

SWINDON BUSINESS NEWS

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Back in the black - print firm rescued by former staff

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Making it in Swindon Help for town's manufacturers See pages 8 & 9

Centre of attraction - How Union Square will give Swindon a new commercial heart



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News in Brief

Queen's Award for Wiltshire firm

A Wiltshire firm that finds markets for surplus or obsolescent medical equipment has won a Queen's Award for International Trade.

Export earnings at Malmesbury-based Hilditch Group have more than doubled over the past three years. It now has 6,400 registered buyers in 40 countries worldwide and employs fully-qualified medical engineers to advise clients.

Archers to become gastropub

The former Archers Brewery at Churchward is re-open in August as a gastropub and microbrewery after receiving a £1.5 million makeover. Publicans Anthony and Allyson Windle bought the brewery last November, eight months after it went into administration. The couple, who also run the Three Crowns in Brinkworth, have taken on former Archers owner/brewer Mark Wallington to produce a range of beers. See www.swindon-business.net for full story

New shops open in Outlet

Two new shops have opened at the Swindon Designer Outlet. Footwear store Kurt Geiger and design-led nursery brand Mamas & Papas join more than 90 designer and high street brands in the McArthurGlen-owned centre at Churchward, part of Europe's leading designer retailer. Centre manager Tina Cumpstey said: "We're continually working to ensure we can bring the best possible outlet offering to our shoppers."

Coming up in June

Next month Swindon Business News will continue our series of features on exporting, with advice for those selling overseas for the first time and information on growth markets. June's issue will also gauge the strengths and weaknesses of Swindon's retail offering, analyse what's behind Chippenham's recent economic growth and look at employee benefits and the secrets of effective branding.

South West's most active agent for the last 10 years

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Swindon's bid for LEP falls short

Swindon has been told by government officials that its bid to create its own Local Enterprise Partnership will not succeed.

Government approval would have meant the town having the smallest private sector-led economic growth organisation in the country – although local economic development chiefs and business leaders insist this would not have put the town at a disadvantage.

However, now it could be forced to re-open talks to join either of the planned Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) in Gloucestershire and Wiltshire as it faces up to being one of the last areas in England without its own LEP.

Both are about to submit proposals for their own individual LEPs.

Discussions took place last year

with the counties including creating a LEP embracing Swindon, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire – but neither county wanted to link up with the town.

Forward Swindon, the economic development agency spearheading the town's LEP discussions, has been drafting the LEP submission to go to the ministers in the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS).

Created by the government as part of its policies to promote local growth, LEPs will play a pivotal role in boosting innovation and business expansion in their area, including ensuring local planning and infrastructure policies support the needs of local businesses.

They are private-sector led but can have representatives from local authorities on their boards.

LEP submissions and their board

members must be cleared by ministers. Officials at BIS have privately told those shaping Swindon's solo LEP bid that it will not be approved and for them to look to link up with other areas.

One person close to the discussions said: "It's back to square one. We talked to both Gloucestershire and Wiltshire last year. Now we could end up having the same discussions. We're in danger of being one of the last area's without a LEP."

The West of England LEP, which includes Bristol and Bath is already operational and has already received funding through the government's Regional Growth Fund.



Bill Cotton

Bill Cotton, director at Forward Swindon, said the town's solo LEP submission was still be drafted despite the comments.

"There has been no official decision reached at BIS yet," he said.

"We have heard comments that our bid will not succeed but we have heard from others that it will be given a fair hearing."

Forward Swindon will publish details of the submission on its website within the next few days and is seeking comments from Swindon's business community.

Some 33 LEPs have been approved across England, covering 93 per cent of the population and 1.9 million businesses.

* Keep up to date with the progress of Swindon's LEP bid by logging onto www.swindon-business.net

Dick Lovett Group buys Motorola building

Three major deals, including car dealer Dick Lovett's acquisition of a high-profile 7.8-acre site alongside the M4, have raised hopes that Swindon's commercial property market could be back on an upward curve.

Dick Lovett Group has bought the site of Motorola's first building in the town for approximately £2.7 million. The building was demolished 18 months ago, leaving the high-profile site at Blagrove vacant.

The family-owned Swindon-based group has grown steadily since launching in the town 40 years ago. Its dealerships in Swindon include BMW, Mini, Porsche, Maserati, Ferrari and Lotus.

Paul Whitmarsh, partner in charge of agents Whitmarsh Lockhart, which handled the sale, said: "It is always a great pleasure to see a successful local company such as Dick Lovett expanding within the town. We wish them every success with their proposed redevelopment."

Also alongside the M4 close to junction 16 on Euroway, Blagrove, fast-growing specialist packaging firm

Wasdell has expanded further, taking a 50,000 sq ft building in addition to its existing 70,000 sq ft base closeby. The firm makes packaging for the pharmaceutical, health care, veterinary and cosmetic industries.



Paul Whitmarsh

Meanwhile, US group Polymer Logistics has occupied a 61,000 sq ft warehouse in Radway Road, Stratton, close to the Europa distribution park, to supply major customer, budget supermarket group Aldi in South Marston, with plastic trays and pallets.

Whitmarsh Lockhart handled both deals. The firm's Ralph Wells said they were the first major lettings of 2011 and an indication of growing activity in the market – although he cautioned against seeing them as a significant sign of a sustainable upturn. Joint agents on the Polymer letting were Alder King.

Campaign launched backing RAF lyneham development

A campaign has been launched backing an ambitious plan to regenerate RAF Lyneham as a theme park and business centre if the Ministry of Defence decides against using it as an Army garrison.

The base is due to close completely at the end of next year following the end of operational flights this July. The Lyneham Needs You campaign is to lobby for the theme park if the garrison plan is abandoned. Campaigner Emma Faramarzi, marketing director of hi-tech firm Emnico Technologies, said the towns of Wootton Bassett, Lyneham and Calne faced economic collapse if there is no Plan B in place. The theme park idea is being promoted by former newspaper tycoon Eddy Shah, now proprietor of the Wiltshire Golf and Country Club near the airbase. Go to www.facebook/home.php#!/Lynehamneedsyou for more details.

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SWINDON BUSINESS NEWS

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Cost: £45+VAT

• Swindon Connections
When: **12 May, 6pm**
Where: De Vere Village, Swindon
Email: admin@business-scene.com

• Artemis Forum: Event for women who are
serious about their business
When: **12 May, 6pm - 9pm**
Where: Jury's Inn, Swindon
Contact: 01793 840 105

• Making the Media work for you
Social Media for Business
When: **17 May, 9:30am - 12:30pm**
Where: Little London Court, Swindon
Contact: 01793 511990
Cost £45

• Social Media for Business
When: **17 May, 2pm - 5pm**
Where: Little London Court, Swindon
Contact: 01793 511990
Email: enquiries@voxonline.co.uk
Cost £45

• The Wiltshire Business Club
When: **18 May, 6pm**
Where: The Rose & Crown, Chippenham
Contact: www.wiltsbizclub.co.uk

• Swindon Public Sector Forum
When: **19 May, 9:15am**
Where: Swindon Borough Council, Euclid St
Contact: david.latham@richmondfellowship.org.uk

• Choosing a website
When: **26 May, 10am**
Where: BRAVE Enterprise Agency, Bristol
Contact: 0117 3144616
Cost £36

People

• Logistics group Howard
Tenens has appointed Honda's
former head of European
transport Ray Runza as its
development director. Mr Runza,
who had worked at
Honda in
various
logistics roles
since 1987
and held his
most recent
job at the car
firm for more



Ray Runza

than seven years, joins Howard
Tenens on a consultancy basis.
He will report to the group's joint
managing directors Ben and Dan
Morris, working specifically on
new business opportunities,
procurement and expansion of
customer and supplier
relationships. Ben said Mr Runza
brought a vast wealth of
experience and contacts across
the European logistics arena to
the group's senior management
team.

• Public relations agency owner
Jo Smyth is the new face at the
helm of business networking
group NRG's Swindon branch.
Former journalist Jo, who owns
and runs PR and copywriting
agency Word Worker, took over
at the May 3 meeting. The
branch meets on the first
Tuesday of the month at The
Marriott, Swindon, from 10.30am
to 2.30pm. Jo, whose business is
based between Swindon and
Malmesbury, said: "I joined NRG
just over a year ago and have
found the group invaluable.
"NRG is much more than just a
networking group and a way to
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Jo Smyth



Lisa Bennett and Lynn Harman

NRG Xtra sessions which are
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confidence. Guests are welcome
to attend the monthly meetings.
For more information about NRG
call 0845 40 80 639, visit
www.nrg-networks.com, or
contact Jo on 01666 861149.

• Venues Event Management
has appointed Lynn Harman and
Lisa Bennett to the company's
expanding sales force. Lynn joins
as client development manager
and will be working on
developing key accounts to
ensure growth opportunities are
maximised, including
construction group Balfour
Beatty, leading automotive
distributor Inchcape and
insurance consultancy Jelf. Lisa
will be fulfilling a new role of
telesales manager. This role will
also focus on managing an
existing portfolio of clients such
as Shaw Trust, as well as new
business generation. Lisa has a
strong background in
telemarketing and account
management having worked for
HFC Bank, HSM and InfoSys.
Mark Fry, sales director, said:
"Client retention and new
business growth feature heavily
in our strategic plans and Lynn
and Lisa will provide vital
elements we need to achieve
this."

