



SHREWSBURY
BUSINESS CHAMBER

Issue 4 2021



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Chairman's Foreword

Kevin Lockwood

Manager of Shrewsbury Shopping Centres



Welcome to the December issue of the Shrewsbury Business Chamber magazine.

2021 has been a strange year for all of us as we have grown to understand more about Covid-19 and its impact on the world and the life that we love. We began the year in lockdown and returned to normality due to the success of the vaccine programme. Currently the UK has administered over 120m jabs and we are hopeful that the booster programme proves successful in combating the increased transmissibility of the Omicron variant.

As a Business Chamber, we are encouraged by several things this year.

The town's response to bouncing back and recovering from the pandemic. Businesses in the hospitality sector have reported strong summer figures and thankfully have not been forced to close in the race to stop the spread of Omicron.

Incredible support and engagement from our members this year. With attendance up on our Zoom meetings as our events committee work hard in finding interesting speakers to talk to our members.

We even managed to host a couple of face to face meetings with our ever popular event held at Love2Stay (Salop Leisure) a walking ghost tour of Shrewsbury town centre and last week we were able to host a relaxed evening of Cocktails and Canapé's whilst presenting awards for the fabulous Shrewsbury Christmas Window Competition.

We already have a very exciting line up of guest speakers for 2022

A very warm welcome is extended to several new members this year who value the networking opportunities, business support and lobbying that the Chamber offers its members Beauty by Sarah, Marches Care, The Shrewsbury Club, Energise Chiropractic and Monks

I would like to pay special thanks to some outgoing members of the Business Chamber who have worked incredibly hard to move us forward. Val Povall who worked as our secretary for over 20 years helping the Business Chamber through some difficult times in its history. Following her decision to leave in October, we have since awarded her the title of a lifetime member, so we can look forward to welcoming her to our social events in the future. Rosie Beswick, an executive member who has moved the Chamber forward significantly by refocusing our website and processes in a way that adds value more value to members and a specific training page, which collaborated training opportunities from Marches Growth Hub and other stakeholders. Max Ball who leaves the Business Chamber after 2 and a half years in the role. With a full time job at Salop Leisure and serving as the club captain of his squash club, he has made the difficult decision to pass on the baton and we now have big shoes to fill.

On behalf of the Chamber, I want to thank Val, Rosie and Max for their tremendous support and enthusiasm and wish them all the very best in their future ventures.

Wishing all our members a Happy Christmas and a prosperous New Year



Special thank you to Lee Roberts who can be found on Facebook and Twitter as: @salopsbfg for supplying the front cover picture

CHRISTMAS WINDOW COMPETITION



Penny Farthing



This winter we held another successful window competition in partnership with Shrewsbury BID. We had 33 entries across the Small window, large window and charity shop categories.

SMALL WINDOW WINNER

This year we invited sponsors for each category which allowed us to purchase new trophies which the winners would then be allowed to keep



Deja Brew

SMALL WINDOW RUNNER-UP



Meg Hawkins

The winners were invited to our Christmas event and accept the award from the sponsor of their category.

LARGE WINDOW WINNER



Tanners Wine

LARGE WINDOW RUNNER-UP

The Tanners Wine window display boosts the Christmas vibe on the east side of the town centre.



Home Essentials Charity Shop

CHARITY SHOP RUNNER-UP



Deja Brew

PEOPLE'S VOTE RUNNER UP

Heart & Arrow have now won the People's Vote awards for December 2020, August 2021 and December 2021



The Salvation Army

CHARITY SHOP WINNER



Heart & Arrow

PEOPLE'S VOTE WINNER



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We take the same approach with the charities and community groups that we choose to support – we like to back causes that make a real difference in our local community. Our specialist adviser Jenny Osborne has wide-ranging experience of the UK social welfare sector, including charitable and commercial organisations that provide care, support and advice for disadvantaged or vulnerable people.

Whether you're an individual, a business, a registered charity, a community group, a care provider, a trustee, a social enterprise, or just a group of friends who want to give something back, our team can help you find the right advice.

Email Jenny on josborne@henshalls.com or call 01743 231091



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Hr Dept Shropshire

Are you struggling with a People Problem that you could with some professional HR advice on?

Niamh Kelly - Director of The HR Dept Shropshire - is an award winning HR professional with over 30 years HR experience at Senior level in the corporate, public and voluntary sector. Working with SMEs across the County, The HR Dept Shropshire has rapidly developed a very strong client base of local companies. With offices in Shrewsbury and Telford, if you have a question about Recruitment & Right to Work; to Resolving Problems; to Redundancy and beyond; she and her team are here to help!



