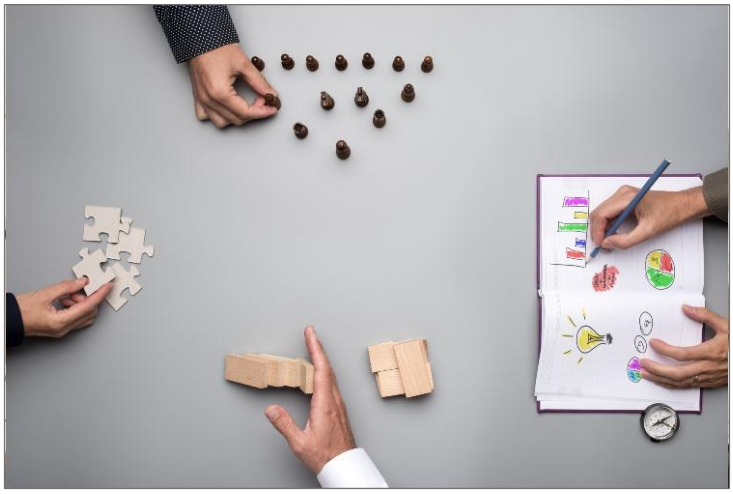
Written 7 August 2023

BUSINESS NEWS - ENGLAND

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

Taking control of your business



We were finally getting over the financial crisis when Covid struck. Russia's war in Ukraine has not only meant human suffering – it has affected the entire global economy, driving up the cost of food and energy. It adds to the hardship for those on low incomes and means serious food security risks in the world's poorest economies.

UK businesses of every size face challenges that are unprecedented and often worrying. So, what steps could you take to have more control over your future?

A business might have a great product or service but without a strategic plan to help it define, articulate, and communicate where it is going, it will be at the mercy of outside events. We encourage our clients to take some time to think long-term about their business and to establish goals or targets that they can control.

A plan starts with identifying and accessing opportunities within your market and should address how your business is going to evolve to meet the challenges of today and in the future. The plan gives your business purpose, and it answers questions about your long-term goals.

The first step is to look at five important areas:

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 plan and where you want your business to be in (say) 2 years, the next step is to work out a marketing programme with actions to make it happen.

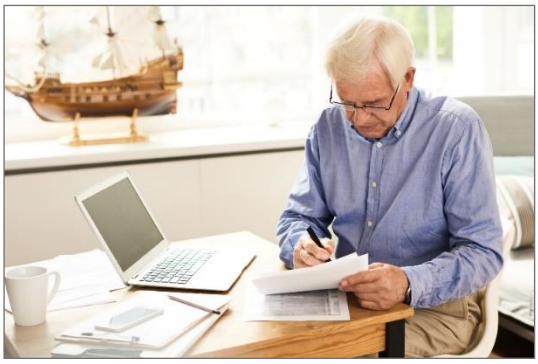
A marketing plan is a business document outlining your marketing strategy and tactics. It is often focused on a specific period (i.e., over the next 12 months) and covers various marketing-related details, such as costs, goals, and action steps. But like your business plan, a marketing plan is not a static document and 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; and
3. The marketing methods you are going to use to achieve 1 and 2.

We specialise in helping our clients manage their businesses. We do this by preparing and updating detailed forecasts, using the latest and most powerful software.

Please talk to us about strategic planning, we can help with a template so you can do this yourself or work together to produce estimates for a variety of scenarios and help you take control of your business!

Filing your Self-Assessment return early



Taxpayers could take advantage of four key benefits when filing their tax return early, HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) has stated.

The Self-Assessment deadline for the 2022 to 2023 tax year is 31 January 2024. Taxpayers who file early will have more control over their financial affairs and beat the January rush.

The four benefits HMRC promote are:

- Planning: find out what you owe for the 2022 to 2023 tax year as soon as you have filed, which allows for more accurate financial planning;
- Budgeting: spread the cost of your tax bill with weekly or monthly payments using HMRC's Budget Payment Plan;
- Refund: Check if you're due a refund in the HMRC app once you've filed; and
- Help: you can access a range of online guidance and information to help you file your return and get help if you are unable to pay your bill in full by the 31 January deadline. You may be able to set up a Time to Pay plan

Please talk to us if you need help filling out your tax return or if you want to file early, we have considerable experience in dealing with HMRC.

