
scheme
Page 11**

从斯温顿走向世界 (From Swindon to the World)

See our three-page export feature P9-11

**The Business Show
Swindon review -
The perfect platform
for growth
Page 3**



News in Brief

Swindon Business News enters the Twittersphere

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Exclusive Budget analysis

Swindon Business News has teamed up with accountants Monahans to deliver a comprehensive package of Budget analysis, comment and news. Visit: www.swindon-business.net for more details.

Data centre launched

Emnico Technologies has launched a UK based data centre facility. The centre is located on ex-Ministry of Defence land to accommodate the strong demand for co-location from the internet and enterprise markets as well as providing additional capacity for its own ever expanding network.

Emnico's newest offering is based at a sophisticated multi million pound facility and now provides the most advanced data centre facilities in the area.

Coming up in April

April's Swindon Business News will include special features focusing on business recovery and finance for growing businesses. We will also analyse Swindon's economy as the town starts to emerge from the downturn and kick off a new, monthly series of articles highlighting apprenticeships, as well as our regular overviews of the commercial property, corporate finance and commercial law scenes.

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Swindon joins Bristol and Cardiff to get economic development back on track

The successful lobbying campaign by councils and business groups in Swindon, Bristol and Cardiff to get electrification of the Great Western railway line could lead to the three working closer together on wider economic development issues.

Swindon Borough Council has signed an agreement with the local authorities in Bristol and Cardiff to push for a greater say in key economic issues affecting the West of England and South Wales.

The three fear that, as Government spending cuts bite, scarce resources for economic development will go to Northern cities.

Swindon, Bristol and Cardiff share a number of key factors including economies based predominantly on financial services and advanced engineering. Together they create an economic powerhouse along the M4 corridor and Great Western railway line which can rival the successful economy of the South East.

The exact remit of the link-up has yet to be fixed but all three councils see it as vital to their future growth.

It has already helped force the

Government into a U-turn over electrification of the main London-Cardiff railway line through Swindon.

The move has the potential to deliver a major economic boost to all three places, cutting journey times and acting as a spur to attract inward investment.

After intense lobbying by the councils and business groups, including GWE Business West and Swindon Chamber of Commerce, Transport Secretary Philip Hammond reversed a last year's decision that long-awaited electrification would be shunted into the sidings.

Swindon Council leader Roderick Bluh said: "This is really excellent news and I'm very pleased the Government has listened to our arguments. It is something that will have a very positive effect on Swindon and the whole region. We know that one of the key ways to improve economic development is to improve transport"

Bristol City Council leader Barbara Janke added: "The three cities of Cardiff, Swindon and Bristol have lobbied hard to make this case, and I look forward to building on these links

with much closer collaboration on economic issues in the future."

Gary Mealing, president of the Swindon Chamber of Commerce added: "Improving the connectivity of Swindon with other major centres is key priority in our bid to attract more business to take advantage of Swindon as a great place to locate your business. Reducing the journey time into London to less than one hour while also improving the reliability and efficiency of the services will be a significant step forward."

Last year the South West Regional Development Agency estimated that electrification of the London to



Swindon Council leader, Roderick Bluh

Cardiff rail route could boost the regional economy by £120m a year.

Electrification will deliver key benefits to passengers including increased seating capacity from the space released by no longer having on-board diesel engines and fuel tanks. Electric trains are quieter and emit less pollution. They are also more reliable than diesel-powered trains.

The Great Western line is one of the UK's busiest, serving a population of around 4.5 million with an economic output of some £92 billion. However, it is the UK's longest non-electrified rail route and average journey times to London are currently around 20 minutes slower now than in the 1970s. Rolling stock used on the line is 30 years old.

The cost of travelling between Swindon to London by train at short notice is the highest in Europe at 70p per mile.

Staff check service goes live for Wiltshire firms

Time and attendance systems group Isys is offering local firms the chance to be the first to benefit from a pioneering service aimed at stopping illegal immigrants working in the UK.

Swindon-based Isys has adapted technology used to verify documents at airports and borders to create a service which allows employers to validate the identity and therefore the right to work of potential employees.

Developed in conjunction with the UK Borders Agency, ISS Facility Management and 3M, Isys's Intelligent Document Checker scans the employee's passport, visa and other documents to carry out checks on its UV images, infra-red, photos, MRZ (machine readable zones), paper type, ink, font and other aspects which identify forgeries.

These are then compared against a library of thousands of documents to identify the type of document and validate its authenticity.

The results are not given to the employee but loaded to a secure hosted database that the employer can access.

Finding out whether overseas workers are in the UK legally can be difficult and time consuming, particularly for small employers.

Recently Swindon's Designer Outlet Village was raided and three illegal workers identified. In 2009 the UK Border Agency imposed fines of more than £22m on firms employing illegal workers. Penalties start at



£10,000 per illegal.

Isys is offering Wiltshire firms the chance to send a current or potential employee to its offices in Churchward House to have their documents verified using this technology.

Isys will also provide employment agencies or contractor's letters of accreditation that they can pass onto clients in order to prove the agency or contractor has been verified as having the right to work in the UK.

Isys development manager Malcolm Budinger said: "This is an extremely serious issue and we are very pleased that we are able to provide local companies with a low-cost method of identifying fraudulent and illegal workers."

For more details go to www.isys-group.co.uk/ukdc

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SWINDON BUSINESS NEWS

26 Wood Street, Swindon
Wiltshire SN1 4AB

Telephone: 01793 615393

Fax: 01793 488517

Email: info@swindon-business.net

Web: www.swindon-business.net

Editor: Robert Buckland

Production Editor: Owen Fishwick

Advertising Manager: Ann Freegard

Administrator: Jackie Hall

Controlled circulation: In excess of
8,000 copies per month

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Published by County Business Publishing Ltd.
Printed by Acorn Press

County Business Publishing also publishes a range of business leads newsletters: Swindon Business Newsletter; Bristol Business Newsletter; and South West Business Media, as well as Estates West Bulletin, a property deals newsletter. If you are interested in receiving a free sample please telephone 01793 615393.

Swindon BusinessNews

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Events

• Business Development Group in Brinkworth
When: **15 March, 7:30am**
Where: Brinkworth House
Contact: 01707 644822

• St Margaret's Prep School, open morning
When: **17 March, 9:30am**
Where: St Margaret's, Calne
Contact: 01249 857379

• Swindon Business Breakfast
When: **18 March, 7:30am**
Where: Swindon Marriott
Contact: David Plunkett on 07834 869562

• Swindon Business Leader's Forum
When: **25 March, 9:30am**
Where: Alexandra House
Contact: David Plunkett on 07834 869562

• The Power of Marketing
When: **31 March, 9am-5pm**
Where: Renovation Centre, Swindon
Contact: 01628 427340

• Growth Club Workshop
When: **1 April**
Where: Alexandra House, Wroughton
Contact: 01672 512001

• Swindon Mindful Employer Network - One-off CIPD session
When: **4 April**
Where: Swindon Marriott
Contact: 07747122767
swindoncipd@hotmail.co.uk

• NRG Business Network
When: **5 April**
Where: Swindon Marriott
Contact: Martin Davies on 0845 4080 639 or email: md@nrg-networks.com

• Seminar: Negotiating and signing contracts, guest speaker Dr Maria Anassutzi
When: **14 April, 9:30am and 12:30 pm**
Where: Broome Manor Golf Club
Contact: 07788 726446
Email: maria@anassutzi.com

Contacts

Forward Swindon
01793 429250

SWRDA
01392 214 747

GWE Business West
08458 505066

Swindon Council
01793 445500

Business Link
0845 600 9966

Wiltshire Council
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People

Andrea Williams has been appointed to the new position of sales director at

Swindon-based IT recruitment company Outsource UK.

The directorship has been created to develop the fast-growing business further as it looks to expand through both organic growth and acquisitions. Andrea has nearly two decades' experience in recruitment. Her last role was as managing director of an Australian recruitment business in Hong Kong and she has experience of working in Asia and



Andrea Williams

the UK. Outsource UK has become the 174th largest recruitment company in the UK, out of some 7,400, and was recently ranked ninth in The Recruiter's league table of the 50 fastest-growing recruitment companies. Andrea said: "In the short-term I am looking to restructure the company so that our excellent team has an improved career structure." Andrea joins managing director Paul Jameson and finance director Sandie Gale on the Outsource UK board.

Bart Beckers has taken over from Jean Marc Torre as the chief executive officer of fleet management company, Arval. Mr Torre spent five years at the firm and is now moving on to join the Bank of the West. Mr Beckers has experience in many high-level roles in Europe, such as chairman of French-based LeasePlan.

The first Chair of the recently formed Swindon Public Sector Forum has been announced. Nicola Houwayek who is Head of Human Resources, Business Transformation at Swindon Borough Council will help develop the fledgling organisation over the coming months.

The Forum was formed from the highly successful Swindon Mindful Employer Network which is managed by Richmond Fellowship Wiltshire and funded by NHS Swindon. The aims of the Forum are to support the public sector during a period of transformation and change particularly on issues relating to employee mental health and well-being. Nicola has worked at Swindon Borough Council for six years and is delighted by her new role with the Forum.

Car dealer Mercedes-Benz of Swindon has named local corporate manager Mike Humber its Employee of the Quarter for selling 190 cars to business clients of the Drakes Way showroom last year. Mike, who has worked at the dealership for 16 years, said his success was due to the extensive model range and the realisation among business drivers that Mercedes-Benz cars are more affordable than many think if whole life costs, economy and the tax implications of low emissions are taken into account. He added that the expansion of Mercedes-Benz's BlueEfficiency engine range, which uses advanced technology to lower fuel consumption and emissions, is



Mike Humber and Mike Fellows

proving increasingly attractive for company car drivers. Mike was presented with his award by Mercedes-Benz of Swindon managing director Mike Fellows. He said: "Mike's knowledge of the brand is second to none and his expertise and passion for Mercedes-Benz makes him stand out as a high performer and key team player at Swindon. "He had a superb year in 2010 and the challenge is to beat 200 cars this year in this important market sector." Mercedes-Benz of Swindon is owned by the Synter Group, which has more than 140 dealerships across the UK.

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Success for Business Show Swindon

GWE Business West is to make its Business Show Swindon an annual event after the outstanding success of last month's inaugural show.

More than 500 people attended the show at the town's STEAM museum and the 80 exhibitors were delighted with the lively atmosphere of the event.

The show, sponsored by Lloyds TSB Commercial, was the first in Swindon for around 10 years and also featured a topical seminar programme covering subjects such as social media, networking, marketing, intellectual property and funding for growth.

