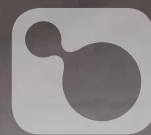


# imagine

issue ten 2012

INSIGHT INTO THE NORTH EAST RECRUITMENT MARKETPLACE



## inside

### **LOOKING FORWARD**

Investment expert Jeremy Middleton on the future prospects of the North East

### **FIRST CLASS DELIVERY**

Find out what it takes to be a world leader in customer service

### **TALENT TERRAIN**

On the front line in the fight to capture and keep the best employees

### **WHITE COAT WONDER**

How SCM Pharma has built global success from its Northumberland lab

### **TECHNICALLY SPEAKING**

Leading lights from the digital sector reveal their HR strategies

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INSIGHT INTO THE NORTH EAST RECRUITMENT MARKETPLACE

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## WELCOME



Welcome to the latest edition of Imagine, Nigel Wright's in-house magazine which covers the range of services we provide to our customers in the North East.

In this our tenth issue, we also bring you in-depth analysis on some of the region's most important sectors, with valuable contributions from a number of influential business leaders.

As financial conditions remain uncertain, retaining customers and also the talented employees that can help to drive growth are two major priorities for many North East business leaders and are prevalent themes throughout this issue.

As well as finding out how Nigel Wright helps its clients excel in these areas, we also highlight several case studies which we hope other North East businesses can learn from.

In a special report on talent acquisition and retention we uncover how businesses, such as national property empire LSL, are becoming increasingly innovative in the way they engage with recruitment agencies to best manage their talent. The strong pulling power of the North East as a great place to work also comes into focus amid growing concerns over a worsening skills gap.

Although we as a business enjoy a global reach through our network of overseas offices, the North East has been and always will be our home. As Imagine reports, we believe the often-understated assets of the region as a place to live and do business could be used to greater effect by employers in attracting and keeping skills here.

Meanwhile, in the fast-moving technology sector, three of the region's lead players explain why their talent demands are in a constant state of flux and how they keep hold of the skilled individuals that fuel their success.

We also put customer services under the spotlight as we investigate what it takes to be world class when managing consumer demands. Car sales giant Benfield Motors reveals how it has transformed its entire strategy to place the customer in pole position, while we also report on the rise of data usage by consumer-facing companies.

In a special report on talent management in the science industry, globally successful pharmaceutical firm SCM Pharma also opens the door to the HR strategy that has shaped its rise to power in recent years.

One of the most prominent investment experts in the region, Jeremy Middleton, also checks the pulse of the North East economy and makes his predictions for the crucial months ahead as the region continues to adapt to ongoing public sector cuts.

At a time when the ability to strengthen customer, client and staff loyalty is vital for business leaders, we hope the following pages will inspire and educate our readers to do just that.

Mark Simpson  
Group Executive Director

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## FEEDBACK

We would be delighted to hear your comments on this edition of **imagine**.

Alternatively if you would like to contribute to the next edition, please contact us on 0191 222 0770.

NIGEL WRIGHT  
RECRUITMENT

imagine

# News and events



Cloud computing raises a number of issues, particularly around security, which are hotly debated by the IT community

## Looking for clarity in the clouds

The Nigel Wright IT Directors Forum hosted its latest Q&A event at Northumbria University recently. The session focused on how businesses are integrating new cloud technologies into their IT systems. Cloud computing is widely regarded as an efficient, faster and more cost effective way to run IT and many businesses have moved to the cloud in recent years – most notably those in the financial services, telecommunications and education sectors. It does however raise a number of issues, particularly around security, which are hotly debated by the IT community.

Nigel Wright invited a panel of IT directors to answer key questions to the forum on topics such as security and best practice as well as presenting a series of case studies of cloud computing success stories, specifically around its integration into larger organisations. The panel members were Steve Caughey, managing director and founder of Arjuna Technologies; Andy Burgess, cloud enterprise sales director from Google; Paavan Mistry, a senior security and cloud architect at PwC; Damon Sununtnasuk, product marketing manager at Microsoft and Jed Woodhouse, IT services director at Northumbria University.

Businesses represented at the event included Barbour, Fenwick Ltd, Greggs, Newcastle City Council, Northumbria Police and Onyx Group. Nigel Wright senior manager Sue Ormerod said: "The Newcastle weather behaved and impressed our London visitors as did the extent and breadth of experience in the room. Special thanks to Northumbria University for hosting it and to panel members for taking the time to attend."

Established in 2004 the Nigel Wright NE IT Directors forum meets every quarter to discuss topical issues impacting the IT discipline. With directors from a wide range of different industry sectors, the subjects covered have been varied and take a top level view of the key issues, so they are appealing and interesting to the widest section of the Nigel Wright forum's members.



Nigel Wright senior manager Sue Ormerod

## New internal appointments reflect continued growth

With offices in Paris, Amsterdam, Brussels, Copenhagen, Stockholm, Oslo, Madrid, Dusseldorf as well as London and Newcastle, Nigel Wright is well placed to serve its broad pan-European client base. Its offices are all in central and prestigious locations and have helped to promote Nigel Wright's premium image as well as attract high potential consultants.

In September 2011, the business announced that it had moved into larger office space in Geneva. Switzerland is a large and strategically important market to Nigel Wright as it provides the European headquarters for many of the world's leading Consumer brands. Senior manager Chris Bone, who leads the Swiss operation, believes "the office provides an excellent base to drive our continued growth in Suisse Romande and Suisse Allémanique, as well as offering our clients and candidates a professional and convenient location to meet". In the last few months Nigel Wright has added two new consultants to its Swiss team, to meet client demand.

Nigel Wright has also recently announced two new directorships in the business. Lars Herrem is now regional director for the Nordic and German markets and Ian Lewis has taken over as regional director for France, Benelux and Iberia. They join Mark Simpson, who is responsible for the UK Consumer, Executive and North East businesses, group MD Jon McNeish and group FD Mark Ingleson, on the Nigel Wright operational board.

The business was also delighted to recently announce the relocation of three of its 'home grown' managers. Jacob Ronne has relocated to Oslo from Copenhagen to manage the Norwegian team. David Feldman is now responsible for the Dusseldorf office having previously held a senior role in Stockholm, and Jeroen Pichal has left Newcastle to manage Nigel Wright's team in the Netherlands.

Around 50% of Nigel Wright's business now comes from overseas markets and it is anticipating further growth in the coming months as the business looks to expand its presence in new territories beyond Europe.

## Best of breed CRM system to help drive Nigel Wright growth

Nigel Wright has updated its CRM software across the business. Following an internal review last year, the business began a search for a 'best in breed' CRM system which would support sales activities as well as facilitate its international expansion. Salesforce was selected as it presented as being the most 'commercially focused' product on the market that would help Nigel Wright to maximise its relationships with current and potential customers.

Some of the key features that Nigel Wright is seeking to take advantage of include the in-built forecasting tool, robust approval processes for project management and the 'chatter' function that will allow greater communication and collaboration between its employees across Europe. Group head of IT John Huggins commented that Salesforce will "ensure that our teams spend less time on administrative CRM tasks and more time selling."

# Salary survey

In February 2012 we published our annual UK salary survey. The report was compiled from over 2,000 respondents, across different industry sectors, who completed our online survey between the beginning of December 2011 and the end of January 2012. The survey is timely, as the beginning of the year is when pay reviews are announced.

Our large data-set allows us to understand the average salary and benefits packages people receive within the UK. Other factors covered include the benefits regarded as important in a remuneration package, the reasons why people move jobs internally or externally, as well as the methods utilised to search for a new job. Some of the highlights of the survey are detailed below.

### Job satisfaction

The results show a fairly satisfied workforce in the UK overall. Although there are variations between the strength of respondents' satisfaction, over 70% of respondents at each level of their organisations rated themselves as being between satisfied and very satisfied. Those working at the executive level were the most satisfied. There was little difference in the level of satisfaction across the disciplines below executive level. Those working in commercial roles, however, are slightly (2-3%) less satisfied than those working in either operations or support services.

### Changing jobs

Respondents were asked to select the top three factors that would motivate them to change jobs, both within their current company (internally) and to another organisation (externally). It is perhaps no surprise that the three most popular influencing factors are quite closely linked – one leading to the other in most cases. These were increased remuneration, new challenges and promotion.



The three most popular influencing factors when changing jobs were cited as remuneration, new challenges and promotion opportunities

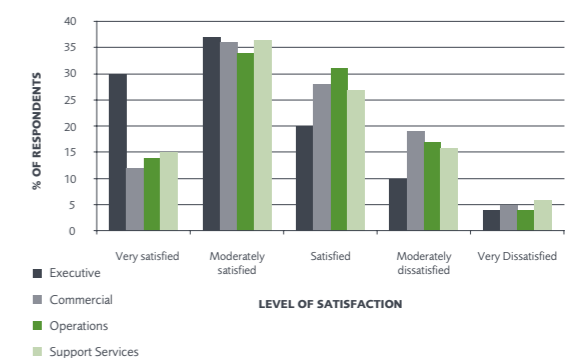
### Job search methods

Respondents were asked to select all methods that they would utilise when looking for a new role. As the respondents surveyed were mainly people already known to Nigel Wright Recruitment, it is no surprise that within the top three methods were our website and using a recruitment consultancy. Social networking is also an increasingly important method for job seekers. Using social networking sites to identify job opportunities now surpasses the use of traditional media such as newspapers and magazines.

### Salary increase

As part of their last salary review respondents received, on average, a 3.4% increase. Overall, respondents were expecting slightly less in their next salary review, with the average increase expected at 3%. Those below executive level including consultants, developers, analysts and assistants were more likely to be anticipating a raise next year than senior executives. Consultants in particular are expecting their value to increase significantly. The full report can be read and downloaded from [www.nigelwright.com](http://www.nigelwright.com).

### JOB SATISFACTION BY DISCIPLINE



## Global ambitions for Nigel Wright

Ten years ago Nigel Wright operated solely in the North East, with twenty eight consultants. In 2011 the business achieved its ten year BHAG (Big Hair Audacious Goal) by becoming a pan European company with over one hundred staff and a turnover of £10-15m. Earlier this year, the business outlined its new BHAG to employees, stating a clear ambition to become a globally recognised leader in recruitment over the next ten years.

Nigel Wright is already making real progress with this objective. With the onset of recession, many of its international clients, predominantly in the global consumer products sector, have divested in Europe with the view to achieving long term growth in emerging markets.

Over the last eighteen months in particular, Nigel Wright has been instrumental in assisting its clients in sourcing talent in Africa, Asia, the Americas and the Middle East in line with global demand.

Group managing director Jon McNeish explained that Nigel Wright's success in recruiting outside of Europe is due to "exceptional market intelligence" and the "ability to quickly understand previously unknown territories and establish relevant networks" to get results for clients. In 2011 the International Consumer Business NetPromoter Score was 92%. While the recent expansion has been centred

overseas, Nigel Wright maintains that its North East operation is central to overall growth strategy. By retaining a strong presence in the region, working alongside businesses in a variety of critical sectors to support them in the selection and development of talent, Nigel Wright has created a strong foundation from which to develop its business elsewhere. According to group executive director Mark Simpson the North East is still a rich area of opportunity for a recruitment business as "organisations in the North East are continuing to recruit key staff across all disciplines and sectors, and the region remains the home to an abundance of national success stories." Beyond the hiring process, Nigel Wright has continued to publish 'thought leadership papers' on a range of issues and trends. Together with the various networking events it organises every year, the business ensures that its customers are provided with tools they can use in their day to day roles, as well as with vibrant communities where they can network and debate the big ideas of the day.

Nigel Wright believes that highlighting its knowledge and expertise of the sectors and countries in which it operates, makes it a credible service provider to customers. It also allows the business to be innovative and creative in its approach to the market.

This strategy has been instrumental in building the brand internationally, particularly over the last eighteen months.



