

# BUSINESS NETWORK

WWW.TEAMVALLEYPUBLICATIONS.CO.UK

ISSUE #48 • June / July 2021

## Not Hide-ing From Success

North East-based Stuart Coupland has turned a 'side hustle' into a flourishing business

FREE

### Smart IT Celebrates Record Financial Year

Gateshead based IT solutions provider sees 30% growth in 2020/21

TOP TIPS ON RECRUITMENT

## Celebrating eight decades of the Team Valley Trading Estate

The Team Valley Trading Estate has been a firm fixture of our region's business community for the past eight decades but why was it created in the first place?

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Advertising cut off date	BOOKING DEADLINE	DISTRIBUTION DATE
<b>ISSUE 49</b> August / September	23rd July	6th August

## Distribution

As well as delivering the publication into every business, approx 800, on the Team Valley the magazine is now delivered / distributed in the following places making the total print run 1000 copies.

The Bank Bar Bistro Low Fell  
UK Land Estates  
Westray Recruitment  
Biz Space Business Centre,  
Earlsway Team Valley  
Team Valley Cafe  
Team Valley News  
Dentist (centre of Team Valley)  
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Owner's Business  
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Blaydon Business Centre  
Metropolitan House  
Business Centre  
Business Networks  
(Metro Centre)  
Northern Design Gateshead  
Greenfield Business Centre  
Gateshead International  
Business Centre

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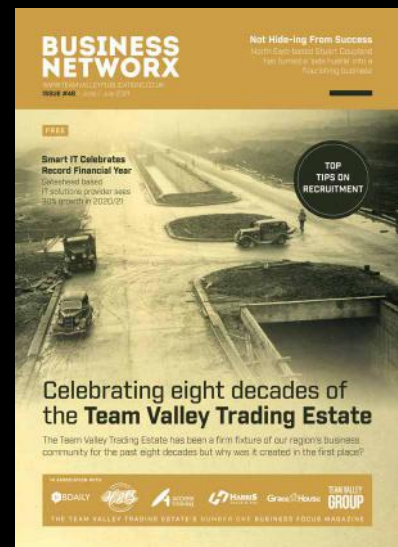
## BUSINESS NETWORK

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## Press Releases

If you have an editorial press release and would like it to be featured within the magazine, please call us on

**0191 487 1834.**

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**Google**  
Reviews ★★★★★

## Contact Us

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## STEM Ambassador helps students with career choices

Due to the pandemic careers fairs and other career related advice for pupils have not been able to take place as usual. So how can students find out what a job entails? And whether it could be suitable for them?

Lara Mellor, from Lara Mellor Training and Consultancy is a STEM ambassador based in the North East, helping promote science, technology, engineering and maths related jobs to school age children. She has recently produced several short videos that they can watch to learn about a day in the life of a Microsoft Trainer and the positive impact of Covid-19 on businesses in the area.

It is important that pupils get a broad range of information about the opportunities out there and that it is not all doom and gloom despite what they may be seeing on the TV or reading through social media.

In fact the training business went through a huge transformation within 3 days of the pandemic by moving from 100% face to face training to 100% online. It has proved to be a really successful business model with the company now able to run sessions throughout the country and even the world. With many working from home and more comfortable with online meetings it is expected that many courses will remain this way going forward.

If I can help with any STEM related support or Microsoft Training requirement then get in touch.

[lara@laramellortraining.co.uk](mailto:lara@laramellortraining.co.uk)  
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**HELEN MCDUGALL**  
HR CONSULTANCY & TRAINING

## TOP TIPS ON RECRUITMENT



### 1. Define the Role and Person Requirements

Identify the key skills, attributes, and experience the role requires. Review any job description that exists for the role any make any necessary updates.

### 2. Shortlisting

Shortlist candidates for interview by matching their qualifications and experience (given in their CV) to the requirements for the post.

### 3. Selection Activities

Take the opportunity to think about other activities in addition to an interview that may be useful, for example, a tour of the premises can allow someone to get a picture of what the organisation does and ask informal questions. A short scenario could be presented and the candidate asked how they would deal with a particular situation.

### 4. Inviting Candidates to Interview

When contacting applicants to invite them to attend a selection process you should always ask them to let you know if they have any special requirements e.g. any mobility issues so you can assess and make any possible adjustments to the venue.

### 5. Preparing for an interview

Prepare a list of questions which can be asked to all candidates. This will ensure consistency and fairness.

Never ask questions about:

- Marital status or marriage plans
- Childcare arrangements
- General family commitments and/or domestic arrangements
- Actual or potential pregnancy/ maternity leave

### 6. Conducting an Interview

Begin with introductions and explaining the format and timescale set for the interview.

Make time at the end to go over terms such as salary, hours of work, holiday allowance available etc. You should also give the candidate an opportunity to ask any questions they would like to ask. Let candidates know if there or any further stages or when they may hear the outcome.

### 7. Make Interview Notes

It is essential for managers conducting recruitment interviews to keep notes of the interview and afterwards to make a record of the rationale behind the selection decision.

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# Buy....Sell....Restore



Handbag Clinic is the best kept secret of fashion editors, stylists, celebrities and royals. We catch up with co-founder and CEO Charlotte Staerck to find out what they are all about.

