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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!

Amazon to close UK grocery stores as focus shifts to online delivery

Amazon is set to close all 19 of its UK Amazon Fresh grocery stores less than five years after launching the till-free sites in London. Five of the stores may be converted into Whole Foods outlets, another grocery brand owned by Amazon.

The closures will affect around 250 staff, and the company has started a consultation process regarding its plans. Amazon has said it will be aiming to redeploy as many staff as possible.

Amazon opened its first UK grocery store in Ealing Broadway in March 2021. Shoppers at Amazon Fresh used a “walk in, pick up, and walk out” model, with purchases billed automatically to their Amazon accounts using in-store cameras and other technology.

Why Amazon is making the change

Amazon said the decision followed a “thorough evaluation” of its operations and the growth potential of online grocery delivery. The company plans to focus on its delivery services, working with partners including Morrisons, Co-op, Iceland, and Gopuff.

Industry analysts suggest the physical stores struggled to offer a differentiated experience. Sucharita Kodali of Forrester commented that Amazon Fresh may not have been set up for success, with issues including store locations and an unproven model in a highly competitive grocery market.

Danni Hewson at AJ Bell noted that the till-less technology “always felt a little awkward,” and feels that Amazon’s strength lies in delivery convenience rather than in-store shopping.

What lessons are there to take?

Amazon’s decision highlights several practical points that can be helpful to businesses of all sizes.

- Test new ideas, but don’t get too attached - trying new approaches is good, but be ready to change or stop them if they aren’t working. Amazon’s rapid pivot shows that even huge companies adjust quickly when their experiments don’t deliver.

- Play to your strengths - focus on what your business does best. Amazon is closing stores to concentrate on online delivery, an area where it already has a clear advantage. Think about where your own strengths lie and build on them.
- Innovations need to have a practical benefit - technology alone isn't enough. While till-less stores demonstrated how technology can work, they didn't really solve anything customers needed. Any new system or process should be simple, useful, and solve a real problem for your customers.
- Be flexible and ready to adapt - markets change quickly. Watch customer behaviour and your competition and be prepared to tweak your approach rather than sticking rigidly to a plan that isn't working.

Amazon's decision to close its physical stores highlights an important lesson for all businesses: success often comes from focusing on your strengths, staying agile and responding quickly to changes in the market. While not every experiment will work, each one provides valuable insight that can help you refine your strategy and grow.

For business owners, the key takeaway is to keep evaluating what's working, identify opportunities to innovate, and make sure your operations are aligned with where you can truly add value. If you want support in assessing your business strategy, planning for growth, or navigating change effectively, give us a call. We would be happy to help you!

See: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cx2xnkkn9ywo>

YouTube Creators Add £2.2bn to UK Economy

A new impact report by Oxford Economics has revealed that YouTube content creators contributed £2.2 billion to the UK economy in 2024 and supported around 45,000 jobs.

The figures highlight how digital content creation has grown into a serious business sector, with creators turning their platforms into careers and even launching companies of their own. For example, Lilly Sabri, who creates fitness videos, has built a community of over six million followers on YouTube, using the platform as a springboard to launch two businesses and create jobs.

A growing marketplace

These numbers are worth noting. The creator economy represents a growing marketplace and offers opportunities for partnering with creators to increase your brand exposure. It can also be worth learning from the way creators build loyal communities online.

Opportunities for growth

The “creator economy” indicates that people now want more than just adverts - they want stories, interaction and authenticity. Are there ways that you could lean into that, even in small ways, to find new growth?

For instance, could experimenting with short-form video (TikTok, Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts), podcasts and email newsletters help you reach customers in spaces where they’re already spending time?

Running behind-the-scenes content, live Q&As, customer spotlights, or collaborating with local influencers who fit with your business can also be beneficial. These days, it’s about building trust and a sense of community around what you do, not just pushing products.