The North East is still a rich area of opportunity for a recruitment business

## Classic cars, triathlons and fundraising activities at Nigel Wright...



The event raised almost £30,000 for the Light Dragoons appeal fund



Russell McCartney and Chris Dresser from our Newcastle office took part in the Alnwick Sprint Triathlon in May. This is a popular event for international triathletes who travel to Alnwick for the one day event, which sees participants compete in a 500 meter swim, 23 kilometre bike ride and 5 kilometre run. Russell and Chris began training for the event at Christmas time in 2011 and both ultimately managed to complete the course.



Ian Scott Bell, head of marketing at Nigel Wright, was the event organiser for the Light Dragoons Classic Car Run in June. The Light Dragoons appeal fund is an organisation set up to provide enduring support to Light Dragoons wounded on operations or in regimental service, to their families and to the families of those killed on duty. The event, which started at Cannon Hall near Barnsley, saw a range of pre 1970 vintage, veteran and classic cars follow a route via Northumberland to Thirlestane Castle in Lauder. Almost £30,000 was raised for the appeal.

## Nigel Wright attracts top engineering talent to region

Nigel Wright recently placed Jon Dale, former head of Whessoe Oil & Gas and Cleveland Bridge, as Managing Director of IHC Engineering Business, based in Northumberland. IHC Engineering Business is part of the IHC Merwede Group, a global market leader in the specialist maritime sector headquartered in Holland.

The Group were keen to appoint a high profile 'international' leader to the post. Mr. Dale, who's career spans the Far East, Middle East and Europe, has held senior leadership roles in a number of engineering companies covering various disciplines. He has led teams on a number of iconic engineering projects during his 20+ year career including the Copenhagen Metro, Barking Reach Power Station, the Burj Al Arab hotel in Dubai and the world's first offshore LNG terminal.

As MD of IHC EB Mr. Dale will play a key part within the

senior management team of IHC's Offshore & Marine Division, setting and developing the strategy for the business who offer fully integrated specialist vessels and mission equipment, particularly in the offshore pipe and cable lay sectors.

Mr. Dale returns to the North East from Oxford to take up the position. He said that since the start of his career on the Newcastle Metro and his time in Darlington he has had a great affinity with the region and is delighted to be back here leading an ambitious business at the heart of one of the North East's growth sectors.

Over the next few months, Mr. Dale will take advantage of the various networking events hosted by Nigel Wright for its alumni where he will have the opportunity to meet other key figures from the North East business community.

In April Arnaud Gimonet, a consultant in our Paris office took part in Tour Auto 2012 Optic 2000, one of Europe's most famous competitive classic car rallies. The event started in Paris on the 17th April where participants began a gruelling 1,500 mile course that ended in Nice, on the 21st. Arnaud, who was the co-driver of a red Alfa Romeo 1600 GT, hosted clients and contacts of Nigel Wright at each overnight stop, during the five day race. His team completed the course, finishing 48th out of 120 racers.



Since the last issue of Imagine Magazine, the Nigel Wright Community Foundation Fund has donated over £8,000 to local charities and community initiatives. Following the Great North Run in September, the fund contributed £300 each to the charities supported by Nigel Wright employees competing in the race including Marie Curie Cancer Care, Percy Hedley Foundation, Newcastle NHS Charity, Tiny Lives, Beating Bowel Cancer and Cancer Research UK. Other organisations that have received donations over the last six months include Doxford Park Tiddlers, Sixty Eighty Thirty, Community Art, Happy Days Children's Charity, Toby Henderson Trust, Four Seasons Activity Group and Headway Safety Equipment. In November our Newcastle Office also raised £1800 for Children in Need.



The group was keen to appoint a high profile, leader with international experience to the post

## Triple boost from key indicators

Three highly respected industry reports recognise Nigel Wright Recruitment as a leading provider of recruitment and executive search services



The rankings highlight the recruitment industry's ability to flourish in tough conditions

In the 2011 UK Recruiter Hot 100, published in November, Nigel Wright leapt up the rankings of top recruiters from 35th to 19th place. The ranking is based on independently researched data which is filtered by turnover and employee numbers. Since 2008, the business has progressed each year from 99th place to now occupying a top twenty spot - ahead of established names such as Harvey Nash, Hudson and Robert Walters. Nigel Wright is the only Consumer industry specialist on the list and the top performing firm headquartered in the North East.

In the same week, Denmark's Økonomisk Ugebrev (Economics Weekly) published its latest research on search and selection companies operating in the Danish Market. Nigel Wright was placed 10th in a list which consisted mainly of global executive search and recruitment providers including Korn/Ferry, Mercuri Urval, Amrop Hever, Odgers Berndtson, Russell Reynolds and Hays.

Nigel Wright was also featured in the latest rankings of the fastest growing recruitment firms in the UK. The Recruiter Fast 50, published in January 2012, lists the fastest growing private recruitment businesses in the UK according to compound annual sales growth rate over three years. All

companies considered for inclusion in the Fast 50 2012 must achieve a level of annual sales of £5m or above in each of their last three financial years.

According to Recruiter Magazine, the rankings highlight the recruitment industry's ability to reinvigorate and flourish in tough economic conditions. Nigel Wright was again the top performing firm headquartered in the North East and only consumer industry specialist in this year's Fast 50.

Follow the links below to read more:

UK Recruiter Hot 100  
<http://www.recruiter.co.uk/Journals/1/Files/2011/11/15/rec-161111.pdf>

Økonomisk Ugebrev A/S: Brancheanalyse: Top-20 Search and Selection  
<http://ugebrev.dk/files/pdf/introNr13-SearchAndSelection.pdf>

UK Recruiter Fast 50  
<http://www.recruiter.co.uk/Journals/1/Files/2012/1/23/Fast50.pdf>

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# Where to next?

Jeremy Middleton, father of a £1bn FTSE 250 empire and now one of the most influential investment figures in the North East, gives Andrew Mernin his views on the prospects for the region in the months ahead



The region's private sector is doing quite well but, like elsewhere, we need more confidence

Jeremy Middleton,  
NELEP board member  
and seasoned investor



As one of the founders of a FTSE 250 firm with market capitalisation in excess of £1bn, Jeremy Middleton knows more than most about building a success in business. He is also well acquainted with the thin line between that success and the potential for failure having followed up his time at Home Serve plc by backing a string of promising young UK start-ups. With his additional role on the board of the North Eastern Local Enterprise Partnership (NELEP), he is also charged with forging a path for the region's private sector towards more prosperous times. Here he analyses the challenges and opportunities facing the region's employers and wider economy and takes stock of efforts being made to handle them.

**HOW WELL IS THE REGION'S PRIVATE SECTOR PERFORMING IN THE BATTLE TO OFFSET ONGOING CUTS IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR?**

Obviously it's a difficult time in the North East as the impact of reductions of spending in the public sector come through but the private sector in the region is holding up quite well under the circumstances in certain areas where we are growing. In particular there's the big success story around Nissan and there's also the fact that we are the only region that's a net exporter. So exporters are benefitting from the weaker pound of late and quite a number of manufacturing businesses are doing well.

**WHERE DO YOU SEE EMERGING OPPORTUNITIES IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR?**

We've got particular opportunities around offshore oil and wind which are doing well but we have great potential to do

considerably better. We've also got quite an opportunity with train manufacturing around Hitachi at Newton Aycliffe. These are all important core industries that, if we can succeed in building a supply chain to in this region, that's where the real opportunities are.

**ARE THE BANKS PLAYING THEIR PART IN SUPPORTING BUSINESSES LOOKING TO GROW AND CREATE JOBS?**

To be truthful I'm not convinced that they are. I don't think the banks can lend. They shouldn't and can't lend on the basis they were lending on in the past because they've been told to rebuild their balance sheet. But that doesn't alter the fact that there's a big problem, particularly for smaller businesses that can't generally get unsecured loans of any description. Because of the crisis in the Euro Zone, banks – as well as investors – don't have the confidence to lend money because



**Banks shouldn't and can't lend on the basis they were lending on in the past as they rebuild their balance sheets**

they are going to be losing it in Greece, Spain and Italy.

**DOES THIS PUT GREATER EMPHASIS ON THE VARIOUS FUNDS AVAILABLE IN THE REGION?**

We have an advantage in that we have quite a well developed venture capital offering in the JEREMIE funds, aimed at smaller and start-up businesses, but we have to make sure that money is not only well invested but that we realise the value in it and reinvest it. In other words sell those investments fairly soon and reinvest them so we've got a fund that's constantly turning over.

**ARE THERE SIGNS THAT LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIPS ARE HAVING A GENUINE IMPACT ON THE FORTUNES OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR?**

Local enterprise partnerships between businesses and local authorities have an important role to play in making sure that we punch above our weight in the North East. That means we need to be putting a convincing case to government about infrastructural investment. We have to find great projects in the North East, prioritise them on a commercial basis and make the case to government. There is evidence that LEPs are succeeding in doing a good job on that and are winning a lot of infrastructural investment, particularly in the North West but we need to do a better job here. We've also got an important role to play in trying to help leverage more cash from government into the region. We are in the process of deciding how to invest £25m of growing places funds in our patch and we are looking to back oven-ready projects that will turn into jobs. It's about providing the last slice of finance to get projects going.

**WHAT ARE THE REGION'S PROSPECTS IN TERMS OF ATTRACTING BIG EMPLOYERS FROM OVERSEAS IN**

**EMERGING SECTORS LIKE OFFSHORE WIND INTO THE NORTH EAST?**

It's difficult bringing in large manufacturers in the offshore wind area because they would always prefer more certainty about where that market is going – but it's not just a local business. When we find suitable employers we will move with the local colleges to make sure the skills are available. If we can find the right people we will also try to find them the land and make sure they are sorted financially and that their transport and infrastructure requirements are met. Our job is to bring in industries to help develop the industries that are already here.

**WHAT OTHER CHALLENGES ARE HOLDING BACK GROWTH IN THE NORTH EAST ECONOMY?**

We have skills shortages in the North East, particularly in engineering, and we need young people to know that if they want a well paid job, they should do maths GCSE and study engineering. We need the take up of apprenticeships to be higher because at the moment you have the ironic situation of having an awful lot of unemployed people alongside a shortage of skills. We have to focus our schools and colleges and academic institutions on helping our young people to be trained in the skills that we need.

The private sector is doing quite well, but like elsewhere we need more confidence. Therefore a solution to the problems in the Euro Zone is vital so that companies are prepared to invest. I would also re-iterate that banks need to be in a position to lend. Access to finance also needs to extend to small businesses.

We need to try to help companies get access to finance from avenues such as the Regional Growth Fund. ■

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# Moving forward together

Nigel Wright Recruitment has shown that the ability to attract and retain talent holds the key to prospering in tough times, as Andrew Mernin discovers talking to group executive director Mark Simpson

Despite the unwillingness of the economic recovery to reveal itself in full, Nigel Wright Recruitment has managed to chalk up another year of growth.

Much of its success – marked by an approximate 10% annual growth rate, with revenues fast approaching £18m – can be attributed to its focus on new opportunities in foreign fields and emerging sectors here in the UK.

But at the very heart of its success, says Mark Simpson, is its capacity to attract and keep hold of the best consultants in the business, without losing sight of customer demands.

"Fundamentally, attracting and retaining our best staff has been critical in navigating the tough conditions and maintaining a strong presence in several key sectors.

"We've got enough of a geographical spread to continue hiring the right people here and at our European offices."

The company has also been aided by a growing desire among employers to spend more on recruiting the best candidates, rather than paying the price for compromise in training and development costs further down the line.

"The trend in the market is that hiring firms are making bigger investments than ever before because they need people of a higher standard that can hit the ground running.

"Because there's a degree of uncertainty, companies are in a lean state and so anyone joining the business has to demonstrate added value with perhaps more capabilities than may have been required five years ago. The recruitment transaction is tougher because of the pushing and pulling in both directions and this has driven a few changes in the market."

In the UK – and the North East of England in particular – Simpson believes it is becoming increasingly difficult for employers to find the skilled professionals and leaders



**The talent pools for engineering and software development are both playing catch-up to market demand**

needed to drive growth in the offshore wind industry and oil and gas sector.