Feedback from exhibitors was positive and three have already booked for next year.

Julie Margerum, managing director of Swindon-based Vox PR said: "There is a real need for this type of event in Swindon and it's really great that GWE Business West is supporting and showcasing local businesses."

Chris Hitchings, director of development at economic development body Forward Swindon, said "It was very busy with lots of noise which means people doing lots of business." Oliver



◀ From left: Ian Larrard, director GWE Business West Swindon, Nicky Alberry, chairman, GWE Business West, Phil Smith, managing director GWE Business West and Tim Burden, international manager, Lloyds TSB bank

Payne of Bruck Payne Associates, the Wootton Bassett-based recruitment, human resource and psychometrics company, found exhibiting particularly beneficial.

"This is the first time that we have exhibited as a company. We were aiming at increasing brand awareness and are delighted with the number of good leads that we have received. Its very encouraging and we are keen to exhibit at future GWE Business West shows."

For sponsors Lloyds TSB Bank, the show delivered on its promises.

Mark French, area director for Lloyds TSB Commercial in Gloucester and Oxon, said: "We are very proud to have sponsored the Business Show Swindon. It was well attended, well organised and a great opportunity for local businesses to network with peers in the area."

- The parliamentary researcher to both of Swindon's MPs will be a guest at next month's Swindon Mindful Employer Network conference. Chris Van Roon will join mental health campaigner Jonathan Naess of Stand to Reason and Swindon Advertiser editor Dave King to discuss the issues relating to the stigma and fear of mental illness at the event, which takes place at the Swindon Marriott on April 4.

- Chippenham-based Wilts, the UK's largest independent electrical wholesaler, has teamed up with Insurantz.com to offer customers business insurance at a discounted rate. Customers applying for a quote via the link www.wilts.co.uk/insurance can benefit from five per cent off their vehicle insurance and 10 per cent off their tradesman insurance. The policy bundles the main cover needs of tradesmen in a single, low cost insurance package.

IT recruitment firm achieves 'audited status'

Fast-growing IT recruitment firm Outsource UK has become one of only four IT specialists to gain audited status with the Recruitment and Employment Confederation (REC), the industry's governing body.

Only 54 UK firms have REC accreditation and, of those, just four, including Outsource, are IT recruitment specialists.

All the Swindon firm's processes and practices were scrutinised by REC's auditor to ensure they are fully compliant with the requirements of the Employment Agencies Act, the Employment Business Act, the REC's Code of Professional Conduct and general business practice.

Outsource managing director Paul Jameson said: "The audit was very vigorous, but it has to be.

"We are delighted with the outcome, which we feel shows that the way we do business is head and shoulders above many others in our industry."

REC represents the UK's £19.7

billion private recruitment industry and has nearly 3,700 companies as corporate members.

Outsource, which provides permanent, contract and interim IT personnel to a range of industries nationwide, has been a member since 1996.

REC chief executive Kevin Green said: "Congratulations to Outsource for achieving audited status which shows they are performing to the highest standards of good practice to which all our members continuously strive."

Earlier this month Outsource achieved ninth place in Recruiter magazine's Fast 50 league table. It was also awarded preferred partner status with one of the world's leading managed service companies, Advantage XPO. The company is in the Sunday Time's Virgin Fast Track 100 league table of independent fast-growing companies and Paul Jameson is the current Wiltshire Business's Businessperson of the Year.



From left: REC chief executive Kevin Green presents Outsource managing director Paul Jameson with 'audited status' accreditation

IT specialist launches VoIP service

IT specialist firm Multidata Broadband has unveiled a voice over internet protocol (VoIP) service which it claims is much more versatile and cheaper for businesses than similar systems as users do not need a computer.

Called Sipstream, the service uses VoIP-enabled phones and so has a call quality as clear as a regular landline or mobile service. However, set-up and recurring costs are greatly reduced and calls between other users of the Sipstream service are free and as there is no line rental, the system is far quicker to install.

Nigel Beasant, managing director of Shrivenham-based Multidata Broadband (MDBB), said: "It's a great service, which, in common with other VoIP systems, enables people to talk to each other over the internet.

"The major advantage with our service

is that users don't need a computer. They just need a special VoIP enabled phone, which we supply as part of the installation, and access to a good quality broadband." Sipstream can also be used with an iPhone or other smartphone by downloading a softphone App.

One of



Managing director of Multidata Broadband, Nigel Beasant

Sipstream's first customers, Swindon-based Naturebotts, says the system has already proved a big boost.

Naturebotts, which supplies eco-friendly baby products, needed a phone system installed quickly when it was relocating to Swindon from Andover.

Joint founder and managing director Penny Bowen said the system is also particularly cost-effective as they need to regularly talk to a co-director in Costa Rica.

With our service is that users don't need a computer. They just need a special VoIP enabled phone, which we supply as part of the installation, and access to a good quality broadband

"Trading is tough as everyone knows, so any efficiencies that can be gained are welcome," she said. "The fact that any of our remote workers, including the director based in Costa Rica, can make free on-net calls is saving us a lot of money."

Another customer is Edge Media, a marketing and design agency based in Dursley, Gloucestershire, which specialises in the education sector. Director Paul Herbert used Sipstream to replace an existing VoIP system which had proved unreliable.

"We liked the economies of the VoIP system but needed one which was secure. MDBB already provided our ISP so we asked them to help.

"The call quality is as good as a regular service and I really like the fact that I can use the App on my iPhone anywhere and be part of the VoIP system."

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The Property People

A courtroom full of tweets and pokes

Journalists, the public and legal teams have recently been given the thumbs up to use Twitter and email in England's highest court, the Supreme Court. In a sign that the courts really are moving with the times, these communication channels will now be allowed in almost all cases.

Chris Kane, a partner in the Corporate Dispute Resolution team at Withy King Solicitors in Swindon, and an accredited mediator, explores the issues:

Twitter is a social networking platform which allows users to share news, views and opinions in 140 characters or less. There was some concern that allowing these instantaneous communication platforms in court would influence jurors or witnesses.

However, the Supreme Court is the final court of appeal for all United Kingdom civil cases and criminal cases for England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Cases do not involve witnesses or jurors so there is no danger of them being influenced by tweets or emails sent directly from the courtroom.

Allowing the use of Twitter and email means that news of the latest legal rulings by the Supreme Court on matters of public and constitutional importance can be spread almost instantaneously.

The use of Twitter in the courtroom came to the forefront following the bail



Chris Kane

The Supreme Court's recent endorsement follows a trend of a growing willingness by the courts to embrace the use of social media such as Twitter and Facebook and to recognise that these are increasingly the mediums that individuals use to communicate.

In Australia and New Zealand, the courts have granted permission for service of court documents via Facebook in recognition of the fact that the documents would come to the attention of the defendants via this medium.

In line with this trend, the English High Court has also permitted the service of an injunction via Twitter. In that case, the anonymous defendant was impersonating the claimant on

Farepak directors to face legal proceedings

Directors of Farepak, the Swindon Christmas hamper firm that collapsed in 2006, are facing legal proceedings to ban them from holding directorships.

The Insolvency Service lodged an application in the High Court on behalf of Business Secretary Vince Cable. The order describes the nine directors as "unfit to be concerned in the management of a company".

The directors have said they will fight the action. They include former CBI president Sir Clive Thompson, who has sat on the board of six FTSE-100 companies, including Rentokil where he was chief executive. If successful, the disqualifications could run for as long as 15 years.

Around 122,000 Farepak customers lost £38 million when the firm went bust shortly before Christmas, with the average saver losing around £400. So far they have received back around 17.5p in the pound.

Last year they heard they would receive a further 15p in the pound after Farepak's joint liquidators BDO announced that an action against the directors of Farepak had been settled for £4 million, with no admission of liability by the directors.

Philip Banks-Welsh, partner at law firm Withy King, said action against directors is not uncommon – there have been 9,600 cases since 1986. But given the circumstances of Farepak's failure, this is one of the most high profile cases for years.

The directors could reach an out-of-court agreement under which they effectively disqualify themselves without the case being fully heard, he said.

Seminar to help bosses with contracts

With managers and business owners increasingly involved in negotiating and signing contracts, a seminar taking place in Swindon next month will help anyone in this position understand the key points of commercial contracts.

Staged by Swindon-based legal support firm Anassutzi & Co, the half-day event on April 14 will focus on the needs of business people dealing with contracts in a fast, effective and clear way.

It is aimed at managers without formal legal training who have to deal with commercial contracts, building their confidence and helping them get to grips with the legal documents more quickly and effectively. This will help them save costs as they can then work more efficiently with their legal advisers.

The speaker will be Dr Maria Anassutzi, an intellectual property specialist lawyer with wide experience in general corporate commercial law. She has held senior positions both in-house with Vodafone and in private practice, including as partner and head of intellectual property and IT at a central London law firm.

The seminar takes place between 9am and 12.30pm at Broome Manor Golf Club, Pipers Way.

Email maria@anassutzi.com or call +44(0)7788726446 for more information.

Morris Owen looks at the Plumbing tax safe plan

Corporate finance specialist Morris Owen comments on the latest HMRC changes to tax.

Those working in the plumbing, heating or gas installation trades be warned – HM Revenue & Customs have you in their sights. This is the latest industry to be targeted in the Revenue's fight against individuals under-declaring their income.

After months of research into those working and advertising in this industry, HM Revenue & Customs has announced that they have a good knowledge of those who should be disclosing income. With this in mind they have launched the collectively named 'Plumbers Tax Safe Plan' (PTSP). Under the plan, individuals working in the plumbing industry are getting a one off chance to tell the HM Revenue & Customs about any income they had not previously declared.

Where the HM Revenue & Customs should have been told about income but were not, any income tax, national insurance, interest and penalties will need to be paid – whether or not the PTSP is used. However, using PTSP allows the taxpayer to have some control over the penalties and payment plans.

Ellie Groves, tax consultant at Morris Owen comments "Similar schemes previously launched by the Revenue offered a sweetener to encourage voluntary disclosure, such as



Ellie Groves

setting a maximum penalty of 10 per cent or 20 per cent. PTSP does not do this. Instead you are being offered a reduction in the amount of the penalty compared to if the scheme was not used and the ability to spread and payments that need to be made"

The deadline for notifying HM Revenue & Customs that you wish to take part in the PTSP is the 31 May 2011 with the actual amounts of income needing to be declared by the 31 August 2011. For further information please contact Ellie Groves email: ellie.groves@morrisowen.com

The recent endorsement follows a trend of a growing willingness by the courts to embrace the use of social media such as Twitter and Facebook

hearings of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, which were naturally the subject of intense media interest. Following this, the Lord Chief Justice announced that permission to tweet and email in all courts in England would be considered on a case by case basis.

