

Written 7 March 2022

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!

We stand with Ukraine!

The days since the invasion of Ukraine by the Russian State have been terrifying for all those people under fire in the country. For the rest of us, the shock at such reckless action has been profound. We condemn the violence replacing the diplomatic dialogue that should be ongoing between all the parties involved in the conflict.



While Britain has very limited direct trade links with Russia, the conflict will inevitably have a wide, indirect economic impact.

The main economic linkage would be higher natural gas prices. We think a conflict would keep inflation higher for longer and potentially bring forward some rate rises and with faster interest rate increases would quicken the housing market slowdown that many analysts have forecast this year as mortgage costs would increase.

If you are a UK business selling goods or services to Ukraine or Russia, you can contact the Export Support Team (ESS) by phone or online. ESS is the first point of contact for business and trade enquiries relating to Ukraine or Russia and continues to provide support to businesses exporting to Europe.

The ESS is a government helpline and online service where all UK businesses can get answers to practical questions about exporting. It gives access to cross-government information and support in one place

The Department for International Trade (DIT) will continue to work with businesses and business representative groups from all sectors, in all parts of the UK, to help make the service as useful as possible for businesses.

You can [access the Export Support Service online](#) or by calling 0300 303 8955 where you will be put in touch with a member of the export support team.

Do you want to grow your business?

Then ask us for a copy of our guide called “57 Ways to Grow Your Business”! Our publication is packed full of bright ideas for the Serious Entrepreneur and starts with the four basics of growth.

All the ideas in this guide ultimately revolve around four basic insights about growing a business. You can:

1. Increase the number of customers
2. Increase the number of times each one does business with you
3. Increase the average value of each transaction
4. Increase your own effectiveness and efficiency

Here are some other business principles that we explore in the guide:

- What you can measure you can manage
- Build in unique core differentiators and focus on them constantly
- It's more important to be different than it is to be better
- Cutting the price is always an option but there is usually a better way – increasing value
- Break compromises and lower the barriers to people doing business with you
- Systemise every aspect of your business
- Empower your team to make it right for every customer
- Create a clear and detailed action plan

Ask us for a copy – you never know there may be a gem or two in there for you to help you grow faster!

What if you put up your prices?

Or maybe increased the number of customers, reduced expenses or even decreased prices. Do you know the effect of these changes to your bottom line?

Successful businesses right now have one thing in common – they are prepared to make fast changes to their plans!

With Brexit, Covid-19 and supply chain problems, flexibility is the key attribute needed to survive and prosper in an uncertain economy.

Just suppose we could show you movements on profit when flexing key variables with a simple but effective tool called "Business Analyst".

ABC Limited

How much profit would you like to make?

	Last year	As % of Revenue
Sales	500,000	100%
Direct Costs	150,000	30%
Direct Wages	300,000	60%
Gross Profit	150,000	30%
Expenses	125,000	25%
Depreciation		
Other income		
Net Profit	25,000	5%

Please note the following potential profit movements

Reducing expenses by	5%	may only increase profits by	£ 3,500
Increasing "sales" by	5%	may increase profits by	£ 7,500
Increasing "prices" by	5%	may increase profits by	£ 25,000
Increasing "prices" by	5%	= the same profit as before even if you lose volume of	14%
Decreasing "prices" by	5%	= the same profit only if you increase volume by	20%

Potential Profit based on "price"

■ Additional profit ■ Original profit

% spinner

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Together we could enter your current figures such as turnover, direct costs such as material and labour and expenses and analyse the effect of rising National Insurance Costs, inflation and work out how these could impact your business. We could then examine key performance indicators and look at all the options such as the impact of a price rise or reduction, increasing sales or reducing expenses to help you maximise your profit and set targets of where you want your business to be in twelve months. We can look at "What if Scenarios" and set a strategy for success. Talk to us about how we can work together on your business and stay ahead of the curve!

What is business asset finance?

Business Asset Finance is an agreement that enables businesses to obtain the assets needed to manage and/or expand effectively and spread the cost/outlay.

Regardless of the size of business, the decision to invest in assets is always difficult but take a look at some of the benefits:

- A great alternative to a traditional bank loan
- Increased tax benefits
- Payments can be budgeted according to cash flow
- Lenders secure against the asset.
- Our experts can advise on:
 - Hire Purchase - allows you to buy an asset and pay for it over a period of time, spreading the cost via an agreement with a finance company. An initial deposit is payable; and
 - Finance Lease – a rental agreement through which an asset can be obtained for a fixed term. At the end of the initial term, the agreement can be extended, or sold with a rebate of the sale proceeds to the client.

You will need to ensure your management accounts are up to date, you have current detailed lists of debtors and creditors and all assets, and you might need up to date projections before a lender will consider your application. Please talk to us about finance, our finance experts have many years of experience and success in advising business across a wide range of sectors in obtaining working capital finance solutions.