IT developers are also thin on the ground and, although such skilled shortages give headhunting champions like Nigel Wright the opportunity to prove their worth, they are also cause for concern.

"The talent pools for engineering and software development are both playing catch up to market demand and we are seeing a lot of wage inflation.

"Many employers are also trying to solve the problem by building their own in-house recruitment functions – but finding good recruitment people to work in-house isn't easy and these projects have had mixed results."

Having adapted to new market forces in the UK, though, Nigel Wright continues to derive 50% of its annual revenues from British-based recruiters.

"The UK remains a fundamentally key market for us in terms of best practice, market perception, profile and opportunity," says Simpson.

While spreading its reach in several key UK sectors, it has also opened new offices in Oslo, Geneva and Dusseldorf.

Germany has emerged as a territory with significant potential and Simpson admits that the firm's success there will only escalate since "we've only just scratched the surface and it looks set to become a sizeable chunk of what we do".

Meanwhile France, Denmark and Spain have also held up well and the plan going forward is now to continue to strengthen its foothold in the 25 markets it calls home.

"We have a great footprint across Europe in terms of offices and we aim to increase our market share and grow in all of those locations.



"It's no longer a land grab to establish ourselves, but more about building critical mass around our network of offices."

As well as the expansion of Nigel Wright's European empire, other changes to the company's make-up in recent months include some structural fine-tuning behind the scenes.

Chief executive Nigel Wright – the qualified accountant who started the business in 1985 – has taken a step back from the role to become a non-executive director.

This has coincided with the appointment as group managing director of Jon McNeish, who has been instrumental in the success of the group's food and drink and consumer divisions in his 12 years at the firm. At the same time, Tim Trotter, operating director of Baird Capital Partners Europe, has joined the board as chairman, bringing with him a wealth of leadership expertise.

Changes have also been made to the way the wider workforce operates at the firm.

The company has invested in new software which has transformed the way its team of consultants ensure that

a strong focus on customer service is a central part of everything they do.

"We've reached the point where over 50% of our revenue is from outside the UK and so we've made a sizeable investment in a new sales force analysis system which isn't typically used in the recruitment industry," says Simpson. "Most recruitment firms have an IT system that drives the recruitment process to help manage candidates, clients and interviews.

"But we decided to invest in a system that would add more value by being more customer focused by managing customer relationships and ensuring that we are approaching the marketplace in the right way."

Buoyed by the growing demand he has seen in new territories and emerging industries over the last 12 months, Simpson remains optimistic that the year ahead will prove another successful chapter in the firm's ongoing rise as a major global player.

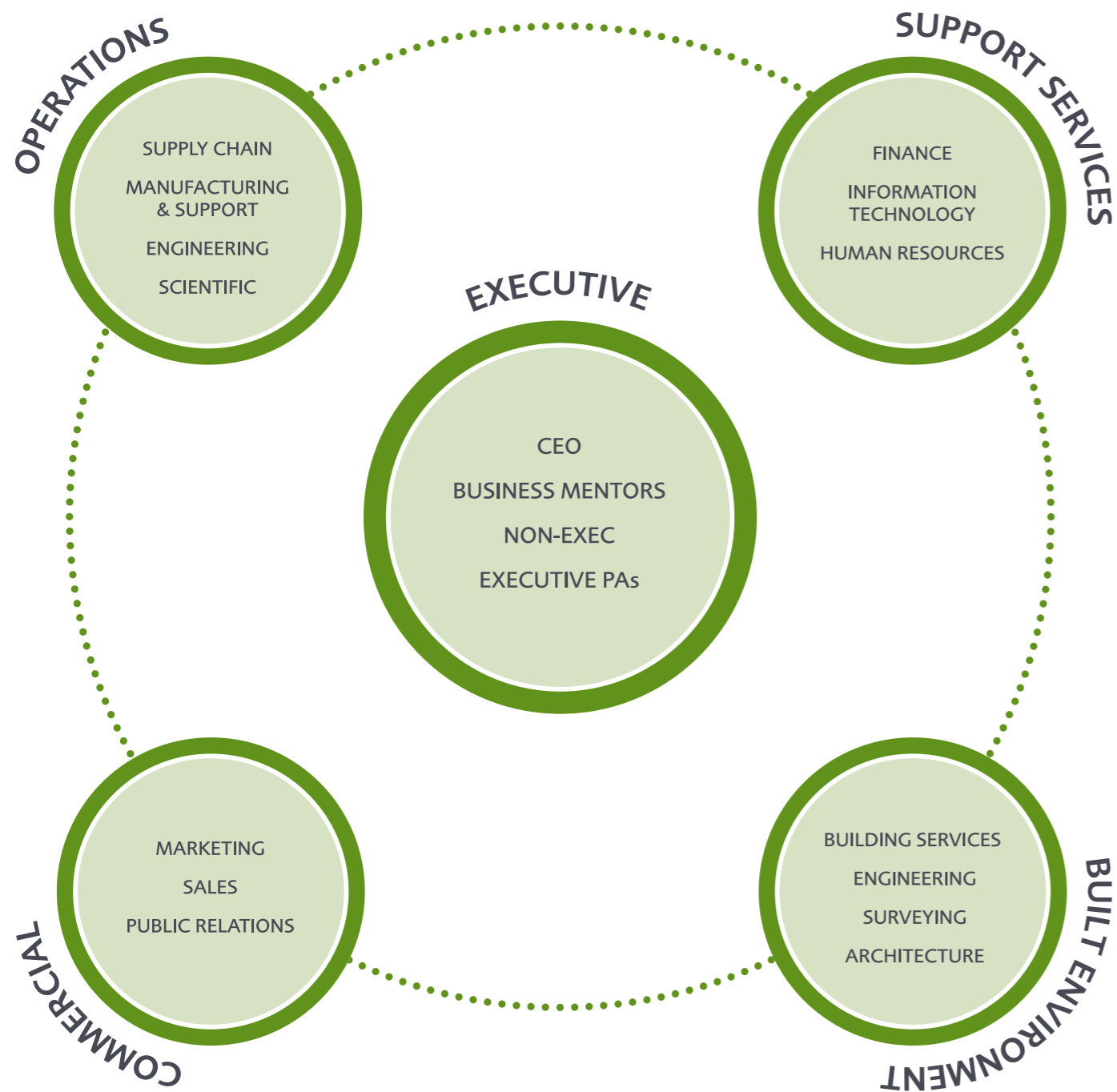
"The outlook for the company is very strong and there's plenty of growth opportunity, even if the market remains tough," he says. ■

Mark Simpson,  
group executive  
director at Nigel  
Wright Recruitment



## Nigel Wright capability matrix

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RECRUITMENT

You don't have to be a global empire to be world class at customer services, Benfield Motors managing director Nigel McMinn tells Andrew Mernin

# First class delivery

Embedding a strong culture of customer service may involve little more than the occasional training day or mission statement at some organisations.

But companies positioned at the elite end of the scale when it comes to building trust with consumers are becoming increasingly innovative and focused in their drive for continual improvement.

The global trailblazer in customer services is Apple. As well as reigning supreme in the land of gadgets, the corporation also rules the world on managing the demands of its customers.

Blessed with an unrivalled level of brand loyalty among its fanatical disciples, the empire has revolutionised the retail experience and set a new benchmark in placing the customer on a pedestal.

The American Customer Satisfaction Index this year gave the firm an 83% rating, based on interviews with 70,000 US consumers, placing it in pole position in a country which itself leads the way in setting customer service standards.

Underpinned by its philosophy that 'no customer service is good service', Amazon too is revered for its ability to nurture customer contentment without the added benefit of face-to-face interaction.

In the UK, retail chain John Lewis proves that traditional values remain important and regularly picks up both industry and consumer-generated accolades. A 2011 poll of 6,000 consumers by Verdict Research ranked the chain as the UK's favourite retailer for the fourth year in succession. The same

poll this year gave the company a 10 point margin in customer service, despite IKEA preventing it from a fifth straight success in the overall title.

Among the consumer satisfaction elite, however, is a growing reliance on what a recent report by global management consulting firm McKinsey calls 'big data'.

The study, Big Data: The Next Frontier of Innovation, Competition, and Productivity predicts that the use of increasingly sophisticated data will become a key basis of competition and growth for individual firms in the future.

At Nigel Wright this is embodied by the firm's use of the NetPromoter Score management tool as a means to continually excel in the client satisfaction stakes.

Each month the firm surveys clients and candidates to gauge the way they perceive its services and whether they would recommend the company to a third party. The group also asks its customers to rate several different aspects of its service on a scale of 1-5, giving it clearly defined improvement goals to work towards.

"The North East market is an essential part of our UK operations," says marketing director Ian Scott-Bell. "For over twenty years we have worked alongside firms across a wide

Engine room: Benfield Motors MD Nigel McMinn has been a driving force in the firm's customer focus plan



range of sectors in the region - encompassing consumer, industrial and manufacturing, professional services and IT and Digital - supporting them in the selection and development of talent across all disciplines.

"In 2010/2011 our North East Business NetPromoter Score, over four quarters, was 94%. That means that 94% of customers would recommend our services to others. This is particularly high for any growing business and we believe it positions us ahead of our competitors."

At the latest reading, Nigel Wright's relationship building, professional knowledge, service and quality were all rated between 80-100% (very good to excellent). At the same time, all of the fourteen key factors central to the candidate engagement process - such as industry knowledge and honesty and integrity - were rated above 3.5 (good), with over half rated 4 (very good) and above by the firm's North East-based candidates.

"The data collected from our customer feedback programme feeds directly into the development of our business and people development processes and we have a culture of constant improvement," Scott-Bell adds.

Like Nigel Wright, Newcastle-headquartered car sales giant Benfield Motors has also recognised the value of using detailed data to better its customer satisfaction performance.

As managing director Nigel McMinn admits, though, the realisation came only after it was forced into a major rethink on the public's perception of its brand - a rethink that has transformed the firm's dynamic between customers, staff and senior management.

Having been part of the fabric of North East life for over 50 years, family-owned Benfield already had a relatively strong reputation as a trusted retailer before the firm decided to thoroughly assess its customer satisfaction performance four years ago.

However, after expanding rapidly up to that point - bringing in numerous new dealerships through acquisition and swelling its workforce - the group needed to take stock of its approach to customers and staff, says McMinn.

"After a series of acquisitions we'd inherited a lot of new people and new businesses that weren't sure what Benfield stood for so we thought it was appropriate to take some hard actions in the business around putting customer service at the heart of what we did," says McMinn.

"We needed to get back to basics and get everyone to understand how important customer service was and to communicate that directly to everybody.

"We use the words internally 'world class'. It's a misunderstood phrase and it doesn't have to mean you're a global player, it just means you do things as well as the best in the world."

Initially McMinn and his team spent a year gathering data from staff, customers and even from people visiting the dealerships who did not convert into purchasing clients.

Interviews were held, inspiration was sought from beyond the car industry from the likes of Apple, Amazon and Toyota and, perhaps most importantly, every single member of staff was invited to share their views on the company's rights and wrongs at a series of training days.

"What we realised was that you can have the best customer service processes laid out in the world and the best systems



to support them and in theory if you follow those processes 100% it will deliver customer service greatly.

"But we realised that if your people aren't happy coming to work, the very people that have to deliver that experience and follow those processes will make mistakes and they won't follow the processes.

"So we came further upstream and realised that we needed to work a lot harder on our people so that they loved coming to work and feeling a big part of the business by getting them to design how the business is improved."

Given that Benfield sells over 25,000 vehicles annually and has a database of 500,000 customers and a national workforce of around 1,200, transforming the business was a huge undertaking.

On the back of feedback from its staff, the company invested £250,000 in replacing its out-dated telephone system and £500,000 on canteens, toilets and other amenities and on immediately required refurbishment work at its dealerships.

But the biggest single investment in the plan was in the installation of a new data management system at a cost of around £1m. The technology enables the firm to take an holistic view of the group's consumer satisfaction performance and also to drill down into the minute detail of each completed or potential transaction.