In practice, permission to tweet is likely to be allowed if it does not interfere with the proper administration of justice and provided the technology is unobtrusive, hand-held and virtually silent.

In this day and age where tweets, texts and emails can be sent at the drop of a hat from almost anywhere and can be accessed immediately on handheld phones, it is not surprising that the courts are embracing the fast developing medium of global IT communications technology and are recognising its benefits in encouraging open justice.

While it's unlikely that members of the general public will readily show up to a courtroom to find out how justice works, social media tools such as Twitter, which are easily accessible and wide reaching, are potentially powerful tools which can be used to enlighten the public about how the court system works.

Twitter and there was no easy means of identifying him. However, it was clear that the defendant could be contacted via his account on Twitter and the injunction would come to his attention if he was served in this way.

The court's approval of service via Facebook and Twitter in the above cases is not only practical, but is cost effective given that service in this way is quick and cheap.

The willingness of the court system to adapt and respond to new technologies shows that the courts may, at least in some ways, be moving with the times. So the next time you happen to be in court and feel like giving the Judge a 'poke', you might just be able to!

Chris Kane is a partner in Withy King's dispute resolution team which deals with commercial disputes and insolvency issues, working closely with the firm's property, licensing, commercial and employment teams. You can rely on our expertise to find pragmatic solutions to your commercial disputes – whatever their size, nature or value. For further information about how we can help, please contact Chris Kane on 01793 536 526 or email: chris.kane@withyking.co.uk

a fresh take on business news

The Swindon Business News website now offers you a whole lot more than just a great informative place to keep up to date with the latest business information and local company news.

We now have a revamped website offering a full company directory with links and information provided.

We also hold all our current month's pages online with active links which can be viewed and downloaded.

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For further information or advice please contact

Withy King Solicitors

Swindon
01793 536526

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Why do organisations need women on their boards?

By Josie Payne, managing director, Bruck Payne Associates

Lord Davies was asked by Business Secretary Vince Cable and Minister for Women Teresa May last August to develop a strategy to increase the number of women on UK listed companies' boards.

They received more than 2,600 varied responses.

The obvious questions are: -

- Why is there a need for a greater gender mix on boards?
- Why are so few women attracted to this role?

- What do we need to do to attract women to what is predominantly a male reserve?

The culture of organisations can benefit from the more emotionally intelligent approach that women bring. There are plenty of men who would rather work the way that women do than the old macho, command-and-control, 'dog-eat-dog' places of work. Learning to influence and collaborate rather than trying to outwork their peers, creating the long-hours culture, which often destroys the family unit running roughshod over anyone that gets in the way.

What talented women are not attracted to are aggression, lack of feeling, hard-edged analytical skills, self-indulgence and second-rate business results. Talented women celebrate success because they stick to their principles and enjoy getting the work done.

Women are not attracted to businesses that are perceived to be



Josie Payne

greedy and where bullying thrives. Organisations where the vast number of the public distrust those in charge and where businesses are threatening our environment and consequently the future of our children. Women will simply walk away with distaste and loathing of cultures where work is measured by how tough you are, how many hours you work, where character is measured by aggression, where bullying earns respect, where living one's values is regarded as 'soft and fluffy' and that women are only good for one thing.

As a woman who has spent the past 20 years at the top of organisations, I don't think that good women are influenced by the gender mix. But they are influenced by the values and ethics of organisations. They will not tolerate bad behaviour and work habits that exclude the external lives and commitments of emotionally rich employees.

Those organisations that don't have a gender balance need to ask themselves why they have failed to attract female talent, and seek advice, probably from a woman!

Talented women are not attracted to aggression, lack of feeling, hard-edged analytical skills, self-indulgence and second-rate business results

Top result for leading West country ice cream business

Swindon corporate finance advisers, Watersheds, have recently secured a new equity investment into award winning Lovingtons Ice Cream Limited. The investment by one of the West Country's leading entrepreneurs will provide Lovingtons with working capital to expand its sale and marketing activity in order to capitalise on the burgeoning demand for its products.

Lovingtons, run by husband and wife team, Mike and Leila Gregory, makes an extensive range of high quality traditional ice creams and sorbets, produced from fresh, natural ingredients; sourced locally in the West Country wherever possible.

From its purpose built facilities in Castle Carey, Somerset, the company supplies ice cream to some of the South West's most prestigious visitor attractions and seaside resorts; even

providing much needed refreshment to the revellers at last year's Glastonbury festival.

Mike Gregory from Lovingtons commented: "We were delighted to work with Sue and her team in securing additional equity investment. Watersheds were instrumental in helping us choose the right person for us and making sure that all parties completed the deal in less than two months. We have strong plans to develop Lovingtons and can't wait to start!"

Sue Green from Watersheds commented: "It is always great to be able to work with a local business here in the South West and to help them grow and prosper. At a time when it is so difficult for small businesses to secure the funding they need to grow, it is hugely

rewarding to secure an investment like this into the company, and it speaks volumes about the quality of the business and the team at Lovingtons. I very much look forward to seeing Lovingtons realise its true potential moving forward and to enjoying lots more truly delicious ice cream."



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- The Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) has warned that proposed spot checks on company records could be used purely as a 'revenue raising exercise' by HMRC.

Under proposals set out in a consultation document, HMRC states that up to 50,000 small businesses will be targeted by HMRC agents in order to check that their business records meet minimum reporting standards. In the most serious cases, those who fail to comply with their record-keeping obligations may be liable to pay a penalty of up to £3,000.

However, the business lobby group said the consultation, which closed on 28 February, lacked information on how HMRC would choose businesses and carry out the checks.

Corporate finance team moves to Bristol offices

Business advisory firm Target Corporate Finance has expanded with the opening of new offices in Bristol. The firm, launched by managing director Mark Harman in 2005, is part of Bath-based Target Chartered Accountants. Mr Harman says the Bristol base is a key step in furthering its presence across the South West. Since its launch, Target has been active in Wiltshire and last year played a key role in the management buy-out of electrical engineering



From left: Mark Harman, managing director and founder of Target Corporate Finance and Jim Shaw, associate director

company Wheeler's. Target Corporate Finance specialises in advising owner-managed businesses across all areas of

corporate finance, with particular sector expertise in defence and national security, food and drink and green technology.

All change for retirement age

With the removal of the default retirement age later this year, Peta Fry, HR Solutions Director at Monahans, discusses some practical issues that companies should address.

- Consider if you still want a compulsory retirement age, and if you do, can you objectively justify it as a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.
- Review whether you have any employees approaching retirement age, decide if they can be given notice of retirement in line with the transitional arrangements and whether you want to do this.
- Look at your employee benefits and the likely costs of continuing these for employees 65 and over.
- Review employment contracts, policies and procedures and employee handbooks to see what amendments may be needed.
- Consider what training you and your managers need to be able to manage older workers.



- Consider the options of flexible working, thus retaining skills, knowledge and experience.
 - Communicate with employees and make decisions based on individual and business needs.
- The number of over 65-year-olds is expected to increase significantly over the next 50 years so this is an issue that can't be ignored.

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BATH, CHIPPENHAM, GLASTONBURY, SWINDON, TROWBRIDGE

Events firm wins gold at industry awards

Venues Event Management, the Swindon-based events company, has won gold at the Meetings and Incentive Travel Industry Awards for the third year running.

The firm collected the top prize in the category for Best Intermediary agency over 40 employees at the awards, which are staged by Meetings and Incentive Travel, one of the industry's most respected publications.

Its annual award ceremony, now in its 24th year, is the industry's oldest established awards programme and the only one with an independently-audited, democratic voting process to decide the winners. The votes are cast by thousands of event industry professionals for a number of categories.

Venues Event Management chief executive Anita Lowe said: "This year was tougher than ever as the organisers had revised the criteria for our category, making a lot more agencies eligible to enter."

Venues Event Management was launched by Anita in 1989 and has become one of the UK's leading providers of event management, conference placement, incentives and accommodation. Clients include BP/Castrol, Mercedes-Benz and Bupa.

RTS allows Swindon firms to be heard

Premier supplier of audio-visual hire equipment, RTS Communications, has expanded its operations into the South West with a new office and warehouse in Swindon.

RTS Communications is already an established provider of quality audio visual and conferencing equipment in London. The move into Swindon follows the company's expansion outside the capital and a series of new ongoing contract wins.

Able to provide a wide selection of top of the range equipment from its fully stocked warehouse in Swindon, RTS Communications has recognised the need for reliable, quality products supported by a professional, experienced team.

Swindon operations manager, Mike O'Sullivan, explained: "As the technology that people use in their own homes has become increasingly sophisticated, business users expectations of the AV equipment supplied to their conference or event are far greater than ever before."

"By using high quality, branded equipment, RTS can deliver the capability and reliability that you need to have full peace of mind."

RTS Communications can also help businesses meet their environmental and financial commitments by reducing travel and meeting costs through video conferencing.

For more information, contact RTS Communications on 01793 694470 or visit: www.rtscommunications.com/swindon

Vox PR scores a hat-trick of wins

Award winning public relations and marketing agency Vox PR has secured a trio of new contracts.

Children's educational charity, Jeans for Genes, has appointed Vox to handle regional, national and trade PR for its online education programme, Genes Are Us, and the free downloadable teaching resources it provides.

Vox will be running a campaign aimed at schools and teaching professionals to raise awareness of the causes and effects of genetic disorders, which are the biggest killer of children aged 14 and under, and to support fundraising by holding a Jeans for Genes day in October.

Vox will also be undertaking an integrated PR and marketing campaign for audio visual hire specialists, RTS Communications. Relatively new to the Swindon area, RTS Communications has expanded

Three companies sign up with Vox to help achieve their goals in business

from London and offers top quality hire services to companies and organisations looking for reliable AV conference and event support.

Time management will also be top of the agenda with Vox's third new win, Tempora. Tempora provides web-based time management software to the creative and professional sectors, which helps businesses ensure they are, and remain, profitable.

The system harnesses the power of cloud computing, meaning that it can be accessed securely from any computer, anywhere in the world. Vox will be managing business to business PR across the South West for Tempora.

Rebecca Ash, marketing manager for Jeans for Genes, commented: "Our schools website www.genesareus.org offers high quality resources to teachers for use across the curriculum. After launching the site two years ago we are really looking forward to working with Vox PR and taking the next step in promoting these resources and our education programme to a much wider audience."

Julie Margerum, managing director of Vox, said: "We're very pleased to be welcoming Jeans for Genes, RTS Communications and Tempora on board and helping them achieve their business goals."

