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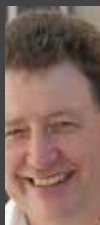
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SANDIE



MEGAN



JUDY



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The passing of the legislation for the partial lease of New South Wales' power network will provide a much needed boost to the \$20 billion Rebuilding NSW fund to build infrastructure across the state.

This one-off opportunity will provide the opportunity to boost economic growth across NSW and help strengthen the nation's largest state economy.

The NSW Government believes that the Rebuilding Fund will boost the state economy by almost \$300 billion in just over 20 years and create more than 120,000 new jobs

A number of Hunter projects have been earmarked for funding. It is hoped that future decisions will be based on economic rather than political bases and that the Hunter will continue to receive additional funding to help grow Australia's leading regional economy.

The fact that we need to raise funding for vital infrastructure funding by one-off events also reflects on the complications of Federal-State funding and the necessity to push forward with tax reform.

It appears close to impossible to come up with a formula for state funding that will be accepted as fair by all the states. After all each state is battling to receive a bigger share of the pie.

Unfortunately the state funding falls far short of meeting the funds required by each state and the shortfall must be made up by a variety of state taxes that on the whole are much less efficient are arguably more detrimental to economic activity than the larger Federal taxes.

The last real major tax reform – the introduction of GST in 2000 – did not achieve the desired reduction of these state taxes.

The nation is crying out for real tax reform. We have simply too many taxes and many that are too inefficient.

Whilst successive Governments, including the current Government, have funded reports and discussions on tax reform the much needed actions have not followed.

The Federal Government released a tax discussion paper Re:think, better tax systems, better Australia on 31 March. All those that are concerned with this topic should be aware of the issues discussed and also provide their feedback to help real tax reform to occur.

In the end, we also need a Government that has the political bravery to push forward with actions. It is a very difficult task but one that is vital if we are to improve our global competitiveness and reach our full economic potential.

Garry Hardie
Publisher & Editor

GARRY HARDIE PUBLISHER & EDITOR



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Hunter Business Review

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Small Biz Solutions for Small Business in the Hunter

The Business Centre has successfully tendered for the Australian Small Business Advisory Service (ASBAS), an Australian Government initiative and will be delivering the Small Biz Solutions program across the Hunter Region for the period 2015 - 2018.

Narelle McClelland, General Manager (The Business Centre) described the program as being designed to empower, strengthen and build the knowledge capacity and confidence of Small Businesses throughout the Hunter Region.

'The program focuses on improving the competitiveness and productivity of small business and to be adaptable to change for sustainability into the future,' she said.

The Business Centre will deliver the Small Biz Solutions program across the Hunter Region including Newcastle, Lake Macquarie, Port Stephens, Cessnock, Dungog, Maitland, Singleton, Muswellbrook, Gloucester, Upper Hunter and Great Lakes areas.

Small Biz Solutions will deliver business related skills and knowledge across five main areas including: Funding Avenues & Financial Analysis; Building Business; Talent and Team; Management Capabilities; and Digital Engagement.

The Small Biz Solutions program offers relevant, low cost advisory services that will be practical, flexible and focused. These will be provided through: one-on-one tailored business advisory services; face-to-face meetings; virtual/online meetings; small group training for up to 10 people at a time; and access to mentoring networks in the defined geographical region of the project.

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Highest honour for Bill McDonald

McDonald Jones Homes founder and owner Bill McDonald has been awarded the highest honour possible by the Housing Industry of Australia, the 2015 Sir Phillip Lynch Award of Excellence.

The award pays tribute to Mr McDonald's vast achievements including his leadership, innovation and generosity. It honours a person in the housing industry who has provided innovative and valuable contributions to the industry.

Bill started his building career as an apprentice carpenter in Newcastle in 1965. After two decades on the tools Mr McDonald started his own business. McDonald Jones Homes is now the largest volume builder in New South Wales and one of the fastest growing building companies in Australia following recent expansions into the ACT and Queensland.

