



# BUSINESSWORKS

Winter 2024 North East

## LEARNING DONE DIFFERENTLY

How do you start a university?  
Just ask Dr Nick Mapletoft  
from UCQ

## TAKING THE REINS

Jordan McCabe on taking her  
childhood dream to a global success

## SELLING THE DREAM

Kevin Beales left a corporate career  
to become a serial entrepreneur -  
but is the success story almost over?

# Making PR Accessible

Why has Sharon Davis made it her mission to give every business a voice?



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BUSINESSWORKS

# WELCOME

Like everyone I know, I was shocked and saddened to hear about the deliberate felling of the Sycamore Gap Tree in Northumberland last year. The tree was a glorious monument to a county's deep-rooted connection with its stunning nature. The brutality and mindlessness of the act in the middle of the night was devastating.

Experts have quickly pointed out that the vandal (or vandals) who committed the atrocity has not succeeded in extinguishing life from the iconic tree as new green shoots could reform on its healthy stump.

"Green shoots of recovery" is a ubiquitous economic term often used to quell dissatisfaction with the promise that better times are on their way.

The announcement that UK inflation fell last summer helped to dust off the green shoots analogy recently, but confidence remains low with another winter of high energy prices. Underpinning this short-term dissatisfaction is perhaps the lack of long term investment.

Business investment in the UK is now lower than in any other country of the G7 and with a General Election taking place at some point this year, it's difficult to see any meaningful commitment to long-term public spending in favour of quicker, voter friendly announcements.

But we shouldn't forget how important it is to strategize for the longer term as a way to establishing a more solid foundation for prosperity and jobs to grow.

As at Sycamore Gap, future generations will get to enjoy a tree in this epic location again - but we should still take comfort and nurture those green shoots if and when they do appear soon.

In our latest issue of BW Magazine, readers can also see the benefits of taking a longer term viewpoint as we profile more entrepreneurs who are rooted in the North East.

You can read about Kevin Beales, who turned his back on a secure corporate career as his desire to run his own businesses proved too great. See how the gamble paid off with his latest venture – My Sales Coach – off to a flying start.

You can also read about Sharon Davis, founder of Kasa Communications, who is making it her mission to reinvent PR to be more accessible; Jordan McCabe, whose plan to create more affordable equestrian clothing for horse riders like her is now paying dividends as she looks to take her company, Aztec Diamond, international; and Dr Nick Mapletoft whose long-term vision is to turn UCQ, his higher education provider into the region's latest fully-accredited university.

I hope you enjoy this issue.



**Alison Cowie, BW Editor**

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[www.bw-magazine.co.uk](http://www.bw-magazine.co.uk)

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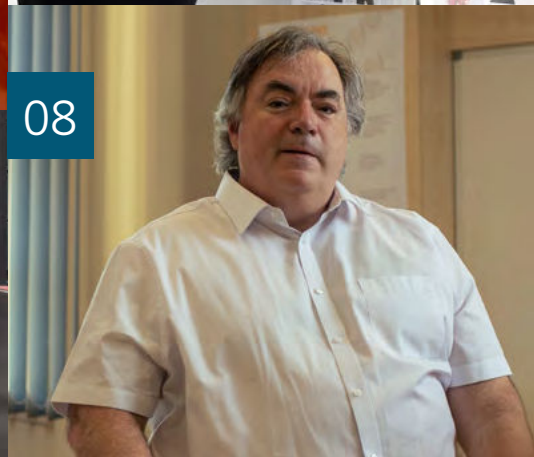
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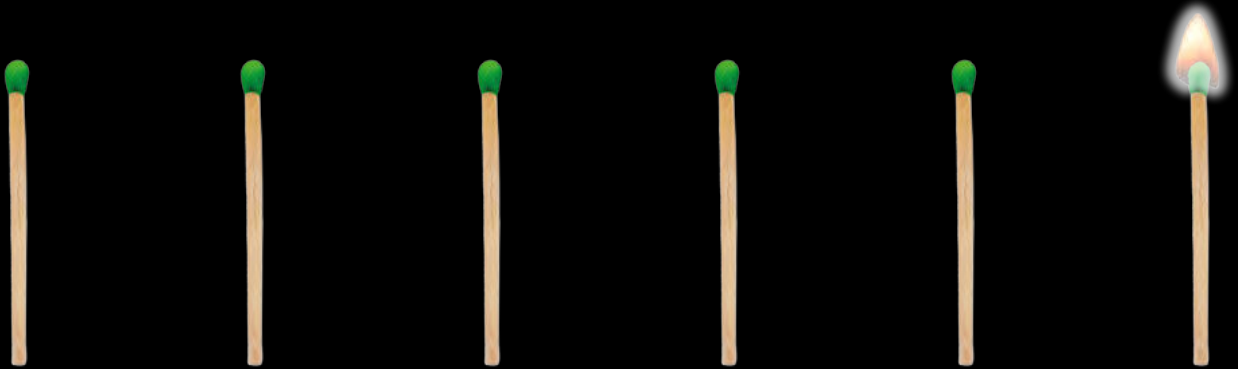
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LS LIFESTYLE



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Survey 2023

# The results are in...



Each year, all final year Higher Education students in England participate in the Office for Students (OFS) National Student Survey (NSS). The survey invites final year undergraduates to share feedback about their courses and their wider experience of university life.

Analysis of the 2023 results show that UCQ has received fantastic responses in all themes including learning resources, student voice and learning opportunities. Our overall score was 9 percentage points above the sector average.

At a glance, the survey found that:

- 100% of students said UCQ lecturers were "good at explaining things"
- 100% believed that UCQ teaching staff made the course intellectually stimulating
- All students surveyed (100%) were happy with how the course introduces subjects and skills in a way that builds on what they have already learned
- 95% of students said the course developed their knowledge and skills that they think they will need for their future
- 95% of students believe that feedback helps them to improve their work
- 95% of students agreed that the course is well organised and any changes to teaching are communicated well

In the following areas, we are at or above a 20% differential with the sector:

- How often do staff make the subject engaging?

- How often does feedback help you to improve your work?
- How well organised is your course?
- To what extent are students' opinions about the course valued by staff?

In addition, we scored a perfect 100% in a number of areas, including:

- Teaching on the course
- Academic support
- Freedom of expression

Commenting on this year's results, Michelle Elliott, Vice Principal said: "I want to say a massive thank you to everyone working on the Chartered Manager Degree Apprenticeship (CMDA) both in a curriculum and operational role. These results are down to you and your commitment to both students and UCQ. It is a pleasure to work alongside you all. Your efforts have made this happen. You should all be very proud."

Gareth James, CMDA Module Lead at UCQ, commented: "This is where we really stand out; nobody goes through the motions and every aspect of academic, professional and operational activity that impacts the student experience is considered in the round, reflected upon and improved."

"Being hard working and committed is not unique in the sector, but being part of a culture & ethos that integrates these aspects and is enabled, supported and nurtured by our Senior Leadership Team is pretty rare-unique in fact, and is what makes the difference." ●





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## Is your business ready?



For the past few years, telecom network providers like KCOM and BT, have been moving all the UK voice networks over to VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol). These major changes are well underway, and your business needs to understand how these changes will affect your communications – doing nothing is now not an option! seriously, it's not an option!

Most of the existing copper landlines across the UK are no longer fit for purpose - they were never designed to cope with the demands the modern world puts on them, and they were certainly never built to carry high-tech broadband services! Businesses who currently rely on ISDN or analogue lines for their communications, will need to upgrade or replace their current telephone systems to allow the calls to route over the new internet protocol.

A key factor to consider when you're switching to VoIP: Is your internet connection good enough to deliver a business grade VoIP service whilst still coping with the day to day running of your business's IT data demands? Across the UK, the Government's broadband initiative 'Project Gigabit' aims to enable businesses and homes access to superfast speeds. By 2025, broadband companies will have laid enough fibre to go five times around the world, connecting 80% of the country. Thanks to the collaboration between the commercial sector and the Government, over 77% of homes and businesses in the UK now have access to gigabit capable broadband, a huge leap from January 2019 when it was just 6%.

Here at Cobus, we have always prided ourselves on recommending the best solution to suit your business needs whilst considering

the features, the infrastructure, and the price, as well ensuring we future proof your business with the chosen platform, after all we have been established for over 32-years, so we do know a thing or two about telephony, communications, and technology. Reducing the overall telecoms costs is a main priority for most businesses, and being able to increase call features and functionality means it's a win-win for organisations looking to upgrade and gain additional benefits. Most new office phone systems already support VoIP, but if yours doesn't, you can either replace your phone system with an IP system or switch from a fixed, on-premise phone system, to a cloud-based Hosted telephony service.