Unlike the IT systems traditionally used in the motor trade, which focus only on new car sales, Benfield's technology

factors in every type of customer transaction, including used cars and servicing and repairs, and also gauges the views of consumers that register an interest but don't ultimately make a purchase.

The data is based around a similar type of NetPromoter Score system as used by Nigel Wright, with the central aim being to establish what proportion of consumers would actively promote the business to others.

While this is often used in retail trade, it is a relatively pioneering concept in the motor industry. "We realised that we really had to think outside the box and step up our game if we wanted to be world class," says McMinn. And the long process of change has certainly paid off. The proportion of 'active promoters' of Benfield has increased from below 50% three years ago to 73.5% at the time of writing - a figure which far eclipses many of the UK's leading customer-facing brands. Staff retention rates have improved too, as the culture which fosters closer dialogue between central management and branches continues to gather momentum.

"Over the last few years a lot of the gripes have been addressed and branch improvement teams rather than management are taking ownership of their branches.

"As the saying goes, with every pair of hands comes a free brain, and we've been switching people's brains back on and saying tell us how things can be better." Perhaps the masterstroke in Benfield's impressive customer services development strategy is its impending move to publish warts-and-all feedback data live on its website.

Customers will be able to see in real time the same data and customer comments Benfield itself uses to gauge its customer satisfaction. Not only will this bring true transparency to an industry that is often dogged by labels of untrustworthiness and underhand sales tactics, but could also provide a double fillip to its performance. Sales growth and higher levels of motivation are both likely outcomes of the project which will be rolled out later this year.

"If you're serious about being transparent with your customers then you have to show them," says McMinn. "Too many people in the car industry aren't transparent and that's the reputation the car industry has. This is why we have to work extremely hard and look outside the industry to see what other industries are doing. Publishing the data also creates a degree of pressure on our people to perform all the time and deliver an excellent customer experience. If customers continue to have a great experience with us they will drive sales up."

As Benfield looks to leave old negative connotations about the car industry for dust, it has also invested heavily in an advertising campaign which steers clear of stereotypical promotions about price-cuts.

The group also now gives prospective buyers what it calls a "lifestyle test drive" during which they can keep the car overnight, test it in their garage and check it suits their needs.

All of which helps what McMinn terms the company's long-term journey towards customer services perfection. "We've seen huge strides forwards," he says. ■



We needed to get back to basics and get everyone to understand how important customer service was



If you're serious about being transparent with your customers then you have to show them

Talent attraction and retention is a process currently undergoing rapid change at the hands of adverse market conditions. Andrew Mernin reports on the personnel trends and challenges facing North East employers – and the solutions being sought

# Catch it, keep it

The fight to attract and keep the best talent in the North East is perhaps at its most ferocious deep beneath the surface of the subsea industry.

Behind headlines charting rapid growth and job creation, is a battleground stalked by offshore employers and supply chain firms on the hunt for the skills they need to progress.

Nigel Wright executive Peter Neal has been a concerned observer in recent years and believes the situation shows no sign of easing imminently.

"There is a war for talent going on in the subsea industry which is unsustainable," he says.

"Senior engineers are just being dragged from one employer

to another, usually when presented with the prospect of earning more money.

"It's unsustainable because you are robbing Peter to pay Paul and it's only creating a short-term gain for the businesses involved. Until we can grow our skills long-term in the North East, or get better at selling the region to engineers elsewhere in the UK or overseas, it's going to carry on until it collapses."

Meanwhile an influx of new employers from outside the region has – despite providing an economic boost – compounded the situation.

"We are seeing a lot of employers landing in the region and then struggling to find people to employ. But they are targeting people already in the region, rather than bringing



Talent spotter: Caroline West, talent acquisition manager at LSL Property Services



Nigel Wright's Peter Neal believes the region is a major draw to candidates from elsewhere



**An increasing part of our consultancy service is in advising clients how to interweave the great assets the North East has as a place to work, into these compelling packages**

talent in," Neal says. As well as a long-term skills strategy driven by Whitehall, an improvement in the way employers promote the North East as a place to work could also alleviate the problem, says Neal.

And it is not just the subsea industry which he believes would benefit greatly from this approach. "Because Nigel Wright is based in the North East and is extremely passionate about it, we are better than most at selling the merits of the region to candidates. But we can only do so much and employers also have to be good at it as well and pull together a compelling package for candidates from outside the North East, or in tempting those that have moved away to return.

"An increasing part of our consultancy service is in advising

clients how to interweave the great assets the North East has as a place to work, into these compelling packages."

While the subsea, and wider offshore-related industry, suffers from an intensifying skills shortage, private sector employers in general are facing growing pressure to recruit candidates that are able to make an immediate impact.

In the boom years much emphasis was placed on the potential of applicants, and transferable skills often outweighed the lack of relevant sector experience those candidates may have had. Predictably, current economic forces have conspired to change this.

Neal says: "Formerly, employers were happy to hire candidates with high potential but also with clear development needs, such as a lack of technical knowledge. Market conditions now, however, don't allow them to invest the time and money in nurturing this high potential talent.

"So now they are looking for the highest performer in their market with the most relevant experience so they can hit the ground running and add value immediately to protect their market position and seize new opportunities."

A by-product of this, says Neal, is the rise of increasingly focused and carefully honed recruitment strategies.

"Many companies we work with now are keen to map out their competition, find the people that are doing a really good job in that sector, tap them on the shoulder and make an offer which they hope will get them on the hook.

"The world is a small place now and our international capabilities are a real advantage in this process, but clients also have to embrace the candidate and be more flexible and creative in the package it offers."

For some forward-thinking employers, specialists like Nigel Wright are also being enlisted more frequently to help develop a longer term talent attraction approach. In the drive to bring the best candidates into their business, these firms are working with recruitment specialists to build an internal structure that will serve their long term personnel needs rather than relying heavily on agencies on a regular basis.

This has proven a particularly successful tactic at LSL Property Services plc – the national property giant which is headquartered in Newcastle.

The firm has seen significant growth in its operations over recent years culminating in the realisation that to maintain its standing within the market, it had to have the best people in place to support it. In order to attract the best people and improve its retention level the group took a bold step to revolutionise its talent management strategy. As a result in 2011 LSL adopted an innovative approach to its recruitment strategy, enlisting the support of Nigel Wright in the creation of in-house talent acquisition teams.

The teams, which brought together specialists from such fields as training and development, financial services and HR, were created in key locations across the UK. Their aim was to recruit and retain high calibre estate agency and property professionals to work for either Your Move or Reeds Rains estate agents – both part of the LSL Group.

The primary role of the teams was to identify and directly target potential employees through mystery shopping exercises, direct mail campaigns and trade advertising and also introduce measures to increase recruitment efficiency, focusing attention on building and managing a talent pool for future vacancies.

LSL's HR director Lisa Charles-Jones – who recently accepted a CIPD Award in recognition of the success of the LSL Talent Acquisition teams – says: "We've come to realise that in the ever demanding and challenging market in which we operate that our people play a vital role in our success and will – as time goes by – become one of our main differentiators. Basically the better customer service we can provide the better results we are likely to get.

"In support of this the talent teams have played a vital role in helping line managers identify and recruit the property professionals we need and, at the same time, help establish us as the employer of choice within the industry." For LSL the fact that it is a plc with a diverse revenue stream – coming from the likes of estate agency, surveying and corporate client services – means it is well positioned when talented and experienced managers and business leaders are weighing up whether to leave their existing post and join the organisation.

Caroline West, LSL's talent acquisition manager, says: "The fact that LSL encompasses such a large number of brands and businesses is perceived by many as a major advantage. Many candidates, for example, are coming from smaller independents looking for a position that offers greater security. LSL can offer this."

Of course, there are invariably challenges, as West explains: "The economic uncertainty means it is getting harder to prize people away from their existing roles. People are more reluctant to move from the security of their current employment but we feel we do have some great incentives for people to come and join us."

And, as she explains, security is not the only motivation among candidates looking to join LSL. "We're heavily committed to supporting employees in their career development including identifying those who would benefit from training or additional on the job support.

"We also have the benefit of a special management pathway programme that helps in the development of business management skills as well as offering support to staff in completing industry-based qualifications. An indication of the success of this is the fact that within the top 10% of the current workforce, over 90% have been promoted internally."

Similarly, commercial and residential surfaces specialist Formica has also recognised the value of focused attention to talented individuals within the company that may have leadership potential. The multinational firm which has its European headquarters on Tyneside, runs a leadership development and change management scheme designed to facilitate strong leadership behaviour, giving managers and supervisors the tools and skills to enable them to lead with confidence and in line with the business objectives.

Consisting of coursework and workshops facilitated in three different languages, the TRANSFORM programme brings together teams from across Europe.

It has also encouraged over 90 employees from as far afield as Finland, Sweden and Spain to communicate regularly through a confidential LinkedIn group.

European HR manager Phil Hepburn, who admits Formica has struggled at times to find local candidates with multinational experience to fill senior European roles, says: "Key to the success of the programme has been the involvement of the senior European leadership team who have embraced it and participated on the same learning journey as all other people managers. The use of social media has also been a key enabler of change by driving real time collaboration between our people going through the programme," he adds. ■

# Talent in focus: Colin Stevenson

After a successful spell on the high seas, Glaswegian Colin Stevenson's career moored at the Port of Tyne as head of operations – port services. Here he tells Imagine what brought him to the region

## WHAT FIRST GOT YOU INTO THE SHIPPING AND CARGO INDUSTRY?

I went to sea when I was 16 with Ben Line Steamers of Edinburgh and sailed on general cargo ships, bulk carriers, container ships and chemical tankers.

I then obtained my master mariners class 1 certificate and after 12 years at sea came ashore as cargo superintendent and subsequently a spell in Thailand starting up a new container terminal.

## AND WHERE DID YOUR CAREER GO FROM THERE?

When Ben Line Containers joined with EAC the firm opened an office in Kent and I became involved with documentation and developing electronic manifesting until the company was taken over by Maersk in 1993.

I then moved to Gearbulk, a Norwegian company specialising in open-hatch gantry crane vessels for the forestry and aluminium markets and had responsibility for all stevedore and agency activities.

In 1997 I moved to NYK on the car carrier side to develop operational cost control measures and improvements and then back to Gearbulk a couple of years later when the shipping market was going through one of its 'tricky periods' to focus on operational cost and productivity improvements. For the past 10 years I looked after their terminal activities in USA, Brazil, Belgium and Asia.

## WHAT ATTRACTED YOU TO WORKING IN THE NORTH EAST FOR PORT OF TYNE?

Location is always going to be a secondary factor to the job and at the time I moved from Gearbulk, I had offers from both the Port of Tyne and a major German shipping company. The Port of Tyne presented the greater challenge and potential job satisfaction when taking into consideration its plans for growth and development.

So having decided on the job, it was then a matter of seeing whether there was any downside to moving to the North East. My wife and I very quickly decided that the natives were friendly and so the decision was taken.

We finally settled in Lanchester which is a traditional village with a variety of restaurants, pubs and local shops, all only a few minutes walk from our house – we couldn't ask for any more. However, we can't deny that the weather is warmer and not so wet in Kent.

## WHAT IMPRESSION OF THE REGION HAVE YOU GAINED IN YOUR TIME HERE SO FAR?

The greatest impression I have is the friendliness of the people. Coming from Scotland, it was nice to get back to a place where people chatted to you in the street and shop assistants talked to you. The South East, where I used to live, is very much a commuter area where there is definitely a 'keep to oneself' attitude.

## WHAT PERKS OR BENEFITS DO STAFF AT THE PORT OF TYNE RECEIVE?

In 2011 the port launched a profit share scheme for all 446 employees. The first award, made in respect of 2010 business performance, was equivalent of 2% of individual employee remuneration and for 2011 the total award was 4%.

