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Business News England

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!

Preparing Your Business for Life Beyond You

When Spotify's founder Daniel Ek announced he would step down as chief executive, it made headlines. After nearly 20 years running one of Europe's most successful tech companies, he's shifting into a chairman role and leaving day-to-day control to two long-serving deputies.

For most business owners, the sums and scale are very different – but the principle is the same. At some point, you may want (or need) to step back. Maybe that's for retirement, maybe to focus on new opportunities, or simply to avoid burning out. The question is: how do you prepare your business to thrive without you in the driver's seat every day?

Here are some practical steps worth thinking about:

1. Build a capable leadership team

Ek's handover wasn't sudden. His deputies have been running much of the business since 2023, which means staff and customers are already used to them leading.

For a smaller business, this might mean gradually giving key managers more responsibility. Let them make decisions, even if you'd sometimes do things differently. Better to iron out issues while you're still around than to hand over untested.

2. Separate ownership from management

Many founders assume stepping back means selling up. Not necessarily. Ek is still chairman and still guiding long-term strategy, for the time being at least, but no longer managing the day-to-day.

As a business owner, you could consider keeping your shares and remaining involved at board level, while hiring or promoting someone to run day-to-day operations. That way you benefit from the company's growth without being tied to the grind.

3. Get your systems in order

The bigger the reliance on "what's in your head", the harder it will be for anyone else to run things. This isn't always easy to detect, particularly if you enjoy being in the middle of things.

You could ask yourself: how many decisions come my way during a typical day? Do all those decisions need my input, or if some of the business processes were written down could staff get things done without waiting?

Having up-to-date procedures, good accounting systems, and clear contracts with customers and suppliers can all help. The more clarity there is, the less your team has to guess.

4. Think about your own role differently

Ek is shifting his focus to strategy, capital allocation and regulatory efforts – this long term, strategic work is likely to be work that he is best placed to do. This is a useful way of thinking about your own role.

Ask yourself: what are the tasks that genuinely require you? And what could be delegated?

Freeing yourself from day-to-day firefighting gives you time to work on the bigger picture.

5. Plan the story you'll tell staff and customers

Spotify's share price dipped when Ek's decision was announced, a reminder that transitions can unsettle people. The same is true in smaller businesses – staff may worry about job security and customers may have concerns about service quality.

Good communication can help. Explain the plan, show confidence in your team, and reassure people.

A final thought

You don't need to be running a global giant to learn from this. Every founder has a choice to make about how long they stay hands-on. Planning your own "step back" early can help to make your business stronger, give you more options, and protect the value you've worked so hard to build.

See: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c3rv35xp07lo

Autumn Budget 2025 – What Might Be Coming for Businesses?

The Autumn Budget will be delivered on 26 November, but the Chancellor's recent speech in Liverpool gave us some useful hints about what could be on the table.

The Chancellor Rachel Reeves appeared to prepare the ground when she said: "We will face further tests, with choices to come, made all the harder by harsh global headwinds and long-term damage to the economy, which is becoming ever clearer."

Her comments note two factors:

- Global headwinds – trade tensions, wars and higher interest rates driving costs up.
- The UK's own productivity problem – the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) is due to publish a critical reassessment of the long-term productivity performance of the UK economy.

In short, the message seems to be: don't be surprised if taxes rise, and don't expect giveaways.

How might taxes be raised?

It looks as though there will be no change to the main tax rates (Income Tax, National Insurance and VAT). When pressed on whether VAT could rise, the Chancellor said: "The manifesto commitments stand." She further said that she wants to protect pay packets and "not put up the prices in shops" – which also makes a straight VAT rise unlikely. But she hasn't ruled out changes elsewhere.

One option for raising money without headline rate rises is to keep tax thresholds frozen. As wages rise with inflation, more people and businesses get dragged into higher tax bands.

Pensions, housing-related tax breaks, and other business reliefs could also be reviewed. The government may frame these as closing "loopholes" rather than introducing new taxes.

Reeves has also confirmed that there could be changes to the legally required biannual forecasts carried out by the OBR. When the mid-year OBR forecasts don't meet expectations, the resulting speculation about tax changes can lead to wider instability. These forecasts might now only happen once a year, which could help with this.

What this could mean for you

We won't know the detail until the budget is delivered at the end of next month. But this Budget is unlikely to bring windfalls for business – it looks like it could be more about stability and plugging gaps in public finances.

As ever, preparation is key. Keep an eye on the announcements and be ready to adapt. We'll be keeping you informed with details of what's changed following the Budget. As ever, if you would like any personalised advice please give us a call. We would be happy to help you!

See: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cj6x07j9e43o

Could Your Child Be Sitting on £2,000 Without Knowing It?

New figures show that more than 750,000 young people haven't claimed their matured Child Trust Funds – savings pots worth an average of £2,242 each.

If your children, employees, or even apprentices are aged between 18 and 23, there's a good chance some of them could be sitting on money they don't know about.

What is a Child Trust Fund?

Child Trust Funds (CTFs) were set up by the government for children born between 1 September 2002 and 2 January 2011. Each account started with a government deposit of at least £250, and many families topped them up over the years.

The accounts are tax-free, and once the child turns 18, the money becomes theirs. They can either withdraw it or reinvest it.