Most of the eligible UK market has already switched over to a VoIP/SIP solution as it provides several key benefits including: -

- Reduce operational costs, typically by up to 50% or more.
- Increase the mobility and productivity of staff.
- Easier deployment, configuration, and maintenance.
- Scalable and flexible, allowing individually tailored growth..

**If you want to make savings on your current telephone line rental and call costs, or your telephone system is out of date and not offering you the new features, options, or reliability that's now in the marketplace, then now is the right time to review your options and switch to VoIP, SIP or Hosted technologies. Make the change now (before the network is switched off!) and contact our dedicated and award-winning team today on 01482 2256661 ●**





# DELIVERING THE SKILLS TO PROPEL BUSINESS GROWTH

Through being an early adopter of 'learning done differently', University Centre Quayside has supported the professional development of workforces for three decades. Here, founder **Dr Nick Mapletoft** reveals his ambition for the higher education provider to become the North East's next University, to enable it to up the ante on the delivery of bespoke learning for decades to come

**H**aving been supporting businesses and their employees with professional development for 30 years, leading the way in the adoption of alternative forms of training and education, University Centre Quayside (UCQ) is now working to become the North East's newest university.

With years of expertise in delivering work-based learning, both in further and higher education, UCQ is hoping to validate its own degree programmes by the end of next year - a huge step in its ongoing development as an education provider.

After it achieves this milestone, UCQ - which is based in Newcastle with sites in

six other major locations around the UK - will then be looking to gain recognition as a university in its own right, becoming the fifth such prestigious institution in the region.

As a validated partner of the Open University (OU), UCQ helped to popularise the concept of flexible learning well before the COVID-19 pandemic, supporting businesses locally and nationally in developing the business and management skills and capability of their workforce.

Its delivery of the degree apprenticeship has been a crucial factor in its ongoing growth over the years, with the

qualification gaining in popularity and profile as a flexible and accessible option for working people to upskill while continuing to earn.

With clients ranging from the likes of Santander, Rentokil, ISS, OCS, Del Monte and a number of NHS Trusts for its higher education offering, through to North East SMEs for its further education, UCQ's comprehensive offering is helping it continue to win new work.

And now, working towards having its own degree awarding powers in 2024, UCQ will expand its offering into delivering degree programmes and becoming a ►

““Being an entrepreneur is such a forward-looking thing, that it doesn't really lend itself to traditional ways of learning.”



privately-owned university - a step its founder Dr Nick Mapletoft believes will be transformational in its future.

"It will be a massive step, and will enable us to develop our portfolio of not just degree apprenticeships, but also degrees within the business and management subject area," says Dr Mapletoft.

"There are several degrees we could deliver within the same sector and subject area with the extensive expertise and staffing we have here. It's a fantastic opportunity for us and our clients.

"And then the plan will be to apply to become a full university. You have to have had full degree awarding powers for a minimum of three years before you can reach this point, but at that time we will apply."

The growth of UCQ into a nationally-renowned vocational training and education provider came from Dr Mapletoft's realisation early into his own career journey that learning needed to be more accessible.

As a computing graduate, he established NIMIS - which he is quick to explain: "stood for Nick Mapletoft Information Systems, rather than the Latin word for 'too much', which some people thought I'd cleverly come up with!" - to support businesses in the creation of bespoke computer systems.

But quickly, Dr Mapletoft realised the need for something much broader. While NIMIS could put the systems in place, developing people is more important and often there was a gap in provision for the training around that, as well as training more generally across the wider business.

"The computing support morphed into management consultancy, really. We went from working with a maximum of two people at the senior level in the company to training people more generally. And for me, that was a very natural fit," he says.

"Both my parents are retired lecturers, my sister is a teacher, there are lots of teachers within the family. Initially, I did try and keep away from teaching, but in many ways it was a great option, it's what we talked about at every meal time in the family. So it did feel like the right path.

"I had also been on the Graduate Enterprise Programme at Durham University Business School (DUBS), which, in many ways, probably taught me more than other academic programmes I've been on.

"Professor Allan Gibb OBE, who set up the Small Business Centre at DUBS, and who sadly passed away a couple of years ago, used to say something along the lines of 'teaching entrepreneurship via traditional teaching methods is like teaching someone how to drive a car by only looking in the rear view mirror'. And there's a lot of truth in that. Being an entrepreneur is such a forward-looking thing, that it doesn't really lend itself to traditional ways of learning.

"So while teaching felt like a good path for me, I also wanted to do things differently."

Initially starting off as a full cost provider of training, the business then became a sub-contractor, later moving into winning contracts in its own right. A key moment in the development of NIMIS - and a key step in its decision to rebrand as UCQ - was the advent of the degree apprenticeship.

"When I first heard about the concept of a degree apprenticeship, it just sounded like a mad idea. But I was intrigued



and spoke with the Chartered Management Institute (CMI), who encouraged us to come on board," says Dr Mapletoft.

"Quickly I realised what a brilliant opportunity this is for people who may not traditionally go to university, or may need to be re-skilled later in life, but who also need to work. If you have a family, secure job, mortgage, commitments, it's very hard to leave that and go back into a student life.

"But this way, it allows them to get the skills and development they need, while being based around the business. So it benefits everyone.

"Combined with our range of other further and higher education opportunities, we are offering something very few other providers can. A learner can start with us, as some have, at even entry level and progress right up to a degree or even Master's level. They could join us as a potential team

leader, having never managed anybody, and progress through to being very senior in their organisation."

Forming a partnership with the Open University to secure institutional approval, UCQ was then able to devise a range of programmes which meet the exact needs of businesses.

"We're not restricted by being place-based and subject to geographical politics, so the Open University was a great fit for us. They're open to people, places, programmes and ideas, and doing things differently," says Dr Mapletoft.

"That was very important to us in creating bespoke programmes - not, like some other universities offer, bolt-ons to existing degree courses, or variations of what they offer within them. Ours have all been built from scratch, created from the ground up with employers and potential

learners, which is why they are fit for purpose.

"The Open University have also understood from day one that our ambition was to deliver our own degrees, and have supported us as much as they can."

This 'open' approach has seen UCQ deliver learning to businesses and learners across the country from its seven locations - Newcastle, Teesside, Leeds, London, Birmingham, Manchester and Liverpool - and also enables the possibility of working globally once it becomes self-awarding.

That crucial step will pave the way for its route to becoming a university - something Dr Mapletoft, while taking inspiration from others, wants to do in his own way.

"We want to be a leader. We don't want to be the biggest, but we're very much looking at being one of the leaders in the work-based learning sphere," he says. ▶



"We don't want to just follow others, although we do recognise there is some brilliant practice in the region and across the country, and we want to incorporate some of that good practice. But we'll be doing things our own way - and because we're privately-owned, we can do that.

"But in being a leader, we will have successes and failures, that is part of the journey we're on. We have set up an institution from scratch already and continue to build that, but there has been trial and error along the way. The recruitment of students and staff, governance, infrastructure, the IT infrastructure, every single thing has been built.

"Through taking this next massive step, we go even further on this journey and will no doubt face more challenges along the way. But as we transition, we are learning ourselves and others can learn from what we are doing. We are documenting and sharing it for the public good."

While remote learning continues to be hugely effective for UCQ, it is also mindful of the need for in-person contact where possible. Its recent inaugural Learning Fair is now set to become an annual event, building that commitment further.

"Students don't come to us for that campus-based experience, that's not what we're about, but we know students like to see each other and our tutors are the same, they like to see their students," says Dr Mapletoft.

"Our graduations to date have always taken place in Newcastle and inductions take place around the country, but our Learning Fair is something that we are definitely going to be doing again - it's already booked in for next year.

"It was a great opportunity for students to get together, meet each other, meet the staff and hear from external speakers. It was such a motivating and positive event with great feedback from students and tutors alike.

"We feel this really helps to address the issue of not seeing people face-to-face, and also helps to build the relationships which are developed so well remotely." ●

**For more information about UCQ and the range of training and learning opportunities it delivers, visit [www.ucq.ac.uk](http://www.ucq.ac.uk)**







*"We don't want to be the biggest, but we're very much looking at being one of the leaders in the work-based learning sphere."*

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**Stockton-on-Tees**  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

# Award-winning, national financial advice company joins the powerhouse of Tees Valley



*Chris Simpson from Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (left) speaking with Mark Draffan and Geoff Charles from Bower Finance.*

Stockton-on-Tees businesses contribute to a third of the Tees Valley region's economic output. Multi award-winning Bower Group is a financial advice company providing national advice for investments, pensions under Bower Wealth, and mortgages plus equity release under Bower Home Finance. First established in 2006 and employing around 50 people across the UK, they expanded to Stockton-on-Tees in May 2022.