## WHAT OTHER THINGS DOES THE PORT DO TO HELP ITS STAFF?

The Port successfully attained the Investors in People standard in December 2011, which has seen the introduction of personal development reviews for every member of the workforce helping to improve employee engagement. ■



Healthy outlook: SCM Pharma MD Dianne Sharp sees a bright future for her firm despite the challenging climate and shortage of available skills

Despite a skills gap in the science sector, North East-based SCM Pharma has rapidly emerged as a globally successful force in recent years. Andrew Mernin puts the firm's talent management strategy under the microscope and looks at the wider industry viewpoint with Nigel Wright's Lesley Nixon

# A test bed for talent

If science-based industries in the UK are under threat from a stifling skills shortage – as talked up by many analysts – the news has not yet reached SCM Pharma.

The Northumberland-based drugs firm has, in the face of much doom-mongering around the UK talent pool, expanded its workforce at pace since it became an independent entity in 2008.

Back then, in the wake of a demerger with medicine manufacturer The Specials Lab, it had a 47-strong workforce.

Today, having broken into several overseas territories and new markets, it employs close to 100 people and remains on target for further growth in the near future.

The Prudhoe-headquartered company started life supplying clinics with bespoke medicines and more recently began working with larger drugs businesses across the globe.

At the helm is managing director Dianne Sharp, who has overseen the ongoing evolution of the firm's ability to attract the best talent available.

"There are probably not that many people left in the business that were here [before the demerger]," she says.

"Part of that is because in a science and tech environment, people are always trying to get more experience, and so they'll have a tendency to move on.

"But also, in a business that changes this fast, some of its needs change. Positions that existed when there were 10 of us are very different from when there was 50 of us, so roles of the business change as do needs and also the culture. It is very different being in a business of 40 people and in one with 90. We've now divisionalised our business so we have

three business units concentrating on service delivery – previously we were concentrating on clinical trial projects but now, because we supply commercial material as well, that's also different."

SCM's emergence as an internationally thriving business has seen it open a US office in New Jersey to expand its growing client base in the States while it is also spreading its reach across Europe and into Japan. The company has also invested £5m in new clean room facilities in Newburn, Newcastle, to facilitate its growth.

But although the company is clearly defying the current economic conditions, it has not been immune to the challenges presented by limited available talent and a dearth of candidates with relevant experience.

According to recent research by Cogent, the sector skills council for the science-based industries, 74% of UK science firms are finding engineering and professional scientist roles 'hard to fill'.

Almost half (43%) of the respondents in the 2011 report put this down to a lack of work experience to meet company standards. The response by many organisations has been to increase spending – with the average external training spend for senior managers in the UK science industry amounting to £843 at the latest count.

When recruiting and then bedding in new senior staff at SCM, Sharp strongly believes that – as well being up-skilled to the technical demands of the role – they must also quickly come to terms with the SME mentality of the company.

"It's difficult to find experienced staff used to working in an SME," she says. "It's easy to access staff that are used to working in large pharmaceutical firms but that doesn't always



At senior level some prior experience of working in an SME is very important because there aren't 20 layers of management to deal with



translate to our size of business so we've struggled with that a little bit.

"I think within an SME you need to have more flexibility and to be able to work in a more dynamic environment, in which you are required to work on lots of different things in lots of different ways.

"In a larger organisation you are more likely to be more focused on a narrow area and work with a narrower group of people and you are potentially further away from the client or the client is actually internal. In a business like ours you are more likely to be more exposed to the client."

At senior management level, incomers to SMEs like SCM from larger businesses can find the change of pace particularly challenging.

Sharp says: "At a senior level some prior SME experience is very important because in SMEs you haven't got 20 layers of people below who are going to get things done.

"If you are working at a senior level at an SME you have to be prepared to be hands-on when the need arises. So on a Saturday morning when there's a flood you're probably going to be one of the first people who's called. You have to be prepared to get out there and start mopping and everything can't be someone else's job because there aren't that many people else's."

On the employee side of the recruitment process, however, the chance to shift from a large to a smaller organisation can be a hugely attractive proposition in the science industry.

Lesley Nixon, senior scientific consultant at Nigel Wright Recruitment, has witnessed a steady stream of candidates

opting to risk the security of working within a mass-employing empire for the excitement of an upwardly mobile smaller enterprise in the sector.

"Because of the economic climate, people are more nervous and value security and stability therefore take fewer risks, but good candidates know their value and are attracted to move to exciting companies," she says.

"I've personally worked with a number of top candidates lately who have made the move from larger to smaller organisations where they can see opportunities for personal growth in what can often be a more dynamic environment.

"The SMEs in this instance are themselves going through periods of growth and associated change and great candidates recognise this as a fantastic opportunity."

Of course in the constant drive for improvement at fast growing science-based businesses like SCM, the net is cast far and wide for the best talent.

As Nixon's team at Nigel Wright has found in recent years, the growing reputation of the North East as a major hub for pioneering scientific endeavour has certainly helped bolster its pulling power in terms of attracting top talent here.

But in Sharp's experience at SCM, no amount of regional attributes – such as its strong scientific reputation, lower cost of living and stunning landscapes – can compete when family issues come into play. "Our growing prowess in science does help to attract the best people here but that doesn't always mean senior candidates are in a position to relocate to the region," she says.

"Family commitments are often cited as reasons why an



In the lab: SCM Pharma's state-of-the-art facility in Prudhoe, Northumberland

individual won't even consider a role in the region, be it children at key school stages, partners in equally senior positions, or problems with being able to sell properties.

"This is compounded when the person hasn't had any connections to the region, with no family connections in the region and no previous time spent here as a student".

Universities are a crucial part of the talent attraction and retention mechanism around which North East-based science firms operate. At SCM, for example, this is highlighted by its decision to house its formulation development capability in laboratory space in the University of Sunderland's new £8.5m science complex.

"We work hard to keep up our links with local universities," says Sharp, who also runs placement schemes with other universities in the region.

While Nixon agrees that the North East's globally competitive science faculties are a major asset for employers in the industry, she also concedes that problems do exist which need addressing.

"What we need to recognise here is that we have many fantastic universities in our region, developing very good academically strong candidates.

"However the growth in the region's science based firms can only be achieved with experienced graduates and this is where the skill gap exists.

"Employers are seeing a shortage of graduates with several years of industry experience to supply the demand being created. Spin-outs, SMEs and corporates need workplace experience now, not months down the line."

Fortunately organisations such as Semta – the sector skills council for science, engineering and manufacturing technologies industries – are actively engaged with the Government on bringing the standard of graduates closer to industry expectations. Looking forward, the pharmaceutical sector in particular is likely to continue feeling the weight of increased pressure on the talent pool.

Nixon says: "This is already a well networked sector with lots of movement between key players in the region and this movement alone will not facilitate the growth and change in the required skill sets.

"Talent must be sourced from outside of our region alongside talent development within the workforce.

"In addition to this I believe pharmaceutical and biotech apprenticeships need to become more common place to develop the talent of the future.

"The continued growth of the region in the science sector must go hand in hand with talent development. Increasingly companies are having to take a strategic approach to employee attraction as a primary consideration when deciding on expansion plans," she adds.

Certainly with vibrant, growth-hungry businesses like SCM in this region, and a number of promising university spin-outs, there is no shortage of incentives for young people considering a career in science.

And higher up the recruitment chain, on top of the opportunity to lead pioneering organisations into new markets, executive-level candidates have the added spur of the chance to play their part in nurturing the North East's global reputation for excellence in science. ■



**Spin-outs, SMEs and corporates need workplace experience now, not months down the line**

# Plugged in to people power

Growth-hungry tech firms expect more bang for their buck when recruiting these days, as Andrew Mernin discovers from some of the brightest lights in the North East's digital and IT sector

Finding the skills needed to keep in line with the ever-evolving requirements of the technology industry is tough enough. The sector moves at a pace unmatched by any other as a constant stream of new capabilities and ideas mature into standard practice and form the basis of client demands.

For fast growing companies in the technology industry, then, the race to attract the best talent – and the fight to keep it – is even fiercer.

Having witnessed a 400% rise in turnover between 2010 and 2011, Newcastle-based Shout Digital is among the market leaders in the region when it comes to responding quickly to industry trends.

The digital agency, which was formed in 2009, is headed up by Gary Boon, a lead architect of chip and pin technology and former technical director at North East-born digital success story TH NK.

Since Shout's inception, Boon has witnessed the rapid rise to power of the firm from small beginnings to one which regularly fends off national rivals for work from London as well as other parts of the country.

The company now employs around 20 people although, with annual turnover on track to double in the current financial year, this looks certain to rise in the near future.

Much of Shout's success in terms of maximising the performance of its workforce, says Boon, has been as a direct result of careful focus on bringing well-rounded people into the team.

The company is built around an ethos of what Boon calls "connected thinking", which means client projects are handled by the team as one, using a broad range of skills.

"What I'm looking at more and more is trying to bring people into the business whose primary skill set will be in one area, but who also understand what the other team members are doing," he says.

"I'm trying to get people who have a much wider vision of the technology landscape rather than just focusing specifically on a pinhead of one piece of technology without looking at anything else.

"They don't need to deliver in that other space or suddenly become a client side developer if they're a .NET developer, but they need to understand that the team they work within has a huge mix of skills and they are part of that skills team," he adds.

As Boon explains, Shout's recruitment policy has been carefully designed to sidestep some of the common failings of many other digital agencies. Apart from searching for technical skills, Boon also looks for expertise in what he calls "the softer skills", such as customer interaction and communication capabilities.

He also avoids the notion of "middle men" which remains prevalent at many web design and marketing firms.

"Traditionally agencies have an army of account managers who are the ones that clients talk to. They act as the middle men and pass information on to developers and so forth.

"There are so many times that I've seen things get lost in translation, so when we set Shout up we decided that was not an approach that we wanted to do.

"The majority of developers we have are equally capable of going into client meetings and having discussions with the client. It's so much easier to have all of the team members there listening and understanding and being able to ask questions rather than just having them completely devolved and decoupled from the process.

"I don't expect any of my developers to go out and sell but I expect them to be able to have client-facing communication skills to be able to go into those meetings and talk intelligently about what is needed on the project and understand their specific requirements."

Perhaps the biggest skills-related challenge faced by fast-moving firms like Shout is in the mobile app field.

But Boon believes if his company – and other agencies in the North East – can get it right, huge rewards could follow.

He says: "One of the most difficult things to fill is mobile. It's the big space that everyone wants to move into at the moment. Businesses want to get into that space as well as a lot of developers that may not have had a traditional mobile development background.

"Trying to find people of the calibre needed has been quite difficult and also mobile developers are commanding high salaries because there's a lot of work down south developing.

"There's a definite differential between what is expected to be paid for an app in the North East and down in London and quite a few good developers are leaving the region.

"There are still a lot of good developers up here and as we recruit we always try to focus on the North East, but there's a



lot of people leaving and going to earn their pot of gold down south in London.

"Mobile is not going to go away and we do need a good level of mobile developers across the North East to work for all agencies because there's a lot of work in that space."

Alongside mobile app expertise, another niche skill in high demand currently is HTML5 – the latest coding language iteration which is expected to become fully standardised in the industry in 2014.

Sue Ormerod, senior manager at Nigel Wright, says: "Towards the end of 2011, the demand for HTML5 started growing and that has caused a massive change in the type of people clients are recruiting.

"Web programming skills like Flash, Actionscript and Flex are really going out of fashion in a big way and everyone is looking for people with HTML5 capabilities."

Ormerod, who is responsible for the recruitment of IT directors and senior IS managers at Nigel Wright, also cites "front-end web design skills" as being as in demand as ever, particularly if candidates can combine these with some knowledge of the mobile space.

Perhaps a surprising trend witnessed by Nigel Wright's IT experts, however, is a degree of apathy among candidates looking for their next challenge.

"We are seeing a lot of candidate apathy in the IT industry at the moment and instances of candidates being lazy, with the number of responses per position falling despite the difficult economic conditions.

"People are using CV sites a lot more and there is an expectancy that they can just put their CV on them and clients and agencies will be able to find them.

