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BUSINESS NEWS NORTHERN IRELAND

Welcome to our round up of the latest business news for our clients. Please contact us if you want to talk about how these updates affect your business. We are here to support you!

What's your growth strategy?

A company might have a great product or service but without a business growth strategy to help it define, articulate and communicate where it is going, it may not grow at all!



A growth strategy starts with identifying and accessing opportunities within your market. The strategy addresses how your company is going to evolve to meet the challenges of today and in the future. A growth strategy gives your company purpose, and it answers questions about your long-term plans.

Having a growth strategy is important because it keeps your company working towards goals that go beyond what is happening in the market today. They keep both owners and employees focused and aligned, and they allow you to think long-term.

The first step is to look at five important areas that will help you develop a growth strategy:

1. Think long term – invest time in understanding where the market is going and what this means for your customers. Short term decisions do not help grow a business.
2. Having a good value proposition is essential – this states the relevance of your product or service, what it does and why customers need it. What is yours?

3. Expanding your reach – who is your target customer and what do you need to do to let them know you exist and that your product or service is relevant to them?
4. Growth means new people, systems and (maybe) different ways of doing things. Grow at a pace you can manage.
5. How will your marketing get your value proposition to relevant customers?

Once you have taken some time to write out your growth strategy and where you want your business to be in (say) 2 years, the next step is to work out your marketing plan.

A marketing plan is a business document outlining your marketing strategy and tactics. It is often focused on a specific period of time (i.e., over the next 12 months) and covers a variety of marketing-related details, such as costs, goals, and action steps. But like your business plan, a marketing plan is not a static document. This should outline:

1. How you are going to keep existing customers happy and returning to buy more often
2. What the goals are for getting new customers
3. The marketing methods you are going to use to achieve 1 and 2

Please talk to us about helping you formulate your expansion plans; we have considerable experience in helping our clients grow their businesses.

Businesses urged to 'scam-proof' their messages to public

The National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) has published new guidance for businesses on creating trustworthy customer text and telephone messages.



The guidance follows a rise in text and call-based scams such as those involving fake parcel deliveries, the most prevalent type of 'smishing' text messages in 2021.

The guidance covers various aspects of secure customer communications including:

- issuing consistent and trustworthy SMS and telephone messages
- measures to make it harder for criminals to exploit telecoms channels
- providing a route for customers to independently verify communications and more

It includes recommended practices for putting services in place and offers nine tips for organisations to follow to create messages their customers can trust.

See: [Business communications - SMS and telephone best practice - NCSC.GOV.UK](#)

Employers' PPE responsibilities extended to 'workers' from April 2022

From April, employers will be obliged to provide personal protective equipment (PPE) to workers, as well as employees, who may be exposed to health and safety risks at work.

An amendment to the Personal Protective Equipment at Work Regulations 1992, will come into force on 6 April 2022.

Organisations will need to undertake a risk assessment to establish whether a worker requires PPE to carry out their work tasks. If they do, the employer will need to carry out a PPE suitability assessment and provide protective equipment or clothing to them free of charge, as they do for employees.

Organisations will also be responsible for the maintenance, storage and replacement of any PPE they provide, while workers will be responsible for reporting any loss or damage to their PPE.

See: [Personal protective equipment \(PPE\) at work \(hse.gov.uk\)](#)

NCSC For Startups programme

The National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) is urging tech startups to join the fight against ransomware.

Companies with ideas to protect small businesses from ransomware are offered a chance to develop them further with leading cyber security experts.

The companies can apply to join [NCSC For Startups](#), a programme in which they collaborate with experts to develop, adapt and test their products.

The programme was launched last year by the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) - a part of GCHQ - and the innovation company Plexal. The programme's

aim is to bring together innovative startups with NCSC technical expertise to solve some of the UK's most important cyber challenges.

The latest call for companies to join the programme is aimed at those who are developing products to protect SMEs from the growing ransomware threat. In the first four months of 2021, the NCSC handled the same number of ransomware incidents as for the whole of 2020 – which was itself a number more than three times greater than in 2019.

The NCSC and Plexal want to hear from startups that can:

- improve choice for SMEs looking for ransomware protection
- encourage firms to implement secure backups to minimise the impact of an attack
- reduce the risks involved in using Remote Desktop Protocol from home

See: [Current challenges - NCSC.GOV.UK](https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/insights/current-challenges)

Directors may be liable for overclaimed CJRS grants

Where HMRC believe a company (including LLPs) is insolvent or about to become insolvent, and overclaimed CJRS grants owed will not be paid, they may give a notice making an individual (or individuals) jointly and severally liable for the relevant tax liabilities. This means that all individuals given a notice will be jointly and severally liable with the company for paying these liabilities.