Mr McDonald said the organisation has enjoyed success during many industry downturns over the years. McDonald Jones continues to expand, last year launching a sister business Mojo Homes, which started building its first home in May. The business also now has display home sites in New South Wales, the ACT and Queensland.

Despite this success, one of his most outstanding and enduring contributions is Mr McDonald's community work. This includes the establishment of the McDonald Jones Charitable Foundation, which generously supports the work of the Maitland Hospital Foundation, the Westpac Rescue Helicopter Service and the Hunter Medical Research Institute.

Mr McDonald is a life member of the HIA. He joined the association over 25 years ago. He has served on the Newcastle Branch Committee and the Hunter Regional Executive Committee. Mr McDonald was the region's inaugural president, a role he held for seven years. Under his presidency membership grew from around 750 to over 2,500 members.

Council delivers 'Living Laboratory' for energy efficiency

As the Energy Hunter program comes to an end, partner organisations The City of Newcastle, the Hunter Business Chamber and Hunter TAFE are celebrating a number of accomplishments related to energy support for local businesses.

The program has made significant contributions to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, improving the energy efficiency of member businesses and saving those businesses money, said Newcastle Lord Mayor Cr Nuatali Nemes.

"The City of Newcastle is proud of its achievements and the success of this program is a testament to what can be achieved through partnership and collaboration," said the Lord Mayor. "Council's role in this partnership has been to deliver the 'Living Laboratory' component of Energy Hunter."

Working with a network of 350 small businesses on an ongoing basis, Council has helped them become more energy efficient - reducing both their electricity consumption and their electricity bills, which helps them increase profits. Council staff members have conducted over 350 face-to-face business visits in collaboration with Hunter TAFE electro-technology specialists and have staged 29 energy efficiency educational workshops, which were attended by 325 participants.

"This program has made a strong positive impact on electricity consumption by businesses in the Hunter and has helped them strengthen their bottom line," said Cr Nemes.

"Since 2012, businesses participating in the Energy Hunter program have collectively reduced their annual electricity consumption by over 4 million kilowatt hours. This represents a reduction in CO2 emissions of over 4,200 tonnes each year and electricity bill savings for Hunter businesses of over \$1.1 million."

For its part, the City of Newcastle has been upgrading its own buildings to be more energy efficient and to reduce the City's electricity bills.

Council has installed a utility monitoring system to help manage energy efficiency and identify priority projects. We have also installed 222 kilowatts of Solar PV capacity at our Works Depot, City Library and the Newcastle Art Gallery, with a further 80 kilowatts of solar planned for Wallsend Library.

The installation of solar PV is reducing Council's exposure to electricity prices, while helping to meet our goal of having 30% of Council's electricity generated from low-carbon sources by 2020.

Over \$1 million for Hunter tourism

The NSW government have announced a funding and support package for the Hunter's tourism industry following the storms in April. Designed to help the region get back on its feet after the devastating weather, it includes specific funding for Dungog, an area hardest hit by the storms.

Destination NSW will provide the funding and support package that will go towards creating new marketing campaigns and building on existing strategies. In addition the Dungog Festival will receive funding to support and promote the town's film festival, which takes place October.

Tourism is a key industry in the Hunter; at the end of September 2014 the region had seen more than 3 million international and domestic visitors stay overnight, with total spending amounting to more than \$1.4 billion.

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In Memoriam

The staff of Newcastle Security are saddened to report that our beloved manager Matt Levin lost his 18 month battle with cancer on Tuesday the 28 April.

Matt was much more than a boss to us. Yes he was a manager, yes he was a leader but he was also a really nice person. He inspired us and made coming to work a real pleasure every day.

One of the ironies of life was that on 8 November 2013, Matt was awarded business person of the year at the Hunter Local Business Awards and on 9 November 2013 he was told that the results of his biopsy show that he has Squamous cell carcinoma.

Matt dealt with his cancer the way he would have dealt with a work project. Head on 100% committed to the fight.

