

BUSINESS

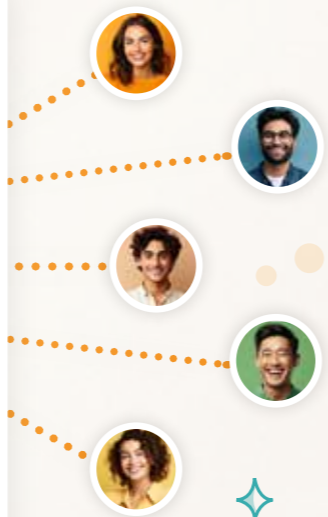
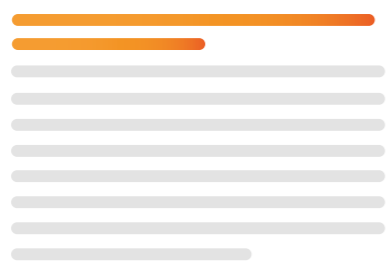
DIRECTION



Technology & Trends

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Technology & Trends

Happy New Year and welcome to the January/February edition of Business Direction Magazine. The focus of this edition is Technology and Trends. We will cover all the latest trends within the technology sector and explore the latest technologies, with a highlight on new tech adoption and cybersecurity.

In recent years, technology has progressed at an unprecedented rate, with emerging technology like Artificial Intelligence (AI) becoming integral to many of the tools and applications we use in our professional roles. AI has been adopted by leading companies to alleviate work pressure, streamline processes, and enhance overall efficiency. However, as with any technological advancement, the need for cybersecurity grows. As we continue to explore and adopt new technologies, safeguarding our digital environments remains a critical priority.



Sharon Smith
Chief Executive

To ensure our Members are protected from the threat of cyberattacks or cyber breaches, we work closely with Member businesses to offer 'Chamber Cyber Essentials.' With every Chamber Membership, Members have access to Cyber Essentials, a certification that helps to protect organisations of all sizes from a wide range of the most common cyber threats. This simple but effective government-backed scheme focuses on five technical controls that have been proven to be effective against up to 90% of cyberattacks.

In this edition, we will highlight the latest advancements and innovations transforming the technology sector. You'll hear from leading IT experts sharing their insights, businesses successfully integrating cutting-edge technologies, and inspiring success stories of tech-driven growth, and an exclusive interview with Patrons and IT solution specialists EBC Group.

Best Regards,

Sharon Smith

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Our Patrons are:



Enter the Chamber Business Awards 2025

Sponsored by Herefordshire Council and Worcestershire County Council

The Herefordshire & Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce are delighted to invite guests to the Worcester Arena for the Chamber Business Awards 2025, sponsored by Herefordshire Council and Worcestershire County Council.

The Awards will welcome over 700 guests from businesses across the two counties. The Awards celebrate firms across Herefordshire and Worcestershire and are a fantastic way to raise awareness of local business success.

There are 15 awards up for grabs, with each of the winners also being entered into the final coveted award, Business of the Year. The benefits that come alongside entering an award are invaluable, including a great boost to staff morale, a powerful tool to raise your profile and a way to stand out against your competitors.

Award Entries Open – 9.00am Monday 6 January 2025

Award Entries Close – 4.00pm Monday 17 March 2025

Awards Ceremony – Thursday 12 June 2025

Award Categories:

Best use of Technology and Trends

sponsored by EBC Group

Charity Business of the Year

sponsored by Milford Research & Consultancy Ltd

Commitment to the Community

sponsored by Malvern Panalytical

Employer of the Year

sponsored by Heart of Worcestershire College

Excellence in Customer Service

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Excellence in Innovation

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Excellence in Manufacturing and Engineering

sponsored by ABE Ledbury

Excellence in Professional Services

Excellence in Sustainability

sponsored by Vinegar Works

Health & Wellbeing in the Workplace

sponsored by Kingspan Insulation

High Growth Business of the Year

sponsored by mfg Solicitors LLP

International Trade Business of the Year

sponsored by Bishop Fleming

Micro Business of the Year

sponsored by Worcestershire Growth Hub

Most Promising New Business

sponsored by Hayward Wright

Small Business of the Year

sponsored by Britannic Place Financial Management

Business of the Year

sponsored by Herefordshire Council and Worcestershire County Council.

Chamber Awards Tickets

Single tickets: £119.00+VAT Members / £159.00+VAT Non-members

Table of 10 tickets: £1,070.00+VAT Members / £1,430.00+VAT Non-members

Entering the Chamber Awards is completely free of charge for Members and £50.00+VAT per entry for Non-members. Businesses can enter a maximum of 3 entries.

Visit www.hwchamber.co.uk/events/business-awards for more information.



How Technology and Coworking are Shaping the Future of Hybrid Working

Hybrid working has become the model of choice for many businesses, offering the flexibility of remote working with the benefits of face-to-face collaboration.



Advancements in technology, particularly Artificial Intelligence (AI), are critical to making this model a long-term success. They help teams stay better connected, organised, and productive, no matter where they are.

Over the next five years, we'll see further investment in technologies that empower hybrid working teams. AI, a key tech trend in 2024, is already transforming collaboration with tools that streamline project management, facilitate seamless virtual collaboration, and improve performance tracking. As businesses embrace a future

of hybrid working, coworking spaces like Oak House Workspace are thriving. They've become the go-to choice for start-ups and freelancers, as well as established small businesses. These spaces provide a professional, flexible and cost-effective alternative to traditional office spaces and are particularly valuable in today's hybrid working world.

For many businesses, coworking spaces eliminate the cost of underused office space. Instead, they offer hubs for brainstorming, team meetings, and client presentations with everything you need for productive working: superfast Wi-Fi, video conferencing facilities, quiet zones, meeting rooms, and office essentials like printers, scanners and secure document disposal.

Far from being a temporary solution, coworking spaces are integral to the future of hybrid working. Experience the benefits of a coworking space and claim a free half-day pass to Oak House Workspace, West Worcester's only coworking space by visiting www.oakhouseworkspace.co.uk.

The Transformative Impact of AI on Recruitment and Employment

Technology continues to reshape the world of work, and at the forefront of this evolution is the growing influence of artificial intelligence (AI) and automation.

While the idea of robots replacing people often captures headlines, the reality is more nuanced. Yes, automation is taking over some tasks, but rather than eliminating jobs wholesale, it's fundamentally changing the nature of many roles.

Repetitive, tedious tasks are now prime candidates for automation, freeing up human workers to focus on higher-value, more creative, and strategic elements of their roles—the aspects that no machine can replicate. AI, on the other hand, supports us in processing data, generating insights, and making decisions at lightning speed. Together, these technologies allow businesses to work smarter, not harder.

At Hewett Recruitment, we've embraced these advancements to enhance our service. By automating administrative processes, our team has been able to dedicate more time to activities that truly matter to our clients and candidates. And with the launch of an AI-powered search tool this month, we're taking this a step



further—streamlining candidate sourcing and improving the quality and speed of our placements. These innovations enable us to focus more on personal connections and delivering tailored solutions, the aspects of recruitment that technology can't replace.

AI and automation aren't here to take over; they're here to empower us. For businesses, this means embracing technology as a tool for improvement, not a threat. By leveraging AI thoughtfully, we can unlock new efficiencies and opportunities, creating a future of work that's more productive and engaging than ever before.



How technology is weaving magic into your holiday experience

In the world of travel, technology plays a pivotal role, from the moment your passport graces the scanner to the blissful moment you sip your first cocktail at your destination.

To cater to the desires of modern wanderers, airlines and hotels have conjured apps that serve myriad purposes—creating and storing boarding passes, sending messages to your personal butler, and more. Moreover, technology is enhancing the industry through the lens of sustainability. Embracing eco-friendliness does not mean sacrificing luxury; rather, innovations like solar energy, ultrafiltration, and reticulation, supporting wildlife and enrich local communities, ensuring that your holiday not only delights but also safeguards the destination through responsible tourism. At arrangeMY Escape, we are dedicated to championing sustainability, featuring hotels like Ikos, which offers complimentary use of their electric Tesla's. We also highlight LNG-powered cruise ships such as P&O, Royal Caribbean, and Disney, along with simple ways for everyone to reduce their carbon footprint. Ryan proudly accepted the ATAS award for Sustainable Agent of the Year 2024, a testament to our commitment to a greener future in travel. Assisted by the wondrous advancements in technology.

www.arrangemy.com

BLUEPOWER – Fuel cell technology with Faun Zoeller

FAUN Zoeller UK (FZUK), a Kirchoff subsidiary, deployed its first Hydrogen Fuel Cell Refuse Collection Vehicle (RCV) in St Helens, UK. The RCV named BLUEPOWER, was delivered to the borough in 2022 to help reach Net Zero emissions in the wider Liverpool City region by 2040.

FZUK CEO, Simon Hyde shared the hydrogen journey. “We established a separate business in Germany, ENGINIUS, to specifically design and produce these chassis, for our current and new markets across Europe. All part of the FAUN Group, ENGINIUS UK was also set up to assist in this development. It has achieved original equipment manufacturer (OEM) status, meaning we have secured EU-type approval, which is a big step for us and gives both the company and products excellent foundation.”



Hyde added where he believes the Hydrogen technology will be used. “Some mileage and energy uses are small, so EVs will be suitable. However, where you have

big ranges, double shifting and high energy usage, fuel cell technology is more suitable. So, I think that you will see a bigger uptake in hydrogen over the next four to five years.”

Hyde concluded. “Our customers all have Net Zero targets, and we are there to support what the government wants to implement. The next steps for us are more projects and proving our product is worthy of investment and delivering far beyond customers and market expectations.”

www.faun-zoeller.co.uk

What to consider when buying a Shared Ownership property

With house prices continuing to soar across the UK, it's becoming increasingly difficult to get onto the property ladder. However, there are schemes that allow buyers to purchase an initial share of a property through housing associations, with the opportunity to increase their share in the future.



Calum McManus
Solicitor, mfg Solicitors

Potential buyers should first consider affordability, as rent will be charged monthly by the housing association based on the unacquired share, along with a service charge for the repair and

maintenance of communal areas, as well as potential mortgage payments.

Secondly, buyers should ask the housing association to confirm the maximum acquirable share, as some lenders will not agree to provide borrowing if the percentage is less than 100%.

Finally, buyers should consider tax implications and whether it may be

more tax-efficient to pay Stamp Duty Land Tax (SDLT) on the full market value of the property or just on the acquired share, especially if they plan to purchase additional shares in the future.

For further advice you can email Calum McManus at [mfg Solicitors at calum.mcmanus@mfgsolicitors.com](mailto:mfgsolicitors.com)

The Key to Boosting Productivity with The Kaleidoscope Plus Group

With employee wellbeing increasingly recognised as a cornerstone of business success investing in wellbeing is no longer optional—it's a strategic necessity.

Poor mental health costs UK businesses billions annually through absenteeism, presenteeism, and staff turnover. By embedding wellbeing practices into the workplace and creating a culture of care, businesses not only reduce the impact of mental health challenges but also boost employee morale, engagement and innovation, leading to long-term gains, including improved productivity, performance and profitability.

Businesses that prioritise wellbeing are more attractive to top talent, enhancing their ability to recruit and retain skilled employees in competitive markets. This focus is particularly important to the younger workforce who are looking for roles that offer not just career advancement but also a supportive and balanced work environment.

They have grown up in an era where mental health conversations are far more open than for previous generations and value employers that align with their values and create safe spaces for discussions.

Businesses also benefit from social stability and broad prosperity, so practical training such as managing stress and building resilience, for example, or equipping employees with the skills to recognise and support an individual in mental health crisis extends far beyond the workplace, forming a crucial part of any ESG strategy.

Whatever your motivation, understanding how the wellbeing of your people can drive the wellbeing of your business should be a key focus on any leadership team.



For more information about The Kaleidoscope Plus Group, please visit www.kaleidoscopeplus.org.uk or call us on **0121 565 5605**.

Landlords must guard themselves against protected leases

Commercial property landlords need to be proactive to avoid being left with unwanted protected leases when taking back possession from a tenant. In this latest edition of Business Direction, senior associate solicitor and commercial property specialist Phil Hunt takes readers through the ins and outs.

This year, the Landlord and Tenant Act 1954 is marking its 70th anniversary, but a recent high-profile court case has shown exactly how the balance of power continues to swing in the favour of tenants.

The Act was introduced after World War Two to govern the relationship between landlords and tenants in commercial premises. However, there have been calls from various quarters to review what is viewed by many as an ageing piece of legislation.

Generally, the Act was considered a way to support tenants in a market weighted heavily towards landlords' interests at the time. The general rule is that a commercial tenant operating a business from its premises has the right to remain in the property after the end date of its lease, unless the landlord can rely on specific exceptions.