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SWINDON - 01793 238323

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Simply Refreshing Recruitment in Swindon

Bidders checking out luxury hotels

Bidders are circling the luxury hotel group Von Essen, which went into administration last month, with some seeking to cherry pick its best-performing establishments.

Accountants Ernst & Young were appointed administrators to the holding company by its bankers Barclays and Lloyds Banking Group when it failed to pay interest on its £250 million debts.

The Bath-based company owns 27 prestige hotels in the UK, including two in Wiltshire – Bishopstrow, near Warminster, and Woolley Grange, near Bradford-on-Avon. All the hotels are operating normally except Hunstrete House, near Bath, which operated under an agreement with Von Essen. It has gone into voluntary liquidation.

Potential bidders include major hotel chains, property companies and private equity groups.

Nationwide continues support for orchestra

Nationwide Building Society is to continue as principal sponsor of Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra (BSO), supporting a range of community and education projects as well as a number of concerts throughout the year.

Swindon-based Nationwide is a major employer in Bournemouth and has a significant presence across the BSO's heartlands of the South and the West.

Under the deal, Nationwide will also take on the role of title sponsor for the BSO community musician Andy Baker as well as working with the orchestra on a number of key community projects including BSO Resonate, an education and community initiative that reaches more than 125,000 children and elderly people through music workshops and therapy sessions every year.

Firms urged to go solar

Businesses are being urged to look at installing solar photovoltaic (PV) panels on their roofs to take advantage of a government-backed scheme.

The scheme pays 50 per cent of the yield generated at 43.3p per kilowatt plus 0.03p for any electricity exported, depending on negotiations with the DNO (District Network Operator) along with major savings brought about by generating electricity rather than buying it.

Russell Barnfield, managing director of Swindon-based installer BPV Solar, believes many firms are unaware of the benefits they can get from the Feed-in Tariff (FiT) scheme.

"It's a gift from the government – and you don't get many of those!" said Mr Barnfield.



Licence to print money: Hayley Woodall with helps from Nigel Scott, has turned the fortunes of the print firm around, creating a £420,000 annual turnover business

Printing firm brought back from the brink is turned into a great success

A North Wiltshire print firm that went bust 18 months ago has been transformed by two former staff members into a £420,000 turnover business with a 12 per cent operating profit.

Former production manager Hayley Woodall and ex-printer Pete Hulbert took over the Wootton Bassett-based litho printers, now renamed Hulbert & Woodall, and rehired five other staff members who had been made redundant when the original business became insolvent.

Now Hayley and Pete are looking to invest in new equipment and offer apprenticeships to young people as they continue to build the business.

Hayley, who had no previous experience of running a business, has been helped by Marlborough-based business adviser Nigel Scott of Action Coach.

Hayley was introduced to Nigel a year ago through Business Link, who she went

to for advice. He helped her to understand the nuts and bolts of running a business – from the legal aspects of employing staff to understanding the marketplace and customers, generating new sales leads, and measuring the performance of the company.

Hayley, who worked at Hulbert Press for eight years before it closed, said: "It was my first directorship and quite daunting. Nigel has introduced a structured approach to running the business. Everyone in the organisation knows what the targets are, which has developed a great team spirit as well as improving sales and increasing profits."

"He introduced a 90-day plan, which is really helpful, and once a quarter we get out of the office and take a good, hard look at the business."

The company prides itself on its local, personal service, which Hayley believes has helped it fend off competition from cheaper internet-based competitors.

"Our customers know they can come in and talk to us, work with our designer, and collect their completed job direct from the print works," said Hayley.

"One of the next initiatives to be implemented by Nigel will be a customer satisfaction survey which will help us to understand how we can offer an even better service to our clients."

"We want to build a reputation as a company that offers the best level of service and the best quality of print in North Wiltshire."

Her time with Nigel, she added, helps her focus on the important things that will help move the business forward.

Nigel said: "Hayley, like a lot of people in her position, has a very busy life. We meet once a fortnight and I help her to improve the business for herself, her staff and her customers. I encourage her to spend some of her time working on the business, rather than all of her time working in it."

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Telecoms company named in 100 fastest-growing for international sales

Telecom services firm RFL Communications has been named among the 100 private British companies with the fastest-growing international sales.

The Chippenham-based firm's 68 per cent growth in export sales over the past two years puts it at number 61 in the Sunday Times, HSBC International Track 100 table.

RFL, which employs 45 staff, achieved international sales of £1.8 million in the past year. Among the high points were the construction of a communications network for a Jordanian electricity and power company. The league table is sponsored by HSBC and accountants Grant Thornton.

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The Property People

Law firm given a fresh start from re-branding

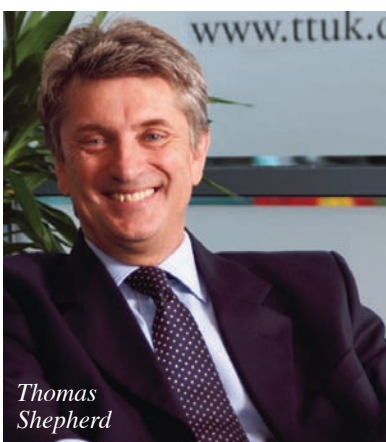
Re-branding as Thrings has given the law firm a fresh start, according to managing partner Thomas Sheppard.

The firm formerly known as Thring Townsend Lea & Pembertons following a string of mergers over 10 years is now ready for the challenges and opportunities of a rapidly-changing legal sector and tough economic climate, he said.

Thomas and director of marketing Lizzie Heffer spent eight months on the re-branding process, from the first meetings with its Bath-based creative agency Radio to implementation across all its communications, including website, stationery and signage.

Along the way the firm, which has the largest of its four offices in Swindon, involved staff, clients and external opinion formers in a series of interviews to give their perceptions of the firm and establish its brand values.

"After all the mergers of recent years it was like putting a bow on top of a parcel - we pulled all the strands together to form one brand," said Thomas. "It gave us a chance to see the firm afresh. While we've got people who have allegiances to the firms that were merged to form Thrings, we've also taken on a lot of people who only know us as one firm, as we are now. They tend to be at least 10 years younger. They're the next generation so in some ways it's



Thomas Sheppard

now like a 'son of' firm, which is great. In some ways it's like starting again."

The new look website goes against convention for law firms' sites and avoids having photos of its people on many of its pages, including the home page. "Our people are important but the firm is more important," said Thomas. "We want clients and prospective clients to identify with the firm."

The re-branding has been well received by clients and staff, says Thomas. "It's been unifying. The whole process has brought people together to think about where we're heading as a firm. We need to be leaner, smarter, positive and unified in a changing market. I think we've achieved that."

Find out more about our feature next month:
Secrets of effective branding
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Indian restaurant celebrates Royal Wedding in style

Award-winning restaurant The Jewel in the Crown served up a special Indian wedding dish to mark the royal marriage of Prince William and Kate Middleton.

Staff at the restaurant on Victoria Road wore traditional Indian wedding dress as they served Shaghor Ranna to invited guests, family and friends.

The marinated chicken dish is traditionally eaten first by the bride and groom, with the groom using his hands to break the whole chicken before feeding his new wife. The colourful dish is lovingly prepared by family members the day before the wedding feast

with the chicken garnished with herbs and spices, covered with mashed potato, served on a bed of pilau rice and surrounded by decorative-shaped salad and vegetables. While it is usually made with chicken, in Bangladesh fish is used instead.



Jewel in the Crown owner Muzammil Ali said: "This is a very special dish which takes a long time to prepare. We have quite a lot of weddings here and this dish plays an important, symbolic role in the traditional wedding feast. So we thought it would be an excellent way to celebrate the royal wedding."

Chippenham tech pioneer to launch cost-saving product

Mobile technology developer M-Netics is to unveil its latest product later this month alongside research which shows how it can help delivery firms further lower their costs.

The Chippenham-based business already supplies major retailers, logistics groups and delivery firms with mobile technology, including hand-held scanners and other devices.

It claims its research among IT decision makers in UK logistics businesses will deliver huge benefits and savings to these firms.

Sales and marketing director Stephen Godman said: "Our research and experience has shown that the last leg of fulfilment, especially the point of delivery, is

an area of untapped savings and potential improvements in customer service for most businesses.

"Our next generation solution is set to deliver on all fronts, improving business processes, cutting maintenance costs, enhancing customer service, strengthening security and increasing efficiency.

"We are confident that the market is ready for this technology."

The new product and research will be unveiled at an exclusive event at the Land Rover Experience, Solihull on May 26. M-Netics was acquired by Tim Hamilton-Davies as part of a management buy out with the previous management team in July 2004.

Synergy Health acquires US sterilisation company

Swindon-based outsourced health services provider Synergy Health has acquired US sterilisation company BeamOne for £21.5 million.

The deal includes a deferred cash consideration of up to a maximum of £12.3m - depending on the performance for the year ending 1 April 2012.

Richard Steeves, chief executive of Synergy

Health, said: "This is a significant step for Synergy, providing us with an entry into one of the world's largest and most established sterilisation markets. BeamOne is the leading e-beam sterilisation provider in the US and by joining our network, we will create the second largest, global outsourced sterilisation business in the world."

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Vox tops Consultancy Standard

Award winning public relations and marketing communications company, Vox, has proved to be top of the class by passing the Public Relations Consultants Association's (PRCA) quality standard, the Consultancy Management Standard (CMS), with a mark of more than 99 per cent.

