

Written by 15 May 2023

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!

Artificial Intelligence – Can it work for your business?

With the new wave of artificial intelligence (AI) technology, there's an opportunity to automate many routine or administrative tasks and improve the overall efficiency of your business.

One AI tool that has gained significant attention recently is ChatGPT.



Developed by OpenAI, ChatGPT is an advanced language model that can understand and generate human-like text. This technology has the potential to revolutionise the way businesses work, which is why we have created our list of FAQs to help you understand this new wave of technology.

1. What is ChatGPT?

ChatGPT is a natural language processing AI model that can understand and generate human-like text. It uses machine learning algorithms to analyse large amounts of data and provide insights and recommendations based on the patterns it detects and information it has been 'fed'.

Before using the system, it is important that you familiarise yourself with it. The easiest way to access ChatGPT is to log into [OpenAI's webpage](#).

2. How can businesses use ChatGPT?

One of the most popular uses is treating ChatGPT as a research assistant or intern within your business and training up the system to automate repetitive tasks such as data entry, invoicing, and reporting, essentially freeing up your time for more complex and strategic work.

There is also the opportunity to improve efficiency and accuracy. For example, it can identify trends and flag potential risks.

AI can help you stay up to date with industry updates and trends by using sources such as news articles, reports, and social media. Depending on the version used and information provided, it can provide insights and recommendations based on the latest developments, enabling businesses to adapt quickly and stay ahead of the curve.

ChatGPT could be integrated into your workflows so it can provide you with real-time updates, insights, and reports. By training ChatGPT on specific industry terminology and practices, it can better understand and generate accurate reports depending on the request or 'prompt' made.

Finally, it is worth noting that this is a language model, so we mustn't overlook that it can write or rewrite text such as emails, blogs, or content, all based on the tone of voice you wish to convey.

3. What is a 'prompt'?

A ChatGPT prompt is the piece of text you input/use to initiate a conversation or request a response from the system. For example, if you want ChatGPT to generate a production report, you might provide it with a prompt such as "please generate a production report for the first quarter of 2023." ChatGPT will then use its deep learning algorithms to examine the prompt and generate a response that is relevant and accurate based on the input provided.

The quality of the response will depend on the quality and written structure of the prompt and the training data used to develop the ChatGPT model. This is why it is important to ensure you are using the most effective prompts and it should be noted that this can take time to master.

4. How secure is Chat GPT?

Naturally, we need to ensure that any sensitive financial information shared with ChatGPT is kept confidential and not accessed by unauthorised parties. We therefore advise that no confidential data is shared with the platform unless you are using a secure communication channel.

It's also essential to verify that the ChatGPT model you are using has appropriate safeguards in place to protect data confidentiality.

Data integrity is also important. Businesses need to be confident that the information they receive from ChatGPT is accurate, reliable, and not tampered with.

We would always recommend verifying any critical information generated by the model before making any important decisions. It's important to note at this point that

no version of the system has fully up to date information, therefore the latest legislation etc. will not be generated as part of any response unless the data is input by the user within the prompt.

5. What is next?

To get the most out of ChatGPT, it is necessary, from a team and system perspective, to invest time and resources in training and development.

With an estimated 2000 AI tools being created each week, there are several platforms and tools available to access ChatGPT, including 'OpenAI's API', 'GPT-3 Playground' and 'Hugging Face's Transformers'. Each platform has its unique features and capabilities, so it's worth exploring to find the one that best suits your needs.

Changes to the VAT online account

From Monday 15 May 2023, unless you are already using Making Tax Digital (MTD) compatible software, you will no longer be able to use your existing VAT online account to file manual VAT returns. That is because by law, all VAT-registered businesses must now use Making Tax Digital (MTD) compatible software to keep their VAT records and file their VAT returns.



What businesses need to do now to avoid a penalty

Step 1. Choose MTD-compatible software that's right for your business – talk to us immediately!