He will be missed dearly here at Newcastle Security but he managed to give us enough. Enough of himself to carry on and enough of himself to do our job in the way he would have liked the job to be done.

*Rest in peace
Matt.*

Coffey to oversee construction of new defence facilities

Coffey will manage the construction phase of the New Air Combat Capability Facilities Project at RAAF Base Williamstown. The Department of Defence project will see an estimated \$950 million invested in the Hunter region.

It will deliver airfield infrastructure and operations, administration and training facilities to support the Australian Government's purchase of 72 F-35A aircraft.

Coffey is the project manager and contract administrator for the works at Williamstown, as well as at nine other bases around the country.

Newcastle Manager Project Management Paul Muir said the project would see a major investment in the region and would be a catalyst to future growth, as well as a strong opportunity for local businesses and workers.

"Our team will bring a strong knowledge of the client's business, as well as extensive experience working on heavy infrastructure and building works," he said.

"Our knowledge of the Hunter region, built over the last 15 years, will provide excellent value to the Department of Defence.

"This project will support the RAAF's capability in the region for decades to come."

We've been involved with the project since 2009 through the design development and government approvals phases.

Our engagement for the construction phase of the project reflects strong performance during the planning stages and our ability to work collaboratively with both Defence and the Managing Contractor to achieve the project objectives.

Coffey was instrumental in leading the managing contractor and their team to plan and design the project, and working with Defence to achieve the key government approvals, in particular, Parliamentary approval, which was achieved in October 2014.

Construction is now underway.

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COR Cooling relocates

Market leading industrial cooling and heat exchange solutions supplier COR Cooling is relocating its NSW based operations to Rutherford during June.

COR's current operations located in Thornton and Singleton will be consolidated into a single, larger and more efficient hub. This hub will be able to provide a more consolidated range of services to COR's valued customers in the Hunter Valley Region and broader NSW.

COR Cooling's NSW and SA State Manager Andrew Carter said, "Relocating to a new larger facility will enable us to provide increased capabilities, better use of our resources and enhance the level of service we provide to our valued customers."

"Bringing our two locations together in the Hunter Valley will allow us to provide greater value by combining all our resources together. Our customers will benefit from faster response times, additional capabilities and increased efficiencies," Andrew said.

"Our new Rutherford facility has a fully equipped modern workshop including a 10 tonne overhead crane, larger hard stand areas and larger wash bays that will provide improved productivity and enhance our commitment to quality and safety."

COR Cooling's new Rutherford facility is located at 15 Bradmill Avenue, Rutherford, NSW.



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OOTS founder Marty Adnum

A website initiative developed by Newcastle creative agency Out of the Square Media (OOTS) has been selected to be archived by a joint venture of the National Library of Australia and the State Library of NSW.

The website, newcastleinspired.com.au has been deemed significant enough to be added to PANDORA, the Australian Web archive based on its "lasting cultural and historical value", a state library spokeswoman said.

The site currently features content produced by OOTS such as the "Feel Inspired" video clips and footage of the Anzac Memorial Walk as well as historical footage compiled to mark the 25th Anniversary of the 1989 earthquake.

OOTS founder Marty Adnum said the self-funded website was created to house significant and inspirational moments from our past and present, so it was tremendous to receive an email asking for permission to archive it for posterity.

"The National and State libraries of Australia are committed to preserving selected websites of lasting cultural value for long-term access by the Australian community. Only a relatively small number of websites are assessed as being significant enough for PANDORA" - a State library spokeswoman said.

The videos featured on the website have received more than 60,000 views and have been shared locally, nationally and internationally.

BHP's Newcastle steelworks' centenary event

Hunter residents, including many former BHP Newcastle steelworks' workers and their families, attended an event to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the steelworks' official opening on 2 June.

Newcastle Industrial Heritage Association (NIHA) hosted the event at 'The Muster Point' at the entrance to the former steelworks. The event included the unveiling of a commemorative sculpture and the sealing of a steel time capsule.