The CMS is an internationally recognised hallmark of PR excellence. It combines elements of ISO9001, which demonstrates quality in management, and Investors in People with criteria specific to a PR consultancy.

Vox was assessed on a number of areas including campaign management and measurement, client satisfaction, people management and business planning – and achieved scores of 100 per cent in all but one area.

Julie Margerum, managing director, said: "We're thrilled to have achieved such an outstanding pass rate on our PRCA CMS audit.

"This is proof of the time, expertise and commitment that we give to all of our clients and the standards that we have always maintained."

Francis Ingham, chief executive of the PRCA, said: "Clients want to work with agencies that meet high standards and deliver results. Vox PR is now accredited with our Consultancy Management Standard and has passed with a very impressive score indeed. To score over 99 per cent is an astonishing and almost unparalleled result. Vox PR had to complete a rigorous external audit which ensures PRCA member businesses are robust and well-run, with all the proper systems and processes in place, and are committed to best practice."



Julie Margerum

PA system key to successful event

A poor PA system or an incorrectly set projector can not just ruin the quality of a corporate event, but can also damage the reputation of the company sponsoring or organising it.

That's the opinion of Mike O'Sullivan, operations manager with RTS Communications, who provide and operate AV systems to government departments, courts and public inquiries, as well as major corporate clients.

"We're often called in by new clients after they've been through the pain of equipment or operators that just aren't up to the job," says Mike.

"I've heard some toe-curling tales of audiences squirming as a microphone hisses or cracks right through a keynote speech, or where a fantastic presentation has only been visible to the people in the front row because the projector isn't calibrated correctly.

"The result is that perhaps days or weeks of hard work is wasted, because the key points that the speakers wanted to make – and the delegates have come to hear – are completely lost.

"Any good supplier should have a lot of experience in your type of function, use top of the range equipment and be able to step in with any additional equipment if your event requires it. Check that they're belt-and-braces people as well – the best providers assume that the worst will happen and always have a back up plan." Call RTS Communications on 01793 694470 or visit www.rtscommunications.com



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Highly-respected solicitor retires

Nita King, partner at Swindon solicitors Lemon&Co, has retired following a decade working at the firm.

As head of litigation, Nita helped grow the department, establishing it as one of the most respected in the area and handling complicated and substantial litigation cases – some worth millions of pounds.

Nita, who became a lawyer in 1993 and previously worked for Laytons in Bristol, said: "I have enjoyed every minute of serving our clients, who have become close colleagues and whom I will certainly miss."

Nita, who is in her fifties, is retiring for personal reasons.

She was born in Kenya and moved to England when she was 16. Fluent in Gujarati with a working knowledge of Hindi and Swahili, she forged strong links with the Asian business community and is a patron of a charity tackling sickle cell disease and thalassemia.

"I am leaving due to unforeseen circumstances and I know I will miss



Nita King

my colleagues, clients, business colleagues and the community to whom I wish all the very best for the future," she added.

The litigation team is now headed by partner Tim Dixon.

Managing partner Deirdre Moss said: "Nita has been a friend and a most valued and highly-respected member of our team and we are incredibly sad to see her go."

Growing law firm moves to new offices

Specialist law firm Hoffman Male is relocating to accommodate growth in the wills and probate part of its business.

The firm will move from its offices in Bath Road, Old Town, to Windmill Hill Business Park, near the junction 16 of the M4, on May 3.

Principal Mary Hoffman said the new office will be more accessible to clients as it is on a direct bus route from Swindon, while parking is free and plentiful.

The firm was started in Victoria Road in 1979 by Roger Male, later moving to Cheney Manor before returning to Old Town three years ago. "Although we are sorry to be leaving Old Town, our new premises are much nicer," said Mary. "They are easily accessible and we need more space. The wills and probate side of our business, which started only last year, has really taken off."

"Our core business, conveyancing, remains buoyant, despite the downturn in the property market and the commercial property side of the business continues to grow. The fact that we have been able to ride out this recession is down to the loyalty of our clients, who recognise the quality of service that we provide."

Mary added that the relocation was, in part, to help clients who have supported the business over many years. "Unlike in Old Town, the new premises are accessible to wheelchair users," she said.

All the firm's contact details – including phone, fax and email – will remain the same.



Mary Hoffman

Report's warning for solicitors as deregulation threat looms

A combination of intense pressure on profits, increased bank debt and the imminent arrival of so-called 'Tesco law' could put some legal firms out of business, according to a new report.

The stark warning comes from accountants and business advisers Grant Thornton, who claim that the outlook for many law firms has been transformed by the economic downturn even before de-regulation of the sector takes place.

Following the introduction of the Legal Services Act in October – which will open up parts of the market to new entrants, such as supermarkets – those unable to adapt to the changes will find themselves facing a battle for survival.

The failure of national law firm Halliwell's last year sent shockwaves through the legal sector – and Grant Thornton's research shows more

could follow in its wake as extra strain is placed on working capital at a time when clients are demanding more service for lower fees.

Nigel Morrison, recovery and reorganisation partner at Grant Thornton in Bristol, said: "The effects of the credit crunch and the high-profile failure of Halliwell's have arguably exposed the underlying weakness of a business model that is based on the full distribution of profits each year."

"The challenges in the current business environment mean that it may be more difficult for some firms to maintain existing lending facilities and, as a result, some may cease to operate in their current form."

The report – "How Vulnerable is the UK Legal Sector?" – identifies several factors impacting on performance, for the full list visit www.swindon-business.net

Lalpac inline for expansion after £2.6m acquisition by software giant

Further growth is on the cards for licensing software firm Lalpac, based in Chippenham, after being acquired by one of the UK's top suppliers of software to the public sector.

London-based Idox paid £2.6 million in cash for Lalpac, which supplies 131 local authorities with licensing management software and services covering the full range of licensing including taxi, private hire, gambling and general licensing.

LalPac, which was launched 22 years ago by Peter Colson, had sales of £1.5m last year, of which more than 85 per cent was recurring.

Idox said the acquisition would immediately enhance its earnings. The deal was secured with an initial £2.3m payment with a further £300,000 a year later subject to certain conditions.

Mr Colson said: "Being part of a larger group will ensure there are sufficient resources to enable the continued development and enhancement of services and improved integration and support."

"This will ensure that we can continue to deliver innovation and enhanced solutions to our customers;

provide the best tools available and work with customers to help make them more efficient, save money and for them to provide a measurably better experience for the public."

IDOX chairman Martin Brooks said: "The LalPac suite of licensing management software products will take its place as an important part of a broader range of products and services that Idox offers."

"This acquisition will provide significant cross-selling opportunities within our customer base and ensure that we continue to deliver innovative solutions to our customers that can help them achieve efficiencies."

Idox is quoted on the London Stock Exchange's Alternative Investment Market with a value of £68m. In the year to October 31, 2010, it made pre-tax profits of £5.24m on sales of £31.2m.

The acquisition was led by Bristol-based corporate finance advisers Icon.

Mr Colson said: "Icon added considerable competitive tension to the deal, which increased value for shareholders despite the background of public sector spending cuts and the added complexity of an Office of Fair Trading review."

Stonegate poaches Welsh egg producer

Stonegate, Britain's second biggest egg distributor, has increased its share of the market with the acquisition of Welsh producer Farmhouse Freedom Eggs.

Pam Corbett, managing director of Lacock-based Stonegate, said the deal was prompted by a desire to

strengthen its presence in Wales and boost its egg-product business. Freedom produces hard-boiled eggs, mayonnaise and liquid egg for the retail and food service sectors.

Privately-owned Stonegate employs more than 500 people and has sales of around £147 million. No

financial details of the takeover have been disclosed.

Stonegate was founded in 1926 by a small group of farmers. It has grown through a string of mergers and acquisitions. It was bought by Pam and Richard Corbett in

2008.

Outsourced accountancy service to save businesses time and money

Morris Owen's outsourced accountancy service started in response to a US-based company that wanted to trade in the UK, but didn't want to incur the overhead of staffing and operating a permanent office here.

Its requirement was very clear; a professional accounting function that it could tap into which was flexible and could grow or reduce in line with the business's needs. US reporting requirements were detailed and the business needed pro-active advice about how to cope with UK tax and regulation.

Some 14 years on and Morris Owen's Virtual Accounts Office provides this outsourced accountancy function to clients in a variety of

circumstances – start-up ventures that want to focus on growing the business, mature businesses that want the comfort of a full accounting function without the overhead cost, companies that have gone through a management buy-out that need to give their bankers confidence in their financial reporting and, of course, the original company that moulded the service.

Manager Rachel McFarlane says: "We are very aware of the pressures businesses face and providing the outsourced accounts function to our clients gives them the best of both worlds; our dedicated staff maintain the client's accounting records and in addition we give them the backup of a firm of accountants who can identify

issues and help them in real time.

"Our clients never have to worry about holiday cover, staffing issues and fixed overhead costs as their accounting function grows or shrinks depending upon how they have coped with the economic conditions. They also have the confidence that they can cope with the ever-changing VAT and tax legislation."

"We pride ourselves on working closely with our clients to ensure they receive a fully bespoke and adaptable service tailored to their needs."

To find out more about Morris Owen's Outsourced Accountancy service, contact Rachel McFarlane at Morris Owen on 01793 603900 or email her at:

rachel.mcfarlane@morrisowen.com

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EVENT

Future of Swindon

THE POWER TO HELP YOU SUCCEED

Swindon is at a crossroads in its development. The town, which once claimed the title of Europe's fastest growing, has seen expansion stall over recent years in line with the global economic slowdown.