Mark Draffan, Director, said "We were attracted to come to Stockton-on-Tees as we already had some employees living here and singing the praises of the area. It wasn't just the delicacy of the local parmo that tempted us. The huge investment into the Riverside Park makes it an exciting place to work, and we love our new office next to the River Tees."



Geoff Charles, Chief Executive at Bower, said: "Our new office has allowed us to build a great team from the local talent over the last 12 months, thanks to support from Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council.

"We contacted the Council in the early days of looking at support regarding the Levelling Up initiative and extending our services in the North East. They supported us with all manner of items from IT, office location, recruitment, and funding to support our vision.

"We've managed to fast-track our expansion to Stockton-on-Tees and employ 10 people here, all done within a year."

Geoff concluded "we're proud of the team we have at Bower. We are passionate about going the extra mile for our customers and take time to truly understand each customer's unique needs.

"It's our vision to serve the wider community of Stockton-on-Tees, increasing employment in the local area and helping more customers with financial advice in all stages of their lives."

Find out what Bower Home Finance can offer by visiting [www.bowerhomefinance.co.uk](http://www.bowerhomefinance.co.uk) Learn more about what support is available for businesses in the Borough by visiting [www.investstocktonontees.co.uk](http://www.investstocktonontees.co.uk) ●



# NEWCASTLE DIGITAL AGENCY READYSALTED AIMS TO TREBLE ITS GROWTH



A Newcastle-based digital agency has announced ambitious plans to treble its growth and open a London office, after expanding its client base in the UK and Europe and recruiting three new employees.

Specialising in UX (user experience) design, and digital transformation development, Readysalted, which recently celebrated its 20th anniversary, have plans to hit half a million pounds turnover by 2025 and treble the size of the business by 2028.

2023 also saw the team achieve their largest annual turnover to date with a 30% increase in revenue from the previous year. The business works with clients including Newcastle, Durham and Cambridge universities, as well as businesses in the medical science and manufacturing sectors.

Currently working with clients in the North East, London and across Europe, the Readysalted team also have ambitious plans to open a London office this year.

Simon Honeywood, Founder and Managing Director of Readysalted said: "The last 12 months have been fantastic for the business as we continue to support our many clients across the globe. I still have to pinch myself about how far we have come in 20 years from when I started out as a freelancer in the industry. This really is credit to the fantastic team we have at Readysalted, their expertise and commitment to delivering outstanding client care.

"We really take the time to understand the businesses we work with, what their customers need when they visit a website, and how they behave online. We also work with clients on digital transformation, which is something that can save people hours and hours of time and completely change the way they work – it really is transformative! ●

Find out more about Simon and the Readysalted team at [www.readysalted.co.uk](http://www.readysalted.co.uk)

## HR Corner: Navigating the Human Element of Business (with Sapphire HR)

Welcome to our HR Advice Column, where we aim to provide quarterly insights into the ever-evolving world of HR and People Management. Please note that the information provided is accurate at the time of writing and is intended for informational purposes only. We always recommend seeking specialist advice tailored to your specific circumstances.

Our first topic of discussion is the draft Employment Rights (Amendment, Revocation and Transitional Provision Regulations 2023). This 'draft' legislation outlines proposed reforms to holiday entitlement and pay, set to take effect in 2024 following changes to EU Law under the Retained EU Law Act.

### So, what changes can we expect in 2024 regarding annual leave?

1. The draft regulations propose allowing 'rolled-up' holiday pay for part-year or irregular hours workers.
2. The draft regulations suggest introducing an accrual method of 12.07% of hours worked in a pay-period for irregular and part-year workers. This method was previously deemed unlawful in *Harper Trust v Brazel*.
3. The draft regulations aim to revoke the Working Time (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020. This means workers will no longer be able to accrue Covid-19 carry over leave but can use leave accrued prior to 1 January 2024 on or before 31 March 2024.



### But who exactly are irregular or part-year workers?

The draft Regulations define an "irregular worker" as someone whose paid hours per pay period during their contract term are wholly or mostly variable. A "part-year worker" is defined as someone who, under their contract terms, is required to work only part of the year and has periods of at least a week where they are not required to work and are not paid.

### Therefore, what exactly are the practical implications of these proposed changes for employers?

1. 'Rolled-up' Holiday Pay: If this becomes law, employers will be able to include an element of holiday pay in each payment to irregular or part-year workers. This could simplify payroll processes, but employers must be transparent about how this is calculated and communicated to employees.
2. Accrual Method: The proposed 12.07% accrual method could make calculating holiday pay for irregular and part-year workers more straightforward. However, employers will need to ensure they have robust systems in place to accurately track hours worked and holiday pay accrued.
3. Revoking Covid-19 Carry Over Leave: Employers will need to manage the transition carefully to ensure workers use their accrued Covid-19 carry over leave before the deadline. This may require proactive communication and planning to avoid a rush of leave requests.
4. Definition of Irregular/Part-Year Workers: Employers will need to review their workforce and contracts to identify who falls under these definitions. This could have implications for contract drafting, payroll systems, and HR processes.

Stay tuned for our next column where we will continue to navigate the human element of business.



# FROM CHILDHOOD DREAM TO GLOBAL SUCCESS

**Jordan McCabe** has only ever wanted to design equestrian clothing - and participating in show jumping helped her to identify a gap in the market in accessible, affordable attire for fashion-conscious females. Through her business, Aztec Diamond, Jordan has led a revolution in the industry - and now plans to widen its reach beyond equestrianism and into the mainstream sports market. Here, we learn more about the North East-based venture reaching new heights around the world

**F**or many young girls, designing outfits complete with glitter and sparkles is part and parcel of growing up. But for Jordan McCabe, now a multi-award-winning entrepreneur and founder of one of the UK's leading equestrian clothing brands, her childhood doodles were rooted in something more.

"I've still got a folder with all of my designs that I created when I was ten or 11 years old. When I looked back through them more recently, I realised that as well as creating products, I had also always created brands along side them," says Jordan.

"So even from that age, while I wasn't necessarily planning an economical business,

I've always had that awareness of the importance of the designs and the brand.

"Designing equestrian clothing is all I've ever wanted to do - and while what you see now is less pink and sparkly than what I was designing back then, the roots of what we produce today are absolutely there in that folder." ►





And from those early designs came Aztec Diamond, the brand named after Jordan's beloved first horse, which has truly redefined the equestrian clothing market.

Established in 2014, Aztec Diamond is credited with introducing the legging/tight into the market, which has since become a staple of female equestrian wear globally.

Through her own experience of riding, Jordan realised the gap that existed for affordable, functional clothing for fashion-conscious young women, in a sport which was already financially draining for so many families. This focus on fashion-forward, accessibly-priced products continues to underpin the work of the business.

And with ongoing growth through the continuing popularity of Aztec Diamond's regularly-released new collections, Jordan - who has won a multitude of prestigious awards, including Lloyds Bank New Entrepreneur of the Year and being part of the Forbes 30 Under 30 list - is driven every day to ensure her childhood dream continues to thrive.

"I have spent the last ten years learning how to create the best calibre of sports wear and I want to take this as far as we can go," says Jordan.

"There are so many opportunities for Aztec Diamond, including in the mainstream sports market, and I want to build further on what we have done so far."

Hailing from a working-class family in the North East, Jordan's developing interest in horses during her teenage years came with the realisation that to look the part in equestrianism came at quite a cost.

"As a teenager, I often felt inadequate, the vast majority of my peers were wearing certain super-exclusive brands, which my family couldn't afford. Back then, there was nothing available at a high street price point," she recalls.

"There was a massive difference between the lowest priced ranges and the exclusive ranges, with nothing in between.

"I knew this was something I wanted to address, and I had a plan in my head of exactly what I wanted to do, when I was a teen I remember not daring tell anyone in case they stole my idea!"

After leaving school, Jordan studied textiles and business at college and wrote business plans to articulate and develop her ideas. Sadly, at this time Jordan's grandmother passed away, leaving her inheritance to Jordan's mother, Jane.

"To create this business was all I'd ever wanted, and my mum took a chance on me and used the money from my grandma to support me," says Jordan.