Shrewsbury BID

Shrewsbury BID is a business led and business funded partnership working for and representing over 500 members in Shrewsbury.

Shrewsbury BID is a not for profit company limited by guarantee and works closely with industry partners including The BID Foundation, Institute of Place Management and ATCM.



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Advice issued to businesses following Plan B announcement

The Government's directive for people to work from home should be less of a headache for businesses this time around, according to a Shropshire legal expert.

John Merry, head of employment at Lanyon Bowdler Solicitors, said:

"Due to COVID-19 continuing to circulate at a high level, many businesses in England have erred on the side of caution and continued to require that employees should work at home to the extent possible.

"For those who have not done so, then of course they must revert to this practice from Monday.

"Having had to adapt to such arrangements before, and in many cases with at least some of the workforce having adopted hybrid working arrangements involving an element of homeworking, it should be much easier for employers to adapt to the home working direction on this occasion than when it was first introduced.

"As the updated guidance states, though, anyone who can't work from home should continue to go into work, for example to access necessary equipment or where

their role must be performed in person.

"The guidance also recognises that home working will not be appropriate for workers for whom it will cause or contribute to mental or physical health difficulties, or who have 'a particularly challenging home working environment', and encourages employers to consider this.

"The guidance states that employees who need to continue to go into work should consider taking regular lateral flow tests. Employers should by all means encourage this – but in the normal course, they can't oblige employees to do so.

"The guidance also sets out a reminder that for those who attend their workplace, the Government will continue to provide up-to-date working safely guidance on how employers can reduce the risks relating to COVID-19, which they should consider when preparing their health and safety risk assessments, and apply."

For more employment law advice, contact John Merry by calling 0800 652 3371 or visit the website at www.lblaw.co.uk



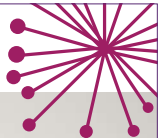
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Salop Leisure named UK's best new caravan dealer for fourth time



Shropshire-based caravan and motorhome dealership Salop Leisure has named the best in the UK for the fourth time.

The company, which has been in business for 55 years and employs more than 200 people at sales centres in Shrewsbury, Machynlleth and Stourport-on-Severn, has been named the top supplying dealers of new touring caravans.

The Owner Satisfaction Awards 2022 are based on surveys undertaken by Camping and Caravanning Club members and Practical Caravan magazine readers. A total of 3,449 owners completed the survey this year - 200 more than in 2020.

"A truly satisfying ownership experience relies on a great product backed by superb sales and aftercare, so the best caravan dealerships also deserve to be recognised," said an awards spokesman.

"Standards among the top performers are high, and we don't want the industry's top performers to rest on their laurels, so we've increased the minimum score for a Gold Award from 80% to 85%.

"You're unlikely to be frowning if you buy from Salop Leisure in Shrewsbury, leaping up to first from eighth place in 2020. A 91% satisfaction rating easily achieves the Gold Award standard and leaves clear daylight between Salop and the best of the rest."

It's the fourth time in nine years that Salop Leisure has won the overall award which is accompanied by a Gold Award for Best New Caravan Supplying Dealers. The company also collected Gold Awards for supplying pre-owned caravans and motorhomes.

Salop Leisure's managing director Mark Bebb said: "We are delighted to be named the Best New Caravan Supplying Dealers in the UK for the fourth time. We are very proud of the team at Salop Leisure who, despite the challenges caused by Covid-19, have continued to work hard to provide great customer service.

"As a business, we never rest on our laurels. We believe there is still room for improvement and that's why we shall continue to strive to provide an even better service to our customers."

Salop Leisure aims to be a one stop shop for customers, who can buy, service, repair and store their touring caravans and motorhomes in Shrewsbury. The company also sells caravan holiday homes and luxury lodges, working with caravan parks across the Heart of England and Mid Wales.

The company's headquarters, located alongside Shrewsbury bypass at Emstrey, has become a tourism destination, as it houses Love Coffee restaurant and Love Plants, a specialist plants centre.

On site facilities also include award winning secure caravan and motorhome storage, which has won the CaSSOA (Caravan Storage Site Owners' Association) platinum award.

Adjoining Salop Leisure's headquarters is the company's multi-award-winning Love2Stay glamping and touring caravan resort.