Step 2. Check the software permissions to allow it to work with MTD. Go to GOV.UK and search 'manage permissions for tax software' for information on how to do this.

Step 3. Keep digital records for current and future VAT returns – more information about [what records must be kept digitally](#) is on GOV.UK.

Step 4. File your future VAT returns on time using MTD-compatible software. You can find out [how to submit your VAT returns](#) on GOV.UK.

You may receive a penalty if you don't file on time via compatible software. For VAT accounting periods starting on or after 1 January 2023 HMRC introduced new penalties for VAT returns that are submitted late and VAT which is paid late. The way interest is charged has also changed.

You can find more information about new [VAT penalties](#) on GOV.UK or by watching a [recorded webinar](#) for businesses.

Review your online sales promotions to ensure they are compliant

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) is urging online businesses that sell goods, services, or digital content to consumers in the UK to review their online sales promotions to ensure they do not mislead consumers or give a false sense of a deadline.

These sales promotions are known as price reduction claims and urgency claims, and businesses use these tactics on their website homepage and other advertising channels. When designed fairly, they can alert consumers to genuine special offers or give them helpful information about current selling conditions.

A price reduction claim example includes using comparison prices to highlight a special offer - 'now £80, was £150' - when the higher price does not reflect the usual price. In that instance, it can give a deceptive impression of the price advantage the consumer will benefit from if they buy now.

An urgency claim can be a countdown clock highlighting when a sale or special offer will finish. For example, 'ends in 2 hours 10 minutes', but when the time runs down, the promotion does not end.

How do I make my online sales promotions compliant?

You should review your online practices to ensure they meet the requirements of consumer protection law and make changes if needed. As part of your review, you should:

- look at all online activities including advertising, website, and apps;
- ensure anyone working on the claims for your online activity understands the legal requirements;
- keep records as evidence to verify the claims you make; and
- ensure price promotions are verified, special offer prices end when the promotion ends, and online advertising is correct.

If you sell products or services on an online marketplace, ensure the information you get from third party sellers is correct.

See: [Urgency and price reduction claims: are your online tactics legal? - Competition and Markets Authority \(blog.gov.uk\)](#)

New guide on cyber security for smart cities

The National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) has released joint guidance to help communities balance the cyber security risks involved with creating smart cities.

This collaborative guidance has been designed alongside agencies from the US, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand to help ensure connected technologies are integrated into infrastructure in a way which protects systems and data.

The guide acknowledges that smart cities, or connected places, have the potential to offer communities cost savings and quality-of-living improvements, but notes these benefits must be balanced with the risks.

These risks include an expanded and interconnected attack surface, risks from the supply chain and vulnerabilities that can be introduced by automating infrastructure operations.

Organisations considering adopting smart city technologies are encouraged to consult this new guidance to understand the vulnerabilities and avoid exposing citizens, businesses, and communities to cyber risks.

See: [Cybersecurity Best Practices for Smart Cities \(cisa.gov\)](#)

Mental Health Awareness Week 2023

Mental Health Awareness Week is an annual event where the whole of the UK comes together to focus on achieving good mental health. The week aims to tackle stigma and enable people to understand and prioritise mental health. This year's Mental Health Awareness Week takes place from 15 May to 21 May 2023, and the theme is Anxiety.

Anxiety is an important human emotion but, in some circumstances, it can get out of hand and become a mental health problem. A lot of different things can contribute to feelings of anxiety, including exams, relationships, a new job, a date, or a big life change. It is also an emotion people frequently experience around money and not being able to meet life's basic needs.

See: [Mental Health Awareness Week 2023 | Mental Health Foundation](#)

Apply for an Advance Valuation Ruling

Get an Advance Valuation Ruling to give you legal confirmation on the correct method to use when valuing your goods to make an import declaration.

When you import goods into the UK, you must work out the correct method to use to work out their customs value.