"My mum didn't have any experience in business, she worked in local government, but she joined me. A year later, she left her job to work with me full-time.

"Neither of us had any specific experience in launching a business of this kind. I worked with a friend of a friend who helped me understand aspects like product and design development and how to find factories, but for a lot of things I watched tutorial videos on YouTube and learnt as I went."

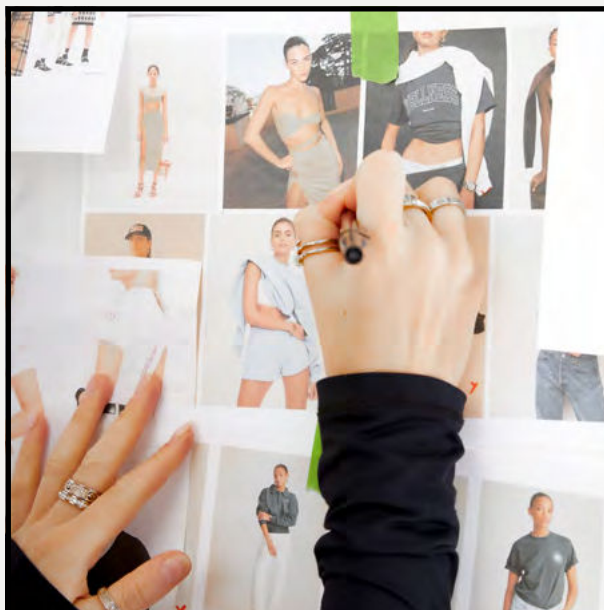
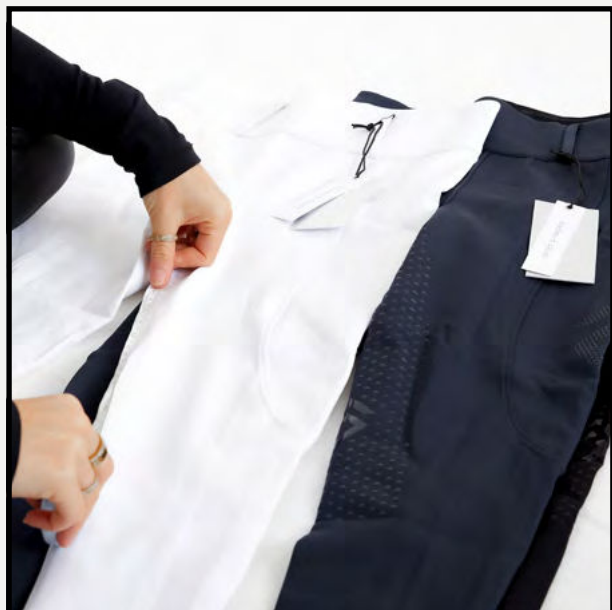
Aztec Diamond was born - and the revolution in equestrian wear was beginning. Jordan, aged only 18, was about to lead the change in affordable, functional fashion for young female horse riders.

The creation of the legging/tight - a product now synonymous with equestrian clothing - proved to be central in Aztec Diamond's impact on a global scale, as well as its identification that the market needed to be more consumer-focused.

"To be able to afford my horses' keep, I used to work on the yard my horse was kept at on weekends and after school. Early mornings when I had ten horses to muck out, I loved to pull on a pair of comfy leggings - but when had to ride the horses, I had to get changed. I saw a gap in the market," says Jordan.

"When I launched the business, there wasn't a product like this [the legging/tight] available, and we have brought that to the market.

"Also, when I set up, I realised that one



of the reasons products were so super expensive was that they were sold B2B. We have revolutionised the industry by selling directly to the consumer online, and now so much of the industry has followed suit.

"I'm really proud of what we have created, and how we have led the change." ►



But as with all trailblazers, rivals are keen to replicate the ideas which scored their competitor such success. This is an issue Aztec Diamond continues to contend with.

"It is difficult and very frustrating," admits Jordan. "There are businesses out there who have copied everything, from our designs to our brand story. It's sometimes quite hard to deal with.

"Customers can't see the quality of our products for themselves through shopping online, and the quality of our designs is something that really differentiates us. So that is difficult.

"But we are introducing new products and designs all the time, we're always launching new campaigns, so we're working hard to make sure we continue to be at the forefront of the market."

With Aztec Diamond now firmly established as a key player in the equestrian market, the rise of the 'sports luxe' fashion trend has created opportunities for the brand in the wider world of fashion. This is an avenue Jordan is keen to exploit the potential of.

"I've spent ten years completely

focused on creating the highest calibre products, which are durable and hard-wearing for such an extreme sport and which have had such fantastic feedback from our customers," she says.

"Due to the demands of the business, I don't own a horse anymore, but I wear Aztec Diamond clothing every day. We're finding many of our customers are the same.

"While we launched as an equestrian brand, the quality and design of our products mean they can be used every day, and for so many more purposes than riding.

"This is something we're really keen to drive forward over the next couple of years and see where it takes us."

Having started her journey as an entrepreneur with a clear idea of the business she wanted to create, but having to gain the knowledge and experience as she went in terms of achieving that, Jordan has learned lessons along the way.

"Patience is something I've had to learn," she admits. "When I was building the business at first, there were some

issues with cash flow and stock. We'd have to sell the products to generate the cash to be able to buy again, and I was always in such a rush to get the products into the warehouse.

"But now, I realise the importance of being patient with your product. If I'm not 100 per cent happy with it, it doesn't go out. One of the best bits of advice I could give is to be patient with your products. Take your time until it's exactly what you want it to be."

As Jordan continues to look to the future, there is one notable change from the past nine years - the absence of her mother Jane, who Jordan has recently bought out of the business so she can enjoy her retirement.

"My mum has always been there with support and advice, anything I've needed, so it will be strange without her. But I know we're both so ready for this next step," says Jordan.

"I want to continue what we have built and take it so much further." ●

**For more information,  
visit [www.aztecdiamond.com](http://www.aztecdiamond.com)**





“I have spent the last ten years learning how to create the best calibre of sports wear and I want to take this as far as we can go.”





Contact us today for more information or a demonstration.  
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or phone 03300 241 666

BT Openreach announced the end of PSTN and ISDN in 2015 and began shutting down UK networks in 2020. This is a huge change, and now is the time to understand what is happening, and how you can prepare for the changes, advise  
**NET Defence**

# The end of the landline... are you prepared?

## What is the 2025 PSTN switch-off?

The big switch off is driven by the telecoms operators, to save money maintaining a legacy system, that is becoming obsolete. The aging copper wired telephone network is struggling to keep up with demand coming from your business communications every day.

The 2025 initiative will digitise the network and switch off PSTN and ISDN, replacing the copper network with fibre optic cables.

## What is PSTN?

PSTN stands for Public Switched Telephone Network. This is your normal phone line with a telephone number, for communication via landline connectivity. This was first introduced in the 1800s and is made up of copper wires above and below ground.

In recent years businesses have been encouraged to transition to VoIP networks, meaning all phone calls and communication will take place via the internet.

## What is ISDN?

Integrated service digital network (ISDN), introduced in the 90s to first introduce high-speed internet services.

As of 2025, you will no longer be able to use ISDN connections or PSTN circuits. Between April and December 2025, there will be a forced migration to VoIP networks.

## How will the PSTN switch-off impact businesses?

All businesses currently using ISDN and or PSTN will be impacted, but if you are still using landline connectivity and devices you will feel the effect of this change the most.

There are other devices that use PSTN technology that also need to be considered, including alarms, CCTV, door entry systems, EPOS (electronic point of sale) systems, telecare, critical care services and more.

This is a huge change that can have wider reaching implications if you do not get ahead of the change prior to mandatory switch over.

## What if you wait to prepare for the PSTN switch-off?

To be blunt, you shouldn't wait it out! You should start reviewing your communication infrastructure now. If you wait until 2025, demand for VoIP services will be very high as this will impact home users as well as businesses. You also risk being unprepared,

some of your services may not be easy to transition and you could risk your business operations and continuity.

## What are your options to get ready for the PSTN switch-off?

VoIP will become the technology behind your communication infrastructure, this will allow you to communicate over the internet via voice, video, images, and files. Part of your communication may already be using this technology if you are using applications such as Teams, Zoom, WhatsApp and FaceTime.

## What are the benefits of VoIP?

Greater flexibility, allowing teams to collaborate using different devices, with the same number from anywhere with WiFi.

Cost effective, large capital investment will be replaced with manageable monthly fees.