Unemployment has risen, particularly among young people, some businesses have closed while others have been forced to cut jobs.

But as the recovery slowly takes hold, what does the future hold for Swindon? Can it grasp the opportunities afforded by its location to regain its place among the UK's most dynamic towns? Has it got the right infrastructure and skills to attract new jobs and businesses?

These issues will be explored at a high-powered business event in the town next month. The Future of Swindon, staged by Barclays Corporate on June 9 and supported by Swindon Business News, will give an invited business audience the opportunity to hear from renowned futurologist and business analyst James Bellini on the challenges facing Swindon in the changing global economy and a panel of speakers will debate how Swindon can best meet these opportunities.

The panel will include Professor Martin Boddy, assistant vice chancellor, research, business engagement and professional development at the University of the West of England. Prof Boddy has studied the growth of Swindon over several decades and has advised local authorities and public sector bodies on its expansion. Also on the panel will be senior figures from some of Swindon's most prominent companies.

Barclays Corporate director Chris Elias, who has been instrumental in shaping The Future of Swindon day and will open it, believes the time is right for such an event.

After many years working in the banking sector in the town, he has seen Swindon rise to major economic challenges in the past and is confident it can do so again.

Much-needed redevelopment in the town centre is about to get underway, including the major Union Square mixed office, housing and retail scheme and the demolition of the former Swindon College building to make way for a leisure and retail development.

On the edge of the town, the giant Wichelstowe housing and employment development is under way while plans have been re-drafted for a major scheme near junction 15 of the M4.

"We are at a crossroads," said Chris. "We have seen similar events happen in the past where major decisions have acted as a catalyst for the development of the town.

"Now after years of false dawns it looks as though the next phase of the town centre redevelopment is set to happen which will see clearance of the old Swindon College site, which has been a blot on the town centre landscape for years.

"There has also been more recent good news following the announcement of the electrification of the mainline rail service to Paddington which should enhance journey times to London considerably.

"Additionally work is progressing well on the new B&Q distribution centre on the outskirts of the town. This is the largest construction project in Swindon for some years and highlights the town's excellent location on the UK transport network.

"We've also seen how events across the world can impact on the local economy. Honda, for example, has had to cut back production at their Swindon plant because they have been unable to obtain sufficient parts from Japan. This shows how the globalisation of trade can really have localised impacts."

James Bellini facilitates The Future of Swindon, 9 June



James Bellini has a distinguished track record as an analyst, writer and presenter. He specialises in future issues affecting business, with an emphasis on brand values and corporate reputation particularly within the retail, financial services and IT sectors. After an early academic career in defence and military strategy, James was invited to become the first British member of the Hudson Institute – the US think tank. He then became Head of Political Studies at the Institute's European division in Paris.

He has presented The Money Programme, Tonight and Panorama. He also spent three years as editor and presenter of Financial Times Television, before switching across to Sky News. Amongst many award-winning credits, he scripted and narrated the 12-part series Nuclear Age. James has served as Chair of a group of corporate communications companies under the umbrella of the ad agency Collett, Dickson & Pearce. He continues to sit on the European Advisory Board of the Global Future Forum.

To register your interest in attending this event email kate.parry@barclayscorporate.com or call Kate on 07766 363490 (Mobile).

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SWINDON BUSINESS NEWS

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Businesses choose to revive and rescue instead of closing down

Conditions remain tough for many businesses and with interest rates likely to rise this year and the full impact of public sector cuts yet to be felt; things are unlikely to get a lot better for all of them.

Across the UK, creditors' voluntary liquidations rose to 4,121 in the first three months of this year, up 2.1 per cent on the same period in 2010.

The figures may be on the increase but they are much lower than previous recessions - a result of a change in attitude from banks and the insolvency industry that means more efforts are now made to rescue worthwhile businesses rather than simply close them down.

Getting the fundamentals of business right are paramount in this economic climate. Experienced insolvency practitioner Rupert Mullins, of business rescue and recovery firm Benedict Mackenzie, has seen numerous good firms fail because they have not heeded the essentials of running a business. And even when the recovery does take hold, many firms find themselves in dire financial straits as they overtrade.

Rupert, who has worked in insolvency for 30 years, said: "There are a number of businesses out there still struggling. They've been given extra breathing space because interest rates



Rupert Mullins

haven't gone up - but this situation isn't going to last for ever - rates will have to go up soon."

HM Revenue's & Customs (HMRC) Time To Pay scheme, that has allowed struggling small firms to delay tax payments, has also held down the number of companies going bust.

"It has been effective and has helped cashflow in a lot of businesses but when you get accepted by HMRC you have to stick to it. You can't keep putting it off. The tax will still have to be paid."

Many businesses, he fears, are storing up problems. "You need to sort

out your cashflow because when a more robust recovery comes you will need cash in the business to fund growth.

"I've seen it so many times - businesses get a big order and think their troubles are over. They rush out and buy stock or raw materials with cash to fulfil it, make the products but then don't get paid for several months. In some cases their cashflow dries up and they go out of business."

Rupert also says owner/managers should not just look to their banks to solve their financial problems. "The banks are lending but the risk has got to be so low that they feel it's a safe bet. You have to prove you have a business that is viable and going forward. You can't just say 'I want an extra £20,000 on my overdraft'."

Too many businesses, he says, negotiated large overdrafts in the good times and are now up to their limit. "They didn't give themselves any room for manoeuvre when things got tighter," he said.

He recommends looking at factoring or invoice discounting. "It's a safer bet and you may get 80 to 90 per cent of your invoice payments upfront. It can help when cashflow is a problem and charges are not unreasonable."

For further information contact Benedict Mackenzie on 0117 373 6222 or visit www.benemack.com

Rupert Mullins' tips for business survival:

- Always have enough to last until things improve. Cashflow is all important
- Look carefully at your position in the supply chain. If you trade with the public sector or defence and construction industries, can you diversify?
- Consider factoring or invoice discounting to boost cashflow
- Check your utility bills carefully and look for savings
- Get away from the office and take a long, hard look at your business. Make sure it is fit for further challenges ahead
- If the problems are worse than you expect, seek professional advice as soon as possible

Making a

Swindon has a rich manufacturing heritage. From the GWR's massive railworks to Plessey semiconductor and Honda cars, the town's industry has long operated at the leading edge of industry.

But with the government now putting the focus back on manufacturing to boost the fragile economy, Swindon's industrial firms need to ensure they are world-class.

Innovation has long been key to Swindon's manufacturing prowess and the latest report from the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) written by Richard Adams of Exeter University

shows Swindon among the leading innovation towns in the country, based on investment by companies in pioneering products and services.

Contributing to Swindon's manufacturing success has been its skilled labour pool and excellent road and rail communications. But its position at the leading edge of innovation is down to investment by its businesses.

With a spate of recent surveys showing manufacturing as one of the few bright spots in an otherwise cloudy economic picture, the town could emerge stronger from the downturn.

But there are still major challenges. According to Andrew Phillips, manufacturing specialist at the Manufacturing Advisory Service in the South West (MAS-SW) manufacturers must clarify their strategic vision to survive.

"They need to constantly question everything they do. What are the competition doing? Are they keeping an eye on what's around the corner? What are the pressures on their customers and suppliers?" said Andrew.

The starting point must be to look

at existing customers and existing products, says Andrew. "Will your customers buy more from you? That's the easiest way to increase sales. Will they buy your other products? Will you find new customers for your existing products?"

"But what a lot of manufacturers do is spend time and money developing new products which they then try to sell to new customers. It's a double unknown and can soak up a lot of time and money."

The first thing MAS-SW advisers do when we go into a business is find out where they stand in the market.

"We look at their strengths and help them innovate, although we also ask if they need to innovate? In some cases there is no point in trying to improve a product. For example, we could help a typewriter manufacturer make better typewriters - but are they going to sell any more?"

Prior to the recession, the government was pushing manufacturers to be more productive. But the game changed to making sure they survived through the downturn. Now the emphasis is on moving back to growth.

But according to Andrew, many manufacturers think innovation only happens in a research and development lab with men in white coats. "But it's about doing what you do better," he says.

"Look at the growth curve for products - from development to new product to maturity then decline. All too often a company with a successful product will use it as cash cow. They won't invest in the next product in readiness for when the curve turns down.

"Innovation can come in many ways - such as moving from hand cutting and machining parts to CNC machining, then laser cutting. The big boys do it - look at Apple. It's going to launch the next generation of

Advice and help in difficult times



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Help in challenging times

We live in challenging times - and there is everything to suggest that conditions for businesses, particularly employers, will remain difficult for some years to come. Taxation in its various forms is rising - VAT and national insurance in particular - not to mention business rates and the impending requirement to make pension provision for employees.

The combined effects of public sector spending cuts, debt reduction by consumers and the harder line being taken by HMRC with businesses suffering cash flow problems are expected to push more individuals and businesses to the brink in the next year.

The understandable inclination of many struggling entrepreneurs is to be positive and hope that things will come good. That may be a recipe for disaster. As the saying goes, failing to plan is planning to fail. Undying optimism is little different from a "head in the sand" disregard for reality.

As well as handling formal insolvency proceedings, Bernard Harrington's team at BHG have a wealth of experience in advising businesses and their owners who are facing difficulties. These range from turnaround situations where a potentially sound business faces temporary difficulties arising from the loss, or failure, of a major customer to helping individuals caught up in the aftermath of a failure because of personal guarantees or loss of income.