"There are also a lot of inconsistencies on there, so you might see a CV online that is completely different from the same person's LinkedIn page.

"There are also a lot of CVs listed on job hunting sites for people that are no longer looking for work, which can be quite frustrating for clients," she adds.

One company which certainly has no time for the apathetic within its ranks is Waterstons, an IT and technology company which is headquartered in Durham, with an additional office in London.

Like Shout Digital, it is also in the throes of a rapid growth spurt, with its annual turnover jumping from £3.7m to £5.4m in the last two years.

And it too is tuned into the need to build its workforce around candidates that can offer more than mere technical ability.

"We don't want developers who are going to sit in the corner and develop at their PCs all day, we want more rounded people who we can send out to customers and get involved in not just the technical work but also the business process," says Michael Stirrup, finance and human resources director.

"One of our biggest challenges is trying to find those people. Traditionally companies tend to separate the business and the technical side of things.

"You might get people who are technically very good but

Shout Digital's Gary Boon believes mobile app development is an area of huge potential for North East firms



I'm trying to get people to have a much wider vision of the technology landscape





Michael Stirrup, finance and human resources director, Waterstons

putting them in front of the customer is a no-no because they just haven't got those skills to be able to extract information from customers in those situations. Trying to find the right people is really quite a challenge for us but when we get it right it really works for us." The recruitment process at Waterstons is also heavily weighted towards snapping up the brightest candidates from the North East's rich pool of talented graduates. Of the 63 people working there currently, between 80 and 90% were enlisted as graduates.

"Bigger companies are often quite envious of our graduate programme and it's really quite detailed," says Stirrup. "We've got good relationships with a lot of universities in the North East region and we've also started to develop links in London as well.

"We hold a detailed graduate recruitment day and have a final few graduates then join us to go through various team building exercises. We observe them and provide feedback throughout the day so even if someone doesn't get a job from us they take away a lot of feedback on how they can improve.

"When they start work they are integrated into the teams quickly and at client facing level as quickly as possible. Rather than a training programme, we'll take them out and give them a chance to work with clients."

Retention levels remain high, says Stirrup, in part due to the firm's flexible working strategy which judges employees on results rather than the amount of time they spend in the office. The business's bright outlook and ability to adapt to the shifting technology landscape have also served it well in attracting and keeping individuals from larger technology corporations. "I joined the company from a multinational myself," he says. "We've got quite a flat hierarchy so if people

come in and are good, they can progress quite quickly.

"It's not a case of stepping into dead men's shoes here, it's more a case that, if they're really good, then we'll promote them and they can move on in the organisation.

"It's not about how long people have been here. We also offer employees the opportunity to get involved in various different projects and develop new business areas," he adds.

In Sunderland, one of the largest and most active technology-based research and development teams is at Tombola, which operates in the rapidly growing online bingo sector.

The technology group has 42 in-house IT staff within its 200-strong workforce, with the majority of them working on new product development. Like other businesses in the industry, it too is currently experiencing a shortage of skills in certain emerging areas of web development.

As HR manager Ian Walshaw explains: "Our demands haven't changed dramatically in the last few years and we are just continuing to move with the times. Skills like HTML5 and CSS3 are the areas of massive shortage where we are just not able to recruit."

Part of the solution to the shortage, according to Walshaw, is working alongside universities in the region to help bring new talent to market.

"We are very closely tied to the University of Sunderland and I'm on the industrial board there. We set the second year students things projects and start talking to them with hope that next year when they graduate we can tempt some of the brighter ones into Tombola," he says. ■



**Bigger companies are often quite envious of our graduate programme**

# Trend spotting

Despite ongoing economic uncertainty, the North East can look forward with optimism, buoyed by the emergence of several bright spots in the recruitment market. So say managing consultants-turned-soothsayers Alistair Moore and David Bowman

Positive news coming out of the private sector has been a rare sight of late, with retail sales washouts and financial market turmoil continuing to dominate headlines. But here in the North East, a region hit harder than most in terms of unemployment and cutbacks in recent years, confidence is rising in certain areas of the economy. Here Nigel Wright Recruitment's operations manager Alistair Moore and finance and accountancy manager David Bowman look forward positively as they outline new trends in a number of key regional sectors.

## RISE OF THE INTERIMS

Until recently, employing an interim director was a tactic employed merely to fill an unexpected gap, such as illness or an impromptu dismissal. As Bowman explains, however, this is changing fast as the North East's financial sector becomes increasingly sophisticated. He says: "The interim market is more developed now than it ever has been in the North East and clients are coming to us more frequently in need of specialist interims. We are catching up to London in that sense where that market is well established and previously up here, if you got an interim in, it was because someone was sick or was going to be put on a project. Interims were generally people that were out of work and therefore immediately available whereas now there are more people who are happy to work on that riskier basis, because they can't guarantee they'll have income and jobs all year."

## MANUFACTURING A FUTURE FOR ACCOUNTANTS

Growth in the oil and gas sector and also in the resurgent car manufacturing industry is fuelling a new wave of demand for accountants with specialist experience. Bowman says: "There's certainly been a surge in demand for finance people that have operated in manufacturing environments or who work in that kind of sector. Then there's the whole 'Nissan effect' related to the company winning new models, ramping up production, opening its battery plant that will also have a knock-on effect in terms of its first tier suppliers across the North East.

"It doesn't seem to matter what the candidate's accountancy qualification is, if they are ACA or CIMA or ACCA, if they have experience of working in manufacturing, there's great opportunities for them and that's for people that are newly qualified all the way up to FD level. "Alongside oil and gas businesses like GE, across the North East there are quite a lot of exciting things happening in the pharmaceutical industry, at companies like Quantum Specials, which is also pushing up demand for accountants.



**The consumer industry is competitive and maturing and businesses within it are trying to find growth**

## INTERVIEW TABLES TURNED

With crippling unemployment continuing to blight the UK economy, it might be presumed that employers can have their pick of the best talent and chose from hundreds of applications for each role. But at mid and senior management level this is not the case according to Bowman. "Businesses are having to work harder in interviews to attract the right talent," he says.

"I think candidates are aware that whilst the job market isn't particularly buoyant, the decisions that they make and the businesses that they join have to be right and they don't want to make mistakes. So it is a case of trying to impress the candidates as much as the other way round."

## SECTOR ENERGISED BY GROUP POWER

Alistair Moore attributes the flow of new opportunities in the offshore energy and oil and gas industries in the North East to the hard work of a small group of organisations. And, as these bodies continue to drive growth in the sector, he sees no imminent end to this trend.

"We are seeing a huge amount of growth happening in these areas and it's characterised by two or three bodies which are each made up of 10 to 20 companies." Such groups include Energi Coast, the representative body for the region's offshore renewables sector whose members have invested almost £400m to meet the demands of the industry. There is also the wider work of NOF Energy, the business development body behind Energi Coast which focuses on oil, gas and nuclear as well as the offshore renewables sector.

"The economic impact of these groups is massive," Moore says. "Not just on those companies involved themselves, but also on the supply chain – the companies that feed into those organisations." But while Moore sees this evolution of the sector and its network of suppliers continuing in the region, he also believes it could cause a worsening skills shortage in the North East. "The impact this growth will have in the future, not just in terms of getting the supply chain companies organised but it's also in the amount of talent that's available for these companies, could be huge. Because offshore wind and oil and gas are all expanding at the same time, they all effectively require the same staff and that is a real challenge."

## BREAKING BORDERS

Within the clamour for engineering skills, there has been a major upsurge in demand for what Moore terms 'white collar' engineering roles. "Because Aberdeen is maxed out on contract rates there's a real drive for white collar engineering businesses to come down to the North East from Aberdeen. As an example there's subsea business Flexlife which recently set up an office here and larger companies like Technip Offshore which is also looking at setting up a presence in the North East. Anything related to energy is going to go through the roof at the moment. They are all coming here and typically look to establish upwards of 50% of their supply base locally, so there are plenty of opportunities on that front."

## PRODUCT FOCUSED

Although industrial markets generally remain in a better position than those directly at the mercy of customer spending, there are signs of recovery in the some areas of the consumer sector. Moore says: "The consumer industry is competitive and maturing and businesses within it are trying to find growth. But on a positive note, this has caused a lot of focus on innovation and new product development. Some of these companies have been bought by venture capitalists and they are spotting opportunities in the marketplace but they are trying to drive cost out of the business. That means they are focusing a lot on procurement, product development and improvement opportunities." ■



# Written in the stars

As the latest custodian of the chief executive's berth at historic pen-maker Montblanc, Lutz Bethge is charged with managing the destiny of one of the planet's most revered luxury brands, as Josh Sims discovers

Lutz Bethge is very insistent that within the first three months of joining Montblanc, each new manager goes to the HQ in Hamburg. That's less so for the scenery - though Germans cite Hamburg as among their prettiest cities - so much as to disavow them of certain ideas. "You have these young guys who believe they can rock the world with their sales skills," says CEO of the pen-maker turned luxury goods brands, ex of the company's finance and legal department, prior to that a product manager with Mars. "They leave with a very different view of the business - that it's about craft, about doing things that not many companies in the modern world can do."

Certainly, while Montblanc has in recent years extended its remit beyond its heartland of pen-making, now including jewellery, accessories and, most successfully, watches - it

launched its first model 15 years ago and now has its own manufacturing capabilities, arguably putting it on a credibility and quality par with watch brands ten times as old - Lutz sees craft as being the linchpin of it all. It is a return to what luxury once was before marketing departments co-opted the term for loo paper and soap.

"There's a search going on for more than the obvious," he suggests. "Even the luxury consumer has faced the overpowering world of the digital age to the point where they have stopped wondering how something works. But now there's a counter to that - to question what's really real, to long for things of sustainable value. It's through these objects that we leave a bit of our own trace through history. They give us a bit of immortality."

| Montblanc CEO Lutz Bethge believes the luxury brand's traditional skills-base is its best asset



People don't just buy products - they want to feel a link to brands they feel are their brands



That may be a romantic reading and, Bethge concedes, what makes a Montblanc pen in particular equally appealing is its symbolic value. Few products are globally-recognised signals of one's 'arrival' - in terms of monetary success - but the Montblanc pen is one of them. "It's the ultimate power tool," as he puts it. "Customers want to show they're part of the movers and shakers of the world. It's not easy to generate that kind of symbol - it just comes with the years. In that sense the brand is perhaps more important than any individual product. That said, no amount of marketing can make an inferior product successful. It has to have substance."

Certainly the manufacture of a Montblanc fountain pen is one of sustained focus. It takes 35 steps just to make one of the nibs - in part using specialist tools, such as the welding machine that operates at 1,064degreesC and yet leaves the metal cool enough to touch immediately, but as much using the kind of handiwork that comes only with years of practice, such as that used to grind each nib. Meanwhile, the artisan department, which works on limited editions - for an obsessive collectors' community - has

worked barrels from jade, granite and even mammoth tusk.

Indeed, one of Christian Rauch's biggest headaches - he's the managing director of Montblanc Writing Culture - is maintaining the expert skills base required to make the pens in a world in which work is losing its appeal: the goldsmiths and engravers, tool-makers and machine operators. "We train up who we can and try to keep them as happy as possible, but the prestige in such work is not what it used to be," the chief executive admits.

Does that mean the fountain pen is ultimately doomed? Rauch thinks not.

He argues that ultimately such pens are much more than their material value, however finely treated, or even in their social value, but in their ability to accrue stories that give them a deeper meaning: his most treasured fountain pen is the one handed down to him by his grandfather, a PoW during WW2 who used it to write his letters home to his family; when he finally made it back, it so suggested his longing for home

Montblanc launched its first watches 15 years ago and has since made up ground on more established brands

that he couldn't use it anymore. The subliminal appeal of real writing in real ink runs deeper still. One of Rauch's favourite ploys is to show someone contracts - one signed in biro, the other using a fountain pen - and ask which signatory is the most senior within their company: nearly everyone assumes it is the user of the fountain pen.