## Summary of benefits:

- Easy to buy and easy to set up, auto provisioning allows for quick installation and no capital expenditure.
- Significant cost savings.
- Flexible and scalable, you are not tied to a location and the system can grow with your business.
- Avoid system failures/outages, you only require an internet connection for the system to work.
- Avoid having your manufacturer end support of an old phone system.
- Improved experience for your customers.
- Increased productivity and collaboration.

We are already supporting many customers who have transitioned to VoIP telephony systems and our engineering and support team has more than 80 years' experience in the sector.

Our key partner RingCentral, is trusted by more than 400,000 organisations worldwide, with a consistent uptime of 99.999%.

Providing a reliable, global, and compliant platform for all of your communication needs.

## The bottom line

Preparing will help you avoid getting caught out leading up to the switch-off.

Our team is here to help you with every step of the journey, get in touch today to start assessing your needs ahead of 2025 or book a demonstration of the different solutions available. ●





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# Making PR accessible

Committed to opening up PR to businesses of all sizes and sectors, and to supporting a diverse range of spokespeople to develop relationships with the media, Kasa Communications is truly doing things differently. **Sharon Davis**, founder and managing director, tells us more

**F**or many businesses, investing in their PR is something that just isn't seen as being for them.

'It's too expensive' is a common reason. Thinking they're not interesting enough to warrant coverage in the media, or they're not a sizeable enough venture, are others.

And through this common perception of PR as being the domain of the 'big players', countless small, independent businesses and the amazing work they do go under the radar.

But for Sharon Davis, that's exactly the type of business she wants to support. Through her venture Kasa Communications, she is truly turning the tide in PR, with a commitment to opening the industry up as never before.

"What's the point in being another agency that wants to promote Coca Cola, or a massive brand like that? I don't get a kick out of that," she says.

"Running a business involves a lot of effort, time and sacrifice. So I think if I'm going to do it, it may as well be for a good cause, to help the businesses and business owners who don't usually get the coverage."

This commitment to doing things differently, and its transparency on pricing, range of affordable packages and offer of free services - such as its half-hour PR Surgery - are key to Kasa Communications wanting to make PR as accessible as possible.

It is also leading on new innovations in the North East

- the Kasa Community, which brings together business owners as spokespeople as a resource for journalists to seek comment on a range of issues; and its Meet the Journalist event, which brings business owners face-to-face with the people who may be interested in writing about them.

Going forward, events are set to feature even more prominently in Kasa Communications' offering, with Sharon committed to setting a new course based on what works best for clients.

And with a growing portfolio of clients from throughout the region - with a particular focus on education, local government, professional services, property and food - the need ►





for Kasa Communications' new approach to PR is evident.

"I'm not from a traditional PR background, I've come from journalism, but I believe PR is an industry that is changing, which reflects the change we're seeing in the world," says London-born Sharon, who began her career in BBC local radio.

"A big one for me is how spokespeople historically have tended to be the same and journalists get the same kinds of quotes. But if we're looking at more diverse voices - females, people from black or Asian backgrounds, or even people from rural areas - journalists will get a different perspective. And that's really important.

"We do need to make it more accessible, and this has always been a driver for me. And I think having come from London, I've seen that in comparison, people in the North East don't necessarily get PR, it's not something that is seen as a big deal.

"So what I really want to do is to educate and help those smaller businesses,

to help them realise there is a space for them to talk and to be heard. And we can help with that."

Having worked in media since 2005, Sharon left the BBC after only two years, aged just 23 - "I'd say I had imposter syndrome" - and worked in numerous specialist titles before becoming a self-employed PR consultant in London, supporting businesses of all sizes and sectors, with one highlight being hosting an international press conference in South Africa.

Having moved to North Yorkshire in 2016, Sharon realised the need to support businesses in her new rural location to have a voice. As well as her PR offering, Sharon furthered her commitment to supporting businesses by creating Dales Business Women, a networking group for rurally-based professional and self-employed women.

Creating Kasa Communications - Kasa means 'to speak' in Ghanaian

- she quickly made an impact in her new home, and has gone on to expand across the whole of the North East region with her news-focused approach helping to open new avenues for clients.

"I think even in the two short years I was at the BBC, I credit that role with my whole career today, because it has given me a real insight into how news works," says Sharon.

"I also realise the need to reach out to a mixture of diverse audiences. This has given me almost the backbone of the business in terms of values. We need to be going beyond your 'typical' people and reaching new ones, making it accessible to them."

As an entrepreneur herself, mother-of-two Sharon is aware of the cost pressures of running a business, so tries to make access to PR as cost-effective as possible.

"We do try to offer free things, or really cost-effective things, and give advice on DIY ways that help people to do their own PR, and that has been great," she says.

"Some of the things we've done have ►









been fantastic - for example, at our first Meet the Journalist event, someone was even offered their own column. That's not something many people would think could be possible unless you were paying a PR agency thousands of pounds.

"But there is only so much of that we can do, because things do cost money. A lot of time and effort goes into the work we do, but we are mindful of our pricing so that people know what we charge and what they'll get in return.

"We appreciate people often don't have

thousands of pounds in their budget to spend on PR, but they don't need to. It has taken a long time for us to get to the point where we're helping businesses in a way that works financially for us too, but I think we've just about hit the sweet spot now."

Constantly innovating and refining Kasa Communications' offering to stay on top of trends is how Sharon believes the business will continue to stand out from the crowd.

"PR is changing, and if you don't keep up and see things differently, particularly in areas like AI, I think you'll fall behind.

I am not sure this traditional version of the PR industry will exist in five or ten years time," says Sharon.

"You have to give people what they want and make sure you're on top of what's happening. I have some ideas for tech and automation for the future, because I want to make sure we're current and forward-thinking. We need to keep innovating and learning the lessons along the way."

Having now reached a stage where Sharon is happy with her business and its offering, with growth plans very much in place for the months and years ahead, she is always happy to share the benefits of her experience with other entrepreneurs looking to develop and grow.

"I'm always really honest about the challenges, it's good to be honest," she says.

"I've always had a vision of what I wanted, but I think sometimes the balance of that vision and getting what I need right now is something I haven't always got right.

"I often look back and question whether I should have left the BBC so soon. Whether I should have gone into self employment in 2010, when all my friends were in paid, secure jobs.

"I think a lot of it came down to my confidence and insecurity, that my inner soft skills weren't developed enough. I've spent a lot of time feeling insecure - but you learn as you go, and I've learnt a lot over the years. I'm not averse to risk, and that is part of the learning process too.

"Now, aged 39, I don't sit down and think about what I did at 23, but I do think you can look back and reflect on what you've done, good and bad. For me personally, being a black woman from South London moving North to start a business has had its own challenges, but I'm proud of what I have created. It has definitely been a success.

"Kasa Communications has a great team who seem to love working here, and I think we have a really good people focus. That has yielded a business that is fun and healthy to be in. I'm really pleased with where we are, and looking forward to what comes next." ●

**For more information about Kasa Comms, visit [www.kasacomms.com](http://www.kasacomms.com)**

“What I really want to do is to educate and help those smaller businesses, to help them realise there is a space for them to talk and to be heard”







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Over the last two years, Marriott Communications has gone from strength to strength and they are now setting their eyes on the US market

# Marriott Communications goes global



Alongside winning Integrative Communications Agency of the Year in the 2022 Northern Enterprise Awards, and our CEO Samuel Marriott-Dowding winning the FSB's North East Young Entrepreneur of the Year 2023, we have seen some exceptional client successes. We have led campaigns that have reached over 18 million people nationally and internationally, secured global press coverage, managed people, brands and their strategic development, and most importantly facilitated digital and financial growth.

Our agency finished 2022 with the development of our tiered communications packages, which were developed to offer high-quality and accessible marketing and communications solutions to businesses on a budget. These packages have proven to be extremely popular with local and regional start ups, many of who are able to enjoy the benefits of working with a marketing agency without the long-term commitment and often high-price tag. Following the success of this service, Marriott Communications are now looking to develop new tiers into the service to cover other areas of marketing, including Crisis & Risk Management and A.I Graphic Design.

Alongside our agency's internal and external service developments, a high-priority target of this year was to identify and explore

international markets and opportunities. With knowledge and support gained from working with the Department for Business and Trade, we were able to identify potential markets within the United States where our communications service would be of value to US companies looking to expand or develop their own services within the UK.

Through this route, we would be able to successfully manage our capacity, the differences in consumer markets, all the while working with international businesses and organisations. Following this new route to market, Marriott Communications was able to secure our first U.S client based in Philadelphia - a momentous achievement for a start-up agency in their second year of trading.