Indian restaurant wins prestigious award

Swindon's leading Indian restaurant, the Jewel in the Crown, has added to its impressive tally of awards by winning the Newby Tiffin Cup following a 'cook-off' staged in the House of Commons' Bellamy's Restaurant.

The cup is contested annually among Indian restaurants recommended by MPs from their constituencies across the UK. Some 74 restaurants were visited by 'mystery diners' from which 11 were chosen to cook one dish in Bellamy's open kitchen.



This was then presented to a judging panel that included celebrity chef Ainsley Harriott, Masterchef 2010 winner, Dhruv Baker, and Celebrity Masterchef 2010 winner, Lisa Faulkner.

Muzammil Ali, owner

of the 200-cover Jewel in the Crown, his daughter Juliana and their head chef decided they should prepare a lamb and pumpkin curry as the combination of sweet and earthy flavours reminded Juliana of the South Asian

dishes of her childhood.

To give the dish, which was served in a hollowed-out pumpkin, a new twist they used all local ingredients.

Their ingenuity paid off and they were presented with the trophy by Commons Speaker John Bercow and South Swindon MP Robert Buckland, who initially recommended the restaurant.

Diners at the restaurant can now taste the dish for themselves and it has become a menu favourite.



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Now is the time to take advantage of trade link-ups, says expert

Swindon is to be promoted as a prime business location at a high-profile conference in Beijing – opening the door for potentially-lucrative partnerships with Chinese companies. Details of the conference next month are still being finalised but it could act as the first major project for the Link to China initiative launched in Swindon at the town's STEAM museum last month.

Dr Kegang Wu, executive director of the initiative, spoke to members of Swindon Chamber of Commerce about the huge opportunities in China and suggested that now was the time to take advantage of trade link-ups in the fast-growing economy.

One immediate outcome is for the town to be showcased at a conference in the Chinese capital where it could showcase its industrial heritage and its forward-looking approach to business.

Speaking at the Link to China launch, Dr Wu said the Chinese economy was forecast to continue to grow at roughly the same rate it has achieved for the past 20 years – between eight and 10 per cent a year.

While there has been strong business links between the UK and China for many years, now was the time smaller businesses could be involved, he said, and the Chinese government is encouraging closer trade ties with the UK.

At present for every £9 in trade from China to the UK, just £1 goes in the opposite direction. The Chinese government is prepared to support UK businesses to tap into its market. "It's probably the first time in history that a government has subsidised imports," joked Dr Wu.

At the same time, Chinese companies were seeking investment opportunities in the UK and were prepared to set up joint ventures and partnerships with UK firms. Dr Wu, who is also managing director of ChinaDirect UK, said there was a lack of knowledge in China about the UK and its economy – yet this was often where partnerships could be developed.

Standing in front of the Swindon-built GWR locomotive Caerphilly Castle at STEAM, he said: "The city of Qingdao is hoping to build a museum similar to this. Well, that could be done as a joint venture with this one." Link to China is being run by the Thames Valley Group of Chambers, of which Swindon Chamber is a member.

CASE STUDY

Local sailing product proves popular on overseas market

A simple-yet-effective new product designed by a Wiltshire firm to help sailing enthusiasts carry hot drinks safely while afloat is now being marketed in Europe.

The Muggi was designed by yachtsman and company founder David Trotter after he became frustrated at not being able to make a cup of tea and carry it above deck without spilling it in choppy seas.

Made from lightweight, non-absorbent foam, the Muggi is easy to carry and clean. Its four precision moulded slots allow mugs to be safely carried onboard whatever the sailing conditions.

It was officially launched at the London Boat Show in January and is already proving popular with the sailing community – some 1,200 were sold in just seven weeks. Chippenham-based Muggi secured distributors for Holland and Germany at the show and is now, with help from Enterprise Europe Network South West (EEN), looking to sign up further distributors across the EU and further afield.

EEN offers free and

impartial European business expertise to help firms to trade abroad.

David said: "I initially thought I would spend the first year building up a UK customer base before moving into European markets. But after securing a

The Muggi was launched at the London Boat Show and is already proving popular with 1,200 sold in just seven weeks

European distributor in our first week, I realised that there was scope to move a lot quicker.

"With Muggi really beginning to take off, I contacted EEN as I felt we needed to capitalise on the product's international market. I wasn't sure where to begin and didn't have the time to manually search for potential distributors."

Innovation adviser Brian Steel met David – the pair had

worked together previously at partner organisation Business Link, developing David's other company Squirrel Design Tree Houses, which specialises in bespoke tree houses.

Brian and David discussed plans for Muggi's European expansion before placing the details on the network's Partner Alert Service earlier this month.

The Partner Alert Service encompasses more than 13,000 overseas trade opportunities in over 45 countries across the globe. Opportunities range from manufacturing and distribution to research and development.

Brian said: "EEN's partner alert service has matched thousands of firms across Europe with distributors. Although Muggi's profile has only just been created we have already seen interest and are certain that we will be able to match them with suitable product distributors, allowing them to expand their reach even further."

"Muggi is a great example of a business which is thinking internationally from the outset."

Exports to lead recovery

The Government wants the economic recovery to be export led, yet many businesses remain reluctant to move into international markets.

Sterling's depreciation has helped underpin efforts to sell UK products and services abroad and according to the Bank of England, exports of electrical goods and automotive and aerospace components are growing strongly, which should be good news for Swindon firms.

While the South West has traditionally been the UK's lowest exporting region, new research carried out by law firm Osborne Clarke shows exports from the region grew by 35 per cent between 2007 and 2010 – twice the UK average.

Initiative launched to help South West firms get exporting

However, a recent survey by the Federation of Small Businesses found less than a quarter of its members are trading overseas, with non-exporters discouraged by worries over exchange rate losses, fears they will not get paid, and concerns about excessive bureaucracy.

The Forum for Private Business found roughly the same picture among its

members who cited a lack of available information on overseas markets as the main factor preventing them from exporting. Launching the initiative, Business Secretary Vince Cable said: "Trade and inward investment are key drivers of growth – they are fundamental to rebuilding and rebalancing our economy."

But how do Swindon businesses break into overseas markets? And which markets should they target?

This three-page special looks at the ground rules for successful entry into the international arena, showcases two small firms which have taken their first steps into overseas trade and gives some top tips for fledgling exporters.

Five growth hotspots for South West exports

Turkey
Saudi Arabia
Japan
China
United Arab Emirates

source: Osborne Clarke



Trade winds: The Muggi is now on sale in Europe

Enterprise Europe Network's 10 top tips for successful exporting

- 1. Exploit your base**

Look at your customer and supplier base for companies already exporting to identify opportunities to exploit. Much of your business may already be done overseas.
- 2. Use your website**

Translate it into your target market's language, identify key words and purchase in-country suffixes for domain names.
- 3. Understand what you're selling**

Not every product or service works in every country. Do your research and really understand where your product or service will fit in.
- 4. Be flexible**

Don't be afraid to consider new ways of operating. Consider third parties for in-country sales, logistics and fulfilment.
- 5. Develop your network of contacts**

Use EU-supported initiatives like EEN to identify contacts, partners and commercial opportunities across Europe and further afield.
- 6. Designate appropriate resources**

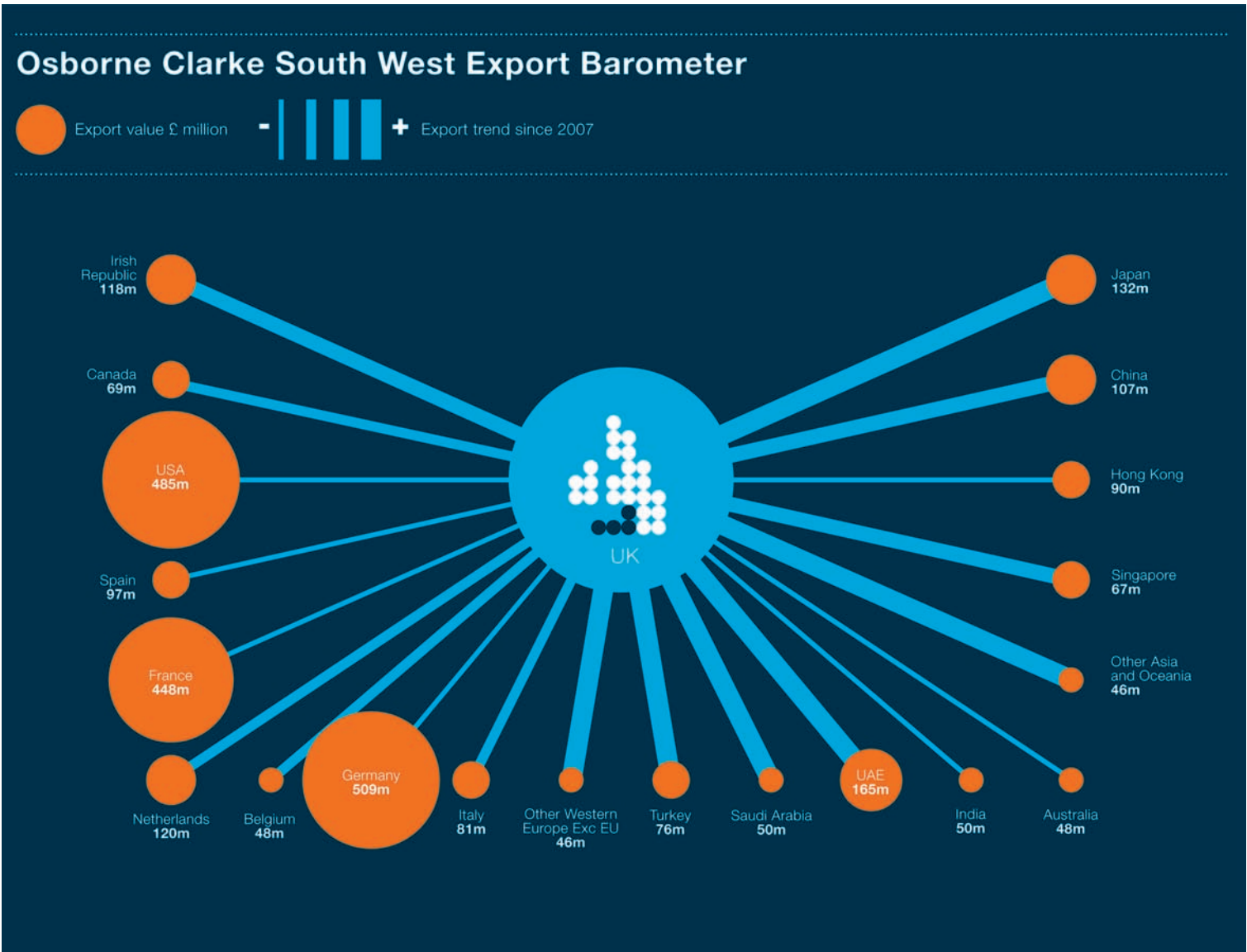
Ensure you have sufficient skills, resources and time to meet the demands of setting up and trading internationally without undermining your domestic activities.
- 7. Watch the bottom line**

Entering new markets is time consuming and expensive, so make sure you budget carefully. Monitor the impact on margins.
- 8. Target less obvious countries**

Select markets that represent the best opportunity and with the fewest barriers to entry. These may not always be the biggest or most obvious ones.
- 9. Be innovative**

Use exporting as an opportunity to introduce fresh processes and methods which will also benefit your business domestically.
- 10. Seek advice**

EEN offers free help and advice to businesses looking to trade abroad and can help with partnering opportunities, intellectual property, funding options and any other international trade related queries.