Landlords across the two counties are being urged to know their legal position, including their position if they intend to redevelop their premises, as they will need to consider whether they can rely on one of the exceptions, including the “Ground F” exception.

Ground F is where the landlord has an intention to redevelop the property and the works cannot be carried out while the tenant remains in situ. At first glance this seems relatively straightforward, but the courts have made it difficult for landlords to rely on it. Landlords need to first prove a “firm and settled” intention to redevelop their property, including applying for planning permission.

A recent high-profile case involving supermarket giant Sainsbury's and a property it rented in London has thrown the issue of landlord / tenant rights into the spotlight. Here, the landlord failed in its bid to use Ground F to remove Sainsbury's.

There are various takeaways from this case, but generally landlords who intend to redevelop or regain possession of their property at the end of a lease term should take legal advice as early as possible. Also, discussing next steps before serving a notice on the tenant can assist in understanding the options available.

Equally, landlords looking to let a commercial property should consider the consequences of whether or not a lease excludes the right to security of tenure. This is often a key negotiation point in heads of terms, and discussing future plans with a solicitor before finalising your heads of terms could mean avoiding potential issues later on.

For a further discussion, members can email Phil at [patrons@mfg Solicitors through phil.hunt@mfgsolicitors.com](mailto:patrons@mfgsolicitors.com).



For all your Commercial Property needs

Contact us now

0121 2367388 mfgsolicitors.com

[@mfgsolicitors](https://twitter.com/mfgsolicitors)





Business Challenges

More information about support and our policies can be found on the Chamber website hwchamber.co.uk/support/policy

Following the recent budget, businesses may encounter new challenges alongside ongoing pressures from the cost of living and energy crises. The Chamber provides support to help businesses grow and thrive.

By conducting local research on key issues, from infrastructure developments to national concerns, the Chamber produces expert reports identifying critical challenges and outlining actions to address barriers to growth.

To support recruitment and retention, the Chamber's Salary & Benefits Survey highlights average pay and benefits offered by businesses across the two counties. With this data the Chamber then creates the Salary & Benefits report in partnership with Hewett Recruitment.

The Chamber's Quarterly Economic Survey (QES), the UK's largest private sector survey, examines areas such as sales, exports, employment, investment, and confidence. This data helps to create the QES Reports, which are then used by the British Chambers of Commerce, the Treasury, the Bank of England, and the IMF to influence government policies.

The Chamber also works closely with local MPs, offering Members the opportunity to attend an MP Q&A session. This group

session is exclusive to Chamber Members and can help businesses understand how their constituency is working to help their business. Chamber Members can also attend the Annual Bank of England Breakfast, which updates Members on the bank's recent activities, the UK economy, and how the bank will help support UK businesses with a series of monetary policies.

With all the above, plus working closely with local councils and growth hubs, the Chamber has created the Cost Savings Hub, Sustainability Hub, and Skills Hub. These hubs are free to use for Members and Non-members and contain information on local grants, schemes, and support from councils, sustainable incentives/funding, and free courses or upskilling opportunities.

For more information on policies and how the Chamber can support your business, contact policy@hwchamber.co.uk.



Funded by UK Government



Innovation WORCESTERSHIRE



You could receive up to £20,000 for Research and Development projects

Receive support with:



New tool equipment



New marketing materials



IP/trademark protection



Creating a prototype



External market research



Product launch



HCR Law Retains Gold Award for Defence Employer Recognition Scheme

HCR Law has once again retained the prestigious Gold Award in the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS), awarded by the UK Ministry of Defence.

The Defence ERS acknowledges employers who actively support the defence sector and set an example for other UK organisations. The scheme offers three levels of awards – Bronze, Silver, and Gold – recognising employers that pledge, demonstrate, and advocate for the defence and armed forces community, while aligning their values with the Armed Forces Covenant.

HCR Law is one of just 15 law firms to hold the Gold Award, which has been retained since 2019. Other organisations across the UK include BT Group, EY, Marks & Spencer and Standard Chartered UK, the full list is available on the government website.

To achieve the Gold Award, organisations must meet criteria across 11 categories. These include signing the Armed Forces Covenant, proactively showcasing their forces-friendly credentials, and serving as an exemplar within their industry sector.

Once a nomination has been submitted and validated, Gold Awards are reviewed by a national selection board, chaired by a Senior Military Officer.

Rebecca Kirk, Partner and Head of Defence and Security said "I am thrilled that HCR Law has once again been awarded the gold standard. This recognition reflects our unwavering commitment to working with and for the armed forces community. At HCR Law, we actively welcome service leavers and others from this valued community and encourage



others to do the same. As the wife of a serving soldier, I understand firsthand the challenges members of the armed forces face. More importantly, I understand that the skills and qualities they bring are invaluable to employers and the benefits to business in supporting our armed forces are numerous. We are proud to play our continuing part in championing this message.

The firm's work within the defence sector, now well-established across the UK, includes supporting former military personnel who run their own businesses supplying goods and services both nationally and internationally. In addition the firm acts as a mentor to SMEs in the defence and security sector, regarding the covenant and the opportunity it provides for businesses.

Hazelton Mountford's Expertise in Faith-Based Insurance Highlighted at AOG Leaders Training Day

Director Simeon Chapman delivered a leaders training day at the Audacious Church in Manchester for the Assemblies of God (AOG)



In November, Director Simeon Chapman (2nd from the right) was honoured to speak at the Assemblies of God (AOG) leaders training day at the Audacious Church in Manchester. Simeon, with over 30 years of experience in insurance, shared his extensive knowledge of risk management and faith-based insurance with the attendees.

Reflecting on the event, Simeon said, "It was a privilege to speak to such a dedicated and inspiring group of leaders. Faith organisations like AOG play a vital role in

their communities and I'm grateful for the opportunity to help ensure their work is protected."

Over the years, Simeon has collaborated closely with AOG and its network of over 600 churches, providing tailored insurance solutions to meet their unique needs. From protecting church buildings and assets to ensuring coverage for outreach events and community projects, he has worked to ensure AOG leaders can focus on their mission with peace of mind.

Faith insurance is about more than policies and premiums; it's about understanding the heart of a community and helping it thrive. With decades of experience in the field, Simeon and the team at Hazelton Mountford continue to support faith organisations in navigating challenges, safeguarding their efforts and empowering their vision for the future.

More about Not For Profit support including Social Enterprise Insurance, Charities Insurance, Faith and Church Insurance can be found on the website: www.hazeltonmountford.co.uk.

Marking a Year of Achievement with Grubby: A Landmark in ATP and Oakland International Collaboration

As Acorn Trade Partners and Oakland International celebrate their successful year-long collaboration with Grubby, a UK-based producer of plant-based recipe kits, focus now turns to developing and expanding product and service offer to better serve Grubby's customer base.



ATP Director Peter Turone stated: "ATP's collaboration with Oakland International has been a real success delivering a wide variety of the premium fresh produce needed for Grubby's food boxes, and is the result of teamwork, dedication, and a shared passion and vision to deliver excellence."

Martin Holden-White Founder and CEO of Grubby said: "A huge thanks to Oakland

International whose relentless effort in refining packing operations has allowed us to deliver well over 100,000 boxes and approximately 500,000 meals. Their consistent 'can-do' attitude has allowed us to expand recipe choices and add additional delivery days. It's great to work with a team that thrives on challenges and continues to raise the bar."

Smart90 Unveils Digital Breakthrough to Empower SMEs for Scalable Success in 2025



SMEs looking to boost growth and build high-performance teams are set to benefit from a new, technology-driven approach in 2025 as a popular programme, proven to help business owners scale their operations, launches new software.

Smart90 has been helping businesses grow for the last 12 years, harnessing the knowledge and experience of its consultant-led team to guide businesses owners through the challenges of scaling their operations.

With the help of Worcestershire technology accelerator BetaDen, the team behind Smart90 is now bringing its system into the digital age with the launch of new software - available direct to customers or through licensed advisors - that guides business owners through its unique 90-day approach.

Kevin Brent, co-founder of Smart90, said: "The whole Smart90 concept was inspired by our own experiences of scaling businesses and the inherent understanding of the challenges involved that gave us.

"While every business is different, there are key themes that regularly prevent companies achieving the growth they would like; from owners getting trapped working in their business, to teams not being empowered to make the decisions required to enable the next stage of growth.

"Our Smart90 software takes business owners through our proven programme, helping them identify the skills and structures they need 'to get out of the way' and build real value as they scale.

"Structured around our unique 90-day planning process, the software helps owners develop their company vision; identify commercial priorities; establish management rhythms that hold the whole team accountable; fostering the collaboration and communication that is needed to thrive."

Embracing AI in Education: Transforming the Learning Experience

In today's rapidly evolving educational landscape, Artificial Intelligence (AI) is emerging as a powerful tool to enhance learning and streamline administrative tasks.

By personalising learning experiences, AI can cater to individual student needs, allowing for a more tailored educational journey. For instance, AI-powered tutors and assistants provide instant support, making complex subjects more accessible and engaging for students.

Moreover, AI is revolutionising the way educators manage their time, automating tasks like grading, planning and scheduling, thereby freeing up valuable time for more meaningful interactions with students. This efficiency not only improves productivity but also enhances the overall teaching experience.

AI also plays a pivotal role in promoting inclusivity by providing adaptive learning tools for students with disabilities and offering resources to those in remote locations. However, the integration of AI in education isn't without challenges. Issues of data privacy, the need for staff training, and ensuring equitable access to AI technology are critical considerations that need addressing.

Looking ahead, the collaboration between educators and AI holds immense potential. By embracing AI, we can create a more engaging, efficient, and inclusive educational environment that benefits both students and teachers alike.



Unlock Worcestershire's Talent with Careers Worcs

Are you struggling to find the right talent to drive your business forward? Careers Worcestershire (Careers Worcs) is here to help.



What is Careers Worcs?

Careers Worcs, a dedicated, free careers, education, training and skills service from Worcestershire County Council, Department of Work and Pensions and Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership, helps to create pathways from post-16 education into employment for people aged 16-24.

We work with schools, colleges, training providers, and employers to guide young adults into roles that match their skills and ambitions. Our free service connects businesses like yours with motivated young adults aged 16-24 who are ready to thrive in the workplace. From full time or part-time employment, apprenticeships, traineeships, volunteering, or work experience, young adults come to Careers Worcs looking to kick-start their career.

Our mission is simple: to empower young adults to succeed while supporting businesses in building skilled, dynamic teams.

How Can Careers Worcs Benefit Your Business?

In today's competitive landscape, recruiting the right people is more important than ever. At Careers Worcs we can help bridge those gaps, linking Worcestershire businesses to the next generation of skilled workers eager to make an impact.

Partnering with Careers Worcs means more than just filling vacancies—it's about building meaningful connections with enthusiastic individuals ready to grow within your organisation.

Here's how we can help:

- **Targeted Matching:** We connect you with young adults whose strengths and ambitions align with your needs.
- **Workforce Planning:** Whether hiring for entry-level roles, apprenticeships, or niche skill sets, we can help you identify and secure the talent your business requires.

- **Sustainable Employment:** Invest in local young talent to secure your organisation's future workforce.

- **Worcestershire Apprenticeships:** Careers Worcestershire works closely with Worcestershire Apprenticeships to ensure businesses benefit from a seamless recruitment process. Worcestershire Apprenticeships is a key partner in helping local businesses build a skilled, sustainable workforce. By offering expert support and access to apprenticeship opportunities, Worcestershire Apprenticeships connects employers with talented individuals ready to learn and grow. Together, we identify opportunities, match the right candidates, and provide guidance to help businesses maximise the value of apprenticeships. Discover how Worcestershire Apprenticeships can support your growth. Visit wocsapprenticeships.org.uk to learn more.

Why Act Now?

Young adults in Worcestershire are brimming with potential but face increasing challenges in navigating the job market. At the same time, businesses are struggling with skill gaps. Careers Worcs bridges this divide, keeping talent local and strengthening our county's economy.

By partnering with Careers Worcs, you have the chance to make a difference - not just for a young person starting their career but for the long-term success of your business. Together, we can build a stronger, more resilient Worcestershire.

Get in Touch

If you have vacancies or want to explore offering apprenticeships, we'd love to hear from you.

Contact Jennie Ellis at JEllis1@worcestershire.gov.uk or call **0300 666 3 666**.

Visit www.careersworcs.co.uk to learn more about how Careers Worcs can support your recruitment efforts.

Find out more at www.careersworcs.co.uk

CAREERS WORCS

WE CAN HELP YOU FILL YOUR ROLES



In today's competitive landscape, recruiting the right people is more important than ever...at **Careers Worcs** we can help you bridge recruitment gaps!

We help to create pathways from post-16 education into employment for people aged 16-24, linking Worcestershire businesses to the next generation of skilled workers eager to make an impact.