**As a one-stop-shop for sustainable luxury they repair, authenticate, buy and sell the world's most coveted bags.**

Over the years they have had offshoots in Harvey Nichols and Harrods and most recently launched in Fenwick. They've established themselves as the trusted restoration choice for high end luxury brands such as Christies of London, Aspinall of London and Jimmy Choo.

#### **Where did it all start?**

I've been obsessed with handbags forever. I'm not sure why, I grew up in

a tiny village outside of Newcastle, and my mum wasn't interested at all. As soon I could, I bought my first

brand-named bag; a cream Luella tote at 18 years old, which I thought was the best thing ever.

This was until it got covered in dye transfer, from my jeans, and I thought it was ruined. A colleague had given me the number of a local repair company, The Furniture Clinic, but I lost the piece of paper.

Little did I know, had I gone I would have met my future husband, Ben, two years earlier than I eventually did in a bar!

Since 2004, Ben continues to be at the heart of a family business that cleans and restores furniture and leather

household items. By the time we met, it had grown from a small online family operation to a thriving global business with a team of 75 people and a network of distributors around the world; all still operated from its North East headquarters.

At the time, I was on a fast-track career path, rising through local government ranks to be appointed as a Senior Buyer of pharmaceutical and medical equipment for the NHS. Whilst my career continued to go from strength to strength, my passion remained with luxury handbags.

I threw myself into researching the pre-owned market and worked with Ben to protect and restore bags to ensure they held or increased their value; nothing seemed to be unsalvageable. For example, I made £300 on a damaged velvet Gucci; my addiction was strengthened, and I knew I was on to something!

I took charge of the day-to-day operations, developing a new system from scratch, working out which brands were popular, sourcing and photographing products. It really spiralled from there. Within that first year, we launched the integrated offering of 'Buy, Sell, Restore'; in addition to our Chelsea and Newcastle store, we also opened another store in Leeds, followed by roll-out into Europe (Monaco) and the Middle East (Qatar).

#### **Sustainability at the heart of our DNA**

One of the reasons we've been so successful is that our sustainable brand is built on genuine and authentic foundations. I was operating in a 'circular' way since I was 16 – buying and selling items I no longer had a use for and repairing those I loved.

I am always striving to ensure sustainability is ingrained in every process within our business – from the products we use, to the packaging we ship items out – we keep waste to an absolute minimum. I even go to the extremes of fishing out recycling that has been put in the wrong bin and locate the culprit.

We are excited to see the vast adoption of circular fashion over the last few years. Handbag Clinic is one of the few businesses who actively recruited during the pandemic and this demonstrates a prominent change in consumer consumption... we look forward to welcoming you to our Stores and Online Clinic!

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# A New Name For a Trusted Face

**When local managed print provider United Carlton opened its doors back in 1987, the Internet hadn't yet been invented and the first version of Microsoft Excel had only recently been released. Meanwhile, photocopiers were slow and cumbersome, and that's all they could do too – photocopy. The thought of collaborative, document management systems and integrated multi-functional printers was fanciful.**

Fast forward 34 years, and the rise of cloud-based software and ever-smarter document hardware has seen workplace technology develop previously unimaginable power and capability.

It's clear that times have continuously changed in the world of workplace technology. And after a turbulent year for many organisations, even bigger changes have recently taken place for the business formerly known as United Carlton. In April 2021, the business was renamed Agilico.

Agilico is a name that reflects its customers' mission to make work easy for their teams by deploying cutting-edge workplace technology. Agilico is the result of a combined group of UK technology businesses backed by Horizon Capital, including United Carlton, each with the same customer-first philosophy, local knowledge and relationships, with vast expertise in managed print services and workplace technologies.

For those familiar with the staff at United Carlton, not much has changed. The same friendly faces are still present, and they're still supporting local businesses large and small in the region. What Agilico now means is a much greater capability and service offering for local businesses to take advantage of. The change has also meant the business itself has been expanding its workforce in the North East and operates from 11 sites UK wide, providing a truly national reach and service capability.

Not only is Agilico now the largest independent Managed Print provider in the UK, it is also the only independent North East business within this sector to be awarded places on Public Sector frameworks. In doing so, it sits alongside some of the biggest manufacturers in the world, cementing its pedigree as the number one local provider for the education sector in the region, while



also supporting organisations such as Durham Constabulary and the NHS. Agilico also supplies over 30% of the North East's top 200 firms and is a trusted partner to the likes of Greggs, Sage and SCS, which is testimony to its service, ability and innovation.

With a tough year for hardware sales and the business service sector in general, Agilico has bucked the trend with some recent large contract awards from Northern Education Trust and Parkdean Resorts, for over 500 multi-functional devices. Huge strides in technology usage over the last decade have revolutionised the way businesses work, and rapid and continuous change has become the defining characteristic of our time. Agilico has been able to provide real value in this area and the business has consequently seen a record quarter in printer sales, as companies look for trusted workplace technology specialists to partner with. With people working from both their office and their homes, the buzz word in the office space at the moment is "Agile working". Agilico's customers are looking for innovative solutions to assist them with ways in which they can manage, post, scan, retrieve, sign and manipulate their documents in and around their organisations more efficiently and securely, wherever they are.

While continuing to provide market-leading managed print services to local businesses, which includes innovative carbon-neutral devices and much more, it now also delivers a wide range of complementary agile working solutions, referred to as its Agile Toolkit. These solutions have proved especially popular

with customers as they look to introduce more flexible working practices.