Painting & Decorating students volunteer their skills to help transform a derelict pub into a new centre for Shrewsbury homeless charity

A class of Shrewsbury Colleges Group Painting & Decorating students have received the work experience opportunity of a lifetime: the chance to completely redecorate a derelict pub in the town centre and help out a local homeless charity in the process.

The former Rock & Fountain pub on Castle Foregate has been bought by [Shrewsbury Ark](#) as their new base of operations. The charity supports homeless people and other vulnerable adults through a drop-in day centre that provides essentials and resources (like hot meals, shower facilities and Internet access) to anyone in the community who needs them.

Emily Bell, Chair of Shrewsbury Ark, explained how much of a difference the spacious new building will make: "Our new premises will provide a safe and comfortable space for those who need to use our day centre facilities but also a welcoming environment for anyone looking for support with addiction, poverty, mental health issues or basic loneliness."

She continued: "The increased office space means we can work in partnership with other charities and organisations to provide advice, healthcare and practical support to those in our community who are struggling."

The project has been a huge undertaking for the charity since the building needed fully renovating. SCG has already worked with Shrewsbury Ark in the past through our [Health & Social Care](#) department, so the charity reached out to the college's work experience coordinators looking for volunteer painters to help take on this difficult task.

The project was a brilliant opportunity for the [Painting &](#)



[Decorating](#) department. The building is so big that teacher Jose Jarrett has been able to take her whole class into town to work on it together and the renovation fits perfectly with what the Level 1 students are currently covering on their course.

This means that they've been able to cover the theory in class every week and then head out to actually put it into practice on a real building that comes complete with all the challenges that can't be replicated in the classroom: decades of old wallpaper, dimly lit rooms, working on-site in the winter weather.

This opportunity to work in a professional environment has meant a lot to the students, who have become livelier and more engaged in their course because of it. "I can see the difference in the way they are focused, their enthusiasm," Jose said. "They have been a credit to the college."

Chloe Powell, 17, described her experience working on-site as "amazing." The chance to actually get to try out the job she wants to do in the future has been invaluable to her: "I love it. I enjoy coming out of college. It's great

knowing what I want to do in the future and knowing that I definitely want to do it now. I wasn't sure before doing this work experience. I wouldn't have known without getting to do an actual job."

The fact that the students are using their skills to contribute to charity is important to them and has added to how passionate they are about the project. "You don't get any reward," Chloe said. "It's the pride that you did that."

Others involved in the project had glowing praise for the class. Emily Bell thanked them on behalf of Shrewsbury Ark, saying: "We are so grateful to the students who have come in to help ready the premises for moving in. As a charity, every penny counts, and such a large building requires a lot of decorating! The students have done a fantastic job, working hard and to a very professional standard. We cannot thank them and their instructors enough for all the work they have put in on our behalf."

Shop late, meet Santa and make some festive friends at Shrewsbury Darwin Centre this Christmas

Shrewsbury's Darwin Centre will be giving people more time to do their Christmas shopping this year, opening until 7pm every Wednesday from 24 November to 22 December, and every day from 20 to 23 December.

And in December there'll also be a chance to meet The Grinch, the Ice Giants and a Polar Bear – and see Shrewdolph the giant reindeer. And Santa will be in his Darwin Centre grotto from this Saturday (5 December) until Wednesday 23 December.

A visit to Santa's grotto costs £4 per child, and includes a gift. All proceeds go to Shrewsbury Town in the Community. Bookings can be made now at <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/santas-enchanted-grotto-tickets-209404714137>

Kevin Lockwood, Darwin Centre manager, said: "We look forward to welcoming people of all ages to the centres during this year's festive period where they can enjoy a safe shopping experience. "The shopping centres have something for everyone this Christmas, whether you're shopping, eating, drinking, looking for that ideal gift or wanting to meet Santa. "And this year our festive friends The Grinch



impersonator, Ice Giants, and friendly Polaris the Polar Bear, will be roaming around the Centre at various times, so feel free to stop by with the family and say hello and have a bit of fun while you are here."

A visit to Santa's grotto costs £4 per child, and includes a gift. All proceeds go to Shrewsbury Town in the Community. Bookings can be made now [by clicking here](#). The centres will be closed on Christmas Day and New Year's Day.