The techniques which can be used to rehabilitate

a business differ from those which may be adopted where a business has no realistic prospect of paying its debts or where the burden of past debt makes a fresh start the only option. One size fits all it isn't! The key is not to leave it too late - doing so usually limits your options and may make a turnaround impossible.

In recent years the team at BHG have assisted businesses and their owners in the following industries - construction, hospitality, recruitment, IT services, advertising and manufacturing. Our efforts have saved jobs and businesses including some well-known Swindon companies. BHG offers a discreet, professional service and no-obligation initial meetings with directors of companies who are, or fear they will be, facing insolvency. Bernard Harrington is a licensed insolvency practitioner of 25 years standing; he and his team understand fully the pressures felt by the owners of distressed businesses. So, if you're concerned that your business is or may be in difficulty now or in the coming months do feel free to call us on 01793 783311.

www.bhginsolvency.co.uk



Bernard Harrington

brighter future

The government wants manufacturing to lead the economy out of recession. It believes the industry can regain its world-leading status with cutting-edge research and development and innovative product design.

But what does manufacturing need to do to achieve greatness? In the first of an occasional series on manufacturing in Swindon, we look at the efforts to improve industry in the town.



iPhone even when the previous one is selling well.”

The majority of what happens in a business doesn't add value, he said. “They need to look at everything the business does - from orders in to despatches out.

Ninety-five per cent of it doesn't add value. Look at the supply chain. Can they take cost out of it?”

With fuel and raw material costs rising, outsourcing to the Far East may not be as cost-efficient as it once was.

“We worked with a company that made large copper components. They bought them in bulk from India and paid up front which impacted on their cashflow,” said Andrew. “They had a lot of money tied up in stock. We looked at it and it turned out cheaper to make them to order

in the UK. Their stock holding went down to zero - they didn't even need a warehouse any more - and saved a lot of money, even though the cost of the actual component was higher.”

Andrew also says costs can mount up when things go wrong. “It's great to save costs by moving manufacturing to China, but what happens when there's a problem? The way the supply chain is set up you can have goods on the sea coming to the UK before you find out what the problem is and can go over there to sort it out.”

Skill levels in manufacturing are also important. But many businesses still see training and development as a cost rather than an investment.

CASE STUDY

Quality and flexibility: key to success

Fascia Graphics is the kind of small business that politicians talk about when they make speeches about the manufacturing revival.

But for the Chippenham-based firm, it's more a case of hard work and determination, coupled with innovation and investment in its people.

The business today is three UK's market-leading membrane keypad and graphic overlay manufacturer, serving the computer and consumer products markets.

When it launched in 1994 it managed to attract 40 customers and achieve a £130,000 turnover. Today it has more than 600 customers and turns over £3.26 million. Staffing levels have reached 74 and are constantly rising as the firm wins new customers.

The emphasis since day one has been on working closely with its customers to deliver a quality product on time and at cost. The fact that the management team have worked their way up from the shopfloor also helps. They are not afraid of rolling up their sleeves and helping out.

For example, recently-appointed operations manager Gary Knowles has been with the company since 1994. His newly-created role involves him running all production and overseeing planning, training and the management of Fascia's team of production supervisors.

Gary is also hold responsible for the company's continuous improvement programme including lean manufacturing.

Fascia has worked with the Manufacturing Advisory Service - South West (MAS-SW) to sharpen up its processes.

As well as taking on more workers - eight joined recently - the firm is also planning major investment in new machinery to keep it at the cutting edge.

“We work closely with our customer, looking at all aspects of the job,” explained Gary.

“Everybody wants their job at the lowest possible price but we don't say we can't do it at that price, we look at using different materials or producing what they want in a different way. The client is happy and we keep the work.”



From left: Michael Hole, engineering manager, Mike Blanchard, QA manager, and Gary Knowles, operations manager

Close working with customers on digital prototyping also helps reduce waste and deliver orders on time and at cost.

Flexibility is also key to Fascia's success. The firm operates two or three shifts during the week and can easily shift to 24-hour production to meet tight deadlines

The firm is also very sales-focused with three sales staff permanently on the road winning new customers and three in the office handling inquiries from across the UK and Ireland.

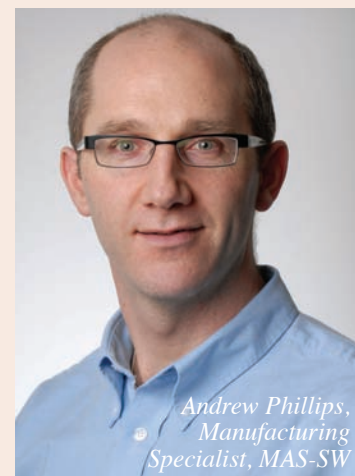
Engineering manager Michael Hole, who worked for the company between 1994 and 2004 and has recently returned, summed up Fascia's approach to business in challenging times with raw material costs increasing all the time.

“Our lean and the continuous improvement processes allowed us to swallow up a lot of the raw material costs without affecting profitability,” he said. “By clever business practices internally, we've managed to maintain highly-competitive costs to our customers. And word gets around that in tough times there is an industry leading company choosing to pass on price increases, so business almost wins itself.”

Advertising Feature

Do you know what areas of your business add value?

Most businesses want to reduce their costs. But do you know which aspects of your business your customers actually value? Andrew Phillips, Manufacturing Specialist at the Manufacturing Advisory Service in the South West (MAS-SW), who works with Wiltshire businesses, explains:



Picture this scenario: A customer sits down in a cafe and orders a cup of tea. The waiter walks into the kitchen and discovers the kettle is empty. He walks to the sink and fills it to the brim. He walks to the fridge and fetches the milk. He then walks to the cupboard and selects a cup and saucer. He walks to another cupboard and gets out a tea pot. He looks for a teaspoon. There are no clean teaspoons. He looks in the dishwasher. It's dirty. He takes one out and washes it. The waiter then realises he has forgotten to ask what type of tea the customer wants and walks back to his table to ask... and so on.

Now, imagine invoicing the customer for every single activity undertaken to fulfil that order, from first contact to final delivery. Some of the activities outlined add value, others are wasteful. If the customer is willing to pay for it, then you're adding value.

In this scenario, understanding what your customer values is key to business success. Supplying refreshment in a polystyrene cup from a van is a very different business to a cafe providing ambiance and relaxation, while the tea itself may be the same.

Split everything you do into value-adding and non-value adding. Some activities may be necessary just to get the job done. These activities should be made as cost-effective as possible, eliminating the unnecessary steps - the waste - altogether.

Every business has value flowing through it but few understand exactly what that value is. This can make all the difference between profit and loss.

Once you are clear about what your customer values and what you need to deliver, everything else is up for review.

MAS-SW provides impartial advice and practical support to manufacturers. If you want to streamline your processes and ultimately increase profitability contact 0845 608 3838 or email info@swmas.co.uk

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The manufacturing advisory service



Top 5 tips for manufacturers

by Andrew Phillips, manufacturing specialist, MAS-SW

Be strategic. Invest time and effort in ensuring the business knows the direction it's heading in.

Understand your products and their markets. Why do your customers buy your products?

Innovate. Develop new products for the markets you know and new markets for the products you have.

Lead. Nurture your people so that they have the competence, capability and confidence to manage and improve the business.

Continually improve. Understand and measure where you are currently. Be better tomorrow than you are today.



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Outsourcing to help firms reduce costs in tough trading conditions

The challenging trading conditions are forcing many businesses to consider outsourcing as a way of reducing costs. Done in the right way, outsourcing can benefit a business greatly - and it's not just through savings.

Outsourcing is often seen as finding a cheaper way of delivering a service. For instance, many firms outsource their telephone marketing. Why pay someone in your office to chalk up a large phone bill by cold calling all day when there are hundreds of firms offering a tailored service. The whole customer relationship process can be outsourced - from call centres to customer liaison and relationship building.

Likewise, few UK companies now manufacture high volume, low value products. It is far cheaper to outsource production, usually to China, and add value from the UK through research

Cheaper alternatives to improve business efficiencies and customer service

and development, product design and marketing.

But many businesses are now finding outsourcing of services they once saw as core is now possible. Human resources, payroll, accounts, finance, IT, telephony can all be handed over to third parties - allowing key staff to concentrate on growing the business.

Much of the growth in cloud computing is being driven by a desire to slash data storage and handling costs - what better way than to upload everything and let someone else store it.

Business Link recommends owner/managers ask themselves the

following:

Will outsourcing free up the business to focus on its strengths? This might benefit the business by allowing staff to concentrate on their main tasks and on the future strategy.

Will it improve efficiency or customer service? Firms should choose an outsourcing company that specialises in the process or service they want them to carry out.

Will the business gain a competitive advantage? Outsourcing can bring flexibility to a business, turning fixed costs into variable costs and freeing up capital. It can also give a business the edge when adapting to changing market conditions.

When outsourcing:

- Remember that although the supplier takes responsibility for the process, you still need to actively manage the relationship
- Take your time making decisions and make sure you are clear about the terms on which you and the supplier are working together
- Make the effort to establish a good relationship - this calls for constant communication and flexibility
- Nominate a member of staff to take responsibility for liaison

source: Business Link

Outsource your sterilisation and microbiological testing requirements

Isotron, the Sterilisation Services division of Synergy Health has been providing outsourced services for over 30 years. The company operates as a contract service provider to key markets, such as healthcare, contamination control and specialist applications.