Update on packaging reforms

The Extended producer responsibility (EPR) scheme has been deferred for a year until October 2025.

The UK government has stated that following engagement with industry, and in light of the pressure facing consumers and businesses in the current economic context, new rules to ensure packaging producers pay for the cost of recycling their packaging will be deferred a year from October 2024 to 2025.

The Government will use the additional year to continue to discuss the scheme's design with industry and reduce the costs of implementation wherever possible. In anticipation of EPR, producers have already started to use less packaging and adopt easier-to-recycle packaging formats, and they expect this process to continue – ensuring that costs are not then passed onto households later on.

This decision to defer producer payments has been taken jointly with the devolved administrations and will provide industry, local authorities, and waste management companies with more time to prepare to ensure the success of the scheme, helping make sure it is best designed to deliver on long term recycling goals while supporting households with the immediate challenge of high prices caused by inflation.

See: Update on packaging reforms to help drive down inflation - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Managing work-related stress

Stress is defined by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) as 'the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them'.

Some people benefit from a certain amount of pressure as it can keep them motivated. However, when there is too much pressure it can lead to stress.

Stress is not an illness, but it can affect a person's physical and mental health.

If not properly managed, stress can cause:

- 'burnout' (physical and emotional exhaustion);
- Anxiety; and
- Depression.



Stress can increase the risk of physical illnesses. For example:

- heart disease;
- back pain;
- digestive conditions like irritable bowel syndrome; and
- skin conditions.

If an employer or employee spots signs of stress, it can be helpful to have an informal chat. This can help them understand how the person is feeling and what support they need. Getting help could prevent more serious problems.

Acas has release new guidance for employers to help them better manage employees' and their own stress.

See: Causes and signs of stress: Managing work-related stress - Acas

'Essentials' training for new conveyancing staff

HM Land Registry has launched a new initiative to help new conveyancing staff get to grips with the practices and processes involved in lodging high-quality applications, from the start.

Comprising a varied range of basic training materials, 'HM Land Registry Essentials' is a self-service training package aimed at helping new staff, as well as more experienced colleagues wanting an opportunity to refresh their knowledge.

The training package includes a mix of short videos, on-demand webinars, flowcharts, and guidance covering some of the most common issues facing new starters in the sector.



These include how to calculate certain Scale 2 fees and tips on avoiding requests for information (requisitions) relating to forms and deeds, execution, restrictions, and variations in names.

There's also an easy-to-follow look at the three parts that generally make up a title register.

See: HM Land Registry Essentials - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

New shipbuilding lending scheme for the UK's coastal communities

A new government scheme to help ship buyers access finance to buy UK-built vessels and upgrade existing ones has been launched. Through the Shipbuilding Credit Guarantee Scheme (SCGS) the government will act as a guarantor for lenders, unlocking credit for maritime firms.

It could help to boost the UK shipbuilding industry and drive growth in areas such as Liverpool, Plymouth, the Solent, Rosyth, Clydebank, and Belfast.

The SCGS could create new jobs and contribute to the economy, according to government estimates based on the demand for commercial shipbuilding in the UK.

The scheme also forms part of the Government's £4 billion plan to revive UK shipbuilding and coastal communities through the National Shipbuilding Strategy Refresh announced last year.

See: New shipbuilding lending scheme to boost UK's coastal communities - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

The Great British Businesswoman Awards 2023

The Great British Businesswoman Awards brings together the whole Great British Businesswoman Series community to celebrate the women who are changing the face of business across the United Kingdom.

The awards showcase the business role models, advocates and mentors, as well as the inspirational women leading businesses and those ascending to new heights!

More than just an awards ceremony, the Great British Businesswoman Awards is a year-round programme of engagement, delivering touch points throughout the year to support and champion.

The awards are free to enter and the closing date to apply is 27 August 2023.