HMRC have issued guidance setting out the conditions that need to be present in order to use their powers:

- a. An officer of HMRC may give a joint and several liability notice to an individual if they are satisfied that all 4 of the conditions A to D set out in the legislation have been met
- b. the company is subject to an insolvency procedure, or there is a serious possibility of becoming subject to one
- c. the company is liable to an income tax charge as a result of receiving a COVID-19 support payment it was not entitled to receive
- d. the individual was responsible for the management of the company at the time the tax first became chargeable, and the individual knew (at that time) that the company was not entitled to the relating COVID-19 support payment
- e. there is a serious possibility that some or all of the income tax liability will not be paid

See: [Overview of joint and several liability notices for the taxation of coronavirus \(COVID-19\) support payments - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/overview-of-joint-and-several-liability-notices-for-the-taxation-of-coronavirus-(covid-19)-support-payments)

GBIP in Taiwan: Smart Cities

Innovate UK is inviting applications for their Global Business Innovation Programme (GBIP) to Taiwan from companies developing new technologies to address challenges in:

- smart healthcare
- smart mobility
- intelligent buildings and housing
- new energy solutions
- future education
- direct citizen engagement
- urban infrastructure and planning

Taiwan is an excellent testbed for future cities innovations and this programme will enable you to find potential collaborators and improve your company's value proposition to international partners and investors.

The programme, delivered by Innovate UK EDGE, consists of:

- a preparation phase
- a 5-day innovation visit focused on Smart Cities
- a post-visit exploitation workshop
- follow-up support from an Innovate UK EDGE Innovation and Growth Specialist

The programme aims to help your business maximise the opportunities identified, including developing innovation projects with partners in the territory.

This initiative will be delivered physically and include virtual activities.

See: [Global Business Innovation Programme Taiwan Smart Cities Flyer 2022 \(ukri.org\)](#)

Climate and environmental risk analytics for resilient finance

Innovate UK's Small Business Research Initiative competition will assist in integrating climate and environmental factors into financial services.

Organisations can apply for a share of up to £1.5 million inclusive of VAT.

This competition will fund projects that bring climate and environmental risk analytics into the everyday practices of financial services.

These risks include:

- physical risks to supply chains and property as posed by increasingly common natural disasters
- litigation risk where businesses are liable for their contribution to damages to nature
- transition risk whereby socioeconomic or political shifts toward net zero undermine non-aligned investments

The competition will fund companies to develop cutting-edge solutions for greening finance and to trial these solutions with partners in the finance industry.

The closing date is 16 February 2022.

See: [Climate and environmental risk analytics for resilient finance: phase one – UKRI](#)

£50 million of Government investment announced for creative businesses across the UK

£18 million funding will support creative businesses outside of London as they create new economic opportunities in their areas, £21 million to go into three-year UK Global Screen Fund to promote UK films internationally and £8 million will help entrepreneurial, start-up video game developers from across the UK create new games the government announced last week.

See: [£50 million of Government investment announced for creative businesses across the UK - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Geovation Accelerator Programme is now open for applications

The Geovation Accelerator Programme is backed by Ordnance Survey and HM Land Registry. The Programme offers 6 months intensive support, structured to each start-ups needs, aimed at helping founders grow their business. Start-ups receive up to £20,000 grant funding and the equivalent to over £100,000 in benefits on the Programme.

Applications for the Spring 2022 intake are now open and are seeking start-ups working in PropTech, as well as start-ups using location data in the energy and mobility industries, especially with a sustainability angle.

The deadline to apply is 28 February 2022.

See: [Startup Accelerator Programme | Geovation | London](#)

Great Taste 2022 Awards

Great Taste is the world's largest and most trusted food and drink accreditation scheme.

Putting your food or drink to the test with our panel of over 500 experts is a quick way to get honest, straightforward and impartial feedback from chefs, buyers, food writers and retailers. Whether your product receives a 1, 2 or 3 star accolade, Great Taste stars are highly respected seals of approval.

General entry closes 14 February 2022 (competition will close earlier if entry cap is reached)

See: [Great Taste - Guild of Fine Food \(gff.co.uk\)](https://www.gff.co.uk)

UK Government sets out blueprint to transform UK

The UK government's [Levelling Up white paper](#) has set out the blueprint to expand opportunities across the United Kingdom.

The UK government has set 12 new missions to drive change to people's lives by spreading opportunity and reversing geographical inequalities.

Leaders across the UK will be asked to find new ways to collaborate and learn from each other's successes as the UK faces common challenges.

One example is a Silicon Valley-style 'Innovation Accelerator' for Glasgow to create quality new jobs and boost regional economies.

See: [UK Government sets out blueprint to transform UK - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

Covid certification system introduced to some business settings

You may be asked to prove COVID-19 status to access certain hospitality venues, businesses and events. This guidance explains the COVID-19 status proof required to access certain businesses and events.

Organisations can use the official, free HSC Check NI app as a secure way to verify an individual's COVID-19 status.

Fully vaccinated, exempt or recovery certificates will be recognised in the app. The app scans the 2D barcode, in an individual's HSC COVIDCert to make sure it is valid. It does not store or transmit any personal data that can be traced back to individuals.

See: [Coronavirus: Covid certification scheme \(nibusinessinfo.co.uk\)](https://www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk)

Apprenticeship Week 7-11 February 2022

The Department for the Economy (DfE) has officially launched the second Northern Ireland Apprenticeship Week taking place from 7-11 February 2022.