Cloud telephony, hybrid mail platforms, information management systems and document digitisation tools are just some of the solutions which are allowing its customers to embrace new ways of working. Many of these tools can integrate directly with modern MFDs to deliver a truly agile working environment, allowing teams to stay connected, responsive and productive no matter where they are. For more information on these agile working solutions, visit [www.agilico.co.uk](http://www.agilico.co.uk).

"This is an incredibly exciting time for us as a business. Ever since we originally founded United Carlton, both Warren Colby and I have been fully invested in the business and we remain so today. Our mission has always been to keep the customer at the forefront of everything we do, while ensuring we offer clients cutting edge workplace technology. We've thrived on building strong local relationships and we're proud of the many trusted partnerships we've forged with organisations of all sizes from our offices in the North East, Yorkshire and the North West. Since receiving investment back in 2019 we have continued to grow, and our new name and enhanced capabilities reflect this. We're now able to deliver our services with quality and consistency throughout the UK, while continuing to build and value our strong local relationships. I hope all of our customers and friends on Team Valley can look forward as we emerge from Covid, and wish everyone the best of luck as we do so."

**Mark Bryce, Sales Director, Agilico.**

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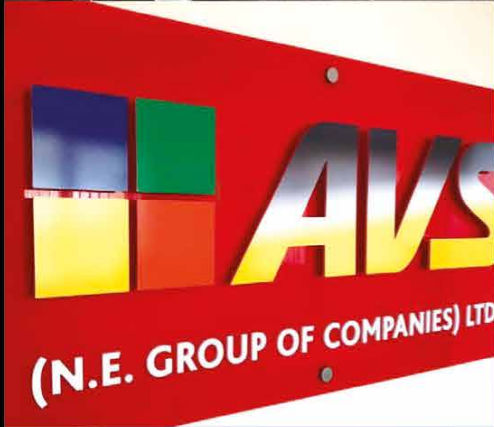
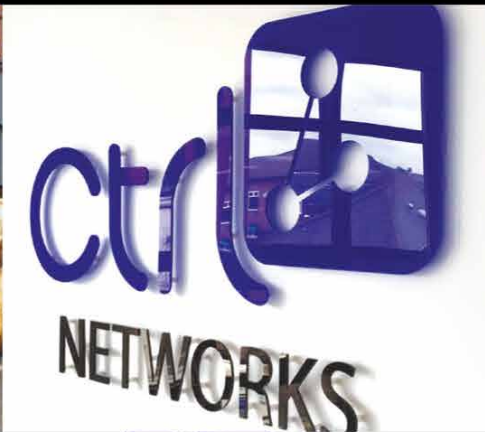
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## New promotions as Whickham Dental Practice looks to the future

Well-known Whickham Dental Practice has announced a round of promotions as it reinforces its reputation as a leading provider of dental services.

As part of its strategic growth plans, Whickham Dental Practice has promoted dental nurse Louise Carter to Head Nurse and Colette Meller to Head Receptionist.

Experienced dental nurse and local resident, Louise has been with the family practice for 17 years, working alongside Associate Dentist Paul Stott. As part of the practice's ongoing commitment to providing high levels of patient care, Louise will manage the team of seven nurses, oversee infection prevention control procedures and ensure product availability at the practice to ensure consistent delivery of all services.

Having joined the practice in 2016 as a receptionist, Colette has seen her role expand to include managing the reception team and overseeing internal communications. Liaising with Clinical Practice Manager Amanda Cain, Colette will ensure that patient service remains a priority as the practice looks to expand.

Whickham Dental Practice principal Andrew Dixon said, "We are delighted to welcome Louise and Colette into their new roles. As we look to grow the practice, Louise and Colette's experience and professional know-how will be crucial to the continued delivery of a high level of dental care and the outstanding experience which our patients have come to expect".

Established over 50 years ago, the Whickham-based practice has reacted positively to fast-changing consumer demands for treatments and aesthetic solutions. Services offered have expanded from the core family dental treatments to include tooth whitening, cosmetic dentistry, Invisalign treatment, and facial rejuvenation.

Andrew continued, "Our team are committed to delivering our trademark "calm and gentle" patient experience as well as developing our range of dental solutions for people of all ages."

For more about Whickham Dental Practice visit [www.whickhamdentalpractice.co.uk](http://www.whickhamdentalpractice.co.uk) or telephone 0191 488 7826.

## Pall-ex shareholding drives growth for North East logistics company

Well-known North East logistics business, OSE European is continuing to expand its geographical reach following its recent confirmed shareholding in the leading UK pallet network, Pall-ex, owners of the Fortec network.

**OSE European's shareholding in the Pall-Ex Group and Fortec network has expanded the areas within the North East they can operate in, opening up further distribution opportunities in NE, SR, and DH postcodes and strengthening their position as one of the North East's leading transport providers.**

Director Dominic Wintrip said "We are delighted to have become shareholders in the Pall-Ex Group. We pride ourselves on the reliability of our service and our ability to offer tailored, cost-effective solutions to businesses looking to move goods. Our partnership with Pall-Ex underpins both our commitment to outstanding service delivery and our plans to grow the business over the coming years".