See: https://www.greatbritishbusinesswoman.co.uk/

The Clean Maritime Demonstration Competition

Innovate UK will work with The Department for Transport (DfT) to invest up to £34 million in innovation projects to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from shipping.



These will be to develop and deploy real-world operational demonstrations of clean maritime solutions as well as carry out innovative feasibility studies and pre-deployment trials.

The Clean Maritime Demonstration Competition (CMDC) Round 4 is part of a suite of interventions launched by the UK Shipping Office for Reducing Emissions (UK SHORE). UK SHORE aims to transform the UK into a global leader in the design and manufacturing of clean maritime technology.

Your proposal must focus on clean maritime technology. Your project must do one of the following:

- design, develop, test and deploy technology; or
- conduct a technical and economic feasibility study.

The competition closes on the 27 September.

See: Competition overview - CMDC Round 4 – Vessel or Infrastructure demonstrations - Innovation Funding Service (apply-for-innovation-funding.service.gov.uk)

New North Sea oil and gas licences

Hundreds of new oil and gas licences will be granted in a controversial decision by the UK government.

The UK government and the North Sea Transition Authority (NSTA) have announced a joint commitment to undertake future licensing rounds, which will continue to be subject to a climate compatibility test.

By adopting a more flexible application process, licences could also be offered near currently licensed areas – unlocking reserves which can be brought online faster due to existing infrastructure and previous relevant assessments.

With the independent Climate Change Committee predicting around a quarter of the UK's energy demand will still be met by oil and gas when the UK reaches net zero in 2050, the Government is taking steps to slow the rapid decline in domestic production of oil and gas, which could secure domestic energy supply and reduce reliance on hostile states.

The NSTA – responsible for regulating the oil, gas, and carbon storage industries – is currently running the 33rd offshore oil and gas licensing round. They expect the first of the new licences to be awarded in the autumn, with the round expected to award over 100 licences in total.

This comes as a new analysis released by the NSTA shows that the carbon footprint of domestic gas production is around one-quarter of the carbon footprint of imported liquified natural gas.

See: Hundreds of new North Sea oil and gas licences to boost British energy independence and grow the economy: 31 July 2023 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Extension of CE mark recognition for businesses

The Department for Business and Trade has climbed down over the new UKCA marking system and announced an indefinite extension to the use of CE marking for UK businesses.

Businesses have repeatedly warned that the copycat UK quality assurance mark would create unnecessary burdens for the industry by creating dual EU and UK certification regimes.

This comes as part of a wider package of smarter regulations designed to ease business burdens and help grow the economy by cutting barriers and red tape. Following extensive engagement with industry, British firms will be able to continue the use of CE marking alongside UKCA.

The Business Secretary acted urgently on this issue, to prevent a cliff-edge moment in December 2024 when UKCA was set for entry. This intervention will ensure businesses no longer face uncertainty over the regulations and can cut back on unnecessary costs, freeing them up to focus on innovation and growth.

The extension will provide businesses with flexibility and choice to use either the UKCA or CE approach to sell products in Great Britain.

See: UK Government announces extension of CE mark recognition for businesses - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Plastic bag use falls by more than 98% after charge introduction

More than 7 billion plastic bags have been prevented from blighting our streets and countryside thanks to the single-use carrier bag charge, new figures announced show.

A 5p charge was first introduced in supermarkets in 2015. Since then, usage at the main retailers – Asda, Marks and Spencer, Morrisons, Sainsbury's, The Co-operative Group, Tesco and Waitrose – has dropped by more than 98%.

The average person in England now buys just two single-use carrier bags a year from these businesses, compared with around 140 in 2014 before the charge was introduced.

The number of single-use carrier bags reported as sold by the main retailers was 133 million in 2022/23, down from 197 million in 2021/2022, representing a reduction of 33%. This is a huge drop from the 7.6 billion used in 2014.

In 2021, the charge increased to 10p and extended to all businesses. This helped bring the numbers down by more than 35% from 627 million in 2019/20 to 406 million in 2022/23.