New ICO video surveillance guidance

The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) has published new guidance on processing of personal data captured by video surveillance systems

The guidance provides organisations in the public and private sectors with:

- information on new applications of video surveillance technologies
- guidance on using these technologies in accordance with the data protection laws

Technologies covered in the guidance include:

- traditional closed circuit television (CCTV)
- automatic number plate recognition
- body worn video
- facial recognition technology
- drones
- technologies such as smart doorbells and dash cams

Organisations using surveillance systems that process the personal data of identifiable individuals need to comply with the UK General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018.

If you operate video surveillance systems that view or record individuals, or capture information on individuals through other types of surveillance technologies, this guidance will be a vital resource for your business.

See: [Video Surveillance | ICO](#)

Construction business cyber security guidance

New guidance published for the construction sector to improve the security and resilience of their business against cyber threats

The National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) has partnered with the Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB) to produce guidance to help small-to-medium sized construction businesses protect themselves from cyber-attacks.

Recent high profile cyber-attacks against the construction industry illustrate how businesses of all sizes are being targeted by criminals. As the industry continues to embrace and adopt new digital ways of working, it is more important than ever to understand how you might be vulnerable to cyber-attacks, and what you can do to protect your business.

The guidance is aimed at small-to-medium sized businesses working in the construction industry and the wider supply chain - including the manufacture of building supplies, surveying, and the sale of buildings.

While you cannot guarantee protection against all the cyber threats you face, by implementing the steps described, you'll be protected from most common cyber-attacks. And should the worst happen, you'll be able to quickly recover.

See: [Construction Guidance English Web Version.pdf \(ncsc.gov.uk\)](#)

HMRC customers have one month left to switch their Post Office card account

HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) is reminding about 7,500 tax credits, Child Benefit and Guardian's Allowance customers they have just one month left to switch their Post Office card account.

HMRC will stop making payments to Post Office card accounts after 5 April 2022 so customers must notify HMRC of their new account details, so they don't miss out on vital payments.

In November 2021, HMRC extended the deadline to the end of the financial year. The one-off extension to the contract meant customers could temporarily continue to receive their payments into their Post Office account, giving them extra time to set up new accounts and notify the department.

Nearly 138,800 customers have already switched their accounts and provided HMRC with updated bank account details. Time is running out for the remaining 7,500.

Customers can choose to receive their benefit payments to a bank, building society or credit union account. If they already have an alternative account, they can contact HMRC now to update their details.

See: [HMRC customers have one month left to switch their Post Office card account - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/hmrc-customers-have-one-month-left-to-switch-their-post-office-card-account)

Use the Correct National Insurance Letter to pay the correct amount

With the 1.25% increase in National Insurance Contributions (NICs) from 6 April 2022 to help fund health and social care it is important that employers use the letter that is appropriate for that employee.

This is particularly important where you employ apprentices under the age 25 (H) and other employees under the age of 21 (M) as there are no employer contributions where the employee is paid no more than £50,270 a year. Although the employee pays 13.25% on earnings above the 15.05% employer contributions are not payable. This is clearly designed to encourage employers to take on apprentices and young adults.

Five new NIC letters are being introduced from 6 April 2022 for military veterans (V) and employees working in a designated Freeport area (in most cases F). Note that the exemption from employers NIC for military veterans only operates for the first 12 months of their civilian employment and the exemption for Freeport workers applies for 36 months. In each case after that initial period the normal NIC letter should apply to that employee.

There are three further NIC letters for workers in Freeport areas with special circumstances.

Check the tables below for the correct letter!

Category letter	Employee group
A	All employees apart from those in groups B, C, J, H, M and Z in this table
B	Married women and widows entitled to pay reduced National Insurance
C	Employees over the State Pension age
J	Employees who can defer National Insurance because they're already paying it in another job
H	Apprentice under 25
M	Employees under 21
V	Military veterans in first 12 months of civilian employment
Z	Employees under 21 who can defer National Insurance because they're already paying it in another job

The 4 NIC letters that apply for workers within a Freeport are as follows:-

Category letter	Employee group
F	Standard category letter equivalent (not within I, S, or L)
I	Married women and widows entitled to pay reduced National Insurance contributions
S	Employees over state pension age
L	Employees who can defer National Insurance contributions

Carrier Bag Levy guidance

From 1 April 2022, the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) will increase the Carrier Bag Levy in Northern Ireland from 5 pence to 25 pence for all bags priced at £5 or less.

DAERA has published new guidance on Carrier Bag Levy legislation.