This development shows that the creator economy isn’t just about social media personalities. It’s part of a wider shift in how value is being created - and for businesses willing to adapt and engage, it could open opportunities.

See: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c0knpm6v36go>

Businessman banned from acting as director after breaching bankruptcy rules

A businessman has been banned from being a company director for eight years after being found to have acted as a director between July 2013 and July 2015 despite being bankrupt since 2005.

In addition to this disqualification, he was sentenced to 22 months in prison in October 2024 for contempt of court in an unrelated case involving company transfers made in breach of a freezing order.

The Insolvency Service’s view

The Insolvency Service made clear that bankruptcy automatically prevents someone from being a company director. They say the ban is there to protect creditors and the public, and that investigations into misconduct will be pursued thoroughly.

What this means for business owners

This case highlights the importance of understanding the restrictions on who can act as a company director.

It is also worth noting that even if paperwork at Companies House suggests a directorship has ended, what matters in practice is whether someone is still involved in running the business.

Therefore, if you are considering bringing someone on as a director in your company or to run the business, it is important to check their status first.

If you are facing bankruptcy yourself, it is best to seek advice early so that you can avoid potential complications.

If you need help with company secretarial or insolvency services, please give us a call. We would be happy to help you!

See: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/former-manchester-businessman-banned-after-ignoring-bankruptcy-restrictions-to-act-as-company-director-for-two-years>

Building cyber resilience: Preparing for Recovery as Well As Defence

Cyber incidents continue to feature in the news headlines, with airports now joining large UK retailers and manufacturers in experiencing serious disruption to supply chains and services.

While small businesses are unlikely to grab the same headlines, the risks are just as real. For many, a serious cyber-attack could stop their business from trading altogether. That is why it is important not only to think about preventing attacks, but also how your business would recover if the worst happened.

Start with the basics

The National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) encourages all businesses to adopt the Cyber Essentials programme. This focuses on five straightforward measures that block the majority of common attacks. They cover areas such as keeping software up to date, controlling access to your systems, and protecting your internet connection with firewalls.

These are practical steps that any small business can put in place without needing a large IT team. Some insurers and customers also now look out for Cyber Essentials certification as a reassurance that you take cyber security seriously.

Know what matters most

If your business were hit by an attack, what would you need to keep running at all costs? For some, it might be your customer database. For others, it could be your booking system, your payment processing, or even email.

By thinking this through in advance, you can:

- Identify your most important systems and data
- Decide how you would keep the business going if they were unavailable
- Put in place simple backup and recovery processes so you are not left starting from scratch.

Plan and practice

NCSC advise that the businesses that recover best from disruption are those that have rehearsed their response. This doesn't need to be complicated. It could mean, for instance:

- Making sure you know who to call - is it your IT support provider, your bank, or the police's cyber-crime unit?
- Keeping offline copies of important contact details and documents
- Agreeing who in the business will speak to customers or suppliers if systems are down
- Running through "what if" scenarios with your team so everyone knows their role

Leadership matters

Cyber risk is often left to whoever looks after the IT. However, a cyber-attack poses a risk to the whole business. Just as you would take a threat to your cash flow or business operations seriously, cyber risk needs to be considered in the same way. This includes staying informed about and interested in the steps you're taking as a business to minimise problems.

Next steps

If you want to build the resilience of your business, consider:

- Reviewing NCSC's [advice for sole traders and small organisations to respond to cyber attacks](#)
- Working towards [Cyber Essentials](#) certification
- Making a simple recovery plan covering your critical systems and contacts.

No business can guarantee it won't be targeted, but by preparing now, you can reduce the damage, recover faster, and keep your customers' trust.

See: <https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/cyberessentials/overview>

ICO Reminds Businesses to Strengthen Cyber Security

The increasing prevalence of cyber-attacks has also led the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) to remind businesses to review their security measures and protect any personal information they hold.

According to government figures, UK businesses experienced an estimated 7.7 million cyber-crimes over the past year. Most small businesses store personal information and rely on digital systems.