The core business is taking the stress out of sterilization and testing, carrying out complex validations and microbiological testing for its customers, so that they do not have to incur the cost and time of facilitating this internally.

Headquartered in Swindon, Isotron is globally positioned to deal with a wide variety of sterilization and testing requirements. With 26 facilities across 11 countries, covering the core technologies of Gamma, Electron Beam, Ion Beam and Ethylene Oxide plus supporting laboratories able to provide a comprehensive service to customers.

Isotron's top priority is customer satisfaction; in order to satisfy its customers' requirements the company delivers a reliable and comprehensive service. With a continued commitment to technical excellence with investment in employees and active participation in ISO CEN committees and working groups, Isotron boasts a number of technical experts who help to find the most appropriate process to treat specific products, whether it is Gamma, Electron Beam, Ion Beam or Ethylene Oxide, and all are supported by a highly skilled and technically competent laboratory.

"Compliance with quality standards is critical to the success of our business. We pride ourselves on our exemplary track record in regulatory compliance and our ability to meet any international quality requirement. We employ industry experts who are actively involved in future industry and standard development.

"We are committed to developing long-term partnerships through understanding, quality and confidence. Success today means relying on your suppliers, so that in turn your customers can rely on you. Isotron is an integral part of your supply chain and you can depend on Isotron to assist in the delivery of your promises.

"At Isotron, we pride ourselves on providing a reliable, high quality service with expert advice on microbial control and material modification. Partnerships require



transparency, collaboration and trust to be successful. We break down the barriers that stand in the way of great working relationships, allowing both us and our customers to focus on what's most important - working together to deliver solutions.

"Our vision is to build a lasting reputation as the trusted experts in global health-related markets by differentiating our services and products through the way we work."

With a wealth of knowledge and understanding, Isotron is able to provide customers with an unrivalled training and consultancy service. The Isotron education days are both a highly successful and rewarding example of the company's ongoing commitment to exceeding the needs of its customers.

Isotron will be hosting a Good Manufacturing Practice education day on 17th May, at Ettington Chase, Stratford-upon-Avon. Confirmed speakers include BSI and High Edge Consulting. For more information, or to book a place, please contact Isotron, quoting SBN001, on 08456 889977 or email: assistance@isotron.com



Finding a benefit to firms in a downturn

Jaki Mitchell, outsourcing partner at national audit, tax and advisory services firm Crowe Clark Whitehill, explains how businesses feeling the effects of the downturn can benefit from effective outsourcing.

Faced with the current economic climate, businesses will be looking to outsource for many different reasons, including improved flexibility and efficiency and, more crucially, to save costs.

A growing number of businesses are realising the benefits of outsourcing their accountancy, which can be more cost effective than having an in-house qualified accountant.

A prime example is Nirvana Spa & Leisure. Based in Wokingham and with more than 20,000 members, it began to outsource its accounting function to Crowe Clark Whitehill in 2002, so allowing senior management to focus on the business itself as well as having access to more accurate management information that would benefit strategic decision-making.

Today Crowe Clark Whitehill provides it with a range of services that include a weekly and monthly payroll, processing accounting data, reconciling the balance sheet and producing monthly management accounts, raising sales invoices and credit control, managing the bank account, preparing supplier payment runs and completing VAT returns.

Nirvana managing director Simon Brown says: "Our objective was to have accurate management information available within four weeks of the month end in order to run our business successfully. The previous supplier was working to a three-month target. Crowe Clark Whitehill is producing results within 10 days of the month end."

Outsourcing can also provide instant access to a wide range of skills, from financial technical expertise to specialist industry knowledge which help them stay one step ahead and meet regulatory requirements on time. It also adds flexibility with resources increased or decreased depending on budget and workflow requirements. In this way, owners and managers can choose to reduce the amount of work outsourced, rather than having to make redundancies.

While the savings can be substantial, effective outsourcing is also about achieving long-term results. In addition to its accounting service, Crowe Clark Whitehill also provides Nirvana's owners and managers with financial advice, forecasting and budgeting services, and corporate and personal tax planning advice as well as company secretarial services.

With Crowe Clark Whitehill staff permanently on site, the two firms have become trusted, long-term business partners. Such a close working relationship has enabled Crowe Clark Whitehill to provide proactive advice and solve problems quickly, with Nirvana benefiting from a six-figure VAT refund and securing thousands of pounds with an R&D tax credit claim.

Start-ups, as well as more established companies, will



Jaki Mitchell

Crowe Clark Whitehill provides services that include weekly and monthly payroll, processing accounting data, reconciling the balance sheet and producing monthly management accounts, raising sales invoices and credit control, managing the bank account, preparing supplier payment runs and completing VAT returns.

frequently opt to outsource their accountancy to focus their energies on building the core activities of the business. However, companies with their own in-house accounting support should also consider outsourcing to a professional firm to carry out statutory compliance reporting as well as providing business and tax advice. In some cases, companies decide against replacing an in-house accountant who leaves, and opt instead for a range of customisable outsourcing alternatives.

In response to increasing demand for outsourcing, the Business Solutions teams in Crowe Clark Whitehill's Thames Valley and Cheltenham offices are growing steadily, with chartered accountants, bookkeepers, Sage specialists and outsourcing advisers combining their knowledge and experience with the versatility that is required to provide a flexible service.

Being an entrepreneur can be a lonely if there are no other business partners to share experiences and worries. Crowe Clark Whitehill can provide an impartial sounding board for corporate concerns while providing alternative ways of dealing with issues that may not have been considered.

Much like a day spa, effective outsourcing can relieve stress. It frees entrepreneurs from being bogged down and enables them to focus on the next big thing that will make their business a success.

For more advice on how outsourcing can help your business contact Jaki Mitchell in Reading on 0118 959 7222 or Richard Austin in Cheltenham on: 01242 234421.

Focus on what you're good at and leave the rest to our professionals

Outsourcing no longer means off-shoring. Where it once had a bad reputation and was simply a means of reducing costs, these days it can add real value to a small, fast-growing business, allowing its owners to concentrate on more strategic work.

That's the view of Andrew Sandiford, director of Target chartered accountants in Bath. Target has built up a solid reputation for its outsourcing services, which range from payroll and accounts to human resources.

"A lot of the increase in outsourcing is borne out of these challenging times," said Andrew. "But technology has also played a part. And it is increasingly about tapping into expert advice and receiving a higher level of service."

He points out that many firms don't have enough work for a full-time accountant so they tend to double up as an HR administrator or facilities manager.

As a result they end up as a jack of all trades and master of none – leaving the business short of expertise.

"Outsourcing doesn't just give small firms easy access to experienced specialists in areas such as payroll and HR as and when they are needed, it also allows managers to focus on running the business."

Outsourcing has a much broader appeal than previously, according to Andrew, and small firms are increasingly looking at new areas to bring down costs and bring in third-party expertise.

"Look at data handling," said Andrew. "A lot of people think its just sending stuff to Bangalore to be input. But it's much more sophisticated these days. For example, we can look at clients' data and analyse it for them in real time. It's sleek and seamless and it adds a lot of value."

"The kind of owner-managed businesses that we deal with

Target's 5 Tips

- 1. Be selective** - an outsourcing team is an extension of your business so it is vital that they are reputable and have a strong track record of working with similar businesses.
- 2. Read the small print** - a detailed outsourcing agreement, which addresses the specific requirements of your business, is essential so that both sides understand exactly what is being provided.
- 3. Establish a strong partnership** - a close relationship between you and your outsourcing team is vital and onsite attendance is an important part of this.
- 4. Ask the experts** - whilst it is usual for more routine tasks to be carried out by junior staff, financial services should be provided by qualified accountants who are experts in their field.
- 5. Look beyond the numbers** - outsourcing isn't just about finance - it is often advantageous to outsource HR, which is a specialism few firms can master on their own.



Andrew Sandiford

everyday – typically turning over between £500,000 to £20 million – find outsourced services really useful. We can offer a virtual financial director-type service which gives them access to expert FDs they could not afford to recruit.

"And in the HR area there is so much new and complex legislation coming out that it's impossible for an owner-manager to keep up with it. Outsourcing HR means they don't have to – they can tap into our expertise as and when they need it."

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In these uncertain times, outsourcing is an advantage that many businesses cannot afford to be without.

Andrew Sandiford
Director



For more information on outsourcing and how it could help your business, contact us.

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Fast Forward launches Unit Store Programme for business customers

Fast Forward, the Business Services Division of New College Swindon, has announced the launch of its innovative Unit Store Programme.

Designed with businesses in mind, the new Unit Store Programme helps staff develop their skills in a flexible way to suit their specific needs.

This new 'pay-as-you-go' approach to training and development enables employees to select units to study on a stand-alone basis, or select a group of units which contribute towards a recognised qualification or award. Units can be selected from recognised QCF qualifications on an individual basis, allowing the choice of those which are most relevant to you and your business.

The unit store also allows employees to complete a unit, and then 'store it' and continue to study



Sinclair Brown

the additional units at a later date to suit the workload and budget requirements of the business.

A wide selection of units are available through the Unit Store Programme, from Team Leading courses such as motivating a team,

conflict management and managing meetings, through to a range of customer service modules.

