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Business News Northern Ireland

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

Unleash the power of generative AI: A potential game-changer for your business

As accountants, we understand the importance of leveraging technology to drive efficiency and innovation in business operations. In this article we will introduce you to the concept of generative artificial intelligence (AI) and the transformative power it could have for your business.

Now, you might be wondering, what exactly is generative AI? In simple terms, generative AI is a type of artificial intelligence that can create new content, such as images, text, or even music, based on patterns and examples it has learned from existing data. Think of it as a creative assistant that can help you generate new ideas, designs, or products.

But how can generative AI benefit your business, especially if you're not tech-savvy? Let us break it down for you:

Creativity and Innovation:

Generative AI can help you unleash your creativity and drive innovation in your business. Whether you're brainstorming new product designs, marketing campaigns, or business strategies, generative AI can provide fresh ideas and inspiration to fuel your creativity.

Personalized Customer Experiences:

By analysing customer data and preferences, generative AI can help you create personalised experiences for your customers. Whether it's generating personalised product recommendations, customising marketing messages, or tailoring services to individual needs, generative AI can help you deliver a more engaging customer experience.

Streamlined Operations:

Generative AI can automate repetitive tasks and streamline business operations, saving you time and resources. Whether it's generating reports, analysing data, or automating customer service interactions, generative AI can help you optimise your workflows and focus on more strategic tasks.

Competitive Advantage:

By harnessing the power of generative AI, you can stay ahead of the competition and differentiate your business in the market. Whether it's creating unique content,

developing innovative products, or delivering exceptional customer experiences, generative AI can help you stand out from the crowd and attract more customers.

So, how can you access the benefits of generative AI for your business? Here are a few simple steps to get started:

- Educate Yourself: Take the time to learn more about generative AI and how it can be applied to your business. There are plenty of resources available online, including articles, tutorials, and online courses, to help you understand the basics.
- Explore Tools and Platforms: Look for user-friendly tools and platforms that offer generative AI capabilities. Many software companies offer easy-to-use solutions that require minimal technical expertise, making it accessible to business owners like yourself.
- Start Small: Don't be intimidated by the technology. Start small by experimenting with simple generative AI applications, such as generating text or images, and gradually explore more advanced use cases as you become more comfortable.

Using generative AI can be as simple as entering a question in the text box of a tool such as Chat GPT. The quality of the response you get will largely depend on the clarity and precision of the question you ask. By experimenting you will soon get the hang of what it can do.

Why not ask us about our tips for getting the best response? We will be happy to help you.

In conclusion, generative AI has the potential to unlock new possibilities and drive innovation for you. By embracing this technology and taking proactive steps to integrate it into your business operations, you can stay ahead of the curve and position your business for success in the digital age.

Is your business Disability Confident?

New Disability Confident guidance has been published to help managers recruit, retain, and foster the progression of disabled people and those with health conditions in the workplace.

The Disability Confident scheme is voluntary and helps employers make the most of the opportunities that can come from employing and developing disabled people.

The new guide has been produced jointly by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD). It's objective is to help employers and employees get the most from the Disability Confident scheme, boost disability employment and reduce the disability employment gap.

The guide covers subjects such as why it makes good business sense, what the role of the manager is and legal responsibilities and definitions.

There are practical tips and advice on language and behaviour, as well as examples of the reasonable adjustments an employer might make.

It can be challenging to attract a sufficiently wide range of applicants when recruiting, so the guide provides advice on how this can be done more effectively to reach more people. Top tips are available too to help with welcoming a new starter.

Advice on how to handle an employee disclosing a disability or long-term health condition is included in the guide, and it also sets out what can be done to help with career progression.

Being a Disability Confident business can not only help more disabled people and those with long-term health conditions to improve their lives through work, but it also makes good business sense.

The practical guide for managers can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/disability-confident-and-cipd-guide-for-line-managers-on-employing-people-with-a-disability-or-health-condition/guide-for-line-managers-recruiting-managing-and-developing-people-with-a-disability-or-health-condition#recruiting-people>

Further details on the Disability Confident employer scheme can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/disability-confident-campaign>

Consultation on law changes to make apologising easier

A new consultation has been launched to find out how the law could be updated to make it easier for organisations to apologise more when they make mistakes.

Many organisations are reluctant to apologise because they are concerned that it will be interpreted as an admission of fault.

However, an apology is often needed by a victim so that they can get a sense of closure and feel they can move on with their lives. This is a case of legal concerns preventing what all parties would like to happen for the victim to feel better.

The Compensation Act already makes it easier for apologies to be made without admitting liability in civil proceedings. This became law in 2006, but evidence suggests that this provision has not given businesses the confidence to be able to apologise when needed.

Therefore, the government consultation will look at whether clarifying or amending the law would be useful.

The consultation will close on 3 June 2024.

The consultation with details on how to respond can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/reforming-the-law-of-apologies-in-civil-proceedings>

Have you checked your tax code?

Prior to the tax year starting each 6 April, HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC), will issue new tax codes to employees, usually where there is a change of tax code.

These tax codes, a series of letter and numbers, allow employers to deduct the right amount of tax to be deducted from each employee when the payroll is run. That is, unless the tax code isn't correct. Therefore, it pays to check that the tax code has been calculated correctly.

The tax code notice usually sets out what has been included. For instance, it will usually include a person's annual tax-free personal allowance.

What do the numbers and letters making up the tax code mean?

Numeric component

This usually represents the amount of tax-free income an individual is entitled to in a tax year. For example, a tax code of 1257L indicates a tax-free allowance of £12,570 for the tax year.

Letter component

This letter indicates specific circumstances or adjustments that apply to the individual's tax code.