Festive Open Hours:

Wednesday 15 December - 9am to 7pm
Monday 20 December - 9am to 7pm
Tuesday 21 December - 9am to 7pm
Wednesday 22nd December - 9am to 7pm
Thursday 23 December - 9am to 7pm
Friday 24 December - 9am to 5pm
Saturday 25 December - CLOSED
Sunday 26 December - 10.30am to 4.30pm
Monday 27 December (bank holiday) - 9am to 5.30pm
Tuesday 28 December (bank holiday) - 9am to 5.30pm
Wednesday 29 December - 9am to 5.30pm
Thursday 30 December - 9am to 5.30pm
Friday 31 December - 9am to 5.30pm
Saturday 1 January 2022 - CLOSED
Sunday 2 January - 10.30am to 4.30pm
Monday 3 January (bank holiday) - 10am to 5pm



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NEW TEAM, NEW SALES STRUCTURE AT SHREWSBURY PIPE AND DRAINAGE DISTRIBUTOR

It's all change at Shrewsbury based Pipekit, as the independent leading distributor of pipework systems and drainage solutions looks to invest in and re-organise its sales division to strengthen and grow its national business. This autumn has seen five new team members join Pipekit in the biggest recruitment drive since the 10 years company evolved and offers a springboard for the company to move forward.

Following the various business challenges faced over the last 18 months, Martyn Rowlands, MD and owner of Pipekit took stock at the start of 2021 and looked to re-organise and invest in the sales and customer service offering. This new make-up sees the workforce split into three geographical teams: North, Central and South with each area having a dedicated sales executive and customer service advisor.

New starters to the business are Paula Lovegrove – Sales Executive North, Jane Cutler – Sales Executive Central, Stephen Pillow – Sales Executive South, Hannah Upton-Evans – Customer Service Advisor North and Chloe Roberts - Customer Service Advisor South. These five join Joanna Trocka, Customer Service Advisor Central, who started at Pipekit in May 2020. The Sales Executive and Customer Service Advisor for each area will work closely together to win and deliver business in their respective areas.

The new look sales and customer service team will report into Jamie McQueen, Sales Director, who, as part of the recent business evolution, has also become a shareholder at the company and will sit on the Pipekit board alongside Martyn Rowlands.

Commenting on the new structure, Martyn Rowlands said: "As with most businesses and companies across the world, the last 18 months have been unprecedented and offered up many challenges. One positive from the process was that it allowed me as owner and MD of the company to have a moment to reflect and look to introduce ideas and plans to help us evolve and strengthen our offering going forward". He continues: "As a business we looked at the gaps, where we could improve on and gained feedback from our clients. We decided to re-structure to offer a more dedicated and joined up regional sales and customer service team; where each has their own area sales targets and customer responsibilities to drive sales and allow us to service our customers more efficiently and effectively".

Pipekit offers leading brand pipework and drainage solutions supported by expert advice and superior customer service. For all enquiries call 01743 860088 or email: enquiries@pipekit.co.uk

New engagement hub launched for pedestrian-friendly Shrewsbury weekend trial

People are being asked to have their say on the new weekend traffic arrangements in Shrewsbury.

The centre of Shrewsbury - Wyle Cop (uphill), High Street and Shoplatch - are currently closed to through-traffic from 10am to 4pm on Saturdays and Sundays to help reduce traffic in the town at weekends.

An official consultation has been launched which will help councillors decide whether to make the arrangements permanent in the future. People can go to www.shrewsburymoves.com for more information about the trial, and to answer a range of questions about what they think of the scheme.

Steve Brown, head of transport and the environment with Shropshire Council, said: "Following feedback from earlier this year and discussions with partners, we have introduced a revised scheme on weekends and are now keen to hear people's views. "It's really important that businesses, residents and visitors have their say so an informed choice can be made about longer-term arrangements."

Seb Slater, executive director of Shrewsbury BID, which represents more than 500 businesses in the town centre, said it was important for businesses to make their views known.

"The consultation website is very easy to use and doesn't take long at all - you can answer as many or as few questions as you choose," he said.

"We did a survey of our members earlier this year and the vast majority wanted some kind of traffic restrictions to give the town centre a more pleasant atmosphere, so we are pleased this new version of the trial has started.

"We are also hoping to have independent surveyors out and about in the town centre over the coming weeks to ask people for their thoughts directly."

Alongside the weekend trial, the Shrewsbury Big Town Plan Partnership, made up of Shropshire Council, Shrewsbury Town Council and Shrewsbury BID, is developing a new movement strategy for the town, following feedback received on the Shrewsbury Masterplan Vision earlier this year. Helen Ball, clerk of Shrewsbury Town Council, said: "Extensive consultation with residents, businesses and organisations has been carried out through the Big Town Plan, and it is clear that people want to see less through-traffic in the centre of Shrewsbury.