The Gateshead-based business has expanded rapidly from being a Newcastle courier-based service to offering a full range of logistical services solutions across the UK and Europe. Offering temperature-controlled vehicles, hazard goods options, and secure haulage transportation solutions in a fleet ranging from small vans to articulated trailers, the business has its eye firmly on

growth as it looks to grow its market share by embracing the opportunities brought about by Brexit and (helping customers overcome the challenges) of the ongoing pandemic.

With consumer buying habits shifting practically overnight, logistics businesses reported a 37.7% increase in B2C volumes in the first nine months of 2020 compared to the same period in 2019. In April and May this year, pallet deliveries to residential addresses were more than double the 2019 figures.\*

Dominic continued, "Partnering with like-minded haulage and distribution companies around the UK who are part of the Pall-Ex network, enables us to offer a reliable, and proven supply chain solution. Utilising the latest technology that being part of Pall-Ex brings, will ensure we can continue to develop our systems and drive efficiencies which ultimately will further enhance the service we deliver to our customers".

[www.oseeuro.com](http://www.oseeuro.com)

\*Fortec Distribution News Article Fortec Distribution December 9, 2020



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- Carrying out investigations
- Problem Solving techniques

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- ✓ Apply different skills and techniques to effectively manage teams, including dealing with difficult conversation and managing conflict.
- ✓ Use facts and data to manage individual and team performance, applying suitable tools and techniques to address examples of poor performance.
- ✓ Be aware of stress and the key sources, applying suitable techniques to minimise the impact on organisational performance.



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# LUCID SECURE



Here at Lucid we work tirelessly to make sure your network is as secure as possible; we do this with a layered defence approach and make it as difficult as possible for cyber criminals to get a foothold in your network. One of the biggest challenges for organisations is cyber criminals exploiting the people working within the organisation. Lucid Secure has been designed to close this security gap, and develop your team's cyber security awareness and reduce your human cyber risk.

## We identify weaknesses in a number of key areas:

Can your staff recognise a data breach or possible cyber attack?

How many of your staff have been caught up in a data breach?

Would your staff know how to deal with a phishing email, or be able to spot one?

Are your staff trained in basic cyber security awareness?

## The First Step – Reporting

Lucid Secure can provide a report to show who, when and what was breached and going forward you will be notified when your users are exposed to a data breach. With continuous monitoring and employee micro-training, your staff would be educated, so that further breaches should not occur.

## The Second Step – Send a simulated phishing email to your employees

Phishing emails remain one of the most common sources of successful cyber attacks and employees continue to show that they are still the easiest point of entry. But how can your business combat this threat?

Simulated phishing tests provide you with an invaluable insight into how vulnerable your users are, whilst offering employees a first-hand look at how phishing attacks and social engineering work to try and gain access to attack your systems.

## Why Phish in your own pond?

"Simulated phishing is just as vital as implementing antivirus and firewalls. It's an invaluable Cyber Security process that helps patch your last line of defence."

## Where should you start?

Assess how vulnerable your users are to an inevitable Phishing scam and increases awareness around social engineering.

Lucid Secure can send a simulated phishing email once a month to all employees, to see if they spot it. The ones that do not spot the email, or need some extra help, will be put onto training courses to continuously educate for further potential attacks. The email is custom-designed and can be from a customer, supplier or government body etc.

## The Third Step - Results and Training

Based on the results of the simulated phishing emails, we would build an individual training plan of online courses, targeting areas where that user proved to be weak. These ongoing IT Security Awareness training sessions are provided initially on a monthly basis, but can be more frequent.

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# Celebrating eight decades of the Team Valley Trading Estate

The Team Valley Trading Estate is known today as one of the North East's largest and most vibrant hubs of economic activity.



**Home to more than 700 companies and supporting around 20,000 jobs, the estate has been a firm fixture of our region's business community for the past eight decades. In fact, it is one of Europe's oldest trading estates and blazed a trail for the roll out of further trading estates across the country.**

But why was the estate created in the first place and how has it transformed over the past 82 years?

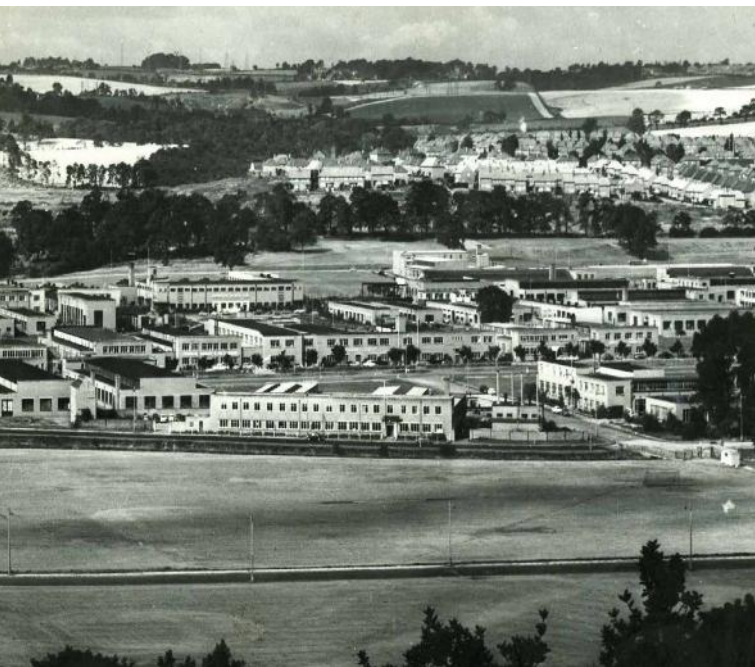
Keith Taylor, managing director of UK Land Estates, has researched the history of the estate and here tells its fascinating story.