South West exporters lead the UK

Exports from the South West grew by 35 per cent between 2007 and 2010 – twice the UK average – as firms from the region moved into new overseas markets.

Research carried out by regional law firm Osborne Clarke and leading researcher Acritas found that despite the value of exports to some of the region's traditional export markets starting to slow, some new markets experienced a high level of growth.

The research also revealed that South West exporters are confident about the coming year, with 90 per cent expecting foreign sales to grow or remain stable in 2011.

However, there were very low levels of awareness of support among three-quarters of the exporters who took part the research, while only a quarter knew where to get advice and had used services from the likes of UKTI and chambers of commerce in the past.

Osborne Clarke partner Paul Killen said: "Times are undoubtedly challenging for exporters, but those we spoke to are confident in their ability to overcome any obstacles and continue to grow their businesses.

"The next two years will be crucial to the survival of many export business, so it is vital that exporters plan well, carry out detailed market analysis and get the right support."

The research showed that Germany, the South West's largest export market, accounted for a sixth of all overseas sales in the second quarter last year. Yet that share was 25 per cent lower than in 2007. In contrast, countries such as Turkey and China, and areas of the Far and Middle East, are fast becoming crucial markets for South West exporters.

By mid-2010, these growth economies were taking around a fifth of exports from the South West, compared to just eight per cent three years earlier.

When it came to confidence, those exporting to the USA are most optimistic, with seven out of 10 expecting to increase their exports. Exporters are also confident about the Far East and Africa (50 per cent expecting growth in both cases). Exporters to Europe and Australasia typically expect exports to remain static, while those exporting to the Middle East expect them to fall.

Generally, South West exporters predict that the next two years will be challenging as the effects of the global downturn, terrorism and climate change impact on their ability to do business abroad.

The research also found that a low level of awareness of where to gain export advice.

Mr Killen added: "Getting the right advice is crucial for both new and established exporters, particularly in a challenging business environment.

"Our research shows that South West exporters have a very low awareness of the support available to them. That's a shame because there are some very experienced organisations like GWE Business West offering advice in the region.

"Many of the exporters we spoke to had set up their export operations on their own – from scratch. While that shows a high level of ingenuity, with the right advice exporters can potentially get trading much faster and avoid costly pitfalls.

"The low level of awareness and take-up of advice amongst South West exporters is an issue that could be addressed by the South West LEPs (local enterprise partnerships) which will replace the South West RDA (regional development agency) next year," Mr Killen said.

Export Category	Percentage
Manufactured Goods	72%
Food and Live Animals	10%
Chemicals and Related Products	8%
Machinery and transport	5%
Misc. Manufactured Goods	4%
Crude Materials, excl Fuels	1%

£1m worth of export finance offered to small and medium-sized companies

Export Enterprise Finance Guarantee (EFG) Scheme established by the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, offering export finance valued up to £1

million to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

ECGD will launch the Export Working Capital Scheme for those not eligible for the Export EFG, offering export finance worth over £1m.

Bond Support

Scheme offered by Export Credits Guarantee Department (ECGD), under which the Government will share risk with lending banks on the issue of contract bonds.

ECGD will support banks offering foreign

exchange hedging contracts to SMEs by sharing credit risk.

In addition, ECGD will extend its existing short term export insurance to cover a broader range of exporters, including SMEs.

CASE STUDY



Sweet dreams: Jesper Sadolin, the Russian distributor for Dream Tubes and Amanda Allerton of Dusky Moon

Wiltshire business a Russian success

Two Wiltshire mums are bringing a good night's sleep to parents across the world by exporting their award-winning bedguard – proving that a well-designed niche product can achieve success on the international stage.

Amanda Allerton and Venetia Fuller set up Corsham-based Dusky Moon in 2007 to sell Dream Tubes, an innovative bedguard that stops children from falling out of bed.

The invention, born out of their own desperation for peaceful nights, uses inflatable bumpers inserted into a special fitted sheet.

It has proved to be so successful it has won many awards from the nursery industry.

Today it exports to 44 countries with support from UK Trade & Investment (UKTI).

The pair joined a UKTI Passport to Export programme in May 2009 when they were supported by international trade adviser Sue Tisdall.

The Passport service helped assess the company's readiness for international business and advised on an action plan to build its international trade capacity.

Further support came via UKTI's Tradeshow Access programme which helped the firm to

attend its first international trade fair in Cologne and provided matched funding support for business development.

Amanda said: "The past year has been tough - the cotton crisis and increased production costs have cut our margins - but we are breaking into new markets. We have just come back from a market visit to Dubai, we were in Russia recently and Las Vegas in October.

"The support we've been given by UKTI and our mentor has been fantastic and instrumental in our success. We have had advice on markets, help with developing exhibition materials and, crucially, sourcing and managing distributors."

Dusky Moon already supplies UK high street names such as John Lewis, Boots and Mothercare and will be in Tesco stores this month.

The prospect of breaking into the US market means the company will have to increase its production operation and the owners are exploring ways to finance the growth.

"If there are small companies out there looking to export they should really look into getting expert advice. We have learnt a lot and been well supported," added Amanda.

Local companies join forces to help exporters get the message accross

Specialist technical authoring and editing company AND Solutions has joined forces with language services provider Prestige Network to offer a translation and editing service to Chinese technology companies seeking to export their products to English-speaking markets.

Chinese clients not only receive translation services but also benefit from best practices in technical documentation content and presentation, raising the quality of the technical documentation and improving their image and reputation.

The service also works the other way round - UK companies can benefit when exporting products and services to China.

Simon Butler, managing director of Swindon-based AND Solutions, said: "As professional technical authors, we understand the need for good-quality and accurate documentation to support technology products. Customers have become used to a high standard of supporting documentation and anything that falls short of this high standard adversely affects the customer's perception of the product and, in turn, the

manufacturer. "For Chinese companies, seeking to export their high technology products to the English-speaking markets, this service will greatly enhance their image and raise the perception of quality in the eyes of their English-speaking customers."

Shawn Khorassani, strategy and business development director at Thatcham-based Prestige Network, said: "We are always striving to provide a better service for both existing and potential clients within the translation and interpreting sector."

Looking East

HSBC looks at the changing face of world business

A fundamental and unprecedented shift is taking place in the global economy, as we see a very clear move from West to East. Asia continues to assert itself as the brightest of prospects on the global landscape. Certainly, the rise – or, some might say, the re-emergence – of Asia following its growth through the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries – will be the most important economic driving force in the first half of this century.

Who would have predicted that China would become the largest importer of Brazilian goods and that today in India, two thirds of exports go to markets other than the US and Europe? This is the emergence of South-South trade: globalisation isn't just a process of goods moving from developing to developed countries; it also crosses and connects emerging markets.

So what does this mean for me you might ask – a business based in Swindon? What can I do to keep up with these powerhouses? Well it's more than just keeping up. It's about working with the East and benefiting from the region and all that it has to offer.

Trading internationally expands a business' horizons, offering unique opportunities for growth, development and profit building.

But while a business might be aware of the benefits of overseas trading, moving from a domestic



Nigel White



Gary Mealing

business strategy to one with an international mindset and approach can seem a daunting prospect.

HSBC is continuing to encourage businesses in the Swindon area to make the most of international business opportunities. HSBC has an unrivalled international presence and a dedicated global relationship management team that can help you negotiate the opportunities and challenges. Its ongoing commitment to support quality businesses with strong management teams and a clear strategy across all sectors continues whatever the market conditions. Businesses in the area interested in finding out more about the support on offer should contact Gary Mealing on 07717 690373 or email garymealing@hsbc.com

In addition HSBC has recently opened entries to Business Thinking 2012.

Interested companies should visit www.hsbc.co.uk/businessthinking to find out more.

HSBC's recent report 'Looking East: The Changing Face of World Business' identified some practical steps to help businesses benefit from the rise in the East and turn opportunities into business realities

- 1. Maximise human capital** – Look beyond your domestic borders to capitalise on Asia's investment in up-skilling. Asia is no longer just a source of low cost labour;
- 2. Create an 'innovation supply chain'** – Forget about the traditional model of Western innovation and Eastern delivery. Take advantage of Asia's investment in R&D;
- 3. Invest in consumer insight** – Tap into the opportunities afforded by unprecedented growth of a diverse and fast changing Eastern consumer market;
- 4. Employ a global mindset** – Overturn preconceptions about the East and foster a culture which accommodates different business models and 'rule books';
- 5. Mitigate risk effectively** – Accurately research, understand and weigh up the risks versus the significant rewards of engaging with the East;
- 6. Rethink consumption and distribution** – Acknowledge individual business' role in tackling global sustainability issues, particularly the East's energy consumption, and consider new models of manufacturing and export as a result;
- 7. Create an advisory-led business** – Acknowledge the role of external experts to provide local market insight into doing business globally.

HSBC



The world's local bank

Telemarketing business celebrates its 10th anniversary with growth

Business-to-business telemarketing firm VHO celebrates its 10th anniversary this year with continued growth and a clear commitment to its clients.

The West Swindon company, which supplies appointment and lead generation, data cleansing and market research, claims to be different from most other businesses in its industry as its seven-strong team do not read from scripts and it does not charge clients large set-up fees.

It also does not outsource any of its work and neither does it insist on long contracts.

Founder and managing director Vivienne Hallett said: "In fact, we recommend a trial.

"We are also different to many of our competitors as we are more technical and IT-focused. We understand our clients and their products and so we can do a much better job for them."

Vivienne set up the business in 2001 shortly after leaving a job as a sales office manager for a Swindon software firm.