When expanding further afield, we can't forget our roots. Whilst we were founded in Scotland, the North East is now our home and it is an incredibly exciting time to have a business here in the North East.

The business space feels energised and dynamic, the entrepreneurs are innovative and creative; and you do not have to look hard to see that there is a monumental amount of development happening throughout the region, something that everyone in one way or another will eventually benefit from. As a start-up creative agency, there is no other place we would rather be. ●





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We speak to Net  
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cyber fears to rest

# Cyber Fear – time for this to stop!



Fear... not something that is new, we all face and deal with it on a daily basis. Fear in the technology sector, also nothing new. Cyber Fear, however, somewhat of an emerging trend!

The cyber sector has experienced huge growth in the last several years, and while certifications and accreditations are regulated and governed extremely well, how those services are sold is not!

Selling fear is happening all too often, and this terrifies me more than cyber risk ever could. I have spent time researching this, talking with peers, customers, and the cyber community here in the Northeast.

Whilst I agree, cyber is no longer an emerging risk, this is a current risk and sits alongside health and safety and financial risk. This is no longer an "if" problem and is now a "when" problem. Governing bodies such as IASME, GHQ, NCSC and the Government all agree organisations need to take action today to reduce their risk. This is where my agreement stops!

Sadly, selling through fear is becoming a common practice. Taking advantage of the "act now before it is too late" messaging. This is resulting in inflated pricing, selling products and services way beyond what the customer really needs and promising magic that doesn't exist.

The result, organisations are feeling bullied and terrified, they can end up purchasing solutions, products and accreditations that are way over what they need or can afford, or it is pushing them to the point of taking no action at all.

The reality, improving your security and reducing your cyber risk does not need to be expensive or complicated. I am working to ensure our cyber services and certifications are a fit for the organisations' requirements while being affordable, available, and attainable!

Some tips to help you along: ensure your supplier is appropriately accredited themselves. Get more than one opinion and quote for any services or certification. Take time to understand your risk, and if it is too good to be true ... it normally is.

If you want to talk all things cyber in a no nonsense, simple and informative way reach out to us today.

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# SELLING THE DREAM

Serial entrepreneur **Kevin Beales** may have been encouraged to build a corporate career, but his desire to run his own company – which began as a schoolboy – wouldn't leave him. He has since gone on to establish and sell a series of successful tech companies based in his adopted North East. His latest venture, MySalesCoach, launched last year and is already flying high, having attracted over £1 million of funding. But is this really the end of Kevin's entrepreneurial journey?

**T**he entrepreneurial spirit was strong in Kevin Beales from a young age, even if some of his early business ventures landed him in trouble with his headmaster.

He explains. "I got suspended from school for selling lottery scratch cards as I think my fellow pupils were spending too much of their lunch money on them."

Kevin's next side hustle of selling computer discs, however, proved much more acceptable – so much so that he began supplying the discs to the school directly.

At university, Kevin – who was born in Brighton but spent his adolescence in Manchester – began organising coach trips to local nightclubs for his fellow students. This soon progressed to stag and hen trips to Europe's best-known party cities, such as Dublin and Amsterdam. These proved so popular that Kevin's Financial Services degree took a back seat.

His parents, however, were keen for

their son to pursue a more traditional career path and the university drop-out eventually relented and began searching for a corporate job.

Kevin's break came six months later when he joined adidas.

"I was working at a print and design company and was distraught when my contact at adidas said she was leaving. Then she suggested I should apply for her job."

Kevin joined the marketing team at adidas in the late 90s, just as the digital revolution was beginning. One day, his boss said to him: 'You've used this internet thing. Do you want to be our New Media manager?' Accepting the role, Kevin was responsible for developing adidas's first website in the UK.

The media manager had begun working more globally with adidas when Sunderland Football Club approached

Kevin to ask if he would be interested in becoming its New Media Manager.

"The club was looking to use the internet to do everything from streaming games to building online presences and communities."

Kevin accepted the role and relocated to the North East to work for the Black Cats. But his entrepreneurial spirit was still burning bright, as he explains:

"While I enjoyed my time at adidas and Sunderland AFC enormously – and I was fortunate to work for some great people on those journeys – I found it frustrating. I was always trying to bend the rules and do things differently. I was described as a maverick, which made me realise that working in big organisations wasn't my destiny."

Kevin worked for two start-up tech companies – including a fast-growing North East company called Communicator Corp, which was owned by the Leighton Group. ►



This work helped cement to Kevin that his future lay in establishing his own business – something that initially didn't go down well with those closest to him.

"I remember telling my wife, Helen - who I'd met while at Sunderland AFC - that I wanted to leave Communicator Corp and set up on my own. She started crying and begged me not to. "We'd just started a family and she was worried about the risk. But I knew it was something I needed to do. We agreed I would try it for six months and if things didn't work out, I would return to a 'proper job'."

In 2007, Kevin established The Test Factory with co-founder David Copple. The company provided online assessment solutions to corporate and education clients.

By his own admission, Kevin made many mistakes in the early days and learned plenty of lessons "the hard way."

But the company developed and attracted major clients such as Microsoft, HSBC, Pret A Manger, Cambridge University Press and Oxford University Press. The United Nations even used the SaaS platform to identify the right personnel for peacekeeping missions.

"We had the internal tagline that we were 'responsible for world peace'," Kevin recalls with a smile.

Despite making mistakes along the way, The Test Factory grew to 50 employee and around £3 million in revenue. It was acquired in 2014 by GL Education, one of the biggest providers of tests in UK schools.

Kevin agreed to stay at The Test Factory for the next 18 months but only lasted six weeks.

"I knew after the acquisition, The Test Factory would be different and a far less entrepreneurial business, but I found it harder than I anticipated. I was chomping at the bit to start another business within weeks," he says.

Kevin's next business was Refract, another SaaS platform he established with Richard Smith and Paul Fleming, whom he worked with at The Test Factory.

As someone with a natural flare for sales, Kevin had often found it challenging to coach colleagues effectively and set about trying to solve the problem.

"One of the things that frustrated me



as a sales leader was trying to coach people on the conversations they were having with clients and potential clients.

"The only thing I felt I could do was sit in on the meetings and then provide feedback to them, which was time-consuming and not very efficient."

He continues: "There are countless studies that show the impact good sales coaching can have on performance and revenue but, on average, sales managers only spend around 5% of their time doing it. They are often tasked with countless other things, whether it's hiring or onboarding, reporting to the board or managing changes in revenue. All of these things are more time critical than sales coaching, which can always wait till tomorrow, and often doesn't happen at all."

With Refract, Kevin and his co-founders created a platform that captured and analysed sales conversations – be they phone calls or video calls – and then used AI to identify what the best performing salespeople did differently compared to their less successful colleagues.



Kevin explains: "The technology would slice the conversation up into coachable moments. It would look at things like rapport, how objections were handled and how much was talking about the product and the price point.

"Managers could then provide coaching by surfacing those moments where the revenue was won and lost."

The AI insights, which were bespoke to each organisation, proved popular and Refract was soon attracting a hefty client base that craved a more effective sales approach.

The potential of Refract attracted the attention of US company Allego, which acquired Refract in 2020.

The acquisition happened earlier than Kevin and his co-founders expected but the opportunity proved too good to miss.

The founder of Allego, Yuchun Lee, was one of the infamous Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) students who made a fortune card counting in Las Vegas (their exploits were made into the film, 21). Yuchun used his winnings to fund his first business - which he later sold to IBM for \$480 million. ▶





"I found Yuchun a really inspirational character and that's a big part of why we ended up working with Allego, and later was acquired by the company," Kevin adds.

Refracts' founders joined the executive team of the newly acquired company. Kevin stayed for two-and-a-half years, heading up the European teams. But history was to repeat itself once again when Kevin left to establish this third company – MySalesCoach.

The reason, Kevin says, was he felt he hadn't fully solved the problem that sales managers still didn't have the time to coach effectively.

"There was now technology and tools to help identify areas of coaching but sales managers, more than ever, lacked the time to coach and support. The problem we started to solve eight years before had actually got worse," he adds.

He and his co-founders, Mark Ackers and John Richardson, developed MySalesCoach, a subscription service that combines a SaaS platform with expert sales coaching delivered by specially selected coaches who could provide

tailored one-to-one coaching sessions.

MySalesCoach only launched in January 2023 but it has already managed to attract more than £1 million of funding from the North East Innovation Fund and from angel investors.