The Team Valley trading estate is the largest estate in our extensive portfolio of commercial property developments and our occupiers include international household names such as Amazon, DPD, Greggs and WHSmith, as well as emerging local SMEs and start-ups that are a product of the region's rapidly expanding technology and advanced manufacturing economy.

However, the history of Team Valley goes back as far as the early 1930s. As the country began to rebuild after the First World War, jobs in heavy industry such as coal, shipping and armaments began to decline. As a result, unemployment levels in the area rose sharply. In Gateshead unemployment reached 57 per cent, whilst in nearby Jarrow unemployment levels were at a staggering 80 per cent.

The people were in uproar and numerous protests ensued. A group of men even marched from Jarrow to parliament in London to highlight their desperation at the mass unemployment.

As a result, the Ministry of Labour commissioned an investigation into local joblessness with war veteran and Conservative MP Captain



Euan Wallace concluding that the creation of a new trading estate was vital to boost prosperity in the region.

In 1936, the Team Valley was selected as the ideal location for this new £2million estate, due to its close proximity to both the urban centres of Gateshead and Newcastle, and the ability to provide new road links for goods to be transported across the country.

Building work on the newly-formed Team Valley Trading Estate began right away and on February 22, 1939, the 700 acre estate was officially opened at a royal ceremony attended by King George VI.

The first tenants to move in were very different to the usual heavy industries of the North. Haulage contractors Orrell and Brewster Ltd and a motor company named Holland Coachcraft Limited took residence and before long, more than 7,000 much-needed jobs were up for grabs.

However, with the outbreak of the Second World War, the expansion of the site paused temporarily, with the land instead used to grow food.

Team Valley was an important area for the North East's war effort, with the Local Defence Volunteer Force – known today by its nickname Dad's Army – using the estate's roofs to watch the skies for German aircraft.

After fighting ended in 1945, soldiers returned home with many of them determined to start new businesses and enterprises.

Scores of new factories and manufacturing companies formed to help rebuild post-war Britain and over the next twenty years, the Team Valley expanded rapidly.

By the mid-1960s, more than 16,000 workers were employed on the estate, with occupiers including popular menswear brand Lyle & Scott, the National Coal Board and advanced manufacturing firm Express Engineering – which continues to be an occupier today.

The estate continues to go from strength to strength, even in the midst of the Covid-19 crisis.

It's no secret that the regional economy has taken a hit this past year, but I have seen first-hand the resilience and adaptability of our local businesses on the estate and I'm certain that we can re-build and pave the way once more.

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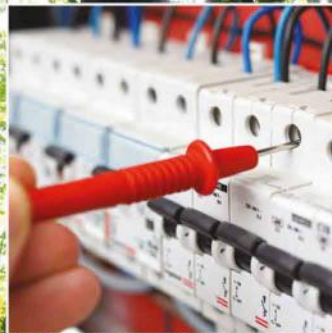
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## OPENCAST BOOSTS THE WORK OF COVID-AFFECTED CHARITIES

OPENCAST Software has confirmed its commitment to making a positive social impact by making generous donations to five local charities.

**The Newcastle-based tech consultancy has donated almost £50,000 to charities whose work in local communities has been much needed during the Covid pandemic.**

The charities include a domestic abuse refuge; a food bank; a support centre for those in need, including the homeless; an LGBTQ support service and a hygiene bank, and were chosen by a team of charity champions at Opencast. The workload for each of the charities has significantly increased since the pandemic began.

Tom Lawson, chief executive at Opencast, explains: "Our mission as a company is to make life better through good team work. 'Good' points to our standards of quality, but it is also about 'purpose'. Our purpose here is to make a real difference to hardworking charities operating in difficult circumstances.

"We sincerely hope our donations improve the lives of those who've turned to our charities for help, and we'd like to thank the Community Foundation who've awarded the donations through our new Opencast Charitable Fund." Charities who have benefited from Opencast's generosity are:

- **The Hygiene Bank in Newcastle**  
The bank was established in 2018 with the aim of helping people in financial

need by providing toiletries and other essential hygiene products.

- **Wearside Women in Need (WWiN)**  
Incidents of domestic abuse have increased since the pandemic began so WWiN has never been busier. The charity operates two refuges and an outreach programme that provides a range of community-based services to women and children experiencing domestic abuse.
- **The KC Foundation for the Byker Connect25 Food Bank**  
This is a small charity, connected to the larger Kings Castle Charity, which provides food for people in need in the Byker area, near to Opencast's Hoults Yard offices.
- **Albert Kennedy Trust (AKT)**  
The Trust provides support, advice and guidance to young people aged 16-25 who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and who are homeless or have a housing need.
- **St Vincent de Paul Society for the St Vincent's Support Centre, Newcastle**  
The centre supports the homeless, those in poverty, those with disabilities, the elderly and young people and black and ethnic minorities.

Tom Lawson adds: "We had a strong year of growth in 2020 and the company has a responsibility to help

those around us who are struggling. We're headquartered here in the north east and we felt it was important to help regional charities working to improve the lot of local communities and people. "One factor that differentiates us is the work we do. Our work for several key clients involves making life better for all of us, using technology to make real changes to people's lives. Our charitable donations are an extension of this – improving people's lives and making things better."