She was a single mum with two small children and needed to work from home. Her hard work and determination paid off. Her first client SunGard, the IT systems developer based in Chippenham recently acquired by Capita, still works with VHO.

Another long-term major client, Motorola Solutions –

which produces and sells hand-held devices – was so impressed with VHO it has recommended the firm to BT and other key business partners.

Last year US e-business pioneer Broadvision appointed VHO to undertake telemarketing and lead generation for the UK launch of its enterprise social network solution.

VHO was tasked with identifying and reaching key decision makers, primarily in HR, to arrange face-to-face meetings.

Broadvision's EMEA director of business operations Ian Heggs said the company had paid its previous telemarketing suppliers on a per-appointment basis, which had not worked out.

"The success rate was only 50 per cent as leads were not well qualified and some appointments resulted in wasting valuable time," he said. "Since working with VHO we have noticed that our lead pipeline has significantly increased and the appointments that we have attended have been high quality. Every meeting produced something worthwhile."

VHO took a step forward last September with the appointment of new business manager Renae McCalla-Kay, who is helping build the business.

Vivienne believes VHO has a bright future with its recent rapid growth showing every sign of continuing.

Recruitment company moves to new offices

Frankly Recruitment, one of Swindon's leading recruitment consultancies, looks back on a year filled with challenges and positive outcomes.

In a tough economic climate Frankly Recruitment is proud of the progress it has made in the local business community – forging relationships and growing its client base to more than 150 in Swindon and surrounding areas.

Due to rapid business expansion, Frankly Recruitment topped 2010 by moving into new offices. The business, headed by directors Amanda Franks and Kelly Walker, has increased from two employees to five in the space of 12 months.

The company has gained a big following on Facebook and Twitter, receiving positive testimonials from candidates and clients on a regular basis.

As a result of this success, Frankly Recruitment has become a finalist at The Wiltshire Business of the Year Awards to be held at the Four Pillars hotel on March 24th.

Amanda said: "It's been a year for solidifying relationships and building on the success of our initial year. Our philosophy has, and always will be, to build strong client relationships at local level, develop a comprehensive understanding of the company culture and objectives, and consequently provide staff of the highest calibre, commitment and personality."

It is this service-driven principle that has earned Frankly Recruitment its reputation as one of Swindon's leading suppliers of quality personnel.

"In order to provide the best quality staff to our clients, we must consistently attract and retain the best candidates. Our research indicates that 75 per cent of our weekly applicants approach Frankly Recruitment through personal recommendation," Amanda added.

"Our temporaries stay with us because they know they will receive the best levels of pay, the best assignments, and, crucially, better levels of care and commitment than any other agency."

"People are our greatest asset, and Frankly Recruitment recognises that 'soft skills' are often more important than experience."

"We recruit our staff from a variety



Amanda Franks

of backgrounds and are committed to training and developing our consultants to enable them to provide the highest levels of service to clients and candidates alike.

"Our aim is to make recruitment simple. Client firms are promised a friendly welcome and a qualified consultant (REC) to address their requirements. We promise the experience with Frankly Recruitment will be a positive one."

In the office environment, Frankly Recruitment's total service capability enables clients to use one supplier for all their supplemental staffing needs.

One phone call gives them worry-free, consistent quality service in a variety of business functions as Frankly Recruitment is equipped with specialised staff, documents and evaluations designed to match clients' operating style.

Frankly Recruitment has also recently become officially licenced to provide McQuaig Psychometric testing – the first independent agency to be given this accolade.

Frankly Recruitment will work with clients to ensure that the system delivers bottom-line results, reduced turnover, increased productivity through more efficient teams and more engaged employees.

Employment testing has been shown to be a strong predictor of future performance if a well-defined process is used to matching the candidate to a valid job profile.

Encouraging news from ONS, says Samaritans

Stephen Platt, Samaritans' trustee and professor of health policy research at the University of Edinburgh, said: "The 2009 UK suicide figures show that the suicide rate has remained unchanged compared with 2008. In the current economic climate, suicide rates could have been expected to rise and therefore this news is encouraging."

"That said, suicide rates may still increase over the coming years as the long-term effects of the recession, rising unemployment and budget cuts take their toll on the mental health of the nation. Every suicide is a tragedy and it is vital that, as a nation, we do not become complacent in our work to reduce the number of unnecessary deaths."

"We call on all agencies to prioritise suicide prevention strategies, with a focus on school leavers struggling to find jobs and low-skilled older workers who have been prematurely excluded from the labour market. We also call on employers, healthcare professionals and members of the general public to look out for the signs of suicide in their staff, patients, family members or friends, and to take action if they are worried about someone."

"In addition to our 24/7 helpline, Samaritans' 18,500 volunteers continue to reach out to vulnerable people in schools, prisons, places of work and on the railways. We are also looking to the future by developing our understanding of the online environment, and building partnerships with search engines such as Google and social networking sites such as Facebook, to ensure that people who are distressed online are directed to sources of emotional support."

Contact Swindon and District Samaritans for emotional support 24/7 365 on: 01793 537373 or email jo@samaritans.org or text us 07725 90 90 90

Drop in at 6 Curtis Street Swindon SN1 5JU (best to call first to check opening times)

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Great response from Business Show for Swindon College

Staff from Business First, Swindon College's commercial training provider were delighted and overwhelmed with the response from those who visited the recent GWE Swindon Business show in February.

Andrea Fitzgerald, business development manager for Business First said: "The business show was a great success and it was an excellent event for us to promote Business First's training provision to employers. We had some great feedback from everyone who visited our stand and we are looking forward to developing good working relationships with those employers who we met at the show."

Business First specialises in flexible training solutions for employers and recently celebrated its success in achieving The Training Quality Standard (TQS) award. The TQS is a prestigious kite-mark awarded to only high performing training providers which recognises and celebrates the best organisations that deliver training to employers.

The TQS highlights high quality, high impact training, by looking at the organisation's responsiveness, flexibility, expertise and commitment to continuous improvement. The

Standard is a mark for training providers to aspire to because it is hard to achieve - and through it, their performance is what really sets them apart from the competition.

Business First went through a rigorous assessment to ensure the capability, performance track record and the customer endorsement made Business First a good choice for employers. Swindon College will now add with pride the TQS logo to all its marketing materials.

Evelyn Little, director of business development and employer engagement said: "We are delighted to have achieved the Training Quality Standard which recognises our delivery of high-quality training to employers that has an impact on either their productivity or efficiency. The Standard shows we are responsive to employers by delivering flexible, tailored training solutions that successfully meet employers' needs and expectations."

For information about the business training courses available through Business First please visit www.swindon-college.ac.uk or email businessfirst@swindon-college.ac.uk or alternatively call 01793 498404.

MPs get a taste of what life is like for modern apprentices

Swindon MPs Robert Buckland and Justin Tomlinson experienced life as apprentices as part of their visit to a construction project at a Barratt Homes development in Swindon.

The visit was staged by CITB-Construction Skills and employer England Carpentry during National Apprenticeship Week, which highlighted the talents and skills of apprentices and encourage young people and employers to think about how an apprenticeship could benefit them.

While on site the MPs tried their hands at a range of activities including roofing, using modern 'green' technologies and practices, as well as hearing from an apprentice on the project about his experiences of training in carpentry and joinery.

North Swindon MP Justin Tomlinson said: "I know from running a small business that apprentices can play a really important role in the workplace." The visit was at Barratt's newly-launched D2 development East Street in Swindon town centre.

The 10 things you need to know about apprenticeships

Swindon has one of the lowest take-up of apprenticeships across the UK, which means many companies are missing out on the opportunities hiring an apprentice can bring.

With uncertainty surrounding the logistics of an apprentice the main cause of this low take-up, Fast Forward, the Business Services division of New College has put together a handy 'Did You Know' guide to the modern apprenticeship.

1. You can be an apprentice at any age

You don't have to be young to be an apprentice. You can be an apprentice at any age. In fact, there is no upper age limit for an apprentice.

2. You can advertise vacancies for free via the National Vacancy Matching Service

Looking to recruit new staff? Choosing the apprenticeships route means this is not a costly option. You can advertise the vacancy for free on the National Vacancy Matching Service, with no agency or advertising fees. Fast Forward can provide support in selecting and interviewing candidates should this be required.

3. You can become an apprentice in over 80 different sectors across more than 200 different frameworks

When asked about apprenticeships,

businesses often think electricians, plumbers and bricklayers. Apprenticeships are currently available in over 80 different sectors from hospitality and IT to retail and accounting.

4. You can use apprenticeships to train existing members of staff

If you have an existing member of staff who you would like to be formally qualified for the role, you can use the apprenticeships route to train them to your exact standards. The competency based element of the qualification involves a specialised assessor visiting the workplace to assess your staff's performance in the role.

5. Government funding is available to support training of apprentices

Depending on the size of your organisation and the age of staff, apprenticeships come with government funding to support the training of staff. Within the 16 - 18 category, this is fully funded by the Government, whilst for 19+ an employer contribution is required.

6. Employers can specify the criteria for the apprenticeship role

You can be as specific as you like when it comes to searching for your ideal candidate. Employers advertising for apprentices can place their own specific criteria on the advert such as "experience in customer service essential"

7. 88 per cent of employers say that apprentices increase motivation in the workforce

According to the National Apprenticeships Service, apprentices do increase morale and motivation in the workplace whilst improving the reputation of the business amongst customers.

8. Higher Apprenticeships are becoming more readily available - an equivalent to a Foundation Degree

Higher Apprenticeships work towards work-based learning qualifications such as NVQ Level 4/5 and, in some cases, a knowledge-based qualification, namely a Foundation degree leading to potential further study at University.

9. Gaining an apprenticeship offers three qualifications in one

An Apprenticeship offers three types of qualification. A knowledge based component, a skills based element and functional skills covering literacy, numeracy and IT

10. Your business can benefit from an apprentice

For more information please call Erica at Fast Forward on 01793 755520 or email apprenticeships@newcollege.ac.uk. Sign up an apprentice before the 15 April 2011, you will receive a £250 Training Passport Voucher (terms and conditions apply).



North Swindon MP, Justin Tomlinson, South Swindon MP Robert Buckland and CITB-Construction Skills sector strategy manager for the South West, Roger Stone take a tour of Barratt's D2, East Street development, as a part of Apprenticeship Week



Why not employ an Apprentice?