"We are really keen to hear the views of as many residents, businesses and visitors as possible about this current weekend



arrangement.

"As the future movement strategy is developed, it is likely that a number of schemes and initiatives will be trialled, so it's vital that people give us feedback as we move through the process."

To get involved, visit www.shrewsburymoves.com

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Winter weather driving mistakes warning

Shropshire motorists who fail to take winter weather conditions seriously could be jeopardising their car insurance cover.

Dave Williams, from Henshalls Insurance Brokers in Newport and Shrewsbury, said with the weather worsening as winter really starts to bite, drivers could be completely unaware of the risks they were running.

"We've all been there on a cold and frosty morning when you're in a rush and you haven't got time to sit and wait while your car warms up and defrosts, so you leave it unlocked on the drive with the engine running.

"But as most policies have a duty of care clause in them, if someone jumped into your empty car and drove off, your policy would be invalid and the insurer would refuse to pay out."

Dave said failing to de-ice and demist the whole car was another risk that most motorists had taken at some point.



"It's a legal requirement that you have to clear any obstructions from your windscreen before you drive – and that includes ice. But it's not only the windscreen you need to clear, it's all the other windows and mirrors on your vehicle too, even if your car has parking sensors.

"And don't forget about any snow on the roof of your car either. Travelling with a pile of snow on top of the vehicle could invalidate your insurance and even lead to a police fine.

"Snow on the roof can be a hazard for you and for other drivers too because the snow could fall off and block your vision, or the vision of other motorists, particularly if you're driving at speed or braking."

Dave said even winter outfits could lead to serious consequences for drivers who were wrapped up against the cold weather.

"It's not against the law, but failing to wear the right footwear while driving is a breach of the Highway Code – so whether you're wearing your winter boots or your Christmas party high heels, it could be classed as driving without due care and attention.

"Bulky winter coats, Christmas jumpers, and fancy dress outfits could all impede your driving when it comes to visibility as well as your ability to handle the steering wheel and other controls.

"And anything that affects your driving in that way could lead to a £5,000 fine and potentially three points on your licence."

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HOW SHREWSBURY SMES CAN THINK STRATEGICALLY ABOUT TALENT PLANNING AND RESOURCING POST PANDEMIC AND BREXIT.

You do not need to spend long perusing headlines to understand the labour shortages which some industries face, notably haulage, food supply chain and hospitality. For many businesses it is seriously curtailing operations.

It is easy to see the causal link from big themes like Brexit, which has restricted the movement of EU citizens, and the pandemic which has also restricted movement - as well as make people reprioritise what they are looking for in a job.

Níamh Kelly from The HR Dept Shropshire outlines how, by adopting a strategic approach to recruitment and retention, local SMEs can tackle this issue.

Níamh explains: "The severity of the labour crisis in some sectors has taken many by surprise, even if the origins are clear to trace. By adopting a strategic approach, you can address the issue in clearly thought-out stages, and benefit from being proactive.

"Whether you are experiencing the squeeze already, or fear you may be affected in the future, a sensible place to start is with a workforce audit to understand your present situation.

"This does not need to be onerous, but make sure you collect useful information that will inform future decision-making. For instance, profiling employee age will help you understand how many of your workforce are approaching retirement. You could capture the length of service to identify where churn occurs most. Overseas workers are still permitted by a new visa system, so monitoring nationality could be useful.

"With your audit complete, turn your attention to creating a priority list of the roles which have the

highest impact on your business. Knowing where to expend your effort (and budget) most effectively is a key element of thinking strategically.

"Having completed these initial pieces of work, you should be armed with data and insight to start targeting specific job roles. How can you make these more attractive? Budgets are often tight and, yes, salary is important; but it is not the be-all and end-all.

"Perks are one cost-effective solution. Another area to look at is improving the experience for staff doing your roles. Many of the jobs which were formerly performed by EU migrants have unfavourable working conditions, such as long or unusual hours, hard manual labour, uncertainty and seasonal variation. Think creatively to address such issues. How can you make hard-to-fill vacancies more attractive?

"A key factor, especially for sectors looking to replace EU labour, is to recognise where training and reskilling is required. How can you open up your job roles to a wider domestic pool of workers? By this I mean creating career pathways for the next generation, or for more experienced workers looking to switch sectors.