Edgar Penollar, chief executive at The Hygiene Bank, says: "We are truly grateful to Opencast Software for their donation to The Hygiene Bank. These funds are vital in helping to raise awareness of the issue and to tackle hygiene poverty."

Rebecca Stevenson, centre Co-ordinator at St Vincent's Support Centre, adds: "We were delighted to receive a grant from the Opencast Charitable Fund at the Community Foundation. It has enabled us to continue our essential support work in providing free meals, emergency clothing, and emergency food parcels to struggling individuals and families in the north east. So far this year that has been over 1,400 people supported by St Vincent's."

Becky Rogerson, director at WWiN, says: "A huge thank you to Opencast Software for acknowledging and supporting survivors of domestic abuse in Sunderland. The pandemic has created the 'perfect storm' for domestic abuse to escalate and as a service we're humbled by the response from the community which has enabled us to go the extra mile; supporting more women and children to safety, and helping them re-establish a life free from abuse.

"The grant provided vital practical help such as removal costs, setting up a new home, and transport to a refuge in a crisis. Our thanks from the many women and children who needed a helping hand; an investment in their futures."

Opencast specialises in building and running enterprise IT systems for the government, key public bodies and global financial services. Clients include JP Morgan Chase and Co, Sage, NHS Business Services Authority, HMRC, DWP and the Offshore Renewable Energy Catapult.

For further information, please contact **Rob Lawson** on **07740 939073**.





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# Smart IT Celebrates Record Financial Year

Gateshead based IT solutions provider Smart IT are celebrating a record financial year in 2020/21 with over 30% growth taking their annual turnover to 3.6 million. Despite the current climate Smart IT have continued to grow, far exceeding the “Pre-COVID-19” target for 2020 of achieving a 3 million annual turnover.

**The firm specialises in managed IT support, cybersecurity services, cloud services, and cloud telecoms, across all sectors including charities, education, healthcare, professional services, and manufacturing.**

Due to the nature of the business, Smart IT experienced an upsurge in the demand for their IT services. A quick and agile service was required to deploy secure home working solutions to many of their clients during the pandemic.

“Almost overnight, we helped hundreds of clients to set up their workforce securely for remote working, switching quickly from office-based to home working, providing future proofed solutions for maintaining a hybrid secure workforce.

Many clients saw the COVID-19 pandemic as the mechanism for change and an opportunity to embrace a new working model to ensuring their operations are secure. A lot of business owners focused on survival through improving efficiencies, which is where Smart IT can really add value.” **Tony Wilson, Managing Director**

In addition to the financial growth, the company has also appointed 13 new roles, including help desk and senior engineers, as well as Account Managers to support our new customers. Smart IT has also demonstrated their commitment to developing their existing workforce with several employees securing promotion.

“We believe firmly in investing and developing our existing employees. It is part of the Smart IT DNA to provide an “Opportunity for Everyone”, at Smart IT “hard work is recognised”. Several of the senior team began their careers within IT with us and have progressed up the career ladder gaining promotion due their high level of expertise and positive attitudes shining through. Career progression and promoting from within, is always high on our agenda at Smart IT “ **Jon Proud, Operations Director**



Despite the challenging times, Smart IT have continued with their apprenticeship program, increasing these opportunities is part of their ongoing strategy, recognising the benefits an apprenticeship provides for both the company and the apprentice.

Like all businesses over the last year, Smart IT were not immune from challenges, the help desk team worked extremely hard in these difficult circumstances, assisting several thousand users to work remotely. Although on-site project work was put on hold, Smart IT were fortuitous not to lose any staff due to the pandemic, they kept their project engineers busy volunteering at local charities and helping out in the community where they could.

“I am exceptionally thankful and appreciate all the Smart IT staff for their efforts to make 2020 a success, many working out of hours to support clients throughout this time, along with field engineers, usually attending customers

sites who supported the local community, carrying out deliveries to the vulnerable. I feel fortunate that we didn't need to make any redundancies as a result of COVID-19”

The growing IT company have big plans for 2021, with ambitious targets in place, aiming to achieve £4 million annual turnover. The focus for the year ahead is to increase the headcount, complete ISO27001 certification and branch out geographically with the opening of a second office.

“We are eager to build on the success of 2020, with a strong leadership team in place, underpinned by a sound business model, I am confident we will achieve our ambitious targets for the year ahead. Along with the expansion plans with the opening of new premises to support Smart IT nationwide as our client base continues to grow.” **Tony Wilson, MD**

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# NOT HIDE-ING FROM SUCCESS

North East-based Stuart Coupland has turned what he describes as a 'side hustle' into a flourishing business over the last 10 months, despite operating in some of the most difficult trading conditions the country has experienced for years.



**Following redundancy a mere six weeks before the UK plunged into a national lockdown in March 2020, Stuart took the opportunity and decided to make his hobby, Coupland Leather, a full-time job - building on the brand he had been working away on in his spare time to create a luxury, handcrafted leather business selling items such as watch straps, belts and notebook covers as well as stunning bespoke pieces including ladies' hand bags and shotgun slips.**

Coupland Leather was formed in 2018 when Stuart began making leather items. From the birth of the concept to the end of 2019, Coupland Leather had produced a total of 81 handcrafted pieces, while he also worked a full-time role in sales and business development.