Get in touch with us and let us know what vacancies or work experience placements you have available, and we can help connect you with enthusiastic individuals ready to grow within your organisation.

Email **Jennie Ellis - JEllis1@worcestershire.gov.uk** or call **0300 666 3 666**



Discover the Wild Side of Corporate Entertaining

Hosting an event in the heart of a Safari Park guarantees a setting that's as inspiring as it is unique. Whether it's a high-profile meeting, a large conference, or a memorable away day for employees, the expert team will strive to bring visions to life.



Make meetings, conferences, or away days truly unforgettable by hosting it in the extraordinary setting of West Midlands Safari Park. With three versatile venues, each surrounded by the captivating sights and sounds of the Park, the event is sure to inspire and impress.

Elevate corporate gatherings with the tailored Day Delegate Packages, designed

to cater to specific requirements and guarantee a successful event. Included in the package is exclusive hire of some of our unique meeting rooms and spaces, refreshments, buffet lunch, private parking and even a complimentary return ticket to the Safari Park.

For company rewards and away days, delegates can explore all the attractions the Park has to offer, including the animals, talks and Adventure Theme Park, alongside private access to the three Safari Venues, throughout the day.

For anyone looking to book their company event, conference or meeting at West Midlands Safari Park, they can take advantage of an exclusive Business Direction offer, of 10% off during events held in January, February or March.

For more details, Contact the team at enquiries@safarivenues.co.uk.

Can Business Owners Rely on AI in Marketing?

We get it. AI is fantastic. It can be extremely useful in today's world and has worked its way into the marketing industry. While AI can significantly enhance marketing efforts, relying solely on it is not a viable strategy in an ever-changing business or industry context.

AI lacks the human touch that is crucial for building genuine connections with customers. Emotional intelligence, empathy, and the ability to understand nuanced human experiences are qualities that AI cannot replicate. Successful marketing often hinges on storytelling and creating relatable content, elements that require human creativity and insight.

Moreover, AI operates on data and algorithms, which means it can sometimes miss the subtleties of cultural context, current trends, or the unique characteristics of specific target audiences. Human marketers can identify and adapt to these nuances, ensuring that campaigns resonate on a deeper level with consumers. This is particularly important in industries where brand loyalty and emotional engagement are key drivers of success.

AI is a key tool that business owners can use for valuable insights and automated routine tasks. The benefits it can have on data analysis is something that the digital marketing industry welcomes! We can now embrace software to get better ideas of customers wants, needs and buying behaviours.



Transparency and authenticity are increasingly a key expectation from consumers as they select the companies they buy from; business leaders must navigate this and balance how much we welcome AI into marketing.

While AI is a powerful tool in marketing, it cannot replace the essential human elements necessary for crafting narratives, making strategic decisions, and fostering authentic connections with customers. We can use AI in our marketing, but the human connection is still vital to keep businesses alive and authentic.



Introducing Clear Energy Choice with Control Energy Costs

Control Energy Costs is excited to introduce Clear Energy Choice, an innovative service that empowers businesses to manage their energy generation and consumption while delivering financial and ESG benefits.

This service opens a new path to the energy market, enabling clients to decide where their excess energy goes - sold back to their own operations or shared with a wider consortium. It also creates a marketplace for communities to access competitively priced renewable energy. Clear Energy Choice offers flexibility, transparency, and sustainability amongst like-minded business communities.

By bypassing traditional Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs), Clear Energy Choice supports various renewable sources like solar, wind, and biomass, maximising on-site energy generation.

Clients benefit from financial control, turning surplus power into revenue and reducing energy costs by offsetting grid imports. Additionally, they enhance their sustainability efforts by using locally sourced green energy. Clear Energy Choice offers a flexible, efficient alternative to traditional energy management.

For more details, contact Nigel Addison-Evans at nigel.addison-evans@cec.uk.com or **07500 027480**.

World-Class Engineering from Blade Tooling

An exciting new chapter has just begun for a specialist Worcestershire engineering company Blade Tooling Co. Ltd, as it welcomes its recent new ownership in 2024, and looks forward to growing its business worldwide.

The Legacy of Expertise

Blade Tooling Company has been a well established part of precision engineering in Worcestershire for over forty years. Based in Pershore, the company specialises in the manufacture of tooling to support the manufacture of aircraft engine components. As part of a strong legacy of aero-engineering in this region of the UK, toolmaking has always been an important part of aircraft manufacturing. The region between Bristol and Birmingham has a long history of aircraft engineering extending back to the very active period after the second world war when there were many active local aircraft engineering companies. It is no surprise that those engineering skills evolved to support the advancing technology needed for new aircraft engines and the original owners of Blade Tooling identified the need to supply tooling to make cast turbine blades for aero engine makers such as Rolls-Royce in Derby and Bristol.

Innovation and Skills

From the outset in the early 1980's the company decided to specialise in making metal dies and mould tooling for casting foundries in the UK, building up its reputation for innovative and high-quality precision tooling. The challenges of producing tooling for turbine blades requires a special combination of innovative engineering design of complex 3-Dimensional shapes and the dedication of highly skilled toolmakers to produce the working die. Today the whole manufacturing process is a unique blend of advanced computer aided design (CAD) and manufacturing with skilled operation of complex computer numerically controlled (CNC) multi-axis machine tools and the magic of traditional hand toolmaking. The company has invested in multiple CAD platforms to support the needs of different customers. With the extensive experience of all types of die manufacture, Blade Tooling has developed its own expertise in advanced Electro-Discharge Machining (EDM) and Wire Erosion machining and advanced 'blue light' optical inspection methods. Die making is a highly specialised area of toolmaking with its own challenges and the expertise required takes many years to develop. Blade tooling understands the vital importance of maintaining the level of experience and expertise and has an



World Class Engineering Tooling for Aero and Industrial Gas Turbine Industries.

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e: info@bladetooling.co.uk
t: 01386 575710



apprentice development programme to train talent for the future.

Customers around the World

As Blade Tooling developed and grew its expertise and experience, the markets for its tooling developed beyond the UK to such an extent that in the past decades the majority of sales have been exports to the USA, Europe, and the far East. Managing the complexities of export and import legislation compliance as well as the requirements for Technical Export licences and Brexit, the help and training resources of the Herefordshire

and Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce has been invaluable.

The Future looks bright

Under the new UK ownership this year the company is well positioned to develop its customer base and markets even further. Meeting the unique requirements of its customers for high quality, on-time delivery and multi-project capability is of utmost importance to Blade Tooling for its continued success into the future.

For more information, please visit the website at www.bladetooling.co.uk.

Stop wasting money on videos that don't sell

“No business wants a video; they want results. Without a strategy, every video risks being just an expensive vanity project.” – Will Hopkins - Founder, Moonrise Media Ltd.

Everyone understands that videos are good for business and every business seeks growth—more leads, more sales, more impact. I'm a video professional and passionate about my craft, but I know it is only a tool to achieve those goals, not the goal itself. I see many businesses making the mistake of jumping into production without realising that both different stages of the sales cycle and different platforms demand tailored content.

For example, a quick, visually-driven Instagram reel might engage an audience early in their journey, but it won't persuade a B2B decision-maker scrolling LinkedIn to invest. Without a strategy to align your videos with your audience's needs, your efforts and investment risk becoming disjointed—and ultimately ineffective.

That's why you need a strategic approach. It begins with understanding your audience: where they are in their journey, what platforms they engage with, and what messages will

resonate most. When this is clear, you can create content that meets them where they are. From short, punchy clips for social media to in-depth explainer videos for prospects closer to purchase, a video content and distribution strategy ensures every piece of content has a purpose.

Without this alignment, even the most visually stunning video can become an expensive mistake. But when each video is tailored to a specific stage of the funnel and optimised for its intended platform, it becomes a precision tool for driving growth.

The question isn't whether you should create a video—it's whether you'll make it count. With a strategy-first approach, you ensure every video works as hard as possible for your business.

Email: will@moonrise.media

Web: www.moonrise.media



Will Hopkins
Story Finder, Cinematographer & Director

ESOS Action Plans: Uncovering Benefits Beyond Compliance

As businesses across Herefordshire and Worcestershire head into 2025, many will need to complete their Energy Savings Opportunity Scheme (ESOS) action plan.

Despite being a requirement for companies who need to comply with the legislation (companies with 250 or more employees or those with an annual turnover exceeding £44 million), this action plan has the potential to unlock a number of strategic and cost saving benefits:

Drive cost savings

One of the biggest benefits of an effective ESOS action plan is the potential to identify and address cost savings.

Generally speaking, the long term savings will exceed the initial investment required to implement these measures.

Energy and operational efficiency

ESOS is all about driving efficiency in terms of energy, but this has a knock on effect on operational efficiency.

As well as identifying ways to save energy, the ESOS action plan can present opportunities to streamline your operations and improve productivity, including a more efficient use of resources, less downtime, and an all round focus on productivity levels throughout the organisation.

Greater resilience

At a time when energy prices are volatile, taking a proactive approach to managing your energy usage is a great way to future proof your business and protect you against energy price hikes.



Corporate responsibility

As more and more businesses and consumers seek to partner with brands who take their environmental responsibilities seriously, taking the lead in terms of sustainability can give you the competitive edge and improve your reputation.

If you'd like support with ESOS, please contact Energy Audits UK and speak to our energy consultants.

www.energyaudits.uk

I NEED YOUR HELP

Are your videos delivering the results you need—or could they be doing more?

To help businesses make the most of their video content I'm launching a new **Video Content & Distribution Strategy** service and in order to refine this service, I'm seeking 10 organisations willing to collaborate on their current video strategy.

Together we'll:

- review how effectively your content supports your goals
- uncover opportunities for improvement
- identify best practices in action

In return, you'll get a free **VCDS** report and **50% off any production services for life**. Whether your videos are thriving or underperforming, your input will be invaluable.

This is your chance to gain valuable insights into your video performance while shaping a service that could transform how stories are told. Let's work together to create content that truly delivers.

Contact me today to be one of the 10.

will@moonrise.media

www.moonrise.media/vcds



Is your organisation looking for ways to reduce your energy costs and meet your obligations in terms of sustainability?

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Net Zero by 2050: Our energy experts work with you to create a robust strategy to prepare for Net Zero by 2050.

Sustainability Studies: Upon completion of the Energy Audit Survey, we assess the suitability, acceptability, and feasibility of each opportunity so you can understand the benefits and pay back for each recommendation.



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Are you a Herefordshire registered business,
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If your answer to these questions are YES, then we have free training for you and your employees!

The UK Shared Prosperity Funding, through Herefordshire Council, is fully financing training courses for Herefordshire businesses. The objective of this funding is to support Herefordshire organisations, by responding to skills needs and upskilling local people.

Fully funded training places are now available on the following courses:

■ AI Training - 05/02/2025

■ Managing People in the Team - 21/02/2025

■ Microsoft Excel - 24/03/2025

You will be required to complete a simple pre and post skills evaluation survey if attending the training.

There is limited availability and the funding ends on 31st March 2025, so ACT QUICKLY!

Contact training@hwchamber.co.uk for more information.

Upskill Your People: Driving Business Success Through Staff Development & Workforce Planning

We are committed to promoting staff development within the Worcestershire Local Skills Improvement Plan.

We held extensive conversations with hundreds of businesses from around the county, and something which really stood out for us was the number of businesses that attribute the training of their staff to financial gain. Whilst this is the ambition of most businesses, we want to ensure that business owners and employers see the tremendous benefits to cultivating and developing their staff – not only for financial growth, but for improved productivity and efficiency, for improved staff morale and retention, for better succession planning and business planning and for making the workplace a place where people want to be.

We are thrilled to be launching our 'Upskill Your People' campaign. The purpose of this campaign is to help boost the importance of great business culture, with a call to action for employers to commit to open discussion and honesty with their employees, to get the same in return. We are working alongside Worcestershire Growth Hub in their endeavours to promote Workforce Planning via their hugely supportive and education Workforce Planning Platform.

Visit www.hwchamber.co.uk/upskill-your-people and start your journey to becoming an even more amazing employer!



Chamber Member Benefits



Exclusive Cyber Essentials

In today's digital world, protecting your business from cyber threats is crucial. The Herefordshire & Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce offers its members exclusive access to Cyber Essentials, a government-backed certification that safeguards against common cyber risks. This accreditation strengthens your defences and demonstrates your commitment to data security and compliance.

For more information, contact us via email at membership@hwchamber.co.uk.

Events Calendar

The Member Events Calendar is free for members to promote their events and webinars, provided they don't compete with Chamber offerings. Non-members can use the calendar for a fee. To submit an event, log in to the Members Area and provide your details; a Chamber team member will review it within 48 hours.

Members can boost visibility through 'Featured Events' at the top of the calendar for two weeks, priced at £99 + VAT for members and £150 + VAT for non-members.