As an employer, there are a number of reasons why you should consider employing an Apprentice:

- Apprentices bring new ideas and inject new life blood into your company
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- Apprentices can be moulded into your ideal employee
- Together we can develop the skills of your workforce through Apprenticeships

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To find out more contact the Business First Team on (01793) 498404, or via e-mail on businessfirst@swindon-college.ac.uk or visit: www.swindon-college.ac.uk



In conversation with Isla Baliszewska, business coach and founder, Your Coaching

Isla Baliszewska is a business coach from Wiltshire who set up her own company Your Coaching in 2004, after more than 25 years experience in business. Here she explains what coaching is and how it can help business growth.

Why would a business need a coach – what are the benefits?

It provides someone objective for the business leaders to talk to, confidentially, about their business concerns, from analysing business growth strategies to pitching for finance. It is a focus for clear planning.

How formal is coaching – do business owners have targets and assignments?

Essentially it can be as formal as the business leader wants it to be. It is always a good idea to have targets and assignments as this underpins a successful coaching programme, providing focus and benchmarks for achievement. Any successful business is going to have plans of some kind whether these be in the form of a comprehensive business plan or jottings on the back of a beer mat.

What is your coaching style?

Engaged, committed, collaborative, challenging, solutions focused and being very interested in the business and its people.

How does coaching work and what results can a business expect?

The business would set its own outcomes and benchmarks of success for a coaching programme and these would be agreed with any stakeholders. The coaching would then be delivered according to the business requirements and is structured to achieve the agreed goals. It might include coaching business leaders, line managers, teams or individual employees through one-to-one sessions, workshops or a combination of these.

How important is the chemistry between a coach and the business owner?

We call it rapport – it is essential to any successful coaching relationship.

What advice would you give to a firm interested in sourcing a coach – what should they look for?

Look for someone with relevant business experience. You don't necessarily need someone with expertise in your industry sector but you do need someone who knows about how a business works and the problems they face. Check websites, ask for referrals, and talk to any prospective coaches so you get a feel for what they offer and how they deliver.

What role do you feel coaching can play in the economic recovery?

Business coaching as a tool can be really effective in helping build business capability and resilience and to identify best use of resources and opportunities. Linking coaching objectives with businesses critical needs will help them remain competitive and perform well which is exactly what UK plc needs to restore a healthy economy.

Growing Business

the big conversation

Coaches and mentors to speed growth for local businesses

Large firms have considerable experience using coaches and mentors to unlock the potential of their high flyers.

This focused, one-on-one support is now being offered to the leaders of smaller, high-growth firms in Wiltshire. As part of our 'Growing Business – the Big Conversation' campaign we look at this promising new initiative.

A new programme, Coaching for High Growth, is being launched to give coaching and mentoring support to local firms with the scope to achieve strong growth. Funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), this initiative is being delivered by GWE Business West and its partners across the South West.

The service, which is free for local firms that meet key criteria, comprises a minimum of 12 hours support from a dedicated business coach or mentor. They work with the business leader and management team over a 9–12 month period to review the business and identify and formulate strategies for growth.

The programme is led by Neil Higginson, programme manager, ERDF projects. He said: "Busy with day-to-day priorities, it is sometimes difficult as a business owner to focus on completing key strategic objectives. Regular update meetings with a coach will ensure that the focus is not lost from the higher level things that can achieve a step change in the growth of a business."

Coaching for High Growth is for businesses with the potential to achieve high growth in the short-term and is available to companies with a turnover in excess of £1 million.

Ian Larrard, director of the Initiative



Neil Higginson

in Swindon and Wiltshire said: "Running a small, growing business can be very isolating. The leader has to make crucial decisions alone and find from within the motivation to keep driving the business forward."

"This programme will give some of our most exciting local businesses free access to high-quality mentors and coaches. This will provide them with a valuable sounding board that will help them achieve the changes they need to grow."

To find out more contact 0845 600 9966, email: info@growthsouthwest.co.uk or visit www.growthsouthwest.co.uk.

To get involved in the 'Growing Business - the Big Conversation' campaign visit: www.businessinfo.thebigconversation.com or follow us on Twitter @growthsouthwest.

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Deals digest

• Caudwell Properties, the firm owned by Phones4U founder John Caudwell, has acquired the freehold interest in Motorola's research and development site at Kembrey Park. Caudwell paid property fund manager Highcross just over £9 million for the 73,256 sq ft Trilogy building. The annual rent is £940,193.50, equivalent to £14.50 per sq ft on the office accommodation and £5.75 per sq ft on the warehouse space. Motorola also pays £24,000 a year for additional car parking spaces. Highcross spent £4.5 million refurbishing the property with a further £1.6m spent by Motorola on additional fit out works.

• Acting on behalf of First Investments, Loveday and Loveday has let Unit 2, Lynton Road, on the Cheney Manor Industrial Estate, to Toolstation for its first outlet in Swindon. The 5,000 sq ft unit has been let on a 10-year lease and is being refurbished before opening to the trade this month.

• Two residential developments on Victoria Road, Swindon, have been brought to the market.

Alder King has been instructed to sell this freehold of numbers 67-69 with detailed planning consent for their demolition to create three two bedroom apartments and 10 one bedroom flats.

Meanwhile the site at 22-23 Victoria RoadB, which has detailed planning consent for 20 new apartments and onsite parking, is being sold by property agents Colliers.



Artist's impression: Swindon council has approved Ashfield Land's proposal of a cinema, restaurants and a Morrison's supermarket at Regent Circus

Bright future for retail

Philip Loveday, partner at Loveday and Loveday, looks at what's in store for Swindon's retail property market

In my experience the economic health of a town like Swindon is judged by the success, or otherwise, of its town centre – and/or its football club's position in the league.

Given STFC's current lowly status in League One, the mantle has been handed to the Brunel Centre and others to show the way.

Thanks in no small part to the introduction of reduced parking charges by Swindon Borough Council

in July 2010, which brought in a blanket charge of £2 for four hours, the town centre is at long last fighting back and can now compete with free parking in Greenbridge and at the Orbital Shopping Park.

Town centre footfall figures in the first six weeks of this year were up by 13 per cent on the same period in 2010; public realm works along Regent Street and Canal Walk are virtually completed (although I'm not too sure about the green wall!); and Top Shop, Wallis and Evans have just reopened, with Bhs following later in the spring.

Add to this the proposed opening by Pandora Jewellers in the former New Look store on Regent Street and the River Island expansion this month, the prime hub area at the junction of the Parade in Regent Street has become a symbol of this upsurge.

Such an improvement, however, cannot hide the

difficulty of the secondary areas around the edge of the town, where retailing still remains a struggle.

A major fillip to these locations, especially around Regent Circus, will be the start of the long-awaited redevelopment of Swindon College.

Not only will this remove an horrendous eyesore but once tower cranes return to the Swindon skyline, we shall undoubtedly see an improvement in confidence.

Having lived through all the delays and disappointments of earlier plans from Norwich Union, Westfield and Modus, I make no apology for suggesting that any development is better than no development.

So I wish Ashfield Land all success in bringing this project forward for 2011, Morrisons et al.

Swindon's doughnut might just be returning to a jammy filling!



Philip Loveday

FACT FILE

Regent Circus

- **Developer: Ashfield Land**
- **Completion 2013**
- **Size - 5 acres**
- **Car park - 800**
- **Morrisons - 60,000 sq ft**
- **Restaurants**
- **Cinema - 950 seats**
- **Cost - £100m**

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• Planning consent for a major scheme in Swindon town centre has been changed from residential to office use by the borough council in a clear sign of the changing market for central area development.

McAler & Rushe had planned to build 129 apartments on Fleming Way site alongside the 229-bedroom Jurys Inn Hotel, which the developer opened in June 2009.

But with the market for town-centre residential cooling, the Northern Ireland-based firm has won a change in the consent for the site to a 95,000 sq ft office scheme over seven floors with a split-level 57-space car park.

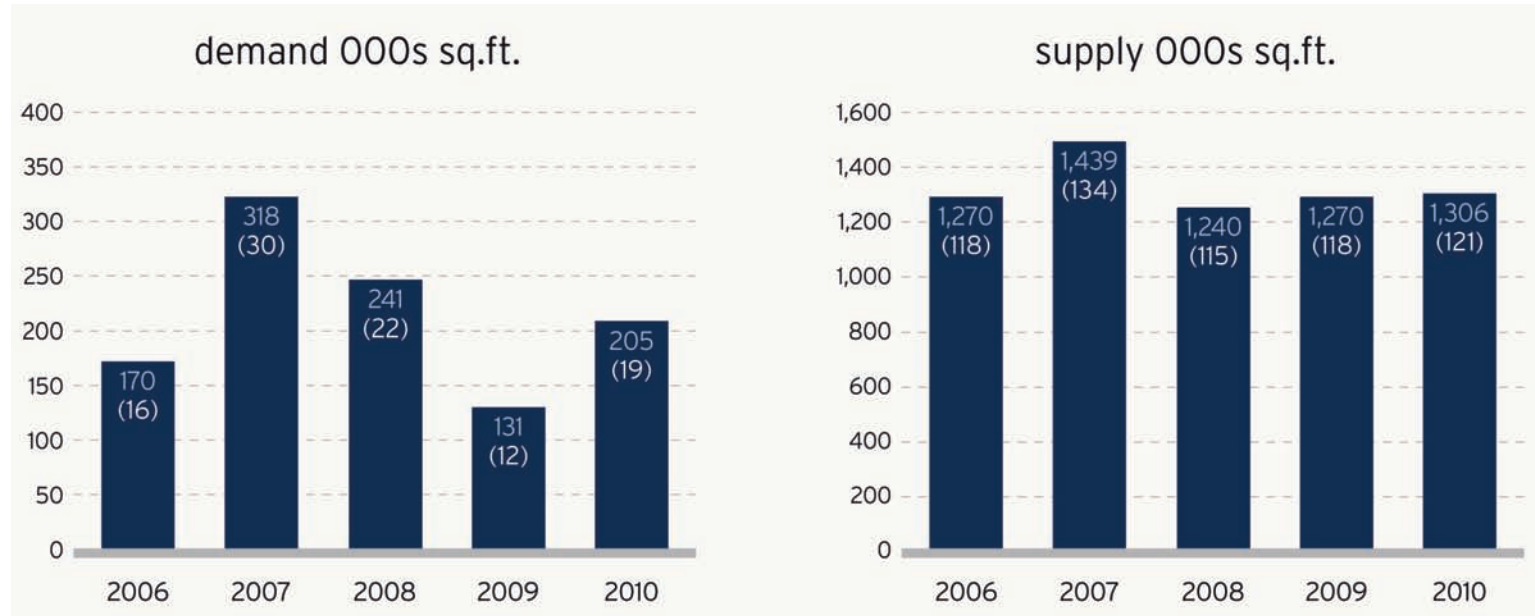
Called Precision Point, the scheme will give the town centre a Grade A office block ahead of the development of nearby Union Square.