On being made redundant on 21st January 2020, Stuart threw himself into the business 100 per cent and from that point till the end of 2020, Coupland Leather created and sold a total of 442 handcrafted pieces - despite losing the security of a full-time role, facing a worldwide pandemic and having to learn how to run a full-time and successful business on his own.

Growth-wise, the company saw an increase of 675 per cent year on year from 2019 to 2020, designed and launched over 20 new products and grew an international presence with sales in the US and Australia, as well as enquiries from other countries.

Founder, Stuart Coupland said: "At first I had a look online to see what others were doing through craft websites like Etsy. Rather than trying to copy their model, I took a step back and reviewed my career path, the connections I have, the people I deal

with and then started to think about and consider products that those people might like.

"I took this a step further and spoke to friends who fell within that target audience to see what they wanted to see me make. Over the years I have added a couple of products a month, a lot of the time through commission-style enquiries asking if I made something like 'X'. After making the products, I took images and added them to the ever-growing product list on my website and this sparked more questions about what I could make."

Stuart markets the brand himself through his impressive network and with the support of his professional photographer girlfriend, Megan. In the build up to Christmas the orders were coming in thick and fast, necessitating a temporary member of staff to assist with admin, but Stuart says it is usually him on his 'lonesome with Netflix and Amazon Prime for company'.

Coupland Leather is a corporate supporter of Butterwick Hospice and works closely with MAIN, as well as being a sponsor of local boxer, Joe Maphosa. There are also some exciting reseller partnerships in discussion which Stuart hopes will come to fruition in 2021.

He continued: "The plan now is to continue building the brand and the business. People have seen it evolve from a hobby to a serious and professional company making high quality products and that is where I want to be.

"In 2021 I'll be focusing more on the ladies' accessories market such as

handbags, as well as expanding the existing ranges."

Coupland Leather handcrafts all its leather products in house, from scratch. Clients can speak directly to the person who will be making their item or gift, ensuring that what they're expecting is what they will get. There is a wide range of dyes, threads and amendments to the designs available, so the finished product not only matches their style but is also perfect for the intended use. There are also several options for personalisation, from stamped initials, dates and names, to laser engraving and the crème de la crème corporate debossing stamps.

For more information, see [couplandleather.co.uk](http://couplandleather.co.uk).



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# Ed's & tails above the rest

Gateshead-based business Ed's Shearing's Dog Grooming Studio celebrates its first birthday.



ED'S SHEARING'S  
**DOG GROOMING**  
STUDIO



**In a time where 'bad news' seems to dominate, it's lovely to find examples of businesses who are not only surviving in this global pandemic - they are thriving.**

Ed's Shearing's Dog Grooming Studio, located in Gateshead, celebrates its first birthday. The studio was opened in 2020 by local business owners and former firefighters Julie and Alfie Moon.

### How it all began

Julie sadly lost her mam - and best friend - Edna, to illness in 2018. After losing her mam Julie knew that she needed something different in her life.

They welcomed a new addition to the family - a cavapoo named Eddy, who continues to bring so much joy to their life. Inspired by her mam, Julie stepped away from her career in the fire service, and decided to retrain as a dog groomer. Prior to serving in the fire service, Julie was a professional hair stylist.

Julie trained all over the UK, learning from the very best in the business - including the Crufts Best in Show Winner for Westies. The couple found the perfect premises in the Low Fell area of Gateshead, and worked tirelessly to transform it into a vibrant and quirky dog grooming studio, kitted out with the very latest equipment.

### Eddy

Ed's Shearing's Dog Grooming Studio opened its doors for the first time on 23rd February 2020. The studio is named after their cavapoo Eddy, who got his name from Julie's mam Edna. Eddy is a regular in the studio and is always first in line to offer a warm and friendly welcome - and is always at hand to offer a reassuring paw to any of his canine friends who may be feeling nervous.

It was important to Julie & Alfie that the studio provided a relaxed environment for their clients. Equally important, was that their human clients felt reassured and comfortable leaving their dogs behind. Being dog owners themselves they know just how important pets are to their owners. Welcoming customers from across the north-east, Julie and Alfie (with the help of Eddy) have built a successful business that is loved by its two-and four-legged customers.

### Celebrity endorsed

The business, which celebrates its first birthday today, consistently receives five-star reviews and recommendations from its clients, and is continuing to grow in popularity. The studio though, also has another endorsement... one that very few - if any - dog groomers can boast. Shortly after opening, Julie and Alfie received a signed photograph from

Ed Sheeran, who had heard about the business through social media. Ed's signed photo stands proudly beside a framed picture of Edna, Julie's mam.

### Happy dogs, happy customers, happy birthday

Once the doors opened, the unique branding, combined with consistent expert service soon led to Ed's Shearing's becoming the 'go to' dog groomers in the area.

Julie, Eddy and the team continue to demonstrate their genuine passion for helping dogs, and it's this passion that sets Ed's Shearing's apart. To celebrate their first birthday, Ed's Shearing's are thanking its customers with cake and special doggy-related goodies.

### What's next for Ed's?

The Gateshead dog grooming studio is looking forward to a second successful year of helping dogs look and feel great. Ed's Shearing's welcomes dogs of all breeds, shapes and sizes through its studio doors, and with signature doggy perfumes, this local business is definitely coming up roses.