That said, Rauch concedes that getting someone to switch is not easy: "We have bad memories of school-days, of blue fingers and being forced to use such pens," he says, and this despite the fact that modern versions are stable under most conditions and write with a glossy smoothness rather than the scratchiness of old. And then there is the price: "Persuading someone to spend maybe E50,000 on a watch is one thing," he says. "Getting them to spend that on a limited edition pen another matter, even if writing with a fountain pen is never going to be a mass-culture but remains for the few and the refined."

Might a Montblanc watch in years have the same status or social semiotic potency as the mighty pen, the Meisterstück

most notably? Bethge takes of his Nicolas Rieussec watch - the latest model designed in honour of the creator of the chronograph mechanism - and suggests that perhaps in 15 years time this, "with the kind of story behind it you need to give any product iconic appeal", could be the time-keeping equivalent. In both cases he knows there is a conundrum to answer: such symbols guarantee sales, but their visibility also risks turning off consumers seeking a more discrete form of self-expression.

In the meantime, Bethge must face a consumer world already undergoing quiet revolution - because of the recession, because of overload, because of disaffection.

"That's why people don't just buy products today - they want to feel a link to brands they feel are their brands, ones that chime with their ideals," he says, citing the company's prominent work in the arts by example. "It'd be wrong to say such things are done for purely altruistic reasons - we have shareholders. But brands like Montblanc have to go beyond the merely commercial now." ■

Montblanc pens are the product of sustained focus. It takes 35 steps just to manufacture a single nib

# On top of their game

If the long-term prosperity of the regional economy rests in the hands of the young business leaders of today, the North East looks to have a bright future, as Imagine discovers

Given the abundance of young emerging talent in the North East, in both leadership and entrepreneurial terms, the region's private sector is seemingly well placed for future growth.

In this article we wanted to take the opportunity to highlight some of the young leaders currently holding senior roles at North East companies.

It is clear that recognising potential rather than track record and longevity is at the heart of these North East businesses that have taken a risk on young leaders. They have also embraced new styles of leadership, which has helped them to be dynamic in tough economic conditions.

Jon McNeish, group managing director at Nigel Wright, says: "The reality is that today you don't have to be over 55

or have worn the right school tie to gain respect in the corporate world.

"The growing importance of sustainability, diversity and an ever changing economic landscape, for example, as key concerns for businesses, has meant that emerging young leaders have come to the forefront as they can offer an intrinsic understanding of these burgeoning strategic areas."

"We're very proud of the young talent in our region and it makes the North East business community vibrant and innovative - a great place to develop your career."

While it would be nigh on impossible to give credit to all of the North East business community's young trailblazers, here we profile a handful of 30-somethings that have caught our attention this year.

Louise Richley  
CEO, Beyond Digital Systems  
MD, For Sale Sign Analysis

Even before reaching her mid-thirties Newcastle-born entrepreneur Louise Richley has already developed a reputation as a prolific business leader. Her maiden company, For Sale Sign Analysis, started life in 2001 and today employs around 60 people. The company, which compiles and processes data for estate agents, continues to flourish with a growing portfolio of clients across the UK. But Richley is also a proven turnaround specialist, having breathed new life into a failing business by transforming it into the success story that it now is. In 2009 she was approached to help revive Icion Systems, a Hertfordshire-based audio-visual solutions firm which was struggling to meet payroll demands. Richley played a key role in developing a new business out of the ashes of the company called Beyond Digital Systems which took on the owners of Icion and some of the staff and set it on a firm footing for recovery and then growth. At the last count the company's annual sales had broken the £2.5m mark amid a number of major contract wins including a deal with Volvo to supply digital signage to 120 showrooms in the UK and potentially more overseas. Richley says the catalyst for her career in business was an MBA course she enrolled on at age 21 and her most important characteristic which has carried her through her career is "being bossy".



The catalyst for Louise Richley's career was an MBA course she enrolled on at age 21 while she says her best asset is being bossy



Hannah Eyres  
CEO  
Keyfund

For the last seven years Hannah Eyres has been at the helm of Keyfund, a charity which engages with 800 volunteers and a small team of staff and plays a key role in helping disadvantaged young people meet their potential in life. Previously she ran leadership programmes for young people, personal development programmes for adults and a non-profit company specialising in supporting SME's.

In 2009 she was named the North East Woman Entrepreneur of the Year Award for Best Social Enterprise and in 2011 was selected as one of the 50 'Northern Lights' by IPPR North, a programme to identify the best and brightest talents in the North.

Under her leadership, Keyfund won the 2009 North East Business Award for Not-for-profit Organisation of the Year and in 2011 was voted 'Outstanding Organisation' in the VONNE North East VCS awards.

The organisation also gained a Royal seal of approval when the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge selected it as one of only 26 charities worldwide to benefit from their Royal Wedding Charitable Gift Fund. Eyres says her career highlight so far has been working alongside venture philanthropy group Impetus, which provided Keyfund with strategic support and pro-bono expertise. "I've had the opportunity to work with the most amazing experts in all different areas of business from finance to HR to business processes and it's just been phenomenal," she says.

And while the chief executive remains 100% committed to Keyfund, she also admits to harbouring private sector ambitions in the future. "Whatever I go on to do it will have to be challenging for me and I'll have to be able to learn new things as well as putting experience into practice. Ultimately I would like to run a good business - in other words a profitable private sector business that has social benefits."

In the meantime, she is currently embroiled in what she describes as an exciting time for Keyfund. "Keyfund is at the point now where it's ready to grow nationally and we've put all of the foundations in place for expansion," she says.

For a 33-year-old, Turner has an impressive track record in management within large organisations and is an accomplished leader with a specialisation in lean and six sigma transformations within manufacturing organisations. He is particularly adept at understanding, assessing and identifying an organisation's strengths and weaknesses and unlocking untapped potential.

Among the key achievements with his current employer is the restructuring of its manufacturing division and the recruitment of its high calibre management team. He has also held senior positions at Terex Equipment Limited - an US\$8bn, 20,000-employee manufacturer - and earthmoving equipment empire Komatsu. One of Turner's career highlights came during his time with the Japanese firm when he competed in the Global Quality Circle championships in Japan.

"I had to present the Assembly department improvements project I had led in the UK facility which involved substantial layout changes and process improvements designed to reduce lead-times and improve Quality," he says.

"I delivered the presentation, partially in Japanese, to a large audience and judging panel, very challenging but a valuable and worthwhile experience as the project was awarded the QC Gold Medal, the first time it had been awarded to anyone from a European subsidiary."

He also has lasting memories of Duco's recent announcement of its major expansion plans for the Newcastle site that provided a significant jobs boost to the region. "There aren't many UK manufacturing companies, growing, investing and expanding like us; it's a very dynamic and exciting place to be," he says.

And the secret of his success? "For anyone in a leadership position I think there are three things that are critical;

Know yourself, know your team and know your customers. It's really important to develop your own self awareness and to appreciate how your actions and behaviours are perceived by others and to be able to be assessed and adjust to any given situation.

"It is also essential to understand what motivates each person in your team and to understand the effect of individual differences and how they can bring balance or discord to a team. Finally Customers are clearly important in any business, but they are often not the centre of attention and do not get they focus they deserve, that is especially true when you talk about internal customers, trying to get people to think outside of departmental silos."

Richard Turner  
VP global manufacturing  
and planning  
Technip Umbilical  
Systems / DUCO



Gary Hutchinson  
Commercial director  
Sunderland AFC



He has been influential in building the city's reputation as a hub for major events

Still in his early-thirties, Hutchinson has been instrumental in recent years in the diversification of Sunderland AFC's revenues to include concerts from some of the world's most popular musical performers.

The ex-waiter's career progression has been speedy to say the least, culminating in his seat in the boardroom at the Stadium of Light. As well as playing a key role in the day-to-day running of the Premier League business and forging links with companies in the area, he has also been influential in building the city's reputation as a hub for major events.

By the end of 2012, the commercial director will have had a significant hand in bringing 12 big-name concerts to Sunderland and around 650,000 music fans, contributing a reported £42m boost to the local economy.

He also recently oversaw the launch of 1879 Events Ltd, an events management subsidiary of the football club.

Rigg trained and qualified as a chartered accountant with Price Waterhouse in Newcastle in 2000 and later joined Deloitte's corporate finance advisory team where he went on to lead a number of the regions mid market M&A transactions including management buy outs, company acquisitions and disposals. He became one of Deloitte's youngest corporate finance directors in 2007 and, following a successful period at Deloitte, he moved into industry and joined Eaga PLC in 2009. During his time here he was responsible for leading the UK's largest and only multi customer project finance fundraise to support the installation of solar energy onto domestic properties in the UK on behalf of Eaga Plc, raising £300m.

"If I was to pick out one highlight then it would have to be raising £300m to support Eaga's drive into the solar market," he recalls.

"It is hard to describe how difficult this was to achieve in the current economic environment and the level of effort that went into raising the money from a number of people."

On the acquisition of Eaga PLC by Carillion, Chris became the businesses renewables director and then, in December 2011 he joined Barclays as corporate director for the North East with responsibility for running the Newcastle office and leading a team of relationship directors dedicated to providing funding solutions to the business community.

Despite having achieved so much in just a few years in business, Rigg has many ambitions to fulfil. He says: "Ultimately I would like to be a shareholder in a successful business or set up an investment fund – possibly they are one and the same. In the meantime my ambition remains to develop myself and test myself in challenging environments where I can add value.

"I am not the type of person who can just sit back, I need challenges. I don't set targets of being X, Y or Z though. Status doesn't drive me at all, fulfilment, pushing myself and seeing others around me develop does," he adds.

"I am not the type of person who has to have something on

the go at all times, both professionally and personally, so in many ways I am self motivated. My wife will testify that I am a nightmare if I have too much time on my hands! My friends will tell you that I am at my happiest managing a project or a situation. I am driven by money but not to distraction. I think I have become wiser and realise that learning, adding value and being out of your comfort zone is where you gain the most experience. Joining a bank to lead in this day and age is a huge challenge but one I know will give me fantastic experience at a time where the world of finance and business is changing on a daily basis.



Chris Rigg  
Corporate director  
Barclays

A new report by Nigel Wright Group has found that the overwhelming opinion held by senior executives working for major global consumer brands, is that gender diverse boards are a good thing for business

# Gender diverse boards essential... says consumer sector



Time might be running out for consumer businesses to pre-empt this shift in policy

The report, which is based on data collected from over one hundred senior executives and board level employees at some of the world's biggest consumer companies, also found that the sector is largely opposed to the prospect of imposed quotas from the EU.

Looming in the background for firms with European operations is the 'threat' (as many perceive it) of quotas for the recommended number of women that should make up a board. Currently Norway, Spain and France are the only EU countries that have a legal quota system. In the next few years, if more member states or companies do not voluntarily move to a more diverse board structure, the European Union will begin enforcing quotas. Only 8% of respondents to Nigel Wright's survey believed quotas were necessary to incite change.

Time might be running out, however, for consumer businesses to pre-empt this shift in policy. An alarming 79% of respondents indicated that gender diversity was not a top ten strategic agenda at their business. Despite this, the majority agreed that having more women on the board would lead to better decision making, greater awareness of and attention to managing risk, better understating of employees' needs and better understanding of business culture.

Although, across the sectors, the move towards an acceptance of the benefits of gender diverse boards has been incremental, it was the view of many respondents that Consumer businesses are perhaps well placed to take a lead in promoting the benefits of gender diversity to other sectors:

"Many consumer businesses have female target audiences – even if the products themselves are used by men, women tend to be the purchasers. Consumer businesses have clearly recognised the benefit of having the internal insight of their purchasers on the boards." MD, Leading fashion brand.

The report also documents the alternative view, which is perhaps more prevalent outside of the consumer sector - that gender diversity is irrelevant. Proponents of this view argue that creating a team of 'well-rounded' individuals with the best skills, knowledge and experience should be the only important consideration when appointing a board. A discussion is also offered on why there are not currently more women on the boards of consumer companies.