Securing investment at this early stage is surely at least in part due to Kevin's impressive ability to establish, grow and sell tech companies. This faith already seems to be well placed as MySalesCoach's CEO reveals the company is growing beyond expectations.

"Things have gone better than we could have imagined. We've grown really quickly. We're now eight months in and we're up to a team of nine, plus over 30 coaches. We're ahead of where we planned to be at this stage and our revenue is almost half a million."

MySalesCoach is already working with major tech heavyweights such as Hubspot, Google and LinkedIn, although Kevin is keen to point out the company is working with smaller enterprises, too.

"The opportunity to amplify and accelerate results through better coaching is evident in every organisation," he adds.

Coaches are now clambering to be part of MySalesCoach but Kevin reveals only 5% make the cut to ensure the sales professionals are matched with the very best personal coach.

While VC investors have placed MySalesCoach on a trajectory to being sold one day, Kevin believes the journey will take longer than his previous businesses.

"We're still scratching the surface of this global opportunity and fully realising the huge market potential will take a while."

Kevin maintains MySalesCoach will be the last business he creates.

"I'm fortunate enough to advise some early-stage tech companies, be an angel investor and sit on the board of a couple of those companies. I love doing that and I'm sure I'll do more and more in the future. But I do genuinely think that this is my last entrepreneurial journey," he says.

Only time will tell whether MySalesCoach satisfies Kevin's entrepreneurial spirit. ●

**For more information on MySalesCoach, visit [www.mysalescoach.com](http://www.mysalescoach.com)**









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Sailors' Children's Society has helped over 48,000 disadvantaged children of seafarers throughout the UK since 1821

# Supporting children and families from seafaring backgrounds



Sailors' Children's Society is a national charity established over 200 years ago. We offer financial and emotional support to children and families from seafaring backgrounds who are in a time of crisis such as loss of a family member, diagnosis of a life limiting or terminal illness or family breakdown.

All the families we help are also experiencing financial hardship. We help families with connections to a range of maritime roles, including those working for the Royal Navy, the Merchant Navy, in fishing fleets, ferries, cruise ships, and cargo ships.

## How we help

- Child Welfare Grants are provided to families monthly to help pay for the basics like food and heating.
- Clothing Grants are provided twice a year to ensure each child has a school uniform and winter clothing.
- Special Grants. These are provided on an adhoc basis to help towards educational trips or essential children's items.
- Christmas Grants are a small grant provided to each family to ensure each child gets a gift at this special time of year.
- Each family will receive a desktop computer so they can do school work at home.

- Every family has the option to have support from a Family Support Officer who provides emotional and practical support such as how to budget, where to find additional help and to provide a listening ear.

## How can I get involved?

Fundraising is vital for the Sailors' Children's Society and our ongoing support for struggling families. Get involved with local or national events and know you are making a difference with every donation.

- Individual fundraising. You can make a difference by entering a sponsored race or organising a local event.
- Group fundraising. Get friends and family involved to form a team for sporting events or throw a party for charity.
- Corporate fundraising. Make the most of your business profile and throw a charity gala or golf day to raise funds.
- Make a donation to support a child: £5 provides a child with a reading book, £10 with a non branded school jumper and £36 provides a monthly hardship grant for food
- Leave a gift in your will so that the charity can carry on supporting the children of seafarers for generations to come. ●



# LS | LIFESTYLE

ISSUE 5

DINING ■ MOTORING





# THE RETURN OF ST. VINCENT

*Alison Cowie visits **St. Vincent**, the Newcastle-based Franco/Italian-inspired wine bar and restaurant that's reopened after a three-year hiatus*

**D**espite some heavy hitters entering the local culinary scene over the last decade or so, one name remains synonymous with fine dining in Newcastle – Terry Laybourne.

Over the years, the chef and restaurateur has opened a bevy of restaurants as part of his 21 Hospitality Group, with each becoming renowned for their cutting-edge food and sophisticated surroundings.

In March, 2020, however - as the local hospitality industry went into freefall due to the pandemic - Terry took the decision to close his Quayside-based Franco/Italian eatery, St. Vincent.

I had spent a lengthy business lunch at St. Vincent a short time earlier and had very much enjoyed its elegant yet informal vibe and top-notch food and drink. It was a shame to see its doors close indefinitely.

Pleasingly, St. Vincent – which sits alongside Live Theatre on Broad Chare – has reopened, reintroducing its classy food and wine pairings in the evenings (Tuesday to Friday) and all day on Saturday.

I returned to St Vincent at 6.30pm on an autumnal Tuesday and was pleasantly surprised to find the eatery already bustling with diners when I arrived.

Matt, the General Manager, welcomed me and took me to my table. He presented me with the daily menu (an early evening menu is also available from £20pp), which was divided into snacks, charcuterie, cheeses, small plates, large plates, extras and desserts. Matt explained the menu is focused on simplicity to bring out the quality of the produce. It's also purposely flexible so it can cater to patrons wanting smaller bites with a glass of wine or two – or those wanting a more substantial three-course meal.

As I waited for my friend to arrive, I sipped on an alcohol-free no-groni, while ruing the decision to bring my car. When



she arrived, she also ordered a no-groni and we staved off our hunger with hearty slabs of homemade focaccia bread.

To start, we looked to Catalonia and chose the Paleta Iberica (£21) to share. The slithers of quality cured ham were served on a plate and came with some traditional pa amb tomaquet, two slices of fried bread topped with crushed tomatoes, garlic and olive oil. Matt suggested we combine this with the roasted beets, Marcona almonds and horseradish crème fraiche (£9). The selection offered a heady mix of flavours and textures, and tasted delicious. Simple cooking, done well.

For our main courses, my friend and I looked to the sea as I opted for the monkfish tail (£28), which was beautifully grilled on the bone and served with aromatic herbs and a sweet

caponata of tomatoes, aubergine, onions, capers and pine nuts. My friend chose the seared tuna (£26) served with Italian salsa rossa. It was equally well cooked and melted in the mouth. Our plentiful side of courgette fries were crisp, salty and swiftly polished off.

To accompany our mains, we ordered a small glass of wine each and were happy for Matt to suggest one for us. He brought us the Akemi Viura Rioja Blanco, which he told us is the only wine Michelin-starred chef, Felix Jimenez, will serve at his Japanese fusion restaurant. Our glasses filled, we tried it and couldn't believe how full-bodied and complex it was. We agreed we loved the wine's story almost as much as drinking it.

My friend and I finished with dessert and I enjoyed the plum and almond tart with Limoncello cream (£8) from the

daily specials. But it was my friend's unbelievably creamy burnt Basque cheesecake (£7.50) - with a hint of smoky bitterness from the burnished baked crust - that stole the show. I'll definitely be ordering that next time.

Looking around St. Vincent, I could see couples and smaller groups enjoying hearty meals like us, while other groups and people on their own were tucking into charcuterie, cheese and wine.

Matt was right, St. Vincent can be whatever you want it to be but this flexibility doesn't come at a cost to quality or expertise. This eatery exudes quality and expertise at every turn. You're definitely in good hands at St. Vincent, and I wish it a successful revival. ●

For more information, visit: [www.stvincentnewcastle.co.uk](http://www.stvincentnewcastle.co.uk)





# Get further, *faster*

**Mercedes-AMG** has announced the launch of its new GLC hybrid SUV Coupé, which promises to blend performance and efficiency with luxury and individual flair

**J**ust weeks after the presentation of the new Mercedes-AMG GLC SUV, the luxury car brand has presented the new GLC Coupé.

It completes the successful midsize series from Mercedes-AMG and combines dynamic elegance and characteristic AMG features.

The GLC 63 S E PERFORMANCE Coupé (pictured) is the brand's first performance hybrid SUV coupé (combined fuel consumption: 7.5 l/100 km, combined CO2 emissions: 170 g/km, combined power consumption:

12.7 kWh /100 km) with 500 kW (680 HP) system output at the start.

The brand has also launched an entry-level model, the GLC 43 4MATIC Coupé (combined fuel consumption: 10.2-9.8 l/100 km, combined CO2 emissions: 232-223 g/km) with 310 kW (421 hp) power and a short-term boost of 10 kW (14 hp) via the belt-driven starter generator (RSG).

The extensive standard equipment of both models feature rear-axle steering, all-wheel drive, AMG SPEEDSHIFT MCT 9G transmission with wet starting clutch and AMG RIDE CONTROL suspension with

adaptive damping supports the dynamic driving experience.