This guidance:

- highlights the key messages of the charging arrangements
- provides some detail on the charging requirement
- deals with exemptions from the charging requirement
- deals with the arrangements for payment of the net proceeds of the levy to DAERA
- summarises the record-keeping requirements
- explains the civil sanctions that DAERA can apply in the event of failure to comply with the requirements of the regulations

See: [Guidance on Carrier Bags Charging Legislation in NI \(from 1 April 2022\) | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs \(daera-ni.gov.uk\)](#)

COVID Recovery Programme for Organisations

The Department for Communities (DfC) has launched the Covid Recovery Programme for Organisations, which has been co-designed with seven sectoral bodies that will deliver the scheme. Eligible organisations can apply for awards of up to £50,000, and more in some exceptional circumstances.



The programme's overarching aim is to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on not-for-profit organisations in the culture, arts, languages, heritage, sports, charities and social enterprise sectors.

All organisations across these sectors should consult their relevant delivery partners' websites for further information on pre-application information, eligibility and assessment criteria, guidance and application forms.

See: [Coronavirus: COVID Recovery Programme for Organisations \(nibusinessinfo.co.uk\)](https://nibusinessinfo.co.uk)

BelTech 2022

BelTech 2022 will take place on 7 April in Titanic Belfast and will continue to lead the way in gathering, informing and inspiring technology practitioners in Northern Ireland.

This tech conference aims to:

- reboot the business tech sector
- showcase local tech business resilience to domestic and global audience
- lead on the development of a new Cloud Native economy

BelTech will enable local software practitioners and entrepreneurs to explore the latest advances in software engineering, specifically focusing on software delivery – the process of delivering technology to market.

The tracks and themes of the event are:

- Going live with technology - these sessions will discuss the challenges of making it to market, what it means to be production-ready, the importance of multi-disciplinary teams, evolutionary architecture and LiveOps.
- What's next, new and changing the industry - these sessions will discuss emerging technology markets that present new tools, opportunities and improvements for business (such as Blockchain, Web3, AI, and cyber security).

Giving technology and business leaders a forum to connect and exchange views with peers locally and globally, BelTech also celebrates achievement in Northern Ireland tech, whilst engaging and inspiring the next generation of professionals.

See: [Beltech](https://beltech.org)

Major business showcase event for Northern Ireland

The Department for the Economy will host a major showcase event for Northern Ireland business on Thursday 3 March 2022.

The Northern Ireland Showcase, which will be attended by businesses and stakeholders, will take place at the International Conference Centre (ICC) in Belfast. It will also be live streamed for international audiences to watch.

What can you expect from the Northern Ireland Showcase?

The event will explore and highlight how Northern Ireland's business community has risen to the challenge of the past two years with drive and innovation – and the lessons we can learn in that regard. It will also highlight why international companies continue to find Northern Ireland an attractive place to grow their business and how local companies are building on their global export success.

The outline agenda includes:

- Minister for the Economy's welcome and address
- Panel sessions featuring:
 - Leading international businesses thriving in Northern Ireland
 - Northern Ireland companies exporting across the world
 - Northern Irish diaspora and the power of our connections

See: [Major business showcase event for Northern Ireland \(nibusinessinfo.co.uk\)](https://nibusinessinfo.co.uk)

Green Innovation Challenge Fund pilot launched

Businesses can apply for project funding to solve challenges of moving to a net zero energy system while delivering growth and jobs for NI

The Department for the Economy (DfE) has launched a call to companies for projects developing innovative low carbon technologies.

The Green Innovation Challenge Fund, delivered by the Centre for Advanced Sustainable Energy (CASE) hosted by Queen's University Belfast - an industry led sustainable energy research centre - has received £4.5 million funding from DfE, under the Economic Recovery Action Plan 'Building a Green Economy'.

The deadline for applications is Friday 13 May 2022.

See: [Launch of Green Innovation Challenge Fund - CASE Call for projects - Centre for Advanced Sustainable Energy \(case-research.net\)](https://case-research.net)

Rates support package for 2022-23

The Department of Finance has announced a number of financial support measures to help Northern Ireland businesses with rates in 2022-23

The regional rate for non-domestic rates has been frozen for another year. In addition to this, all businesses will receive a one-month rates holiday with the exception of utilities and larger food stores. Retail, hospitality, tourism, leisure, childcare, newspapers and airports will receive a three months rates holiday, meaning businesses in these sectors will not have to pay any rates until July 2022.

Small Business Rate Relief

The [Small Business Rate Relief](#) (SBRR) scheme has been extended for another year to provide those businesses that qualify with a reduction of between 20% and 50% on their rates in 2022-23.

Eligibility for SBRR is based on the [Net Annual Value \(NAV\)](#) of a business property. SBRR is automatically applied to businesses. There are three levels of SBRR:

- business properties with an NAV of £2,000 or less will receive a reduction of 50 per cent rate relief
- business properties with an NAV of more than £2,000 but not more than £5,000 will receive 25 per cent rate relief
- business properties with an NAV of more than £5,000 but not more than £15,000 will receive a 20 per cent rate relief

See: [Rates support package for 2022-23 \(nibusinessinfo.co.uk\)](https://nibusinessinfo.co.uk)