You can apply to HMRC for an Advance Valuation Ruling before you make an import declaration to:

- check that the valuation method you have identified is correct; and
- get a legally backed decision that you can use this method before you make your import declaration.

It can take up to 90 days to give you a decision once you've applied and your application has been accepted.

See: [Apply for an Advance Valuation Ruling - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/apply-for-an-advance-valuation-ruling)

New online hub launched for food businesses

The new 'Here to Help' hub brings together a range of guides, documentation, and checklists on how to:

- set up a food business,
- achieve a good food hygiene rating, and
- manage allergens to keep customers safe.

At a time when new food businesses are facing cost pressures and other challenges, the FSA and local authorities want to make it easier for businesses to do the right thing.

The hub aims to encourage businesses to access these free resources and to recognise that the FSA, as well as the Environmental Health Officers within their local councils, are there to help them run a compliant and safe business.

As part of the campaign, the FSA has also made available new [case studies](#) on their blog, telling real stories about how working with your local authority and the FSA helps get your business off the ground and grow safely and successfully.

See: [Guidance for food businesses | Food Standards Agency](#)

Last chance to claim Pension Credit and qualify for £301 Cost of Living Payment

There are just four days to go for people to claim Pension Credit and still qualify for the latest £301 payment, which they will receive direct into their bank accounts. Provided a claim is made before 19 May, it can be backdated for up to three months so long as the applicant was also eligible to receive it during that time.

- Pensioners urged to check if they could be eligible for Pension Credit, worth over £3,500 a year on average.
- Those who successfully claim by 19 May could also receive a £301 Cost of Living payment – demonstrating the Government's focus on delivering the five priorities, including halving inflation, growing the economy, and reducing debt.

Pensioners can check their eligibility and get an estimate of what they may receive by using the online [Pension Credit calculator](#).

Workforce surveys for those in the creative sector

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland (Arts Council NI) has created two new surveys to help them:

- examine the skills within the Northern Ireland workforce, and
- get insight into the challenges faced by the sector.

The surveys target individuals and organisations working across the creative sector in Northern Ireland.

Insights collated will help the Arts Council NI to explore ways to help workers, make the case for funding to tackle the challenges, and design the right interventions to support creative organisations in NI.

See: [Workforce surveys for those in the creative sector \(nibusinessinfo.co.uk\)](#)

Respectful conversations - Employer guidance

The Labour Relations Agency (LRA) has produced new guidance and an accompanying podcast to encourage respectful conversations in the workplace.

The LRA in its pursuit of improving employment relations in Northern Ireland has published a new guide for employers to help encourage respectful conversations at work.

The breadth of conversations considered appropriate for the workplace has expanded in recent years. Employees are no longer expected to separate work from their personal lives and many employers now recognise the business imperative of providing support to employees dealing with challenging life events such as parental bereavement, domestic abuse, or menopause.

This guide has been produced to support employers who want to encourage respectful conversations at work, eliminate taboos around certain topics or opinions, and support an open and genuinely inclusive workplace culture in which all employees feel valued and have a genuine sense of belonging.

This guide outlines:

- what makes a conversation respectful;
- where workplace conversations happen, especially as most workplaces now alternate between the physical office and home working;
- the importance of workplace culture;
- how to champion differences;

- planning for imperfection; and
- practical actions to encourage respectful workplace conversations.

See: [Respectful conversations | Employer guidance and podcast \(nibusinessinfo.co.uk\)](https://nibusinessinfo.co.uk/resources/employment-law/respectful-conversations-employer-guidance-and-podcast)

Respectful conversations podcast

The Labour Relations Agency has also produced a podcast in partnership with Diversity Mark to support employers who want to encourage respectful conversations at work. The podcast helps to bring to life some of the key areas of the new respectful workplace conversations guidance.

See: [Access the LRA's new respectful conversations podcast](https://www.lra.ie/en/news-and-events/news/2022/05/24/access-the-lra-s-new-respectful-conversations-podcast)