## A FLOWING SILHOUETTE

A sporty transition to the rear is the main feature of the new Mercedes AMG GLC Coupé. The headlights connect to the top of the AMG-specific radiator trim, emphasising the width of the vehicle, while the AMG front apron in jet wing design has striking large air inlets and vertical fins. The two-part tail lights also help widen the rear view with a black, dark red connecting element.

### SPORTY ELEGANT INTERIOR

In the interior, AMG seats in ARTICO man-made leather/MICROCUT AMG microfiber with unique graphics and covers provide a sporty touch. Optional upholstery made of leather and Nappa leather with an embossed AMG coat of arms in the front headrests is also available. The AMG performance seats are also available as options. There is also the standard AMG Performance steering wheel in Nappa leather (GLC 43) or Nappa leather/MICROCUT microfiber (GLC 63 S).

### INFOTAINMENT

The MBUX infotainment system includes various AMG-specific displays and functions. These include the independent displays in the instrument cluster, in the portrait format multimedia central display in the centre console and in the optional head-up display. The AMG exclusive “Supersport” style offers the possibility of displaying various content via a vertical structure. This includes a set-up menu that shows the current chassis or transmission settings. The driver can also have a navigation map or consumption data displayed in “Supersport” style.

### A2.0-LITRE FOUR-CYLINDER ENGINE WITH ELECTRIC EXHAUST TURBOCHARGER

The heart of the new Mercedes-AMG GLC Coupé models is the AMG 2.0-litre four-cylinder engine, which combines innovative technologies and high performance with exemplary efficiency. The engine is so far the only series engine in the world that is charged with an electric exhaust gas turbocharger via the additional 48-volt on-board electrical system, which also includes the belt-driven starter generator (RSG).

### E PERFORMANCE HYBRID

In the GLC 63 S E PERFORMANCE Coupé, the M139I produces 350 kW (476 hp) at 6,725 rpm. This makes it the most powerful series-produced four-cylinder in the world. The maximum combustion engine torque of 545 Nm is at 5,250-5,500 rpm. In the performance hybrid, the 2.0-litre engine is combined with a permanently excited synchronous electric motor, a high-performance battery developed in Affalterbach and the fully variable AMG Performance 4MATIC+ all-wheel drive. ▶







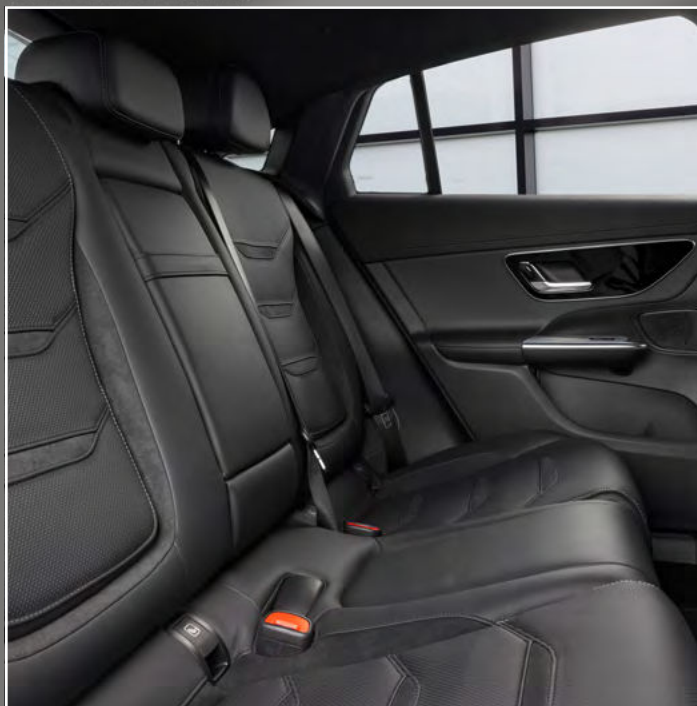
#### AMG HIGH PERFORMANCE BATTERY – INSPIRED BY FORMULA 1

The development of the lithium-ion energy storage is inspired by technologies proven in the Formula 1™ hybrid racing cars of the Mercedes-AMG Petronas F1 Team. The AMG High Performance battery combines high, often consecutively available power with low weight to increase the overall performance of the vehicle. Added to this is the rapid energy consumption and high power density.

#### 80 KW CONTINUOUS POWER AND 150 KW AT PEAK

The high-performance battery in the GLC 63 S E PERFORMANCE Coupé offers a capacity of 6.1 kWh, 80 kW continuous power and 150 kW peak power for ten seconds.

“The heart of the new Mercedes-AMG GLC Coupé models is the AMG 2.0-litre four-cylinder engine, which combines innovative technologies and high performance with exemplary efficiency.”





Charging takes place via recuperation or the installed 3.7 kW on-board charger with alternating current at a charging station, wall box or household socket. The battery is designed for fast power delivery and absorption and not for the longest possible range. Nevertheless, the electric range of 12 kilometres enables a practical operating radius, for example for low-noise, fully electric travel from residential areas to the outskirts of the city or to the motorway.

#### EDITION 1 AT MARKET LAUNCH

The GLC 63 S E PERFORMANCE Coupé can be ordered as an exclusive Edition 1 in the exterior colours graphite gray magno or high-tech silver magno for one year from market launch. A foil in magno charcoal visually stretches the vehicle's sides.

The 21-inch AMG forged wheels in cross-spoke design are painted matt black. The high-sheen rim flanges provide an attractive contrast. This also applies to the yellow-painted brake calipers of the AMG high-performance composite brake system.

To protect their valuable vehicle, every customer receives a tailor-made AMG Indoor Car Cover with the "Edition1" logo. With its breathable outer skin made of tear-resistant synthetic fibre fabric and the anti-static inner fabric made of flannel, it protects the vehicle in the garage from dust and scratches. ●

Further information about the Mercedes AMG GLC Coupé is available at [www.mercedes-amg.com](http://www.mercedes-amg.com)





Forward plan with our helpful

# EVENTS DIARY



## JANUARY

- 24** ASSIST: Just Networking in Stockton, Parkmore Hotel, 636 Yarm Road, Eaglescliffe, Stockton On Tees, TS16 0DH. 10am-11am  
[www.assistwomensnetwork.co.uk](http://www.assistwomensnetwork.co.uk)
- 31** Survive and Thrive in Business – Making Sure Your Business Idea Works, Northern Design Centre, Abbott's Hill, Gateshead, NE8 3DF. 1pm-3pm  
[www.businessgateshead.co.uk](http://www.businessgateshead.co.uk)

## FEBRUARY

- 5** Prudhoe Business Networking Event, Spetchells Centre, 58 Spetchells, Front Street, Prudhoe, NE42 5AA. 9am-10.30am  
[www.eventbrite.com](http://www.eventbrite.com)
- 13** Newcastle City Ladies Networking, Hilton Newcastle Gateshead, Bottle Bank, Gateshead, NE8 2AR. 9.30am-11am  
[www.cityladiesnetworking.com](http://www.cityladiesnetworking.com)
- 15** Speed Networking, Blackfriars, Friars Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 4XN. 5pm-7pm  
[www.blackfriarsrestaurant.co.uk/events](http://www.blackfriarsrestaurant.co.uk/events)
- 23** North East Networking Event, Lumley Castle Hotel, Ropery Lane, Chester-le-Street, DH3 4NX. 11.30-3pm  
[www.allevents.in](http://www.allevents.in)
- 26** 15 Ways to Build Your Business Confidence, North Shields Customer First Centre, Northumberland Place, North Shields, NE30 1QU. 9.30am-12.30pm  
[www.bipcnortheast.co.uk/events](http://www.bipcnortheast.co.uk/events)

## MARCH

- 4** Newcastle FinTech Forum, One Strawberry Lane, Newcastle Upon Tyne, NE1 4BX. 8am-1pm  
[www.fintechnorth.uk](http://www.fintechnorth.uk)
- 20** Northumberland Tourism Fair, Willowburn Leisure Centre, Alnwick, NE66 2JH. 10am-2pm  
[www.tourismfair.co.uk](http://www.tourismfair.co.uk)
- 21** Teesside Expo, Main Hall, Wynyard Hall, Stockton-on-Tees, Billingham, TS22 5NF. 10am-3pm  
[www.teessideexpo.co.uk](http://www.teessideexpo.co.uk)

To have your event listed here, please email [alison@bw-magazine.co.uk](mailto:alison@bw-magazine.co.uk).

Please note, while we make every effort to ensure these listings are correct, we cannot be held responsible for changes or cancellations – always contact the venue beforehand to check.

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