Why so many are unclaimed

When the scheme was running, if parents didn't open an account, the government did it for them. Now, according to HMRC, 758,000 accounts are sitting unclaimed.

September is the most common birth month so there is a new wave of 18-year-olds who have just become eligible to claim their savings pot.

How to find out if you've got one

If you already know who the provider is, you can contact them directly. If not, there's a locator tool on GOV.UK – it takes a few minutes to submit a request, and you'll usually hear back within three weeks.

You'll need the young person's National Insurance number and date of birth when using the tool.

A quick reminder for business owners

If you employ young people in this age group, it might be worth mentioning this to them. Some may not know they might have a CTF waiting. A quick word could genuinely make a difference to their finances – and they'll likely remember you helped point them in the right direction.

See: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/savings-stash-worth-thousands-waiting-for-758000-young-people

CMA Flags Concerns Over Rising Fuel Margins

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has published its latest monitoring report on fuel prices, highlighting increases in both pump prices and retailer margins.

Between May and August 2025, the average price of petrol rose to 133.9 pence per litre (ppl) and diesel climbed to 141.9ppl. That's up by 1.9ppl and 3.5ppl respectively.

While global oil markets explain part of the increase, the CMA is more concerned about retailers holding onto higher profits at the pump.

Margins far above historic levels

The CMA found that:

- Supermarket fuel margins (the difference between selling price and what the supermarket pays for fuel) averaged 8.4% for the first half of 2025 – more than double the 4% level seen in 2017.

- Non-supermarket retailers saw an average margin of 9.8% for the same period, compared with 6.4% in 2017.

Dan Turnbull, Senior Director of Markets at the CMA, said: “What’s deeply concerning is that fuel margins – a key indicator of retailer profit – remain far above historic levels.”

In fairness, the monitoring report doesn’t look at how operating costs have changed for retailers. So, CMA will be carrying out a full review of retailers’ operating costs in its first annual road fuel monitoring report, which is due to be published at the end of 2025. This will allow the CMA to assess whether rising costs explain some of the increase, or whether retailers are simply enjoying fatter profits.

Retail spreads remain high

The CMA also looked at “retail spreads” – the average price drivers pay at the pump compared to the benchmark price at which retailers buy the fuel.

- Retail spreads for petrol averaged 13.3ppl between June and August, lower than the spring period but still double the 2015–2019 average of 6.5ppl.

- Diesel spreads also averaged 13.3ppl, well above the long-term average of 8.6ppl.

Fuel Finder scheme coming

Following a recommendation made by the CMA in its 2023 road fuel market study, the government is planning to launch its new Fuel Finder scheme by the end of the year. This will allow drivers to compare real-time fuel prices via navigation apps, in-car devices and comparison websites.

Increased transparency in pricing may push retailers to be more competitive in their pricing and help bring margins back down.

What’s next

The next major CMA report is due at the end of 2025 and will provide a deeper look at retailers’ operating costs. In the meantime, businesses and drivers alike will be watching closely to see whether the Fuel Finder scheme makes a dent in the high margins and helps bring more competition back to the pump.

To review the report in full, see: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/road-fuel-quarterly-update-report-september-2025

Digital ID to Become Mandatory for Right to Work Checks

The government has announced its plan to introduce a new digital ID scheme, which will become the standard way to complete Right to Work checks by the end of the current Parliament.

The digital ID will be available to all UK citizens and legal residents and will be stored securely on mobile phones in the same way as the NHS App or contactless payment methods.

The new system should make compliance simpler for employers carrying out Right to Work checks. Guidance will follow as the roll-out progresses, with a consultation later this year to help shape how the service works.

The government has confirmed there will be options for people unable to use smartphones, and security will be built in through encryption and authentication technology.

For now, employers should watch for updates and prepare for digital checks becoming mandatory.

See: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-digital-id-scheme-to-be-rolled-out-across-uk

£150 Million Boost for Creative Industries Across the Regions

Creative businesses and freelancers outside of London could receive increased support following a government announcement aimed at accelerating growth in the sector.

Six regions with established strengths in film, TV, music, fashion and video games will each receive £25 million to grow their creative industries. The funding is part of the new Creative Places Growth Fund, first outlined in June's Creative Industries Sector Plan.

<u>£25 million each for six regions</u>

The money will be spread equally across:

- Greater Manchester
- Liverpool City Region
- North East
- West of England
- West Midlands
- West Yorkshire

Culture Secretary Lisa Nandy confirmed that the allocations will be devolved to local Mayors, giving them scope to tackle regional challenges and opportunities in their community. The funding will be provided over three years, starting in the 2026 financial year.

£8 million in grants for SMEs today

Alongside the regional funding, more than 100 micro, small and medium-sized creative enterprises across 12 regions are receiving a share of £8 million in Create Growth Programme grants.

Grant sizes range from £20,000 to £140,000 and are designed to help firms commercialise new ideas and access resources, knowledge and private investment that will help them to scale up.

Some of the recipients include:

- Translating Nature, an art and design studio in Margate
- King Bee, an animation studio in Hertfordshire

Whether you're in line for government support or not, if you run a creative business and would like help to see how you could grow and scale your business please get in touch. We would be happy to help you!

See: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/six-regions-receive-25-million-to-bolster-creative-industries