The annual week-long celebration, led by DfE, aims to highlight the important role played by apprenticeships across Northern Ireland by bringing together partners including local councils, employers, universities, further education colleges and private training providers.

Apprenticeship Week events

Through a series of in-person or virtual events, the week will showcase how apprenticeships can transform the future of apprentices and businesses.

Businesses can get involved by hosting their own apprenticeship events or in collaboration with others. If you are interested you can email apprenticeweek@economy-ni.gov.uk.

See: [Find a list of Apprenticeship Week events](#)

Omicron Hospitality Payment

Over 3,200 businesses will be eligible for a one-off grant payment under the scheme, subject to regulations. Payment levels are:

- £10,000 for businesses that are the primary occupant operating from a property with a Net Annual Value (NAV) up to £15,000; businesses that are the occupier of part of a property with any NAV; or sports clubs which occupy and manage a licensed bar and/or licensed restaurant facility and have received less than £50,000 in total through the DfC Sports Sustainability Fund
- £15,000 for businesses that are the primary occupant operating from a property with a Net Annual Value (NAV) between £15,001 and £51,000
- £20,000 for businesses that are the primary occupant operating from a property with a Net Annual Value (NAV) over £51,000

Eligible businesses will include:

- Hotels
- Restaurants licensed under Article 5(1)(e) of the Licensing (Northern Ireland) Order 1996
- Unlicensed restaurants
- Cafés
- Coffee shops
- Bistros
- Snack bars

- Public houses licensed under Article 5(1)(a) of the Licensing (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 (including nightclubs)
- Social clubs and private members clubs (excluding sporting clubhouses)
- Sports clubs which occupy and manage a licensed bar and/or licensed restaurant facility and have received less than £50,000 in total through the DfC Sports Sustainability Fund

See: [Omicron-Hospitality-Payment-Scheme-Guidance-V3-31-Jan-2022.pdf \(nibusinessinfo.co.uk\)](#)

For further details see: [Coronavirus: Omicron Hospitality Payment \(nibusinessinfo.co.uk\)](#)

Funding to support not-for-profit organisations to take on new staff and train and upskill existing employees

The Covid Recovery Programme Employment & Skills Initiative will provide funding for the next three years for grants to support individuals and not-for-profit organisations with costs for a variety of new or enhanced roles within the Arts, Heritage, Creative Industries, Sports and Voluntary and Community sectors.

The initiative will fund the salaries and associated costs of new entry level employment opportunities and host organisations' support costs in not-for-profit organisations for those of working age (18 years+).

The scheme also aims to provide funding for training and upskilling of existing employees in key roles within the affected sectors, in an effort to incentivise staff to remain in and develop their career in these sectors and assist the sectors to fully recover from the impacts of the pandemic.

See: [The Covid Recovery Programme Employment & Skills Initiative | Department for Communities \(communities-ni.gov.uk\)](#)

Arts Council's National Lottery Small Grants Programme reopens

Professional arts organisations and community groups can now apply for grants between £500 and £10,000 to support projects in any art form, including music, drama, dance, literature, visual, and participatory arts.

The Small Grants programme is looking for projects which will provide ways for new and existing audiences to connect with the arts and which reflect the diversity of Northern Ireland's society and culture.

This year, the Arts Council is also offering to fund projects which mark The Queen's Platinum Jubilee while remaining true to the overall aims of the programme, which is supporting the growth of arts in the communities.

Organisations can apply for funding for projects due to commence from 27 March 2022 onwards. Projects which start within two months of the application date will not

be accepted, so make sure to apply for funding at least two months before the start of your event.

See: [Small Grants Programme | Arts Council of Northern Ireland \(artscouncil-ni.org\)](https://www.artscouncil-ni.org/)

New business programmes promoting vibrancy in Belfast

Expressions of interest are being sought for two pilot programmes aimed at promoting vibrancy in Belfast, developed in response to challenges experienced by businesses during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Vacant to Vibrant Capital Grant Scheme

The Vacant to Vibrant Capital Grant Scheme aims to incentivise both property owners and potential occupiers (including start-up retail, independents, SMEs, social enterprise, leisure, hospitality and the cultural and third sectors) to bring vacant spaces in Belfast city centre back into use and support revitalisation.

The scheme aims to improve individual properties, contribute to higher quality streetscapes and greater city centre vibrancy, sustain jobs and help create new employment opportunities.

The deadline for expressions of interest is 16:00 on Monday 28 February 2022.

See: [Vacant to Vibrant Capital Grant Scheme \(belfastcity.gov.uk\)](https://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/vacant-to-vibrant)

Supporting Vibrant Business Destinations

Supporting Vibrant Business Destinations is a partnership with the Department for Communities and will offer support to business groups that wish to set up a new, constituted business association or re-energise existing business associations that have been inactive.

Following successful completion of an expression of interest, business groups will be supported to develop an area-based action plan and have the opportunity to apply for funding up to a maximum of £40,000.

Expressions of interest will be accepted until May 2023 for this programme.

See: [Supporting Vibrant Business Destinations \(belfastcity.gov.uk\)](https://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/supporting-vibrant-business-destinations)