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Worcestershire Commercial Property Market Report 2025

LAUNCH EVENT

Wednesday 12 February 2025
8am - 11:30am
Sixways Stadium, Worcester

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Model shown: Mazda MX-30 Exclusive-Line Auto, OTR from £29,995.00. Model shown features optional Polymetal Grey paint (£550). OTR price includes VAT, number plates, delivery, 12 months' road fund licence, first registration fee, 3 year or 60,000 mile warranty and 3 years' European roadside assistance. Test drives subject to applicant status and availability. Details correct at time of going to print. Not available in conjunction with any other offer unless specified. †The official CO₂ emissions figure for the Mazda MX-30 e-Skyactiv EV is 0 (g/km) CO₂ emissions. Figure shown is for comparability purposes; only compare CO₂ figures with other cars tested to the same technical procedures. Figure quoted is derived from the latest WLTP test cycle. ‡ 25 minutes charging time is based on an ambient temperature of 20°C. Charging times will vary depending on a variety of factors including the output of the charger being used, ambient temperature and battery state.

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The changing role of legal teams in businesses – looking ahead



Those who have responsibility for legal decisions in a business play a critical role in navigating the complex legal and regulatory environment of today. Their responsibilities extend beyond legal advice; they are strategic partners, risk managers, and compliance gatekeepers. As the legal and regulatory landscape rapidly evolves, several key areas demand their attention.

Key areas for legal decision-makers in 2025

1. Data privacy and protection

Data privacy remains a cornerstone of legal compliance, especially with the rigorous enforcement of regulations such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Heads of Legal and those they work with must ensure their organisations comply with these laws to avoid hefty fines and reputational damage. This involves understanding the legal requirements, implementing robust data governance frameworks, and managing data breaches effectively.

2. Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) compliance

ESG issues are at the forefront of corporate strategy, driven by increasing stakeholder expectations and regulatory requirements. Reporting on ESG metrics has also become crucial, with laws such as the EU's Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) mandating detailed disclosures.

3. Regulatory compliance

Regulatory compliance is a challenging area, particularly for multinational corporations operating in multiple jurisdictions. Laws and regulations are constantly evolving, staying up-to-date with these changes is vital to ensure ongoing compliance in businesses. This involves monitoring legislative developments, advising on implementing compliance programmes and conducting internal audits. Failure to comply with regulations can result in severe penalties and operational disruptions.

4. Legal technology advancements

Legal technology, or "legal tech," encompasses a range of tools designed to streamline legal processes, enhance efficiency, and reduce costs. Businesses are increasingly adopting technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) for contract analysis and e-discovery tools for managing large volumes of documents.

5. Corporate governance

Robust corporate governance practices are essential for maintaining investor confidence and ensuring regulatory compliance. Those with legal responsibility ensure the company's governance framework aligns with best practices and regulatory requirements. This involves drafting governance policies, advising on ethical practices, and overseeing compliance with governance standards.

6. Employment and the workplace

The legal aspects of employment and workplace relations are complex and evolving. Legal leaders must navigate issues from employee rights to diversity initiatives. This includes advising on employment contracts, managing disputes, and ensuring compliance with anti-discrimination laws. A crucial role is played in developing policies that support a fair, safe, and compliant workplace.

7. Difficulties with contract management

Frequent handling of amendments on client contract templates can be onerous. The constant flow can be time-consuming and often a roadblock to engaging in more important tasks. The challenge is to reduce time spent on third-party contract negotiations and streamline the review process.

8. Addressing resource and time constraints

Business legal teams are constantly trying to juggle workload with reduced resources; a common sentiment among the legal community across the UK. This intensifies the need for streamlined processes and effective automation to manage the workload, and looking at reliable methods for outsourced support when required.

With additional pressures on legal operations and in-house counsel, those making legal decisions are increasingly finding they need flexible legal support. Legal secondments are being used as a way to increase legal resource and support. HCR Flex turns the traditional legal charging model on its head.

HCR Flex is here to supplement or complement your in-house legal team, or can be used as an alternative to in-house counsel. It gives you access to the commercial legal expertise you need when you need it, and allows you to control your costs.

Many well-known brands are benefitting from the HCR Flex model by adding our specialist commercial lawyers to their existing team.

HCR Flex can help you and your legal team with:

- Spikes in workload – interim support to help you deal with these fluctuations
- New or large projects – legal support without a permanent increase in headcount
- Absences and departures – additional capacity to fill your gaps with temporary or long-term secondments
- Skillset gaps – specific legal expertise when you need it
- Legal team transformation – flexible support with price certainty and transparency.



For more information, please contact

Robert Capper, Partner, Head of Commercial

T: 01905 744 814 | M: 07909 970 323

HCR Legal LLP is authorised and regulated by the SRA

www.hcrlaw.com

Empower your teams with e-learning

The UK e-learning market is projected to grow by 15% over the next 5 years equating to a growth of approximately £13 billion. This has been driven by advances in technology, increased internet speed primarily through 4G and 5G and hybrid working environments that demand flexible and convenient learning solutions.

It's no surprise that the pandemic significantly accelerated interest and rapid development of e-learning. Many training providers were forced to adopt and switch from traditional classroom-based training to virtual delivery via online platforms as a solution to the crisis.

Higher Education institutions and larger corporate organisations have invested in Learning Management Systems (LMS) and are utilising this technology as a platform of choice to upskill employees, using the technology as an effective and efficient tool to empower their team's learning and development.

However, for smaller companies it would not make economic business sense to make such a financial investment for this kind of technology and many may not have the resources or the knowledge to manage such platforms. However, having access to e-learning courses to upskill their employees in the most cost and time efficient way would be hugely beneficial.

Here are our top 3 benefits for using digital technology:

- 1. Flexibility** – training can be delivered at a time to suit the needs of the individual and fits in with production or work patterns
- 2. Cost savings and affordability** – with digital learning there is no need to pay or claim travel expenses, reducing journey times to zero which is kinder to our environment. Affordability is one of the main advantages of undertaking e-learning. Lower costs for the training provider mean that these savings are reflective in the pricing of modules
- 3. Micro learning option** – courses are often delivered in bitesize modules making the information more digestible allowing individuals to work through the content at their own pace.



Looking for funding to help with the costs for training your employees?

With the SkillsBoost-Worcestershire grants available, there has never been a better time to re-assess your Learning & Development Programme or better still create one! Make investing in training and workforce planning work for you.

For more information please visit the website at : www.hwchamber.co.uk/skills-solutions.

More information about each training course and upcoming dates can be found on the Chamber website hwchamber.co.uk/events-and-training-calendar

Meet the Chamber Training Team



Olivia Williams,
Head of Events
& Training



Amanda Swingewood,
Training Co-ordinator



Saskia Murphy,
Events & Training
Assistant

Our Chamber Training Team are on hand to support you with any questions you may have. For further details, please do not hesitate to contact the team on **01905 673600** or email training@hwchamber.co.uk

Training & Development

January Course Dates

Advanced Microsoft Excel
Wednesday 8 January, 9.00am-4.00pm
£169+VAT Members / £210+VAT Non-members
Location: Worcester

Managing People in the Team
Tuesday 14 January, 9.00am-4.00pm
£169+VAT Members / £210+VAT Non-members
Location: Worcester

An introduction to Finance for the Non-finance Manager
Wednesday 15 January, 10.00am-3.00pm
£169+VAT Members / £210+VAT Non-members
Location: Worcester

Conducting Effective Team Appraisals
Thursday 16 January, 9.00am-4.00pm
£169+VAT Members / £210+VAT Non-members
Location: Worcester

Intermediate Microsoft Excel
Thursday 16 January, 9.00am-4.00pm
£169+VAT Members / £210+VAT Non-members
Location: Virtual

Professional Telephone Techniques
Tuesday 21 January, 9.00am-4.00pm
£169+VAT Members / £210+VAT Non-members
Location: Virtual

Emergency First Aid at Work
Thursday 23 January, 9.00am-4.30pm
£95+VAT Members / £115+VAT Non-members
Location: Worcester

Google Analytics 4 – GA4
Tuesday 28 January, 9.00am-12.30pm
£95+VAT Members / £115+VAT Non-members
Location: Virtual

Communicating for success
Thursday 30 January, 9.00am-4.00pm
£169+VAT Members / £210+VAT Non-members
Location: Worcester

February Course Dates

Role of the Team Leader
Tuesday 4 February, 9.00am-4.00pm
£169+VAT Members / £210+VAT Non-members
Location: Virtual

Employment Law Update
Wednesday 5 February, 10.00am-3.00pm
£169+VAT Members / £210+VAT Non-members
Location: Worcester

Fire Marshal Training
Thursday 6 February, 9.00am-4.00pm
£95+VAT Members / £115+VAT Non-members
Location: Worcester

Train the Trainer
Monday 10 February, 9.00am-4.00pm
£169+VAT Members / £210+VAT Non-members
Location: Worcester

An Introduction to Digital Marketing and PR
Tuesday 11 February, 9.00am-11.00am
FREE for Members / £115+VAT Non-members
Location: Zoom

Introduction Microsoft Excel
Wednesday 12 February, 9.00am-4.00pm
£169+VAT Members / £210+VAT Non-members
Location: Virtual

Assertiveness and Confidence
Thursday 13 February, 9.00am-4.00pm
£169+VAT Members / £210+VAT Non-members
Location: Worcester

*Courses may be subject to change from the time of printing.



We would like to hear from you!

Whilst continuously expanding the training offering, the Training department are always looking for new ideas for courses. It's great to understand what topics will be most beneficial to local businesses.

For any suggestions, please email training@hwchamber.co.uk. More information about each training course and upcoming dates can be found on the Chamber website - hwchamber.co.uk/events-and-training-calendar

AI and the rise of the 'new' newsroom

Artificial intelligence (AI) has attracted lots of media hype for its perceived impact on business – which ironically includes newsrooms too. Hereford Times editor, John Wilson, explains how AI may be a useful new tool for journalists, but will never replace traditional reporting skills.

The rise of AI has provided endless clickbait headlines forecasting the end of humanity as we know it.

The truth – for local newspapers at least – is more mundane. While AI lies at the heart of the so-called Fourth Industrial Revolution, its current role in journalism could be better described as 'hi-tech' assistant.

As John points out, its emergence is a double-edged sword, posing a threat in some respects but also offering great opportunity to take the tedium out of daily tasks.

"There's a certain amount of routine involved in journalism such as rewriting press releases or producing local event listings," he explains.

"It's worthwhile material that people want, but it's the sort of task that AI can generate in tandem with a trained journalist to verify it.

"However, trust is still a big issue. Google uses search generative experiences for online queries now, where the first thing that pops up is an AI generated summary of answers.

"The trouble is this summary doesn't link back to its original source, so newspapers like us – which may have generated the original information – get no reward in terms of referral traffic from Google.

"There's also a risk of undermining trust because people don't necessarily know if the content is true, where it's come from, or if it's influenced by inbuilt bias."

Journalists at the Hereford Times follow strict guidelines for AI, with training in its ethical use. "We take our responsibilities very seriously and it's a tightly controlled tool.



"It retains a very human aspect as our journalists have to ensure overall accuracy at the end of the day.

"We have a bespoke tool called News Creator, programmed to understand our writing and presentation styles. It avoids time-consuming rewrites by, for instance, converting business jargon into palatable content."

With the rise of digital media, there's also been a lot of speculation about the 'demise' of local newspapers.

This is far from reality, says John, with the Hereford Times consistently selling its 8,000-plus weekly run. "The digital side is growing exponentially, but print news remains a significant source of revenue for us.

"The two platforms work great together, for instance real-time data helps us see what resonates with our audience.

"Stories used to be based on gut instinct – now it's a much more scientific process. We can clearly see what news is most popular and where our readers' interests lie.

"As a business, it's pointless providing a service with little focus on what actually matters.

"Our readers are very interested in the dramatic stuff that's always been 'bread and butter' for news, like crime and emergency stories, and the weather. Digital means we're always up to speed on that!

"They're also incredibly interested in food and drink. On the other hand, it can be hard to drum up engagement in politics, unless it's an issue affecting a lot of people."

John adds: "Critics will say that journalism is in decline and 'not as good as it used to be'. In fact, technology is helping us do better in many ways.

"We deliver what people want, based on reliable data, rather than second-guessing. It's a much fairer relationship.

"But AI in general will never replace a trained journalist. It can't replicate the human qualities needed to empathise with a grieving family or sit down for a coffee with a nervous whistleblower who happens to be sitting on a massive scandal.

"At the same time, there's little regulation so we have to be vigilant against AI-generated churn smothering verified, trustworthy news.