Happy first birthday, Ed's Shearing's... here's to many more!

[www.edsshearings.com](http://www.edsshearings.com)



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# FIGHTING SPIRIT OF WL DISTILLERY PAVES WAY TO PRESTIGIOUS ACCOLADE



**County Durham based WL Distillery are making a splash in the gin market after winning Silver at the prestigious 2021 London Spirits Competition. The distillery is now just six months into production of their award-winning 1st Edition Gin, despite having to pause the initial launch and production which had been planned for early 2020.**

"As with many businesses the start of the pandemic made 2020 a challenging year, with a refocus in business strategy. We took the decision to halt the initial production and launch of the 1st Edition Gin, it was a difficult decision but the right one due to uncertainty in the market. We wanted to support the community somehow and decided to utilise our resources for the production of sanitiser which was at a shortage at the time."  
**Scott Wilson-Laing, Managing Director**

With a community ethos at the heart of the company the distillery made the decision to use their raw materials to make sanitiser to help charities, emergency services, the NHS and vulnerable individuals.

This led to Scott receiving the UK Business Heroes Stamp from the British Chamber of Commerce UK Business Heroes Scheme for his support during the pandemic.

The company continues to distill their support into the community and are avid supporters of Grace House North East and sponsors of the Women's basketball team at Newcastle Eagles.

"I was honored to receive the unexpected recognition for our work during the pandemic, so many individuals and companies have come together to support others over the months through difficult times and it was humbling to receive the award. Community interaction is at the forefront of the business and I'm very proud to be associated with Grace House and Newcastle Eagles, who are both very important parts of their community through the work that they do."

November 2020 saw the resurgence of the distillery with the 1st Edition Gin hitting production alongside a miniature festive themed range, closely followed by a Valentine's duo. This all proved to be just the tonic to tantalise the taste-buds of the growing loyal customer base.

Now just six months in the independent small-batch producer is delighted with the response to their 1st Edition Gin, a refreshing creation boasting an indulgent aroma infused with garden botanicals, touches of apple, pear, raspberries, blackberries and those all-important juniper berries. The award winning recognition from the prestigious London Spirits Competition 2021 was just the accolade the distillery needed and prompts the future for a further upward trajectory.

The London Spirits Competition looks to recognise, reward and help promote spirits brands that have successfully been created to identify with and target a

specific spirits drinker. Spirits were judged on the basis of three primary criteria and WL Distillery scored highly in the three judging aspects of quality, value and packaging.

Now in its fourth year, the prestigious competition is an annual judging of international spirits organised by the Beverage Trade Network and the Silver medal is an ultimate endorsement in the global spirits industry.

"We are delighted that our 1st Edition Gin has been awarded Silver at such a prestigious spirits competition. The demand for our gin continues to be strong and we have a number of exciting plans in the pipeline and look forward to unveiling these in the coming months." The judging panel of 2021 was drawn from leading spirits industry professionals with direct commercial buying responsibility. This establishes the winners at the competition to be agreeable to the on-premise trade and consumer alike and makes an award from the London Spirits Competition a coveted one.

"Spirits brands consumers are looking for an-round experience when drinking a spirit. The spirit needs to hit all the right notes to be enjoyed again and again. So, at the London Spirits Competition, we evaluate spirits that contribute to a spirit's overall drinkability. Along with the quality, spirits are assessed for their appearance and value."  
**Sid Patel, CEO, Beverage Trade Network**

With ingredients taking centre stage, WL Distillery take great interest in nature and the beauty that it represents. Each bottle is infused with nature using handpicked, measured botanicals and natural mineral spring water to ensure the freshest, most authentic taste. The distillery is committed to combining their passion for gin with capturing the charm and nature of the region. Crafted in the North East, from start to finish the gin is expertly monitored and created, by hand in the distillery.

With in-store presence in Fenwick's over Christmas and listings in Vogue and GQ magazine, the explosion of flavours from the award-winning distillery continues to be a hit with gin enthusiasts, with orders coming in from across the UK. Shop online at [www.wldistillery.com](http://www.wldistillery.com)



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# REPUTATION, A BUSINESS ALTER EGO

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## DID YOU KNOW

**90% of UK employees** who regularly drink higher quality coffee at their office, feel motivated to give their best at work.

Employee wellbeing should be at the forefront of business to ensure their workplace is a welcoming and positive environment. A great benefit to providing premium coffee on site is giving back to your staff and ensuring they feel valued at work.

**Jemma Williams is Lyreco's account manager for Nespresso Professional.** Offering no obligation machine demonstrations and coffee tasting to businesses throughout the North East.



Jemma Williams

*I work alongside businesses to ensure they have the best solution for their business needs, tailoring their machine choices to ensure it is bespoke and works best for them. I'd love to be part of the reason that your business is being able to bring people together safely and provide time to pause, reset and get collaborative in the workplace again.*

*We offer machines to suit all areas and so what might have worked before the pandemic, may need reconsidering. Our 'touchless' machines offer the safest way to process a coffee and are very easy to sanitise before and after each use. This will be a huge consideration for communal areas where social distancing is in place.*

*Lots of companies are planning the 'return to work' phase and are considering a high quality coffee as a benefit and a motivator for employees who will be working in very different environments.*

If you are interested to learn more about how Nespresso Professional can support you with upgrading your businesses coffee solution please get in touch.

**Jemma Williams**  
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