The full report which includes a summary of other research conducted into this area and a suggested further reading list, can be downloaded from Nigel Wright Recruitment's website, [www.nigelwright.com](http://www.nigelwright.com).



# And the winners are...



This year's awards were bigger than ever with a record number of applications

Nigel Wright, associate sponsor at the 2012 North East of England CIPD HR&D Awards, helped to celebrate the region's best HR and development practitioners and companies

Around 400 delegates from across the North East gathered at the NewcastleGateshead Hilton hotel to celebrate the individuals and organisations leading the way in HR and development. Nigel Wright was an associate sponsor of the 2012 North East of England CIPD Awards, which rewarded the achievements of some of the region's brightest and best employers including a banking empire, a fire brigade and a university.

Among the employers recognised were Northern Rock, the University of Sunderland, LSL Property Services and Caterpillar Articulated Trucks. Catherine Attwell, chair of the CIPD in the North East, said: "This year's awards were bigger than ever with a record number of applications, even more support from existing and new sponsors and the quality of applications was superb, giving our judges a fantastic challenge deciding this year's winners."



**Engagement and Well-Being Award**  
Winner: MSD

**Excellence in Developing People Award**  
Winner: Northern Rock



**Innovation in Social Media and Technology Award**  
Winner: University of Sunderland

**Change Management Project of the Year Award**  
Winner: Sunderland City Council

Within the 400-strong crowd at the CIPD HR&D Awards in Gateshead were professionals who have proven themselves to be exemplary in terms of HR and development in recent months - alongside colleagues and friends who were there to celebrate, network and enjoy the special atmosphere of the event



**HR&D Team of the Year Award**  
Winner: Caterpillar Articulated Trucks

**SME Excellence in HR&D Award**  
Winner: TH\_NK



Nicola Whinham, Chairman of Fundraising Committee for CHUF and Tony Weightman

Catherine Attwell, Chair, CIPD North East of England



Winners on the evening. Left to right, Lisa Charles Jones, Shaun Kelly, Poppy Penhallow, Julie Arnell, Bernadette Bruton, Dave Rippon, Chris Fares and Andrea Walters



Sue O'Donovan, Nigel Wright Recruitment



**Talent Attraction and Management Award**  
Winner: LSL Property Services plc

**Diversity and Inclusion in the Workplace Award**  
Winner: Tyne & Wear Fire and Rescue Service

# Leading lights named

Nigel Wright was associate sponsor of the North East Accountancy Awards 2012, which recognised some of the finest finance professionals in the region

The sixth annual North East Accountancy Awards saw hundreds of accountants, other finance professionals and their colleagues gather at the Newcastle Marriott Gosforth Park hotel to celebrate the achievements of the region's top financial businesses and individuals.

Among the winners were Robert Ribchester, who was named New Accountant of the Year, Paul Newton from Performance Horizon Group Limited who picked up the title of Accountant of the Year and Procter & Gamble's Faye Wilson, who was named Accounting Technician of the Year.



David Bowman, Nigel Wright Recruitment opens awards



**New Accountant of the Year**  
Winner: Robert Ribchester, Ribchesters Chartered Accountants



**Accountant of the Year**  
Winner: Paul Newton, Performance Horizon Group Limited



Richard Morgan talks to FD of the Year Martin Such



**Accounting Technician of the Year**  
Winner: Faye Wilson, Procter & Gamble



**Corporate Finance Deal of the Year**  
Winner: PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP



Richard Morgan, Nigel Wright Recruitment

# Event on the menu

Behind the scenes of the Nigel Wright Business Leaders Suppers

Every month a select band of business leaders gathers at one of the North East's top restaurants for an evening of engaging conversation, sharing ideas and enlightenment in a range of topic areas.

Unlike larger networking events, the aim is not to push products, set up sales deals or steal ideas from rival firms. Nor is attendance restricted to business leaders from vast corporate empires.

The Business Leaders' Supper is in fact a small, informal gathering of managing directors, CEOs, finance directors, CFOs and other key influencers from the North East business community.

It is the brainchild of Nigel Wright Recruitment, which runs the invite-only dinners across a number of venues including Jesmond Dene House, the Theatre Royal, Bistro 21 and Judges Country House Hotel in Kirkcubbin.

With only a maximum number of eight people invited per event, the suppers are enjoyed amid a relaxed, intimate atmosphere that encourages topical, sometimes contentious and frequently amusing chatter over the best cuisine the North East has to offer. Senior manager Peter Neal, who organises the events, says: "Guests come from SMEs, large corporates, corporate finance and law firms, business schools and regional business representative organisations.

"Like-minded individuals in key decision-making roles enjoy sharing their experiences with each other. Often there are a great deal of common objectives and challenges to discuss and debate, even when guests are operating within quite different markets.

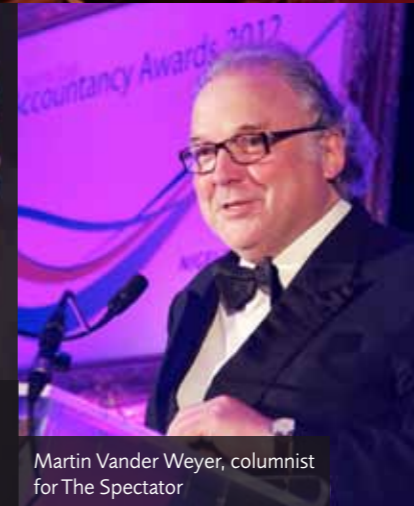
"Everyone values a good contact to add to their network and the Business Leaders' Supper is all about the quality and longevity of introductions."

While enjoying the social aspect of the suppers, Neal and other members of Nigel Wright's senior team also take the opportunity to gauge challenges being faced in other industries to learn more about how to better serve the company's clients. At the same time, the suppers have - in their three-year history - proven to be the ideal event for newly appointed chief executives from outside the region to quickly gain some important insight and contacts from the North East business community.

A recent attendee was Edward Twiddy, the former senior local government officer from the Treasury who is now to head up the North East LEP. Neal adds: "The informality and intimacy of the Business Leaders' Supper provides a very relaxed but respectful environment for discussion and encourages a wide range of topics to be discussed. Nigel Wright is built on connecting the right people through a thorough understanding of them, their businesses and the markets in which they operate."



**Outstanding Achievement Award**  
Winner: Paul Walker (accepted by John Wall)



Martin Vander Weyer, columnist for The Spectator

## The other winners on the evening were

**Finance Director of the Year**  
Martin Such, Quantum Pharmaceutical Limited

**Tax Advisor of the Year**  
David Hammal, PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP

**Branch of the Year**  
KPMG LLP

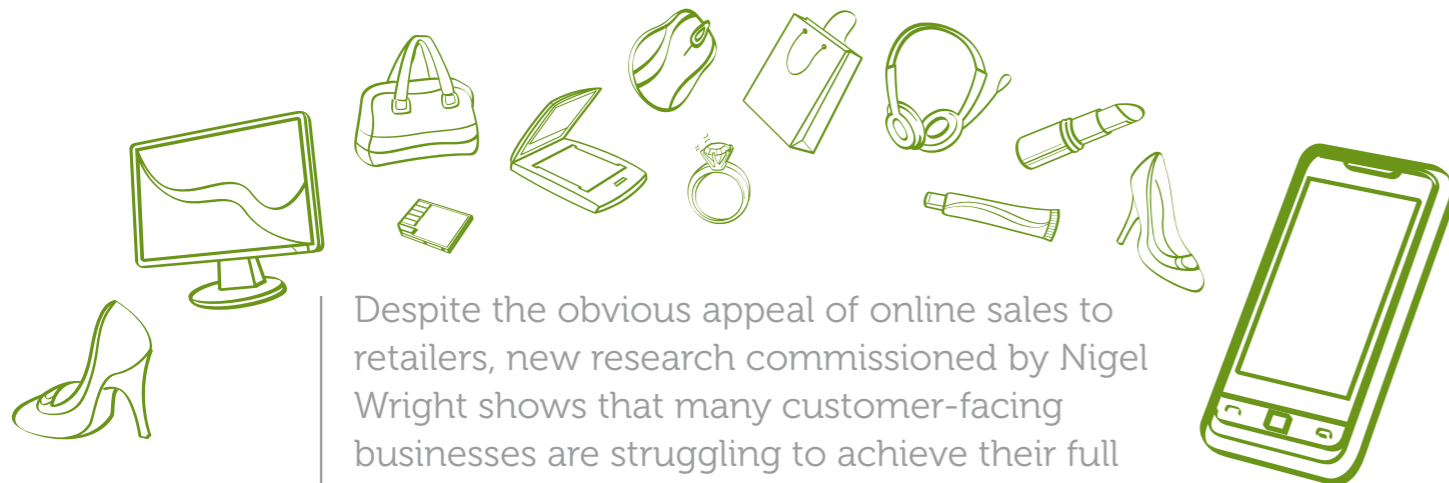
**Independent Firm of the Year**  
Evolution Business and Tax Advisors LLP

**Accounting & Finance Employer of the Year**  
Tait Walker

**Business Finance Team of the Year**  
Lotte Chemical UK Ltd

**Public Sector Finance Team of the Year**  
BT South Tyneside

# New report on digital and ecommerce trends



Despite the obvious appeal of online sales to retailers, new research commissioned by Nigel Wright shows that many customer-facing businesses are struggling to achieve their full revenue potential on the web

Nigel Wright's latest management report 'Digital futures in the consumer sector: leadership, organisational structure, strategy and investment' confirms that many companies in the consumer industries still have a long way to go in terms of developing sophisticated and 'slick' ecommerce channels. The research is based on a series of interviews with ecommerce and digital marketing experts, as well as the opinions of over one hundred senior executives from major consumer brands, that completed an online survey.

Although the economic crisis was a catalyst for many traditional consumer businesses to start investing in building digital capability, the majority of respondents to the European wide survey would only describe their digital infrastructure as fairly sophisticated or not sophisticated at all. Despite this, 77% agreed that most consumer businesses must seek to increase investment in digital infrastructure, if they want remain competitive.

The report asserts that to build this capability businesses need to identify and hire the right talent and introduce the right kind of leadership to drive digital change across the organisation. Experts were clear about what this should look like: "Strong commercial background with a good understanding of the mechanisms of the internet and the way in which consumers engage with products both online and offline. Ideally, you need people who have worked in the internet industry and who have conducted business online for a number of years."

Those that completed the survey, however, largely (72%) agreed that there is a shortage of people with the necessary skills to drive digital change in the consumer industries. Individuals with strong 'pure play' credentials are difficult

to identify and as a consequence many businesses are still relying on traditional marketers to lead the digital function. According to industry experts, companies should endeavour to have their digital channel separate from marketing and led by an expert positioned at the same level with the same strategic focus, as other commercial departments.

Traditional consumer businesses do have an advantage in one area. The digital segment will increasingly be based around customer experience as people today expect the same level of service they receive offline, online. Companies that started out offline have a lot of experience in creating excellent customer service experiences for customers, while businesses that start online that don't invest in creating adequate service channels, often fail. Traditional retailers can also utilise their store assets to be creative, and take on pure plays in an environment where they don't exist.

The future of digital, according to experts, relies on a gradual transition from it being the bottom-up responsibility of the 'technocrats' to a situation where it is 'truly owned' by the executive functions. Seventy percent of respondents to the survey felt that eventually, digital would be integrated into all business units. We can deduce from this that many consumer companies see the evolution of the digital channel as something that will require executive leaderships to drive its initial development. In the long term, however, the aim of the strategy should be to provide business units with the necessary skills and autonomy to utilise it for their own purposes.

The report, which was published in April, also considers some of the key trends driving investment in digital marketing such as social media, m-commerce and video. You can download the full form report from [www.nigelwright.com](http://www.nigelwright.com).



Most consumer businesses must increase investment in digital infrastructure to remain competitive

global brands, global opportunities

For more information or to apply visit [www.nigelwright.com/workforus](http://www.nigelwright.com/workforus)





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