Agents Alder King and Knight Frank are advising McAler & Rushe on pre-letting the scheme, designed by MAP Architects, although they have ruled out building it speculatively.

Alder King partner James Gregory said: "McAler & Rushe worked very closely with the council to deliver the Jurys Inn Hotel which has been an important boost to the regeneration of Swindon. This new office scheme will add to this by creating the kind of new product Swindon needs to attract new employers and create a dynamic office market."

Knight Frank partner Tony Nicholas added: "This new office scheme is a major boost for the town though because it can be delivered quickly. Swindon currently has a very limited supply of good quality office stock."

Offices



Prime sites hold

P rime retail properties and good quality industrial stock are likely to be the most sought after sectors this year as the market continues its slow recovery.

The outlook comes from the latest Market Monitor from property agents Alder King, the firm's annual snapshot of the South West's commercial property market.

According to Simon Price, Alder King's head of agency in the region, last year witnessed a steady improvement on the market lows of 2009 and activity is already improving this year.

Echoing a recent report by rivals GVA, he said: "In the year ahead we particularly expect progress in city centre office markets where the supply of new Grade A office space continues to reduce."

This trend is also seen in the industrial market with high-quality new space is becoming limited.

There will also be strong activity in the food store market across the region, according to Mr Price – a position reflected locally by requirements for new sites from several major supermarkets, including for a major store to anchor the new district centre at Swindon's Wichelstowe development, while in Chippenham, Waitrose is opening in Borough Parade and several discount food retailers are looking at sites in the town.

Offices

Demand increased markedly during 2010, although this was distorted by Motorola's deal to rent 58,400 sq ft at the Trilogy building at Kembrey Park, according to James Gregory of Alder King's Swindon office. Other significant transactions included the sale of 32,900sq ft at 109 Cheney Manor to a private investor, 17,200 sq ft at One Stanford Street let to Lantech Training, the sale of the 15,500 sq ft Wessex Court former Job Centre to local developer Epoc Properties for conversion to flats and logistics group Wincanton taking 10,225 sq ft at Unit 4, York House, Edison Park.

On the supply side, the comprehensive refurbishment of Station Square has put 51,000 sq ft of Grade A office space on the market – the only such scheme available in the town centre for immediate occupation. McAler & Rushe obtained planning consent for a 90,000 sq ft scheme on Princes Street next to Jurys Hotel while Shearer Property Group plan to refurbish Falcon House in The Parade. These schemes will complement the nearby major Union Square development, where 650,000 sq ft of office space in planned.

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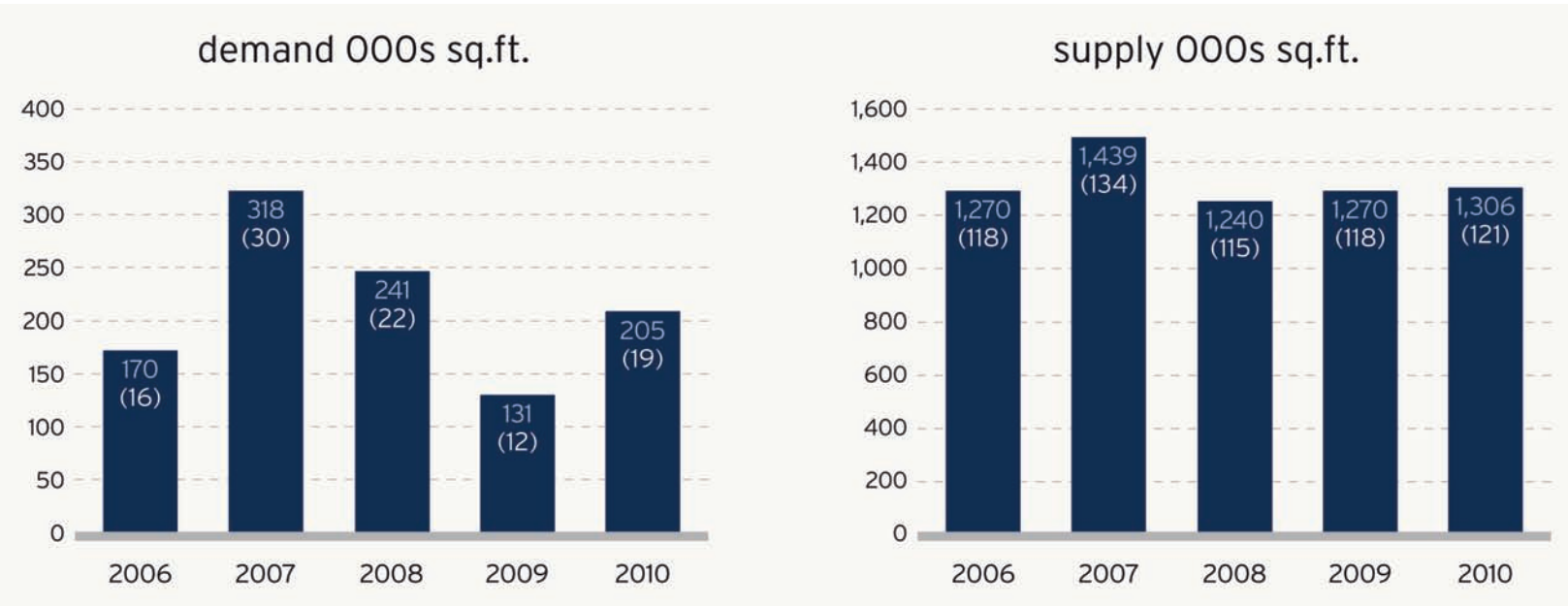
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James Gregory
Industrial

Take up last year was significantly higher than in 2009, according to James Gregory, with car seat maker TS Tech taking 220,000 sq ft at Spectrum – the former Renault building – in Westmead, Capgemini opening a data centre in the 90,000 sq ft Merlin building at South Marston, Cirencester medical products firm Vygon buying the 220,000 sq ft former Motorola building at Groundwell and Yuasa Batteries taking 75,000 sq ft at South Marston. As a result, the number of available large buildings has fallen, although the 242,000 sq ft Oxford warehouse on Europa Industrial Park is now on the market.

Retail and Leisure

Ashfield Land's five-acre, £100 million Regent Circus scheme is due to start this year and includes a 60,000 sq ft Morrisons supermarket, 950-seat cinema and eight restaurants. The old Technical College is being converted to office use.

Out of town, the 59,000 q ft John Lewis At Home store at Mannington

boosted the town's retail offer while Bridgemoor retail park is being refurbished to provide high-quality unit fronting onto Great Western Way. The former Mecca bingo hall in Princes Street has been refurbished and reopened as the MECA live music venue.



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Deals digest

• The former Ryder premises on the Groundwell Industrial Estate in Swindon have been let by Alder King Property Consultants, acting jointly with Altus Edwin Hill and on behalf of Ryder, to OnSite Central on a new 10 year lease.

OnSite Central is an established company which specialise in the surveying, management and maintenance of the waste water industry's assets, including pipework and vessels. The company recently acquired 365 Environmental Services Ltd, which has been based in Cirencester since 1969, confirming OnSite Central as one of the largest specialist wastewater contractors in the UK.

Alison Williams, senior surveyor at Alder King said: "We are delighted to have secured such a prestigious tenant for Ryder Limited. The unit is a detached 5,260 sq ft warehouse building with ground and first floor office space, forecourt parking and a generous yard and turning area."

The Groundwell Industrial Estate is on the northern fringe of Swindon, with excellent access to the M4 and M5."

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Local MD wins South West Entrepreneur of the Year award

Market master: Mark Nutter, managing director of Isys and Samantha Boardman of Sue Ryder - picture courtesy of Bristol Evening Post

Mark Nutter, managing director of Swindon-based time and attendance systems group Isys, has won the South West Entrepreneur of the Year award, having raised more than £17,000 for the Sue Ryder Care charity.

Mark was among a group of business people challenged by the charity to make as much as possible from £50. By betting that oil prices would rise, he managed to raise just over £17,000.

Mark came up with the idea for the high-risk strategy following earlier success in the futures market, especially oil trading, having put many of Isys's growth plans on hold 18 months ago.

"While my day-to-day work at Isys reduced, I spent more time learning the markets and how I could trade on the futures of oil prices. For some reason I can't quite explain I found that I had a

real knack at reading the oil prices and what they were likely to do in the very short term, with relative small amounts of money I was able to make significant returns.

"When it was suggested I could invest the £50 for Sue Ryder and make the charity money it seemed an obvious idea."

Mark agreed to underwrite the £50 and was also prepared to carry any losses should his oil trade prove unsuccessful.

In the end he managed in a few hours to turn the £50 into more than £17,000 by buying oil positions in the belief that the price would rise, which it did by \$2.

Samantha Boardman of Sue Ryder said: "We are thrilled at the amount of money Mark has raised and especially as he has embraced the idea of showing some entrepreneurial spirit and invested the money with a 19,100 per cent return!"

Postal Museum plans are scrapped

Plans to house The British Postal Museum & Archive (BPMA) in Swindon have been scrapped just a year after they were first drawn up.

The Trustees of the BPMA said they had taken the decision "in response to significant changes to funding expectations, particularly from corporate supporters, during the past six months".

In a statement, the BPMA said: "The BPMA retains its commitment to securing an accessible future home, and its staff will continue working to achieve the best possible outcome for the BPMA and its unique collections.

"The BPMA also continues to work with communities in Swindon, where it will be staging an exhibition of iconic post office photographs in the autumn."

The BPMA received a Lottery Fund round one pass for the £19 million project early last year which meant it could proceed to drafting a full development plan.

Architects Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios were appointed to work up a scheme to house the museum and archive in the Grade II listed Chain Test House in Churchward Village.

Marketing chat show goes online

A new online TV show dedicated to marketing issues has just been launched on the web. Produced by Cirencester-based web video company BizView.tv.

The show is the brainchild of Grant Leboff, marketing guru, author and founder of The Sticky Marketing Club. The 20 minute TV chat show with invited expert guests will be released once a month and can be viewed in a shortened form on YouTube or in full at www.stickymarketing.com

BizView.tv have been planning the productions for over a year with bestselling author and renowned public speaker Grant Leboff. "I first started talking to BizView about my ideas for on-line TV in late 2009," said Grant, "and it was clear straight away that they not only understood my requirements but were very proactive and creative in how we could realise the project professionally but on a limited budget."

The initial plan is for a run of 12 programmes, released on the last Monday of each month.



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