One element of this could be to use government schemes such as apprenticeship incentives or the Kickstart Scheme. Another idea could be to explore technological solutions like eLearning.

"Local SMEs will want to pursue initiatives appropriate to their own size and budget. With the right rigour and creative touch, they can benefit from taking a strategic approach. Professional advice is available.

Níamh Kelly - Director of The HR Dept Shropshire; The HR Dept Wrexham & Chester and The HR Dept Mid Wales - is an award winning HR professional with over 30 years HR experience at a Senior level in the corporate, public and voluntary sector. Working with SMEs across the region; she and her team have rapidly developed a very strong client base of local companies. You can contact them on Shropshire@hrdept.co.uk or 01743 290474

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New Member



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With a pro-active approach to healthcare, we look to tackle many leading symptoms that keep people inactive, unable to work and from doing the things they love. Our members have reported a reduction in headaches, pains and aches in the body, as well as being generally better in themselves. This allows you to be more active on a day-to-day basis.

We would love to offer our expertise to the Shrewsbury Business Chamber. Any reader will receive a Consultation for £50.00 instead of £65.00 as a limited offer. We look forward to meeting you soon!



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The next cohort for Shropshire is starting in

January 2022 and is limited to 20 participants so if you are looking for a business development programme for yourself or a senior member of your team then book your seat today.

To register your place, please click the link below and select Coventry University in the "show business school" drop down:

[Visit Website](#)



Shrewsbury Business Chamber support Crane Counselling

Last month Shrewsbury Business Chamber donated a laptop to Crane Counselling.

The business established in 2017 provides a wide range of counselling services and solutions for individuals, couples, families and now young people.

Crane Counselling are opening another counselling room in the Roy Fletcher centre and the laptop will be useful for note taking and other parts of their operations. The organisation is funded by their chaity shop on Mardol which is full of furniture, household items as well as books and electrical goods.

Crane Counselling are currently recruiting for volunteers to staff the shop. So if you can help please let them know by calling [01743 240546](tel:01743240546)





Spotting spam sites and encouraging employees to stay alert

Spam websites are becoming increasingly inventive and distressing in equal measure but what are they, what are they after and how do you and your employees spot them?

Shrewsbury-based PC Net Solutions has highlighted the dangers of phishing scams before - the direct approach by a scammer to try and get you to reveal your personal information, bank details and access to devices and networks through copycat emails, phone calls, text messages and even by good old-fashioned post which, at first glance, may look like the real thing.

Don't get caught out

But there are other subtle ways that can be used by scammers, designed to convince you that you are viewing a legitimate business or other organisation - the creation of spam websites, methods which can easily catch you out if you are not very careful.

Spam sites are set up to mimic an official website, just waiting to draw you in and provide you with disinformation or get you to do something you will later regret. A good example of this is when genuine event tickets have sold out and a spam site is set up to trick people into buying tickets which don't actually exist.

All too real

We know of one event in Shropshire where the spam site actually had downloadable tickets with QR codes and everything else that made them appear genuine. This kind of thing is of course on the increase again as more and more events return after 18 months of cancellations due to the pandemic.

Another problem arose when a local school bonfire and fireworks night was adversely affected after a spam site was set up with the sole aim of raising money through adverts posted on it. There was a lengthy written narrative which bore no relation to the wording on the original official website publicising the event and also featured **THE WRONG DATE**.

There was nothing organisers of the event could do as the spam site had a disclaimer on it which read:

"Please be advised that Bonfire Night Party accepts no liability towards any of the events listed. The website offers listings of bonfire night however any events listed may not be official events taking place at that specific location or at the start times or dates listed. Please check local listings with your local bonfire society for any events listed as events may not be taking place officially on this date. Bonfire Night takes place on 5th November as this when it is celebrated however official events may take place on other dates."

It is important to warn your employees that if they see a disclaimer like this it usually means it can't be trusted. Spelling and poor grammar such as this particular example are also a good sign that it's not genuine.

Taking responsibility

It's important that people recognise the dangers and always keep their wits about them. If something doesn't look right then it probably isn't! Businesses especially need to be vigilant and having anti-virus software installed doesn't account for human error and someone clicking on something they shouldn't or responding to a request for sensitive information.

It is something which should be incorporated into company training programmes with employees fully understanding the implications and not relying totally on the technology. Helpful tips include:

- Question every communication
- Beware of anything you are not expecting
- Check the sender's branding colours
- Don't reveal personal or company information
- If in doubt, carry out your own checks

The onus is very much on the individual to ensure these dangers are permanently kept in mind and that they always remain on the highest level of alert.