Sinclair Brown, business services manager at Fast Forward, said of the new programme: "This is a great opportunity for businesses to develop the skills of their employees, and be in control of their training budget by only purchasing the units most relevant to the business and employee needs."

The Unit Store opens in May 2011 and will be available throughout the summer. For more information about Unit Store visit <http://fastforward.newcollege.ac.uk/unitstore> or call 0808 178 3675.

Workshop prices range between £30-£50. Fast Forward may have access to Government funding to support accredited units as part of Unit Store. This funding will only be available until the end of July 2011.

Apprenticeship focus at New College

Fast Forward, the Business Services division of New College Swindon is one of the leading providers of apprenticeships across Wiltshire.

Erica O'Flynn is the apprenticeship coordinator and employer engagement officer for Fast Forward, and proving they practice what they preach, she has just started a Level 3 Advanced Apprenticeship in Business and Administration herself.

Apprenticeships are an excellent way for employers to ensure that employees gain the skills and knowledge to carry out their work duties, and reach a high standard of competency and performance, and is a proven way of dealing with both current and future workforce issues.

Apprenticeships result in a nationally recognised qualification and are work-based learning programmes.

Erica explains why she decided to take on an apprenticeship: "It has been many years since I studied for a qualification, so when the opportunity arose for me to take part in the apprenticeship programme, it sounded like a great idea, and I wanted a qualification specific to

my job role and that would benefit me, my employers and enable me to progress in my career".

Erica is well placed to explain the benefits of enrolling existing employees on an apprenticeship.

"An apprenticeship really can benefit a business – your employees learn the skills directly beneficial to the company they work for, and the courses the apprenticeships take are structured towards the employers needs.

As a training provider, New College and Fast Forward, the Business Services Department within New College can provide a variety of Apprenticeships. Training is fully funded for 16-18 year olds whilst for apprentices aged 19+, an employer contribution for training may be required. In all cases, employers are required to pay staff at least the minimum Apprenticeship wage, or the national minimum wage for 19+ apprentices.

For more information contact Erica O'Flynn at New College on 01793 755520 or email: apprenticeships@newcollege.ac.uk

'Ultimate Part Time' training guide out now

Swindon College's 'Ultimate Part Time' training guide is now available and can be accessed on the college's website.

It is aimed at people who are looking to gain a new skill, re-train or get a recognised qualification. All the courses listed start from May 2011 and there are a range of courses on offer, including business management, communications, construction plant training, electrical, hairdressing, beauty therapy, DIY, health and safety training and many more.

Darren King, enterprise manager, said: "This training guide is the first of its kind in Swindon as the College is pleased to be working in partnership with a number of private training providers including Training Express, The Wiltshire School of Beauty and Holistic Therapy, Quicklearn, KD Training and Soloman Training.

"This is an exciting opportunity as the College is now able to offer a wide variety of part time courses, some of which are delivered in the College, others are at other locations in the town or by distance learning. There's

something for everyone.

"The best way to access the part time guide is via the college's website and people will be able to apply and enrol online. Alternatively, if someone prefers to print off the part time enrolment form from our website and bring it into Student Services they are very welcome to pop it in with it at any time. Printed copies of the part time training guide will also be delivered to local libraries, information centres, community centres and leisure centres in and around Swindon.

"All the part time courses run subject to sufficient demand and it is recommended that places are booked as soon as possible to avoid disappointment either on the College's website, by phone or in person. Places will be allocated on a first come, first served basis."

To find out what part time courses are available, visit:

www.swindon-college.ac.uk. For more information about a course contact Business First on 01793 498404 or email: businessfirst@swindon-college.ac.uk

Applicants flock to recruiter's graduate training scheme

A graduate training scheme set up by a Swindon recruitment company to attract new people into the industry has been hailed a success.

The scheme, set up by Outsource UK and launched in March, has already generated a interest and half of the six positions have been filled. A second assessment day is due to be held on May 17 for potential candidates, where it is hoped the final three will be recruited.

In the recruitment industry, a training programme for raw talent is almost unheard of, as most companies look to bring in only those who already

have recruitment experience.

Outsource UK supplies permanent, interim and consultancy IT personnel to a range of companies throughout the UK.

"We set up the training scheme to take on six graduates – or people of graduate calibre – to train them in recruitment with a view to having a permanent position with us at the end of their six month process," said Anna Stretch, Outsource UK's recruitment and training manager.

For further information about the graduate trainee scheme, email Anna at astretch@outsource-uk.co.uk



The new Unit Store Programme (USP) from Fast Forward offers a "pay-as-you-go" approach to training and development which puts **you** in control. Select QCF qualifications most relevant to you and your business.

Unit Store Directory

- Team Leading
- Customer Service
- Business Administration (Coming Soon!)

Funding & Costs

Workshop prices range between £30-£50*, depending on whether it's a full or half day session. If you are registered unemployed, you may be eligible to attend the workshops for free.

For more information on our Unit Store Programme or to make your booking, please contact us on 0808 178 3675 or visit our website on: <http://fastforward.newcollege.ac.uk/unitstore>

*Registration fees will apply where learners wish to receive an accredited certificate.

Fast Forward
Training and Development for Businesses
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OUT NOW!

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

Swindon College North Star Avenue, Swindon SN2 1DY

Town's new commercial heart moves a step closer

Muse, the developer behind Swindon's flagship Union Square scheme, has submitted an outline masterplan to Swindon Council, bringing the town's new commercial heart a step closer.

The massive town centre development, at 17-acres one of the largest of its kind in the UK at present, will change the face of Swindon.

Some 645,000 sq ft of prestige office space will, for the first time, enable the town centre to compete against out-of-town schemes to attract major occupiers while high-quality retail and leisure space will bring small-scale independent and upmarket outlets to the town.

It will also give Swindon a showpiece bus and coach interchange in Fleming Way, which will become bus-only. New road layouts and access routes into the scheme will also make the town centre more pedestrian-friendly.

Construction, which could start as early as October if planning consent is granted for the first phase, is likely to take between 10 and 15 years.

London-based Muse, part of construction giant Morgan Sindall, was selected as the preferred developer three years ago after the New Swindon Company (now Forward Swindon) and South West Regional Development Agency had spent several years working with numerous landowners to assemble the site.

Since then Muse has been drawing up a blueprint for the much-needed project, which includes the former Post Office and police station sites on either side of Fleming Way.

It has now lodged the masterplan with council

chiefs and is expected to follow this with a detailed application for the first phase later this month. Off-site work to convert Whale Bridge roundabout to a signal-controlled junction and open up access to the site for construction vehicles has already started.

Phase I will include an 850-space car park and 84 two-bedroom apartments, including social housing and shared ownership. This will be the first of a possible 10 phases of development, although Muse and the design team behind Union Square, which includes highly-respected Robin Partington Architects and Townsend Landscape Architects, have built-in a large degree of flexibility.

Construction of the offices will be occupier-led - it is unlikely any buildings will be put up speculatively.

Forward Swindon chief executive Ian Piper said Union Square will help change the perception of the town.

The timing was also good because work is likely to start around the same time as the eye-sore former college building in Regent Circus is demolished and replaced by a new shopping and leisure scheme.

"It will bring a showpiece development to the town centre and so will fit in with a new emphasis Forward Swindon will take on marketing Swindon," said Mr Piper.

"It goes hand in glove with promotion of the town and comes on the back of the planned electrification of the main line to London. It will change the face of the town and give us a new commercial heart."



Artist's impression of Union Square

Union Square factfile

Size: 17 acres, 1.7m sq ft of buildings

Developer: Muse Developments

Architects: Robin Partington Architects, Townshend Landscape Architects

Features: 600,000 sq ft of high-quality offices, plus shops, bars, apartments, new bus interchange, 850-space car park

Timescale: Outline masterplan submitted. Possible October start. Completion in 10-15 years.

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Sensitivities of the residential market

By George Humphries, managing director, Atwell Martn

A way of avoiding being seasick is to focus on the horizon. In much the same way, the residential market has made both owner-occupiers and developers fairly ill over the last four years. The longer-term view however lessens the pain, particularly when the latest IPD index shows that residential has outperformed all other types of commercial property and has shown a thumping 10.4 per cent return over the past 12 months.

Sitting in Swindon, this either suggests that commercial property is on its knees or that we are living in a parallel universe. As with all indexes, they tend to be dangerously general. Prime London residential property has led the way and is now an asset class in its own right. A more regional view

might suggest that prices have flat-lined over the past 12 months, whereas a closer look at type and location illustrates a different pattern of price movement.

Family houses in the villages surrounding Swindon have seen a respectable rise in value over the past two years whereas the flats and ubiquitous new homes of North Swindon have struggled to gain ground due to the absence of funding, equity and the effects of excessive supply.

The level of mortgage lending in the Swindon area has fallen by approximately 50 per cent from its peak in 2007. On reflection this does not seem that surprising bearing in



mind the level of buy-to-let activity and first time buyers who were being offered lending at loan-to-value ratios in excess of 100 per cent. That was then and this is now.

We have pulled through our hangover but we are still very sensitive. The principal driver holding back growth is the availability of funding. Banks can hide behind the European Basel III Rules which dictate the ratios of bank capital adequacy and liquidity. In short, we are still a long way from seeing the banks relax their lending criteria for household lending. Housebuilders are having to look at alternative sources of funding such as private equity, but ultimately they are reliant on selling their product into the occupier market where lending is tight.