"We as a team are responsible for making sure the Times can be trusted to keep meeting local need. The old-fashioned values of truth, accuracy, fact and objectivity apply more than ever."

www.herefordtimes.com



A bright new dawn for safari park

Joanne Hammick is the new managing director at West Midlands Safari Park. Here she tells Business Direction about her vision for sustainable growth and conservation at this top regional attraction.

Tell us a bit about your background?

I have many years of experience in the hospitality sector, having served as General Manager of Studley Castle, part of the Warner Hotels group, previously. I have over 20 years in leadership roles and have developed a passion for creating an environment that is not only guest-focused but is also a top employer, fostering a supportive and rewarding workplace for staff. I believe that success in hospitality comes from balancing the needs of customers with those of the team, ensuring that everyone feels valued and empowered. This philosophy has guided me throughout my career, and I aim to continue applying it in my new role.

What does your new role entail at West Midlands Safari Park?

In my new role at West Midlands Safari Park (WMSP), I will focus on driving sustainable growth across all facets of the Park. This includes expanding the popular Safari Lodges, which have already become a thriving part of the accommodation offering, and strengthening our venue hire services to appeal to both corporate and public clients. I'll also be working closely with the team to enhance the Park's overall guest experience, ensuring it remains a premier destination for families and visitors of all ages. Our goal is to create unforgettable experiences while promoting sustainability and wildlife conservation.

“WMSP is a big part of the wider West Midlands community, attracting generations of families to share the wonderful experiences the Park can offer.”



What attracted you to it?

I've always admired business leaders who successfully manage diverse organisations, and WMSP is an excellent example of this. When the opportunity arose to join the team, I jumped at the chance. There are many synergies between the attractions and the hospitality industries, particularly the focus on people. Being a people-orientated leader, I was drawn to the chance to work alongside this team, and to be part of building unforgettable experiences for our guests of all ages, is a huge privilege.

WMSP is a big part of the wider West Midlands community, attracting generations of families to share the wonderful experiences the Park can offer. The Park's reputation for delivering fun, educational, and family-friendly experiences makes it an incredible place to be. Who wouldn't want to be part of such an iconic institution if given the chance?

What are your plans for 2025 and beyond – can local businesses get involved?

Since I'm just beginning to familiarise myself with the Park, my initial focus will be on continuing to drive our commitment to sustainability and wildlife preservation, while creating even more engaging experiences for our guests. While it's too early to outline specific projects, the future is full of exciting

possibilities and I'm eager to explore them with the team.

It is essential that we work with local businesses and that the Park continues to engage with the wider community. Collaboration is key to ensuring that the Park remains a vibrant and inclusive part of the region, and we are always open to exploring new initiatives and partnerships with local businesses.

Any exciting developments in the pipeline?

We've recently launched our brand-new Hippo Lodges, which add to the already impressive range of accommodation options at WMSP. These lodges offer guests the unique experience of staying close to wildlife while enjoying luxurious and comfortable surroundings. Integrating this exciting addition into the business will be a major focus in the early part of 2025.

Beyond that, we're always on the lookout for new opportunities to enhance our offerings. The team and I will continue to explore fresh ideas and innovations to ensure the Park remains a top destination for visitors. I'm sure that there will be some exciting developments on the horizon as we progress through the year, and I look forward to sharing these with our guests and partners.

Visit www.wmsp.co.uk to find out more.

EBC Group: making IT easy for business

EBC Group has been ahead of the game for over 35 years, thanks to its creative IT solutions for business. Now two new game-changing services are available to clients in law, finance and policing, as Head of Marketing Aidan Halling explains.

EBC Group of Halesowen has come a long way since its founder Richard Lane started selling printers in 1989.

From these humble beginnings, his company rapidly expanded into IT services management for business.

And today, as CEO, Richard oversees a national company which employs over 60 IT specialists responsible for an ever-growing client portfolio in all aspects of business.

"EBC has certainly come a long way from the early days" says Aidan. "We're always on the lookout for gaps in the market, which is how our latest services - LawFinity and Themis - came about."

The LawFinity platform

UK legal and financial services are highly regulated, with very strict levels of security and compliance.

A one-size-fits-all approach to IT systems and data doesn't work in these sectors, which is how EBC designed an exciting opportunity - LawFinity.

"Lots of IT providers offer a standard service for cloud storage, backup, cybersecurity etc. but the needs of a solicitor, for example, are very different to a retailer," Aidan says. "We know that SRA and FCA compliancy changes what seems like almost daily, so the solutions we propose ensure compliance now and into the future".

"LawFinity offers a bespoke service to every one of our legal and financial clients, which is all ISO accredited. We carefully consider each client's unique requirements before tailoring the software and systems package that's right for them. One size certainly doesn't fit all."

Mike Bridges is the new head of LawFinity, and his team is ready to help clients deal with everything from IT troubleshooting to the installation of new telephony systems.

A Managed Print Service is also available for the efficient processing and safeguarding of confidential data, allowing clients to concentrate on the areas they excel in - their own business.

Themis

EBC's other pioneering new platform, Themis, is designed to help the police manage historic evidence securely on the cloud.

Named after the Greek goddess of justice, this groundbreaking service provides a digital record of historic evidence which can be easily sourced in the event of a trial.

Aidan explains, "Holding onto historical evidence is a huge challenge for the police, particularly in serious crimes where items may be stored for over 100 years.

"These exhibits can include anything from VHS tapes and USB sticks to microfiche records, CDs and DVDs - and everything has to be manually tagged.

"Large amounts of money are spent renting warehouses around the country to store the evidence, and of course there's an ongoing risk of fire, break-ins and natural file degradation.

"The current system is very costly and time-consuming in terms of operational efficiency, because of the protocols involved in handling physical evidence.

"This includes tracking it down in storage, handling and sealing items, to transport to court. Potentially, it can take months to gather all the evidence for one court case.

"We believe Themis offers the complete solution. Our full-service management platform offers everything from hosting and encryption, to evidence sharing and analytics. It's fully MOPI compliant and we've also successfully been approved to be part of the BlueLight Commercial (BLC) Framework.

"Each piece of evidence is uploaded to the cloud, and easily retrievable for court cases. It offers a single view of all historic media in digital format, is secure and consistent, and safeguards against damage and loss.



"It means that precious police resources can be much better utilised in other areas, as well as cut costs for the taxpayer.

"One of our first clients - Avon and Somerset Police - saved around £1/2m in the first year.

"We think other large service providers like the NHS will also find it very useful as the system is rolled out in the future. Themis is already showing massive potential."

“We believe Themis offers the complete solution. Our full-service management platform offers everything from hosting and encryption, to evidence sharing and analytics. It's fully MOPI compliant and we've also successfully been approved to be part of the BlueLight Commercial (BLC) Framework.”

- Aidan Halling, Head of Marketing

IT for business

Rapidly changing trends in technology are an ongoing challenge for businesses, "which is why we are here to take the headache out of IT," Aidan adds.

"There's a lot of competition among managed service providers, but we're almost seen as an authority figure for IT services, especially in the West Midlands.

"Sometimes, IT road maps can slip by the wayside; for instance, cybersecurity is a massive problem, and a solution installed six months ago could well be superseded now.

"This can sometimes lead to uncomfortable conversations with clients, but it's our duty to be responsible and speak out.

"For example, our data centres provide full support to guarantee the best in systems' management, connectivity and security.

"Hopefully it will never happen, but in the event of a cyberattack, our clients' data is fully backed up and readily accessible.

"And we appreciate budgets are tight, so our core value is ethical sales.

"This means making sure that - once our clients have the right systems in place - they are kept aware of new updates and developments. They might not want them, but from a corporate responsibility point of view, we always have to be honest and transparent.

"Our ultimate goal is to continue being the IT services provider of choice."

Full details available at www.ebcgroup.co.uk or email queries to hello@ebcgroup.co.uk.



Find out more about EBC Group at

www.ebcgroup.co.uk

Health and Wellbeing Conference

Thursday 30th January, 9.00am-3.00pm, Hilton Puckrup Hall Hotel, Puckrup Lane, Tewkesbury, GL20 6EL

£50.00+VAT Chamber Members / £65.00+VAT Non-members

Immerse yourself in inspiring talks from guest speakers who will share innovative insights and emerging trends.

Topics include: The positive impact of nutrition and physical health, how to manage mental wellbeing in the workplace, support for neurodiversity such as ADHD and Autism and how to strengthen your well-being and mindfulness. This event will include plenty of networking opportunities, refreshments and a two course lunch.



sponsored by **LUCART** 

Meet the Buyer Event

in partnership with Worcestershire Council, Herefordshire Council, Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust & West Mercia Police

Thursday 27th February, 8.30am-12.30pm, Sixways Stadium, Warriors Way, Worcester, WR3 8ZE

£0.00+VAT Chamber Members / £50.00+VAT Non-members

This new half-day event will offer valuable insights and guidance on navigating online submission portals, understanding the necessary experience, policies and accreditations for suppliers, identifying where and when to find opportunities, and exploring how small businesses can gain significant benefits by bidding for tenders.

Food and Drink Conference

sponsored by mfg Solicitors

Thursday 27th February, 08.30am-12.30pm, Dewsall Court, Dewsall, Hereford HR2 8DA

£0.00+VAT Chamber Members / £50.00+VAT Non-members

Now in its sixth year, the annual Food and Drink conference will feature prominent speakers from top industry-leading companies and offer abundant networking opportunities, helping attendees forge valuable relationships and establish new connections. This event includes breakfast and refreshments.

Economic Business Conference

sponsored by Worcestershire County Council

Friday 7th March, 08.30am-12.30pm, DRPG, Ikon Estate, Droitwich Road, Hartlebury, Kidderminster DY10 4EU

£0.00+VAT Chamber Members / £50.00+VAT Non-members

The conference will provide information from a lineup of expert guest speakers. Highlights include updates on the Chamber Manifesto for 2025/26, perspectives from the Bank of England and Midlands Connect, an analysis of the UK economy under the Labour government, and strategies for inclusive leadership. This event includes breakfast and refreshments.



Secure Up to £20,000 in Grant Funding for Business Innovation

Businesses across Worcestershire can access up to £20,000 in grant funding to bring their ideas to life through the Innovation Worcestershire programme.

Businesses across Worcestershire can access up to £20,000 in grant funding to bring their ideas to life through the Innovation Worcestershire programme.

The Innovation Worcestershire initiative aims to assist businesses in rethinking their operations. It offers grant funding to support the development of innovative products, services, and technologies, helping companies enhance existing processes and adapt to the evolving market landscape.

What's in it for your business?

- Access up to £20,000 in funding: Unlock new opportunities with grant funding for your R&D projects. Tap into new markets, enhance your competitive edge, and drive growth with full financial support.
- Tailored business support: A Specialist Advisor will assess your business and identify growth opportunities. You'll receive one-on-one advice and dynamic

workshops to develop a customised innovation plan tailored to your goals.

- Ongoing guidance: The Innovation Worcestershire team provides ongoing support, helping you implement your action plan and ensuring long-term success.

Why Innovate? Innovation helps businesses stay ahead, whether launching new products or improving internal processes. It's a proven strategy for growth and competitiveness.

How to Apply

All applications are subject to a competitive process and are evaluated against eligibility criteria, and the amount available is also dependent upon your location.

Start your innovation journey today by reaching out to the team. Simply email us on businessinnovation@worcestershire.gov.uk or visit www.worcestershire.gov.uk/innovation-worcestershire-grant to learn more and start your application.



Rotherwood Healthcare Launches Pioneering Wellness Programme to Enhance Resident Well-Being

Rotherwood Healthcare, an award-winning healthcare provider, is excited to announce the official launch of its Rotherwood Wellness Programme, a pioneering initiative designed to enhance the health and well-being of residents across its care homes.

This programme's exclusive focus on isometric training sets it apart from other care home providers. This proven method uses muscle contractions without movement in the surrounding joints—making it a safer and more effective option for building strength and improving mobility.

The Rotherwood Wellness Programme, developed in collaboration with experienced wellness coaches and external professionals, focuses on providing tailored exercise routines for residents of all fitness levels. Isometric exercises, which place minimal strain on joints, are particularly beneficial for individuals who are frail, have limited mobility, or are at risk of falling. These low-impact exercises can help residents safely improve strength and stability.

"At Rotherwood, we are always looking for ways to improve and enrich the lives of our residents," said Sharen Guise, Chief Operating Officer at Rotherwood Healthcare.



"The Rotherwood Wellness Programme is an innovative approach that not only focuses on physical fitness but also promotes overall well-being. Isometric training offers a highly inclusive and safe exercise method, and we're proud to introduce this groundbreaking initiative to our homes.

We look forward to seeing the positive impact this comprehensive initiative will have on our residents."

The Rotherwood Operations Team, along with external professionals, has

developed an intricate exercise plan featuring a variety of isometric exercises designed to suit all needs and levels. To ensure residents can engage with the programme at their own pace, the exercise routines are accompanied by easy-to-follow videos that the Lifestyle teams will frequently run throughout our homes. This makes the programme flexible, user-friendly, and easily integrated into daily routines.