Six reasons why a virtual company Christmas is a good idea

This time of year is usually filled with festivities. From Christmas parties to the legendary Secret Santa gift exchange, there is normally no shortage of reasons to get together with friends, family and co-workers during December.

But after a difficult year curtailing coronavirus, and with continued efforts to keep the risk of transmission low, the festive season is already looking very different this year.

Varying government restrictions remain in place which require physical distancing and significantly reduced gatherings. Many teams have been dispersed, downsized, or are working in a very different way to this time last year.

So what options are left for seasonal celebrations in the workplace? And how can employers reward employees in the absence of the annual staff party?

Get creative this Christmas

Employees may be working at a distance or not yet be filled with festive cheer. However, that shouldn't deter you from arranging a few cost-effective virtual events to lift spirits and bring them together.

If your team find joy in generosity, why not set up a virtual Secret Santa using an online name selector? Alternatively, get buy-in from employees for fun charity events, like Christmas Jumper Day.

Amongst other things, 2020 may well be remembered as the "Year of the Quiz"! Why not revive this summer lockdown favourite with your team?

Communication is key to ensure that everyone gets the message, including those on furlough leave. Make sure they feel included by inviting them to a casual Christmas catch-up or game via Zoom. This is not only allowed during furlough but encouraged, so long as employees are not undertaking any work.

Not everyone will feel like participating however, for various



reasons. It's important to explain that your virtual events are voluntary and that any coercing of those choosing to opt out will not be tolerated.

What are the benefits of virtual staff events?

There are many benefits to celebrating Christmas virtually with employees this year. Some of which include:

1. Bring employees together, no matter where they are

With many people continuing to work remotely, employees could be missing out on the social aspect of your company culture. Hosting a virtual event, which isn't to talk about work, can make your team feel valued and better connected.

2. Reduce the risk of vicarious liability

By facilitating Christmas themed calls, or even virtual leavers drinks for departing employees, you reduce the risk of employees arranging meet ups themselves, which could be against COVID guidelines if done in person. Protect employees and your business by providing a safe outlet.

3. Combat loneliness at work

Christmas can be a lonely time for some, especially with the added pressures of social distancing this year. A virtual Christmas event can be another contact point, and provide you with insight on how employees are coping whilst working from home.

4. Boost employee engagement

Sadly, cancelling the staff party is inevitable, but cancelling all celebration is not. Filling the void with some fun online events shows employees that you care. It may give them the boost they need to stay engaged through the winter.

5. Reward staff with cost effective benefits

For many businesses, finances have taken a hit this year. If you're seeking cost-effective ways to reward staff, a Christmas call or virtual game should be top of the list. Additionally, small and frequent signs of appreciation can do wonders for employee retention.

6. Maintain good workplace well-being

The effects of the coronavirus pandemic have longstanding implications for mental health. Your workplace well-being could be at risk if employees feel they have little to smile about. A fun virtual Christmas event can help during these darker winter days, whilst a workplace well-being strategy can help in the long term.

HR Support when you need it

If you have some ideas for a virtual company Christmas, but want to run them past HR to make sure they are low risk, get in touch today. We'll support you through the virtual festive period and beyond, ensuring your workplace well-being strategy is ready for anything.

Shrewsbury IT company joins EPX Technical Services family

A Shropshire IT company has joined forces with one of the top providers in the UK - as it extends its team and its offering for county clients.

PC Net Solutions, based in Shrewsbury, has become part of the EPX Technical Services family.

Managing Director Katy Jones said the team could not wait to start working together with EPX after the partnership was officially agreed on December 2.

"PC Net and EPX share a common goal and, through this exciting collaboration, both our team and the team at EPX will have opportunities to reach out to more businesses and continue offering top-quality IT solutions and support for them," Katy said.

"We have known the guys at EPX and have been exchanging knowledge with them for quite a while.

"Our customer care is so important, and it is fantastic to connect with an IT support company as reactive and proactive as EPX are. We are confident that our customers will be happy with the increased range of experience and skills we can offer together."



PC Net Solutions has successfully trading and growing its business client base since 1998 with a focus on professional, friendly and customer-focused care and support.

EPX has been established for over 15 years and has earned an outstanding reputation for professionalism and being trusted IT partners. Recently, EPX has won the 2021 Channel Futures MSP 501 Award and been named as one of the top 25 MSPs (Managed Service Providers) in the UK, along with being ranked 404th in the world.