Meanwhile, retailers have voluntarily donated more than £206 million from the proceeds to good causes in education, arts, heritage, sports, environment, health and charity or volunteering sectors since the charge's introduction.

See: Plastic bag use falls by more than 98% after charge introduction - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Alcohol Duty Reform



The changes to the Alcohol Duty structure and the new reliefs took effect on 1st August 2023. These include:

- A new alcohol Duty system: standardised Alcohol Duty bands for all types of alcoholic products. There are new duty rates based on alcohol by volume (ABV) for all products;
- A Small Producer Relief: which reforms and extends the relief previously enjoyed by small breweries, to producers of all alcoholic products under 8.5% ABV;
- A reduced rate for draught products also known as Draught Relief, which reduces the tax due on draught alcoholic products under 8.5% ABV, packaged in containers of at least 20 litres, and designed to connect to a qualifying dispense system; and
- Transitional arrangements for producers and importers of some wine products: to help them with moving to the new method of working out the duty on their products. This allows businesses to use an 'assumed strength' of 12.5% ABV when working out the duty for wines with an ABV between 11.5% and 14.5% ABV. This measure is in place for 18 months, from 1st August 2023 until 1st February 2025.

See: Alcohol Duty from 1 August 2023 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

The Rural Payments Agency has begun to issue the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) advance payments.

In 2022, Defra announced that payments would be made in two instalments each year for the remainder of the agricultural transition period. Around 50% of the overall payment is being made now with the remaining balance expected from December.

Payments are up to 50% of the total annual BPS payment and will hopefully help farmers impacted by price rises throughout the industry with their summer season cash flow.

The RPA expects the vast majority of farmers to be paid on time, though there will be a small number of farmers whose claims will require additional checks which will take longer to process. The RPA will contact these customers to inform them of the next steps while maximising the number of farmers receiving their advance payment by the end of August.

Since 2021, BPS payments have been reducing each year as they are phased out completely by the end of the agricultural transition period in 2027. This is a process known as progressive reductions and was introduced to manage the transition from Direct Payments as smoothly as possible. The proportionate amount of progressive reductions will be applied to both the advance and balance payments.

All farmers should make sure the RPA has their up-to-date bank account details. Once a payment has been made, a remittance notice is sent in the post confirming the amount paid. When the balance payment is made in December, a claim statement will be sent to explain how the 2023 payments have been worked out.

See: Advance BPS payments to be issued to farmers - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

New Bristol railway station



Passengers in Bristol will benefit from easier access to jobs and businesses as Transport Secretary Mark Harper opened a new railway station near Avonmouth last week.

The Portway Park and Ride station, backed by both government and local authority funding, was the first station to open in Bristol in almost a century.

Regular services will run from the accessible, single-platform station 7 days a week along the Severn Beach railway line, taking passengers into the city centre of Bristol in just 24 minutes.

See: New Bristol railway station to connect communities and grow the economy - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Funding for livestock farmers to improve animal health and welfare

A further £10 million is being made available to cattle farmers in England to help them replace ageing cattle buildings with state-of-the-art facilities, Defra has announced.

As set out in guidance published last week, the Animal Health and Welfare Infrastructure Grant will allocate awards to farmers ranging from £15,000 to £500,000, prioritising new and upgraded calf housing which will improve livestock conditions and help boost farmers' productivity and profitability.

Through this grant, cattle farmers can access funding for roof-top solar panels on calf housing buildings, fulfilling a key commitment made by the Prime Minister at the Farm to Fork Summit earlier this year. This will enable farmers to improve the thermal insulation of their buildings whilst providing low-cost energy for calf housing.

The government has also announced that more than £19 million has been awarded to over 3,000 pig, poultry, sheep, and cattle farmers who successfully applied to the first round of the Animal Health and Welfare Equipment and Technology Grant. These grants, of between £1,000 and £25,000, will help farmers with items ranging from livestock handling equipment to reduce lameness in sheep or cattle or sealed water tanks to reduce disease transmission in outdoor pigs, to automated monitoring systems and sensors which free up farmers' time and limit environmental stress in poultry housing.

See: Calf Housing for Health and Welfare 2023 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

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