NIHA President and event organiser Bob Cook said the centenary of the steelworks' opening is a significant milestone in the region's history that warrants celebrating. He said the

celebration was made possible because of the support of four businesses.

BHP Billiton was the major sponsor of the event. Other long time supporters of NIHA - Arrium, Hunter United Credit Union and Phoenix Health Fund - supported the event or the construction of the sculpture and time capsule. Funding for the sculpture also came from a NSW Government Community Building Partnership Grant, the Australian Workers Union, NIHA and many other small groups and individuals.

"The steelworks has left its mark on the people and businesses of Newcastle and the Hunter," Mr Cook said.

"The majority of Hunter people know or are related to someone who once worked at the steelworks," he said.

"It is wonderful to see business supporting Government and other community members to ensure we appropriately celebrate and preserve this important part of our region's history."

"We wouldn't have been able to have the right sort of commemoration without this business support."

Newcastle Industrial Heritage Association Inc. is a community group formed in May 2000, following the closure of the BHP Newcastle steelworks, to promote the role that all industries, particularly Hunter industries and manufacturing, have played in Australia's development. It facilitates and presents research into the Hunter Region's industrial heritage and seeks to promote tourism and adaptive reuse of existing industrial heritage sites, buildings and moveable objects. NIHA organises annual reunions for Newcastle steelworkers and tours on the history of Newcastle steelmaking.

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Hunter Defence Conference

The 2015 Hunter Defence Conference was held at the iconic Fort Scratchley function centre and historic site on 20-21 May. Mr Scot McDonald MLC, Parliamentary Secretary for the Hunter and Central Coast, officially opened the conference.

The annual conference has three objectives. Firstly, it seeks to provide a regional touchpoint for engagement between Defence industry stakeholders. This year over 140 delegates attended the conference, with representatives from the RAAF; Defence Materiel Organisation; the US Department of Defence; Lockheed Martin, BAE Systems and other Prime contractors; consultants Aurecon, KPMG and others; and many regional SMEs including HunterNet members.

Secondly, the conference offers a forum for major project updates and other significant announcements. This year conference delegates heard key updates in the Joint (capability development), Maritime, Land and Aerospace domains. Of particular benefit was an update on the JSF Program by Mr Todd Mellon, US DoD, Director of Logistics and Sustainment for the F35.

The final objective is to interact with a contemporary theme of importance to industry. The theme this year was "A networked future – Integrated communications and systems for Defence." The theme picked up presentations from the University of Newcastle and industry stakeholders including RPDE, DSTO, CSIRO, DIIC and NICTA. Attendees were also briefed on the RAAF's 'Plan Jericho', with its vision to create an Agile, Adaptive, Information Age and Truly Joint 5th generation air force.

The evening networking function included drinks in the grounds of Fort Scratchley and firing the WWII gun with three gunners selected by raffle. Attendees were then treated to a three-course meal in the conference centre entertained by the Australian Army Reserve Band (Newcastle). Between courses attendees heard from Legacy, Soldier On, Defence Reserves

Support, and AVM Chris Deeble, AM CSC (Program Manager Australian JSF Program) who spoke on 100 years of Anzac on this centenary year of Gallipoli. Proceeds from the evening function were donated to Soldier On and Legacy to promote their work supporting ex-serving personnel and their families. During the evening Mr Tony Cade, HunterNet CEO gifted \$2,500 to each of these charities from conference registration fees.

Ian Dick opened the conference on Day 2 announcing plans to establish a Defence 'business access centre' in the region. This initiative will build on the work he has undertaken over the past five years supporting regional industry as Project Director, Hunter Defence Project. Further detail on this access centre will be released when funding arrangements have been established.

Newcastle to Canberra flights begin

Flights between Newcastle Airport and Canberra commenced on 1 June with new airline FlyPelican. Flights between Newcastle and Sydney also began on 11 June.

The twice-daily services for both city pairs are on a schedule convenient for business travellers wanting to make day-return trips. Sunday flights are also scheduled.