Ian Hulme, Executive Director for Regulatory Supervision at the ICO, said: "When people share their personal information with your company, they need to feel confident you'll do as much as possible to keep that information secure. While cyber-attacks can be very sophisticated, we find that many organisations are still neglecting the very foundations of cyber security."

Practical steps for businesses

The ICO recommends a number of straightforward actions to strengthen data security:

- Back up data regularly, test the backups and ensure the backup is kept separate from your live data source.
- Use strong passwords (three random words is a good approach) and enable multi-factor authentication where possible.
- Be careful about what you say and what documents you have on your screen that others could see, particularly if you work in a public place.
- Be alert to phishing emails, especially those demanding urgent action or payment.
- Install and update anti-virus protection on all devices, including those used at home or remotely.
- Secure your devices by locking screens when unattended and keeping equipment out of sight.
- Avoid public Wi-Fi or use a secure VPN when working away from the office.
- Limit access to data so that staff only see what they need for their role.
- Take care when sharing information, whether via email or by screen-sharing in meetings.
- Only keep data as long as necessary, and ensure old IT equipment is securely wiped before disposal.

Reporting breaches

If a business suffers a data breach as a result of a cyber-attack, it must be reported to the ICO within 72 hours of becoming aware of it.

Further guidance is available on the ICO's website.

See: <https://ico.org.uk/about-the-ico/media-centre/news-and-blogs/2025/09/information-commissioner-s-office-shares-cyber-security-tips-for-small-businesses/>

UK and US launch joint task force on the future of financial markets

The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rachel Reeves, hosted US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent at Downing Street recently for a joint industry roundtable. The meeting reaffirmed the close ties between London and New York as leading global financial centres and announced the creation of a new Transatlantic Taskforce for Markets of the Future.

Purpose of the task force

The taskforce will provide recommendations to both governments on how the UK and US can work more closely together in areas such as:

- Digital assets - exploring both short-term opportunities while regulation is still developing and long-term possibilities for innovation in wholesale digital markets.
- Capital markets - identifying ways to make it easier for UK and US firms to raise funds across borders, reducing unnecessary burdens and strengthening competitiveness.

The task force will feed its recommendations through the existing UK-US Financial Regulatory Working Group and report within 180 days.

See: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/boosting-collaboration-between-uk-and-us-financial-systems-to-drive-innovation-and-growth-in-global-markets>

Preparing For the New One IPO Patents Service

The Intellectual Property Office (IPO) is preparing to launch its new One IPO patents service in early 2026. The system will replace several existing services and change how businesses apply for and manage patents.

The IPO will confirm the launch date 6-8 weeks in advance. Updates will be shared on GOV.UK and via IPO social media channels.

The new service will require an IPO account. Larger patent holders are being contacted directly to help with setup. Smaller patent holders will be able to create an account via the IPO website when the service goes live.

To find out more, check out the IPO's recent article: [Five things patents customers must do for the new One IPO service](#).

Free LRA Seminars for Employers on Workplace Issues

The Labour Relations Agency (LRA) is running a series of free seminars this autumn to help employers, managers and HR professionals tackle some of the key issues that arise in the workplace.

Each session lasts around two hours and will be held at the LRA's offices in Belfast and Derry. The events are designed to provide practical guidance and insights that businesses can put into practice immediately.

Upcoming events

- Dignity at Work
 - [Tuesday 21 October 2025](#), 10:30 am, LRA Head Office, Belfast
 - [Thursday 30 October 2025](#), 10:30 am, LRA Regional Office, Derry-Londonderry
- Conducting Employment Investigations
 - [Tuesday 18 November 2025](#), 10 am, LRA Head Office, Belfast

The sessions are open to all employers and are free of charge, but spaces are limited. Registration is available through the LRA's website.

See: <https://www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/content/lra-employer-events-2025>