Rotherwood Healthcare are also extending the programme to include a focus on nutrition and diet, with the catering team working hard to develop a new range of products that promote healthy eating.

Rotherwood Healthcare provides award-winning Residential, Nursing, and Dementia Care in seven care homes across Shropshire, Herefordshire, and Worcestershire, with two additional care homes under construction. To find out more, call **0808 175 6408** or visit the website at www.rotherwood.care.

Authentic heritage with The Lygon Arms

The Lygon Arms offers an authentic heritage, relaxed charm and country cool retreat for business or pleasure.



Located in the heart of the chocolate box, quintessentially English village of Broadway in the Cotswolds, its 86 unique guestrooms and suites provide exceptionally comfortable accommodation in a fabulous historic setting. Guests can also enjoy the hotel leisure facilities including The Lygon Spa, which

provides a tranquil space to relax and unwind with its indoor pool, jacuzzi, sauna, steam room, gymnasium, fitness studio and seven treatment rooms

We understand the importance of working together with our local business community and organisations across Worcestershire and beyond to strengthen the awareness of this remarkable destination and continue to develop and enhance our offering to appeal to new and emerging markets. We are proud to become a strategic partner of the H&W C of C and look forward to developing this new relationship, sharing successes, and growing together.

SurfTech IT Marks 10-Year Anniversary

Local award-winning Managed IT Service provider Surf Tech IT recently celebrated their 10th year in business.

Based out of Stourport-on-Severn, Surf Tech IT continues to thrive and grow providing a range of Technology, Support and Cyber Security solutions to businesses, schools and charities.

As a Technology provider, we continue to innovate within the managed IT services space, adding AI to our business has meant that we can streamline processes and provide a superior response to our clients, reactively as well as proactively.

Clients expect less problems, but also advice as to how they can improve their business using technology and this is where we believe we stand out as a provider. With our enhanced offering we align clients with best practices and IT standards, spending time to



better understand their business and assist in providing a road map to utilise technology.

If our team of experts can be of assistance, please do not hesitate to reach out to our Managing Director on **0330 120 0295** or **mparsons@surftechit.co.uk**.

Empowering regional businesses with innovative products

Simple Design Works is a strategic product design house with offices in Worcester and Hereford, specialising in innovation management and new product development.



Led by Kristo Shivachev, Simple Design Works streamlines product design and innovation to minimise risk and maximise profitability.

Renowned for tackling complex technical challenges, the team at Simple Design Works excels in finding unconventional solutions to difficult problems. Their approach ensures that products not only function effectively, but achieve commercial success in their respective markets.

They do this by adopting a user-centric focus and a commitment to designing products that closely align with end-user needs. The multi-skilled team are accomplished in blending technical expertise with creative thinking and styling, to deliver practical and impactful innovations.



IT-EPOS Group join as Strategic Members of the Chamber

The IT- EPOS Group is delighted to be new Strategic Members and are looking forward to working closely with the Chamber and its members.

The Company provides reliable and tailored services with extensive experience and knowledge in a range of sectors, allowing them to deliver bespoke pro-active solutions for their customers.

Standing out for their ability to support customers' needs 'under one roof' the Company provides services in IT support, EPOS solutions, marketing and office business solutions.

Director, Simon Underhill explains 'We ensure that our customers do not get caught between suppliers; we provide everything they need 'under one roof'. We believe this is what stands us out from the market.

We are excited to work closely with the team at the Chamber and meet its members to develop business relationships throughout.

For more information about IT-EPOS Group, visit www.it-epos.co.uk.

Prestigious Award Win for KEMP Hospice Fundraiser

Jayne Sargeant, Head of Fundraising and Communications at KEMP Hospice has been chosen as Fundraiser of the Year 2024 at the Institute of Fundraising (IOF) West Midlands Conference.



Jayne Sargeant
Head of Fundraising & Communications,
KEMP Hospice

The award, sponsored by Charity People, was presented during a prestigious ceremony earlier this month in Birmingham, recognising Jayne's outstanding contributions to fundraising and her unwavering dedication to the charity sector.

With the support of the Fundraising and Communications Team, Jayne has spearheaded numerous innovative campaigns that have not only increased vital funding, but also raised awareness about the essential services KEMP Hospice provides to the community.

In response to receiving the award, Jayne said "I was delighted and truly humbled to receive such an award at the IOF West Midlands Conference in Birmingham earlier in the month. It's a wonderful recognition of our work, highlighting the incredible commitment to my Fundraising

and Communications team, the whole KEMP Team, and the free specialist care and services KEMP Hospice provides. It was a fabulous conference, thank you to all at IOF West Midlands and to Charity People for sponsoring the awards."

The Institute of Fundraising West Midlands Conference has long been a platform for celebrating excellence in the sector at a local level, and this year's event was no exception. Caroline Beech, Chief Executive at KEMP Hospice, also praised Jayne's achievement and said "We are incredibly proud of Jayne for being recognised as Fundraiser of the Year at the IOF West Midlands Conference. This prestigious award is a true reflection of her dedication, passion, and creativity in driving fundraising efforts for KEMP Hospice. Jayne's leadership has made a significant impact on the charity, not only through the vital funds she has helped raise but also in building meaningful connections with our community. Her hard work and commitment have ensured that KEMP Hospice can continue providing essential care and support to those who need it most. Congratulations to Jayne, on this well-deserved achievement."

DRPG's Big Build Exceeds Anniversary Goal

On Tuesday, 26 November 2024, DRPG kicked off its 45th-anniversary celebrations with a live broadcast, partnering with LightBulb Teams to deliver 'The Big Build' initiative.

The event, streamed across the globe, brought together clients, agencies, venues and suppliers to construct prosthetic hands as part of the Give a Hand programme.

The 60-minute broadcast, hosted live from DRPG's HQ studio complex in the Midlands, guided participants through the assembly process in real time, fostering collaboration across multiple locations. Teams included DRPG clients, partners and suppliers such as Nationwide Building Society, NEC Birmingham, ExCel London, and Attivo, alongside colleagues from DRPG's satellite offices in Germany and the US. This shared effort highlighted a unified commitment to advancing accessibility and delivering a meaningful global impact.

Karen Small, Meeting Needs board member, and head of The Giving Committee said, "Meeting Needs is honoured to support DRPG, a long-standing charity partner, in this brilliant initiative—to build and deliver prosthetic hands to those who need them most. It's a privilege to contribute to LN4, the charity facilitating the distribution of these life-changing limbs. As the industry's charity, it's imperative we give back to causes close to our community, who so generously support us."

By the end of the broadcast, 62 prosthetic hands had been completed, exceeding DRPG's goal of 45 hands for 45 years. These prosthetic hands will now be delivered to individuals in lower economically developed countries, providing them with greater independence in their daily lives.

DRPG has extended the initiative outside of the broadcast, encouraging other businesses and organisations to get involved through this team-building activity until the end of 2024.



David Meade, Founder of LightBulb Teams, commented, "It was incredibly rewarding to see teams across the globe assembling prosthetic hands live during the broadcast. Once completed, these hands are accompanied by personal messages from the builders and delivered to recipients across the developing world. These hands allow people to feed themselves, write, and regain the independence we often take for granted. This initiative showcases the power of teamwork and compassion to transform lives."

Dale Parmenter, CEO of DRPG, reflected, "After an incredibly rewarding day, we are thrilled to have exceeded our goal of 45 prosthetic hands. This event encapsulated our ethos of making 'anything possible' while marking our 45th anniversary. Knowing that these hands will empower individuals who otherwise wouldn't have access to such life-changing tools fills us with immense pride."

This event comes as part of a collective goal from DRPG to deliver 45 CSR projects within the 45th anniversary year. For more information on how to get involved in DRPG's Big Build visit Big Build Challenge | DRPG's 45th Anniversary.

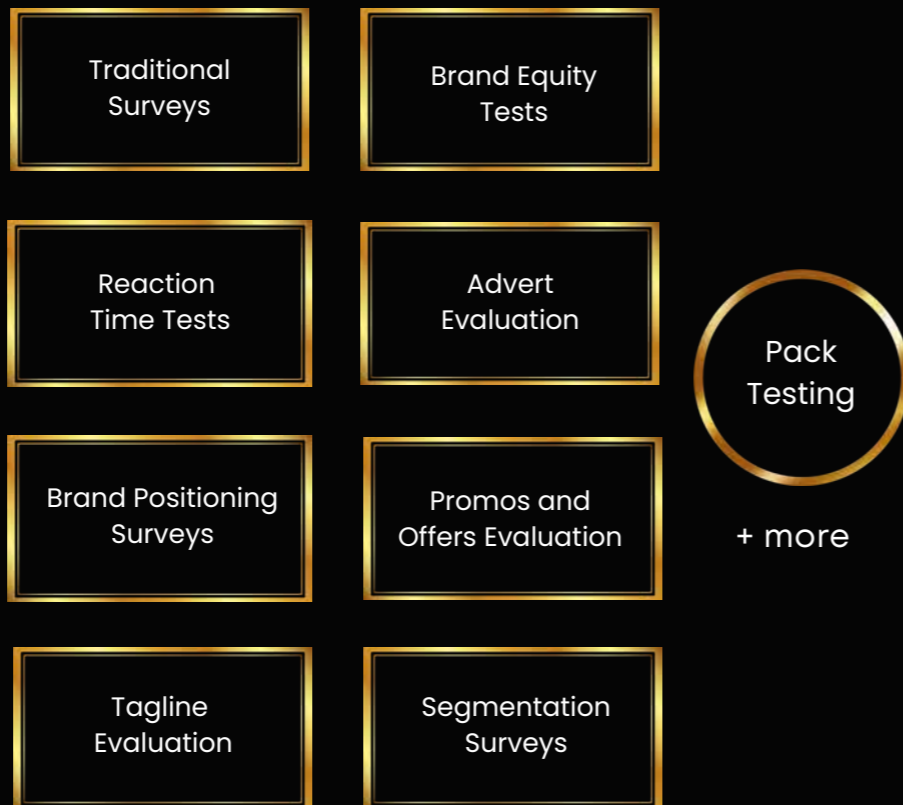


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Glow Up with the io8: Ratio EV's Innovative EV Charger

Ratio EV has introduced the io8, an innovative EV charger that combines high functionality with aesthetic appeal, designed to enhance both the practicality and ambiance of its installation sites.

The io8 builds on the io7 model by offering advanced lighting capabilities, featuring a lighting unit that emits soft, diffused light, ideal for creating inviting, well-lit environments in spaces like hotel car parks and corporate campuses. Available in three height options (1.5m, 2.5m, and 3m), the io8 is a flexible fit for a range of settings.

The io8's lighting design prioritizes safety and usability, helping users locate charging stations easily while also providing illumination for charging cables. It doubles as emergency

lighting during power outages, further supporting nighttime visibility and security.

Manufactured in Redditch, the io8 provides exceptional quality as well as meeting practical requirements. Under the hood, the io8 offers reliable charging options, including both single-phase (7.4kW) and three-phase (22kW) configurations.

Compliant with industry standards and accessibility requirements, it also features an IK10-rated aluminium body for durability and integrates sustainable materials, with



recycled aluminium. To optimize charging efficiency, io8 supports both static and dynamic load management through the optional io8 Sense hardware.

Established in 1987. Reimagined in 2024. Kidderminster Marketing Agency Launch Rebrand

Kidderminster full-service marketing agency, Citizen Communication, has announced its official rebrand to CitCom, following a period of sustained growth and success.

The strategic rebrand emphasises CitCom's commitment to innovation and providing enhanced marketing services. It follows a period of significant growth for the agency, which has expanded its client base and diversified its service offerings, including SEO, PPC, VR, social media management and photography, and grown its headcount to a team of 10 in-house experts.

Founded in 1987 by three Kidderminster College tutors, today CitCom boasts extensive experience in design, print, digital, marketing, events and



videography, working with a growing portfolio of clients, including industry leaders like EE and BT, and local businesses throughout Kidderminster.

The rebrand will enable the agency to further strengthen its market presence, adopt new technologies and broaden its service capabilities to better meet the evolving needs of clients.

"By harnessing the power of AI and other cutting-edge technologies, we are poised to deliver even more creative, impactful, and data-driven solutions for our clients." Join CitCom at their Open House Event on Friday 8th November, 10am-4pm.

For more information about CitCom, visit www.citcom.co.uk.

Charity Run Supporting Grace Kelly Childhood Cancer Trust

Ballards LLP and Four Squared Recruitment have successfully completed a challenging 10-mile charity run, from Droitwich to Worcester, raising crucial funds for the Grace Kelly Childhood Cancer Trust.