The newly established partnership also brings many synergies through the use of existing skills, resources and products, and facilitates the exchange of knowledge, training, and development opportunities.

Daniel Ellis, CEO of EPX, said: "We have known Katy and the PC Net team for several years and are incredibly excited to welcome them to our team. The support team is now much larger, with a wealth of experience in security and cloud technology, plus a highly professional approach to customer success."

As a result of this new partnership, the total headcount now stands at 25 staff, and over time PC Net will begin trading as EPX.

"Our clients can be assured that there will be no change to the high standard of service they receive," adds Katy. "The addition of EPX will simply allow us to strengthen our existing range of solutions and introduce additional skillsets and specialisms to the PC Net team."

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Lawyer warns of drink-driving dangers over Christmas and mobile phone law changes in new year

A Shropshire-based lawyer is alerting people to the dangers of drink-driving over the festive season and the strengthening of laws in the new year on using mobile phones while at the wheel. Steve Scully, associate solicitor advocate at Lanyon Bowdler specialising in driving offences, said it was important for people not to let their guard down and be aware of the legal demands on drivers at all times.

"Drink-driving is dangerous at any time of year but Christmas is the period when we can be more susceptible to the temptation of alcohol and it simply isn't worth it - it can have life-changing implications and lead to the loss of your licence," he said.

"People may think they are fit to drive after having a drink, but the only way to be really certain is not to drink anything if you are planning to drive. It's also important to be aware of the risk of being over the legal drink-drive limit the morning after drinking.

"Whenever alcohol is involved, it's really important to be aware of how it can still be in your system the next day.

"Guidance shows that you should allow up to three-and-a-half hours per large glass of wine before driving, which adds up to 14 hours if you have had four large glasses of wine.

"If you have been drinking medium-strength beer, it is advised that you leave two-and-a-half hours for every pint - so if you have finished drinking five pints of beer at 11pm, you shouldn't drive until 11.30am the next day.

"It's worth bearing in mind that everyone's body deals with alcohol in different ways and at different speeds but these timescales give you a good idea and are worth remembering." Steve said he also wanted to highlight the changes regarding using a mobile phone while driving - a move made by the Government to strengthen the existing laws and make our roads safer.

"It is currently an offence to text or make a call on a hand-held mobile phone while driving but from the new year it will also be against the law to scroll through playlists, take videos and photos and play games on a mobile phone while driving," he added.

"It's all part of a drive to crack down on road safety by tightening the rules and anyone breaking the law will face at least a £200 fixed penalty and have six points on their licence."

For more advice about driving offences, Steve can be contacted on 0800 652 3371 or email stephen.scully@lblaw.co.uk



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Apprentice hoping to climb career ladder with Shrewsbury lift company

A family-run lift company has appointed a new apprentice to help it address the shortfall of highly-skilled staff engineers.



Engineering apprentice Tom Owen has joined Belvidere Lifts, which was founded in Shrewsbury in 2002.

The business says it has grown steadily, based on the firm foundation of quality products and service, and wanted to ensure that all employees reflected this. Training its own employees through apprenticeships has been key to its growth, it added.

Stephen Nankivell, managing director of Belvidere Lifts, said: "I started my career as an apprentice and knew that this was the way to build a good team, trained to our standards, and embracing our values.

"Our sector is specialised and struggles for highly skilled engineers but apprenticeships are helping us to address that. The company's biggest asset is its employees.

"Tom is settling in well and is spending time with a service engineer, supporting on-site maintenance. He will then move in to the workshop undertaking repairs and ultimately installation.

"He will follow the maintenance and operations engineering technician level three apprenticeship. This standard is ideal for the sector and is helping to fill the skills gap for service engineers."

Tom had studied a level three public services qualification with the intention of joining the armed forces, but a change of location and a

change in circumstances required him to take stock.

Tom said: "Engineering has always been at the top of my career preferences and I wanted training and qualifications which would help me to build a good career.

"The apprenticeship at Belvidere Lifts was offering just that and there is also the possibility of progression on to a higher apprenticeship in the future. I am really enjoying the work and colleagues are really helpful."

Amanda Carpenter, project lead for the Ladder for Shropshire, said: "We were delighted to support Belvidere Lifts to progress this opportunity and wish Tom every success with his apprenticeship."

Employers wanting to know more about apprenticeships can contact Amanda on amanda@ladderforshropshire.org

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