In the meantime the planning process remains paralysed by a well-intentioned coalition government which has scrapped the Regional Spatial Strategies and replaced it with nothing apart from a sprinkling of 'power to the people'. The Localism Bill wants to give communities the say

on planning issues. Great in theory, painfully slow in practice. Tighter building regulations in favour of saving the planet will increase building costs and slow the development process. Ironically, the government has now realised that the new build supply is at an all-time low and is now intending to make it much easier to convert commercial building to residential use.

As if the market was not sensitive enough, we have the global issues of sovereign debt, Middle Eastern turmoil, rampant commodity inflation and now Bin Laden with a hole in his head. However, after all this, things are really not that bad. Sensibly priced homes in the better locations are performing well, illustrated by the recent sale of the Hills Homes scheme at South Marston, where prices averaging £500,000 have been readily achieved.

The outlook is stable. Keep looking at the horizon and we become less sensitive about the choppy parts which are nearly behind us.

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Deals digest

• Keningtons has let 38 Regent Street, Swindon, to betting shop business S & S Bet after receiving considerable interest in the town centre retail unit. The premises have a 399 sq ft ground floor sales area with ancillary first floor accommodation of 388 sq ft. Keningtons and Colliers International represented J D Wetherspoon.

Hot desk facilities offered at Park House Swindon

Park House is now offering hot desk facilities as a direct response to customer needs for affordable and flexible work space – with no tie-ins or hidden costs.

Hot desks are available in any one of the offices in this Grade II listed building which combines period character with the latest technology, flexibility and first class service.

Park House is ideal for those companies looking to enhance their professional image with a prestigious office location. Licences are available on a monthly basis and provide exceptional value for short or long term requirements. We can give you one weeks' notice to move hot desk location within the centre and only require one months notice from businesses wishing to vacate.

Competitively priced at £199 plus VAT, this includes one desk with pedestal and chair, internet and telephone line. The use of the address at the centre can be used for business only and not as a registered office. There will be a signed agreement between both parties and a direct debit set up.

For further information please visit www.parkhouseswindon.co.uk or call 0845 8505 066

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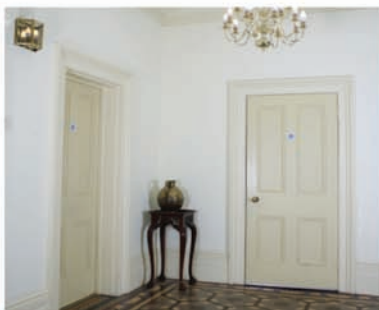
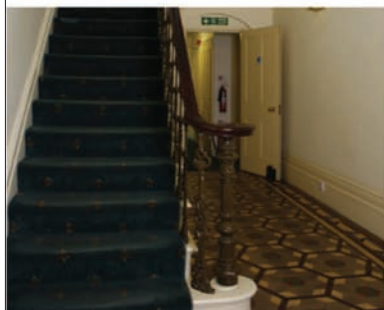
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• Plessey Semiconductor has relocated from its historic home on the Cheney Manor Industrial Estate to refurbished offices on the Delta Office Park. The firm, which at one time employed 2,000 people in Swindon making semiconductors for the consumer electronics and defence industries, has taken 4,300 sq ft in the Delta 500 office building.

The office is being used as a design and technology centre with the firm's manufacturing plant in Plymouth. Delta 500 is marketed by Whitmarsh Lockhart whose Martin Baker said: "The building was chosen not only for the conventional reasons of good quality flexible space and great car parking but also because of the flexible attitude of the landlord towards the nature of the lease agreement and flexibility on offer." The quoting rent for Delta 500 is £12 per sq ft with short-term agreements available.

• Electric vehicle supplier E-motion has relocated from Blunsdon to the former Woollens Off Licence in Cricklade Road, Swindon, after buying the freehold interest in the 1,365 sq ft, end-of-terrace property. Whitmarsh Lockhart acted on behalf of the private sellers. The property was marketed with an asking price of £115,000. Martin Baker of Whitmarsh Lockhart's office agency department said: "The property will find a new lease of life with a modern, environmentally friendly, forward thinking company which is poised to refurbish the building and bring it back to its former glory."

Motoring

In Gear

Quake-hit Honda suffers fall in profits

Profits at car giant Honda plunged by 38 per cent during the first three months of this year after production was hit by the earthquake and tsunami in Japan.

And a senior executive at the group warned the second quarter could be even worse as its manufacturing plants outside Japan, including Swindon, continue to be hit by a shortage of Japanese-made components.

Earlier this month Honda halved production at the Swindon plant due to a lack of parts, believed to mainly be electronic components, from Japan. The 3,000 workers remain on full pay.

Honda also blamed the strong yen for a fall in sales over the period, which resulted in net profits falling from 72bn yen (£529m) to 44.5bn yen (£327m).

However, Honda full-year net profits nearly doubled to 534bn yen (£3.9bn) on strong sales last year.

Honda told investors it is unable to provide a financial forecast for the coming year because of the impact of the earthquake and Fumihiko Ike, a senior managing officer and director added: "We envision the second quarter being grimmer than the current quarter because even if production levels begin to pick up in Japan by then, there will still be a lag effect at our overseas factories."

Honda was forced to close its Japanese plants for a month in the wake of the devastating earthquake and tsunami that hit the country on March 11.

Spokesman Tomohiro Okada said: "The March quake was the biggest reason for declining profit. We simply could not produce cars due to parts shortages after the quake."

Car sales fell by 2,000 to 56,000 in Europe, including the UK, during the three-month period, mainly due to reduced demand for the Civic in the UK, Italy and Netherlands, although sales of the Swindon-built Jazz rose in Germany.

Earlier this week Honda said output plunged 62.9 per cent year-on-year in March while worldwide total production was down 19.2 per cent at 282,254 units.

Honda is the first of Japan's Big Three car makers to report earnings since the earthquake and tsunami.



**For the latest news on Motoring,
visit our website at
www.swindon-business.net**





New teaching opportunities now available

The Swindon SCITT teacher training course is offering ICT training for local people.

Based in Swindon secondary schools, the courses are delivered by professional tutors to support the development of teaching skills and subject expertise.

Trainees have access to a unique blend of practising teachers, Local Authority specialists and University of Bath consultants. Of the 25 students who completed the course last year, 14 secured a teaching post in Wiltshire schools. If you would like further details, please phone us on 01793 716970, email:

c.moon@swindonscitt.org.uk; or visit: www.swindonscitt.org.uk

Smiths hit by £1.9m fraud

Smiths News, the Swindon-based newspaper and magazine distribution group, has been hit by a £1.9 million fraud at its book wholesale arm, Bertrams.

The group said it had identified a customer account that had been fraudulently controlled by an employee, who has since been dismissed. "After obtaining external advice we expect the loss to be fully recoverable under our insurance policies," the group said in a statement.

Wiltshire Business Forum launched to fill gap created by public sector cuts

As a result of the public sector spending cuts, the activities of the Business Link organisation have been dramatically curtailed. Later this year its regional teams are being disbanded and the service will then just be limited to a central facility.

A small group of local businessmen felt so strongly about the loss of this valuable resource that they have put their hands in their pockets to finance the start-up of a new organisation; the Wiltshire Business Forum.

The key objective of the Forum is to provide practical, face-to-face, help and support to both new start up firms and developing local small businesses. The intention is to feed off the skills of local industry professionals who are successful businessmen in their own right and are prepared to give up some of their valuable time and knowledge to benefit others.

The Forum's core activity will be to provide a series of learning events on a variety of topics geared towards the needs and demands of the Forum membership.

The first two of these free seminars will be held at The Wiltshire Golf Club and Hotel, Wootton Bassett on:

Tuesday July 5, 2011 6.15pm to 8.00pm to include specific sessions on:

- Establishing a tax efficient business structure
- Tax management is the process of keeping more of your cash in your pocket



Picking up the slack: Alistair Fenwick of Carlton Business Centre, Mark Barrett of Riverview Portfolio, Tony Capener of Chilvester Financial, Peter Johnson of Awdry Bailey and Douglas Solicitors.

- Premises management – it does not have to be a nightmare
 - Renting versus buying; the legal aspects
- Thursday July 7, 2011 6.15pm to 8.00pm to include specific session on:
- Capital raising, improving the odds of success
 - Ways to finance your business
 - Effective communication in this electronic age
 - Marketing your business online
- Each seminar will be followed by an 'any questions' style seminar with a

panel of expert professionals. New start up firms will qualify for free membership of the Forum which will then go on to provide added services such as regular networking events, newsletters, briefings and attendance at further training sessions on a range of subjects.

There is no charge to attend either seminar, though numbers are restricted. For more information and to reserve a place, register at: www.wiltshirebusinessforum.com, or telephone 0800 018 5749.

Text-back service from V Cars

V Cars has become the first Swindon cab operator to offer offer customers increased security levels by using a text-back service.

The system sends a text message directly to the customer's mobile with details of the vehicle's make and model, colour and registration so that, when it arrives, they can make sure it is the taxi they booked.

"All the customer's details are entered on each booking, therefore providing a very safe and secure system," said Dan Lane, group general manager.

"We are also able to track the specific location of the vehicle as well as having a constant data trail on the actual journey route taken."

The text-back service is standard for all of V Cars customers at the point of booking.

"We are extremely pleased to be able to give our customers extra confidence in the service we provide," added Dan. "We would like to thank all our customers for making us the biggest private hire company in the South West with more than 850 vehicles."



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