The collaborative team undertook the demanding run from their Droitwich office to the Worcester Waterside office, demonstrating a shared commitment to supporting local charitable initiatives. The Grace Kelly Childhood Cancer Trust, founded in 2016 in memory of four-year-old Grace, focuses on funding research into rare and aggressive childhood cancers and providing critical support to affected families.

James Syree, CEO of Ballards LLP, highlighted the significance of the team's efforts: "Our colleagues have shown extraordinary determination and compassion by completing this challenging

10-mile run. This is more than just a physical challenge; it's a testament to our firm's commitment to making a meaningful difference in our community and supporting critical research into childhood cancer."

Emma Richardson, Managing Director of Four Squared Recruitment, emphasised the importance of local charitable support: "Supporting local charities is at the heart of our company's values. By partnering with Ballards LLP for this charity run, we're not just raising funds, but also raising awareness for an incredibly important cause that directly impacts families in our local community."



Through this initiative, Ballards LLP and Four Squared Recruitment have demonstrated their commitment to corporate social responsibility and community engagement, bringing hope and assistance to families facing the most challenging of circumstances.



International Trade

Artificial Intelligence Power in Customs Declarations

ChamberCustoms uses artificial intelligence (AI) to streamline export declarations. The process assists in the reading of your commercial invoice, the absorption of key information, and the reduction of human errors, all of which speed up the overall process. This benefits not only us, but also you!

The 'Try our AI tool' link is a free and simple tool that lets you test yourself by uploading an invoice.

If you are satisfied with the procedure, you can request a demo to see how easily the AI wizard creates export declarations.

Do not worry! This tool will not replace us; we will continue to review all declarations before filing with HMRC.

www.chambercustoms.co.uk/aitool.

To find out more about any of these services and to check availability please contact the International Trade Team at internationaltrade@hwchamber.co.uk.

Meet Our International Trade Team



Kayla Ball



Emma Harris



Natalie Foxall



Sabrina Brown



Amy Timmins

Our International Trade Advisors are on hand to support you with any questions you may have. For further details, please don't hesitate to contact the team on **01905 673614** or email internationaltrade@hwchamber.co.uk.

International Trade Training Courses

Thinking about making a New Year's resolution? How about attending our courses and becoming an expert in your field?

We have the following courses available for booking today!

Methods of payment & Letter of Credit

15th January 2025 (09:30-15:30 - Virtual)

Preference Rules of Origin

19th February 2025 (09:30 - 12:30 Virtual)

Understanding Export and Export Documentation

5th March 2025 (09:30 - 15:30 Virtual)

***Courses may be subject to change from the time of printing.**

International Trade ATA Carnets

Since the UK exited the EU, there has been a greater need to restrict temporary movements. If you transmit or receive products for demonstration, exhibition, testing, or as professional equipment, you should consider this passport for goods.

Here at the Chamber, we offer a half-day course on the ATA carnet scheme, which is a beneficial international plan for the temporary transit of products.

What will the course cover?

- The application processes and how to successfully manage ATA carnet use.
- Give critical knowledge to businesses that have previously been able to move free-circulation commodities around the European Union without delay.
- Provides clear direction on determining what information and documents are required, as well as the skills necessary to build compliance systems inside your business.

- Highlights the significance of export entry declarations and how to read them.
- Ensures you comply with temporary international movements of goods while also increasing your grasp of customs procedures and how to minimise unnecessary tax and VAT costs.

Who should attend?

- New or occasional exporters.
- Shipping department trainees.
- Export administrators and managers without formal training.
- Buyers, purchasing, and procurement workers who need to understand essential problems to accurately obtain prices.

If this is something that applies to you, click on the link below: hwchamber.co.uk/international-trade-training-courses



Nicklin Accountancy Services welcomes new apprentice

Halesowen based accountants Nicklins is proud to announce their new apprentice, James Harvey to it's growing team this year.



James joins the Audit and Accounts department where he will have the opportunity to gain experience whilst working towards his AAT qualification. Nicklins are committed to fostering new talent and providing opportunities for growth,

they work closely with local schools and colleges to develop outstanding home-grown talent.

The apprenticeship programme at Nicklins is designed to give employees the opportunity to develop practical skills with industry specific experience as well as receiving continued training and guidance providing opportunities for career development. This opportunity allows them to gain hands on experience into the day to day workings of the accounting industry and develop a deeper understanding of the skills required to succeed.

David Wright, Director said "We are thrilled to have James join us, at Nicklins we are proud to invest in developing the next generation of talent and are excited to see how James will grow within our team".

Solicitor duo complete training contracts

Two up and coming lawyers are celebrating after completing their training contracts with law firm and Chamber patrons, mfg Solicitors.

Solicitors Reuben Grimshaw and Lucy Allen have now been appointed into full-time positions having completed their respective qualifications over a two-year period.

Reuben joined as a trainee solicitor in 2022 and since then worked across a variety of the firm's specialist departments as part of his training contract. Now qualified, he will take up a position within the firm's Kidderminster-based Commercial Litigation department.

Lucy, meanwhile, joined as a paralegal in 2021 and began her training contract in September 2022. Based at mfg's offices in Birmingham, she now begins a full-time role within the Civil



Litigation division, working in the firm's Personal Injury and Clinical Negligence team.

www.mfgsolicitors.com

New Managing Director for West Midlands Safari Park

West Midlands Safari Park (WMSP) is pleased to announce the appointment of Joanne Hammick as its new Managing Director, beginning in December.



Joanne brings with her extensive experience in the hospitality sector, having served as General Manager of Studley Castle, part of the Warner Leisure Hotels group. With over 20 years in leadership roles, her strategic vision and deep

industry knowledge are expected to further elevate WMSP's success.

Joanne's appointment comes at a pivotal time for WMSP, following its recent rebrand aimed at enhancing guest experiences and modernising its brand identity. In her new role, Joanne will focus on driving sustainable growth across all facets of the Park, including expanding the thriving accommodation arm, Safari Lodges, and strengthening its venue hire presence in both the corporate and public sectors. She will also oversee strategic initiatives to position WMSP as a top wildlife destination for family recreation, events, and overnight stays, adding to the Park's unique offerings and reputation as a premier attraction.

Practical Workforce Development for this Paradigm Shift with TDM

On the theme of "Technology and Trends", we are, once again, experiencing profound paradigm shifts in both the way technology helps us to work and the way we want to work as people.



In the early 1990s, technologies like internet search, Microsoft Office Suite, and later Web 2.0 interactive technologies and portable devices revolutionised the way we work. Now, in the 2020s, we are at another crossroads where new technologies are set to significantly impact our work processes, although the exact outcomes are still uncertain.

Current Technological Trends

Predictive data analytics will enhance decision-making for organisational growth. Data security has become a critical concern. Microsoft's Power Platform suite, including Power BI, Power Automate, Power Apps, and Power Pages, is likely to be a key toolset for many businesses.

Developing Digital Skills

To support workforce development, employers can leverage apprenticeship programs. TDM, a training provider based in the West Midlands, offers a comprehensive model called "the

whole journey" for "Digital Transformers" in areas such as Tech & Networking, Cyber Security, Data Analytics, Business Analytics, Software Engineering, and more.

- **Skills Bootcamps:** Prepare individuals for these roles.
- **Level 3 Apprenticeships:** Develop early career technicians.
- **Level 4 Apprenticeships:** Take individuals deeper as technologists.
- **Degree Apprenticeships:** Produce "T-Shaped" Solutions Professionals with both business and technological expertise.

TDM, funded by the Department for Education, offers learning plans, training programs, and coaching to support employer-responsive learning and performance improvement. Their services, powered by the Totara Talent Experience Software, align with Daniel H. Pink's motivational agendas, emphasising mastery, autonomy, accountability, and purpose.

To address the digital skills gap, involve employees of all ages and departments in digital transformation initiatives, rather than relying solely on government funding for early careers. For more information, contact enquiries@tdm.co.uk or visit www.tdm.co.uk



Ormerod Rutter wins Employer of the Year at North Worcestershire Business Awards

Ormerod Rutter Chartered Accountants has been awarded the 'Employer of the Year' title at the North Worcestershire Business Awards, held on November 21st at Hogarth's Stone Manor.

This award aimed to recognise organisations that demonstrate excellence in cultivating a supportive, learning, and wellbeing culture.

Ormerod Rutter was recognised for its dedication to employee development, offering award-winning apprenticeship and training programs alongside many career progression opportunities.

Judges also highlighted the company's focus on continual professional development and knowledge sharing across all levels of our organisation. Regular "lunch and learn" sessions are a testament to this commitment. Hosted by partners and senior team members, these sessions provide valuable insights and foster a culture of continuous learning.

Ormerod Rutter's culture is one of inclusivity, support, and shared success. Although the business has grown and the team expanded over the past 40 years, they maintain the values of a family firm at heart. These values are ingrained in every aspect of their work, ensuring that each employee feels like a vital part of the extended family.

This achievement is a testament to the firm's dedication to its people.

Navigating a route to better borrowing

For many SMEs, the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic meant that they were forced to switch into survival mode, using up cash reserves and / or borrowing funds to simply stay afloat.



Dr. Steve Walker
CEO, ART Business Loans

Post-pandemic, many businesses that borrowed to survive the lockdown are now seeking funds to either refinance their pandemic loans or accelerate future growth. It is crucial for small business owners to adopt a thorough and robust approach to taking on new debt, understanding the potential pitfalls, as lenders may demand more stringent financial figures and forecasts.

SMEs are increasingly turning to alternative lenders, which now account for over 50% of loans to UK SMEs. These lenders offer quick and convenient online decisions, providing fast access to finance, but can come with high interest rates (over 30%) and short payment terms, putting pressure on cash flow.

Many businesses are struggling to meet the requirements of their original loans and are finding it difficult to obtain funds from traditional banks. This has led to an upsurge in demand for refinancing and larger loans geared to growth. Community Development Finance Institutions (CDFIs), like ART Business Loans, play a significant role here. CDFIs lend in scenarios where other lenders say 'no', when other lenders have already lent all they can, or when they can lend as part of a package with other banks or finance sources.

CDFIs take a people-centred and relationship-based approach, providing a deep understanding of the business and its financial needs. This approach can offer a vital route to long-term financial security for SMEs facing financial challenges, even when traditional lenders are unable to help.

Movers & Shakers

Read about the latest movers & shakers for this issue.



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People Power: Protecting and Investing in Your Workforce

For businesses in Herefordshire, attracting, retaining, and supporting skilled employees is more vital than ever.

Offering attractive benefits is now a competitive necessity. Comprehensive packages, including private medical cover, tax-efficient pensions, and wellbeing programs, boost morale, loyalty, and productivity while reducing turnover.

Private medical insurance ensures quicker access to healthcare, minimising absenteeism and disruption. Tax-efficient pensions demonstrate commitment to employees' futures, helping them maximise earnings. Such benefits position businesses as desirable employers, vital for attracting top talent in today's competitive market.

Employee retention is equally critical. High turnover disrupts operations and increases costs. Supporting staff with health cover,

workplace wellbeing initiatives, and financial education reduces stress and boosts morale. Upskilling and reskilling employees future-proofs your workforce, ensuring your business remains competitive. Key person insurance provides financial protection against the unexpected loss of crucial team members, safeguarding stability.

Legal and compliance risks must also be addressed. Employment disputes related to contracts or discrimination can result in costly claims. Employment practices liability insurance protects against these risks, covering legal fees and settlements.

By integrating robust benefits, managing risks, and investing in employee development, businesses can create



workplaces where people thrive. A secure, motivated workforce is the key to business success. Partnering with trusted advisors ensures your workforce strategies align with your goals, delivering long-term rewards for your employees and your business.

What benefit can migrant workers bring to your business?

The UK is suffering from skills shortages in several sectors and many companies are looking to fill the gap with employees from overseas. This benefits businesses by expanding and growing their network with people from different countries.



241,719 visas were granted to main applicants in all work categories in the year ending September 2024 with a significant number of these being in the Health and Care sector as well as other occupations including IT, Manufacturing, Engineering, Finance and Hospitality.

The 'Immigration Salary List' covers a number of roles such as bricklayers, carpenters, roof fitters, graphic and multimedia designers which the Home

Office deem as Shortage Occupations and which have the advantage of attracting a lower salary as a result.

How can companies sponsor overseas employees?

The minimum salary threshold is £38,700 for employees who are sponsored from April 4th 2024 as Skilled Workers. In some cases employees can be paid less than the minimum salary and there are transitional

provisions available such as those who have been in the UK as Skilled Workers prior to April 2024 or those who have studied in the UK and wish to remain here.

Once a company has been granted a sponsor licence by the Home Office they can sponsor candidates provided that the specific requirements are met and the company continues to meet the various compliance duties associated with the licence.