Some common letter codes include:

- L – the individual is entitled to the basic tax-free allowance.
- M – marriage allowance is being transferred from a spouse or civil partner.
- K – additional deductions are being made from the individual's pay, such as underpaid tax from previous years or tax on benefits in kind.

It is important to check that a tax code is correct to avoid overpaying or underpaying tax.

If an employee believes their tax code is incorrect or needs adjusting, such as due to a change in personal circumstances or income, they can contact HMRC directly to request a review or update of their tax code. HMRC will then make any necessary adjustments and send an updated tax code to use in subsequent payroll calculations.

If you need any help with your own or your employees' tax codes, please do not hesitate to contact us. We will be very happy to help you.

Crackdown on retail crime anticipated

The Home Office have reported that the Prime Minister has set out tough new actions that will provide better protection for the high street and crack down on retail crime.

Assaulting a retail worker is going to be made a standalone criminal offence that could result in being sent to prison for up to six months, a fine of unlimited amount, or a ban.

Criminal Behaviour Orders could be used to bar offenders from visiting specific premises. Breaching an order might result in a maximum five-year prison sentence. Causing grievous bodily harm with intent may even result in a life sentence.

Tags will be used where if an offender is guilty of assaulting staff three times or is sentenced for shoplifting on three separate occasions. Facial recognition technology will also be used to help police enforce the laws.

The news has been warmly welcomed by businesses in the retail sector.

The Coop Group's Paul Gerrard, Campaigns and Public Affairs Director said: "The Co-op sees every day the violence and threats our colleagues, like other retail workers, face as they serve the communities they live in. These measures will undoubtedly, when implemented, keep our shopworkers safer, protect the shops they work in and help the communities both serve.

See: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-launches-retail-crime-crackdown>

Safety notice issued on thermites

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) have issued a safety notice about the manufacture, storage and carriage of thermites and thermite containing articles.

Thermites are a type of pyrotechnic composition that produces intense heat and molten metal. In use, they can reach temperatures of several thousand degrees Celsius, which makes them useful in welding, metal cutting, demolition, mining and special effects applications.

HSE has identified that thermites, and thermite containing articles, that should be described as Class 1 dangerous goods (explosive) are instead being transported as either non-dangerous or as Class 4.1 dangerous goods (flammable solids).

This misclassification can result in additional hazards for people working throughout the transport industry as well as for emergency services who may need to attend an incident. It may also mean that appropriate safeguards are not put in place for workers and other people at affected factory or warehousing sites.

HSE are urging businesses to ensure that thermites and thermite containing articles are properly classified.

See: https://www.hse.gov.uk/safetybulletins/manufacture-storage-carriage-thermites-containing-articles.htm?utm_source=hse.gov.uk&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=thermite-sn&utm_content=home-page-news

What can you do to recover a hacked account?

Losing access to any of your digital accounts can be very stressful, and if it's an account you need for work this can be doubly the case.

The National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) produces guidance that can help the self-employed and sole traders as well as any individual recover a hacked account.

First, how can you tell if you've been hacked?

Sometimes it's obvious because you are unable to log into your accounts or an unauthorised purchase or money transfer's been made. But other telltale signs include:

- changes being made to your security settings,
- receiving messages or notifications from your account that you don't recognise, and
- records of logins from strange places or at unusual times. Look out for telltale signs in your online accounts.

The NCSC lists the following steps to take so you can recover your account:

1. Contact your account provider.
2. Check your email account.
3. Change passwords.
4. Log all devices and apps out of your account.
5. Set up 2-step verification.
6. Update your devices.
7. Notify your contacts.
8. Check your bank statements and online shopping accounts.
9. Contact Action Fraud.

More detail on what these steps involve can be found in the guidance.

See: <https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/guidance/recovering-a-hacked-account>

New R&D tax relief guidance available

For accounting periods beginning on or after 1 April 2024, a new merged scheme for research and development tax credit comes into force.

The new merged scheme replaces the old RDEC and small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) schemes.

The new scheme reduces the amount of benefit that would generally have been received under the old scheme.

Loss making R&D intensive SME companies can also benefit from additional support through Enhanced R&D Intensive Support (ERIS). Broadly speaking, if a company's R&D expenditure amounts to at least 30% of its total expenditure then it may qualify as R&D intensive.

HMRC has published guidance on how to claim, and additional guidance is available for loss-making SMEs based in Northern Ireland.

If you need any help with an R&D claim or wonder if your business could make a claim, please contact us at any time and we would be happy to help you.

Guidance on the merged scheme and ERIS can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/research-and-development-rd-tax-relief-the-merged-scheme-and-enhanced-rd-intensive-support>

Guidance on ERIS for loss-making SMEs based in Northern Ireland can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/research-and-development-rd-tax-relief-enhanced-rd-intensive-support-for-loss-making-smes-based-in-northern-ireland>

£15,000 bursary available to craft makers

Applications are being welcomed by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland for the 2024 Rosy James Memorial Trust Award. The value of this annual award is up to £15,000.

This award is aimed at craft makers who use materials singly or in combination. The materials used might include:

- Fired clay or glass,
- Fine or base metals,
- Textiles using any kinds of applications,
- Wood,
- Plastics,
- Paper or other materials not included on this list.

The award is mainly aimed at covering costs related to the craft maker's body of work.

Rosemary James was an arts patron who bequeathed over £500,000 on her death to establish an annual bursary to help artists, designers and makers pursue their careers by developing a new body of work.

Applications must be made by email before 4pm on Friday 3 May 2024.

Details about who can apply and how to apply can be found here: <https://artscouncil-ni.org/funding-for-individuals/rosy-james-memorial-trust-award>