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known for his attention to detail and customer commitment. Adam Griffin, leverages 14 years of expertise, and a passion for innovative technologies to empower SMBs. Shaun Tolley, our Technical Director, brings 12 years of experience and qualifications/certifications in Azure, Microsoft 365 and various security software/hardware, ensuring advanced technical guidance.

With Cirrus MSP, the sky isn't the limit — it's just the beginning. Let's rise together. For more information about Cirrus MSP please call **01905 918229** or visit the website at www.cirrusmsp.co.uk.

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A simple commitment that makes a big difference

Leading property consultancy 'grows its dough' in support of Worcester Hospice

A leading property consultancy turned £40 into over £1,500 in a charity challenge to support a Worcester hospice.

Fisher German's Worcester and Hereford offices have taken part in the St. Richard's Hospice 'Grow Your Dough' challenge and have raised a total of £1,554.50.

The initiative challenges participants to grow an initial £40 into as much as possible to support the hospice, which cares for adults with a serious progressive illness, improving their quality of life during treatment and supports the families and loved ones of patients.

The Hereford office kicked off the fundraising drive by hosting a charity fayre, followed by the Worcester office's 'FG Raffle' event which included the chance to win a range of prizes donated by colleagues and businesses including overnight breaks, food and drink prizes, vouchers, beauty treatments and more.



Fisher German has been a long-standing supporter of the hospice – an independent charity which only receives around a quarter of its funding from the NHS, relying heavily on public donations and fundraising events and challenges to continue providing its essential services.

This includes sponsoring the hospice's Lights of Love Festival which the firm is once again

pledging its support to in 2024, for the sixth consecutive year.

The cherished Worcester event, which has been running for more than 20 years, allows anyone to dedicate a light on a 'Lights of Love Tree' to celebrate the life and memory of a loved one, regardless of their connection to St. Richard's Hospice.

Nikki Upson, of Fisher German, said: "We are thrilled to be part of the Grow Your Dough initiative and to make a meaningful contribution to St. Richard's Hospice.

"We would like to say a big thank you to everyone who supported the initiative. We're extremely pleased to have raised more than £1,500 for the hospice, and we now look forward to continuing this support by sponsoring this year's Lights of Love festival."

IT-EPOS Group links with the Worcestershire Breast Unit Haven

IT-EPOS Group is delighted to support Worcestershire Breast Unit Haven as its 'Charity of the Year' for 2025.

Currently, 800 women and 7 men a year are diagnosed with breast cancer in Worcestershire.

Worcestershire Breast Unit Haven is the local breast cancer charity for the county. It exists to provide practical and emotional support to the women and men of Worcestershire with their breast care needs, working closely with the NHS specialist breast care team to provide the best possible care in the

best environment, enhancing patient outcomes significantly.

IT-EPOS Group are aware of the great work done by the charity for those dealing with breast cancer. Simon Underhill, Director of IT-EPOS Group is excited to be supporting this charity in 2025. "With no Government funding, the charity has to rely on fundraising and donations to continue its essential

support for those diagnosed with breast cancer throughout Worcestershire. As the charity says, 'everybody knows somebody' and I am delighted we are able to help and support."

Alexandra Craigie, Charity Director, said, 'Every penny we raise supports the Worcestershire community. The support of businesses like IT-EPOS Group is crucial. We're excited to work with you in 2025.'

Annual Quiz raises £1790 for Redgate Sports

SME Solicitors' Annual Charity Quiz has raised a record amount for Redgate Sports.

SME Solicitors and Redgate Sports' joint Quiz, hosted on 14 November at the Graeme Hick Pavilion, Worcestershire County Cricket Club, was a great success.

SME Solicitors, well-established provider of legal solutions in Worcestershire, runs an annual quiz in support of its chosen charity. This year, the firm partnered with Redgate Sports, a local charity dedicated to providing sports sessions combined with mentoring and wellbeing support for young people. Redgate Sports has been building momentum since its launch event on 26 June, which created considerable buzz among Worcestershire's business community.

This year's quiz received an impressive turnout, with a total of 21 teams entering.

The event also featured a highly anticipated raffle, with prizes generously donated by local businesses. The raffle's overwhelming popularity contributed significantly to the event's total proceeds, raising an outstanding £1791.50.

Despite fierce competition from several teams, Brockway Carpets' team, 'The Big Scarves,' took home the trophy. St James's Place's 'Agatha Quiztie' earned the runners-up spot, with Pinfields Limited following closely behind.

The firm is incredibly proud of the turnout and is grateful to Worcestershire's business community for coming together to support such a fantastic cause. Redgate Sports is a local charity which accepts referrals from



schools and other community partners, delivering sport sessions combined with mentoring and wellbeing support.

To donate or learn more about Redgate Sports, visit the charity's JustGiving page: www.gotos.me/klk10M.

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Choosing The Cart Shed as your charity partner is a great way to invest in the health and wellbeing of our communities.

The Cart Shed is a mental health charity unlike any other – enabling people to find meaning and purpose in their lives by using occupational health principles in our Herefordshire woodland.

We work with people from the age of 10 and our oldest participant is 89! All have one thing in common – they are going through some tough times.

People can self-refer, or be referred by their GP, school, family, social worker or other health professional. Once here our qualified occupational therapists, mental health professionals and tutors support participants to understand, manage and overcome their challenges and engage them in woodland craft such as green woodworking and willow work.

Not only do vulnerable people find support here, they find connection both with nature and with others. In feedback, several people have said we have saved their lives.

It costs around £500K a year to run our service for between 100-130 people a week. We are supported by amazing volunteers who drive our minibuses, cook lunch in our woodland kitchens, support our tutors and maintain the sites.

If you think your company could support us, get in touch for a sponsorship form or just name us as your beneficiary charity. Take a look at the website or come for a visit – our CEO Katie would be happy to show you around.

www.thecartshed.co.uk

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PRIMROSE BUSINESS BREAKFAST

Q&A with local motivational speaker and endurance athlete Nigel Watson

BOOK HERE:
primrosehospice.org/events/business-breakfast/

Wednesday 19th February 2025
9am-12:15pm



Primrose Hospice and Family Support Centre

Primrose Hospice and Family Support Centre is an impactful local charity based in Bromsgrove.

Throughout the year, we enhance the quality of life for people with life-limiting illnesses in North East Worcestershire, providing them and families, carers and friends with the care and support they deserve during extremely difficult times.

At Primrose, we support patients with life-limiting illnesses such as heart failure, lung conditions, cancer, neurological conditions and more, providing much needed holistic care and support services for over 1,000 people each year, as well as providing advice, counselling and bereavement support to help families on their journey.

There has never been a better time to develop a partnership with Primrose, fulfil your CSR policy and make a lasting contribution to a local charity's work. We are looking for businesses (large and small) to partner with us to help bring about lasting change to people in need. It will give you, your colleagues and employees a real sense of pride to know what impact you are making.

There are many ways to partner with Primrose, such as,

- Nominate us as your charity of the year
- Donate directly and help fund a particular part of our work
- Get your employees involved in fundraising for us
- Take part in corporate volunteering days
- Donate items to our charity shops

Find out more at our Business Breakfast networking event in February. To book attendance, please go to primrosehospice.org/events/business-breakfast

Contact the Fundraising Team

Adam Siviter (Fundraising Manager)
adam@primrosehospice.org

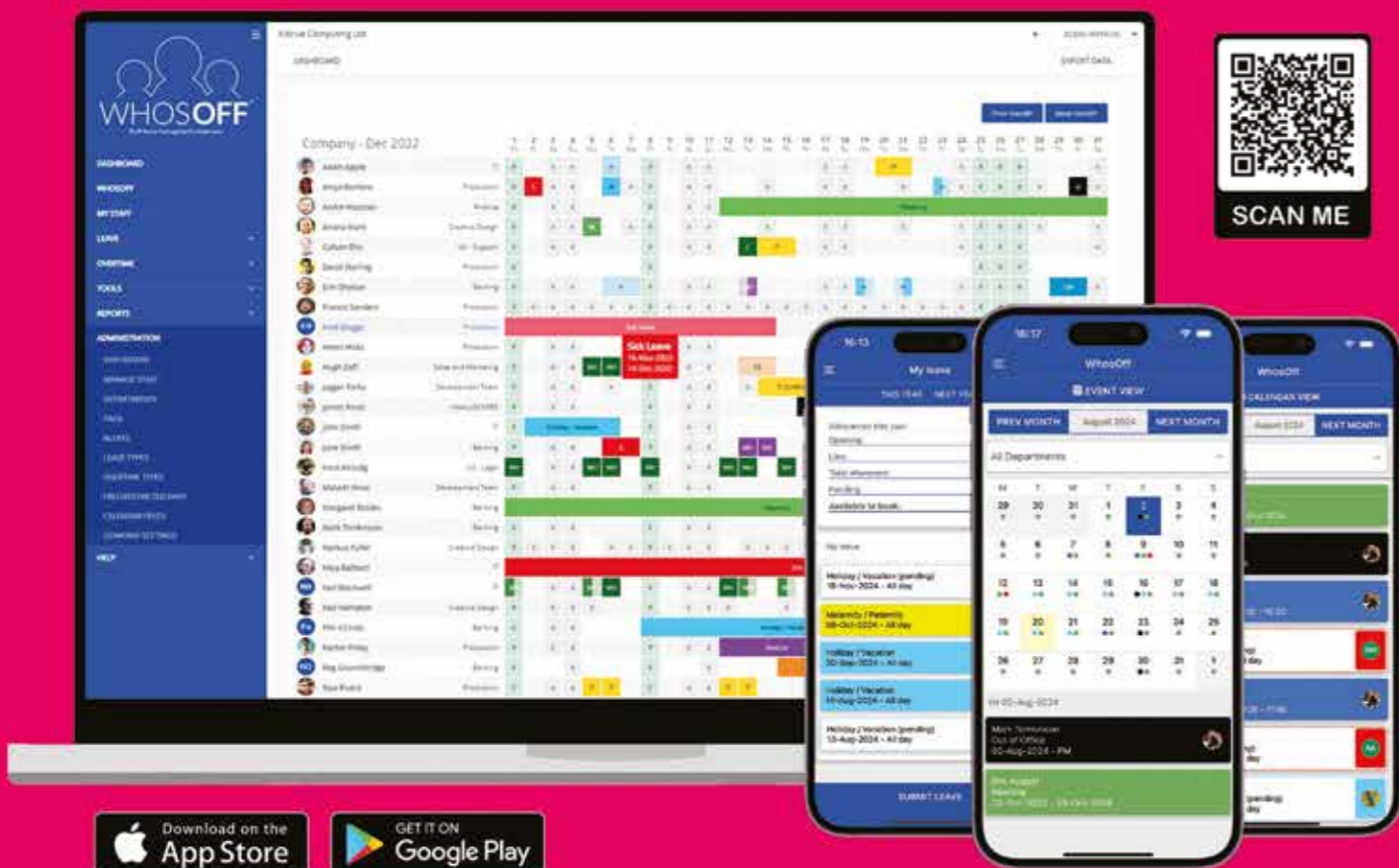
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Herefordshire Cultural & Creative Industries Sector Study 2024

The creative industries are a significant contributor to the UK economy, generating £108 billion annually and employing over 2.3 million people.



They rank among the world's fastest growing sectors providing high-quality employment, drive innovation, and support civic and social wellbeing. The UK Government has identified the creative industries as one of five priority sectors to drive further growth.

A review of Herefordshire's cultural sector commissioned by Herefordshire Council in Spring 2024 and produced by www.thefifthsector.co.uk identified key areas for growth and development:

- Resilience of Herefordshire's creative business base is underlined by continuous growth of registered enterprises, from 645 in 2020 to 695 in 2023, despite disruptive impact of Covid.
- GVA of Herefordshire's cultural and creative sectors grew by 38% 2020 to 2022, from £83.2m to £114.7m – a faster growth rate than the county as a whole.
- Increased output has been driven primarily by productivity growth, not by increasing the scale of employment. GVA per capita in the sector

grew by 31% in the same period, to £54,100 – nearly double the average GVA per capita for all employment in Herefordshire of £27,278.

- Research identified a creative workforce of 4,100 (including freelance and self-employed workers).
- The wider creative workforce is estimated to increase the sector's economic output to £229.7m in GVA – 5% of Herefordshire's total.

Retaining and attracting talent to Herefordshire and neighbouring counties remains a high priority, along with development of industry standard creative and digital skills training. Herefordshire Council along with Herefordshire Cultural Partnership www.the-shire.co.uk is currently refreshing its Cultural Strategy for 2025-30.

Nic Millington, CEO, Rural Media Chair, Herefordshire Cultural Partnership, nicm@ruralmedia.co.uk

Image credit: On The Black Hill (BBC Four), Prod. Rural Studios www.ruralstudios.co.uk

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Please send all submissions to marketing@hwchamber.co.uk

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