Newcastle Airport's Manager Aviation Business Development David Nye said, "The announcement of a start date for these services is very welcome. The collapse of Brindabella in 2013 left a significant gap in the market for direct services to Canberra. The business community has been very vocal in their desire to see these services brought back and I'm pleased we've been able to do so."

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Daynatech facility officially opened

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Australia's oldest reservoir opened to the public

Newcastle East is home to one of the oldest reservoirs in Australia, it's also the only one to be open to the public. The first tours of The Res took place in May. An important landmark in Newcastle, and an engineering marvel for its time, The Res was built in the 1880's on Tyrrell Street, the reservoir stored water for the booming city, and delivered it straight to people's homes.

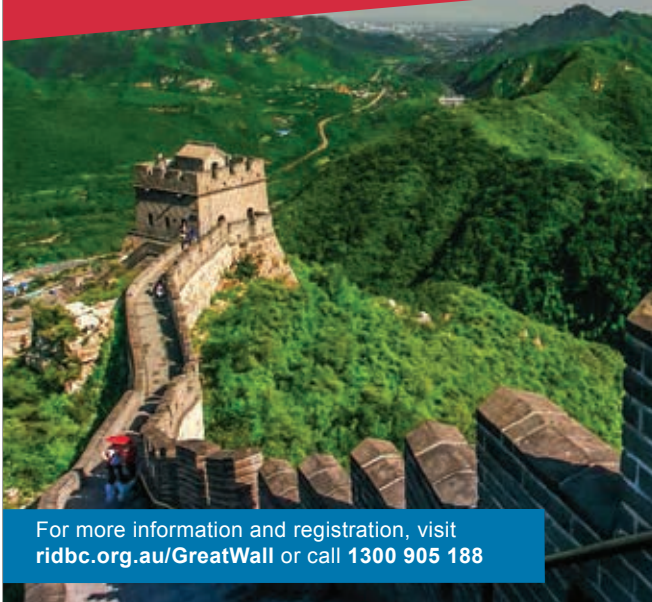
Following the decision to open the underground reservoir a number of upgrades have been made to the site to make it more accessible, including stairs, ventilation, scaffolding and lighting. The public tours will operate by ballot and according to Hunter Water tour guide Nick Kaiser, 12,000 locals have signed up already. "It's just a huge amount of interest, and we're going to do our best to work our way through as many of those people as we can."

Each group will explore The Res, its colonial architecture and rusted pipes that sit as they were laid so many years ago, and they'll hear some stories about life in Newcastle in the late 1800s. Tours run for around 30 minutes on weekdays and are conducted by a ballot on a monthly basis.



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Lets Talk With...

In a few words tell us about your current role.

I am a Cancer Institute NSW Early Career Research Fellow employed through the University of Newcastle. My work takes place at Hunter Medical Research Institute (HMRI) where I work in the field of medical genetics. My project is to identify genetic factors in inherited bowel cancer and I am to find new causative genes for inherited bowel cancer and also genetic factors influencing disease expression (when and where cancer develops).

How have you reached this point in your professional life?

My career path towards being a cancer researcher has been long and winding but well worth it as I've gained valuable experience and met a lot of interesting people along the way.

After high school I worked as a nursing assistant at a nursing home in Norway for 1 year, before starting a degree as a pharmacist technician. Then I worked in a pharmacy for a few years but did not find it challenging enough so I decided to become a mid-wife but while improving my grades to get into a nursing degree I changed my mind and went for a Bachelor degree in Medical Laboratory Technology (called a bioengineer in Norway – trained to work in any clinical laboratory). At this stage it had not really crossed my mind that I could become a biomedical researcher. During my final year I undertook my final project/thesis at a laboratory at the University of Reykjavik, Iceland – my first interaction with a research laboratory and I loved it.

I have always liked travelling and studying overseas was a great way to see the world. After my three months in Iceland I was offered a job there as a research assistant where my job was to set up a research laboratory for a new company called Iceland Genomics Corporation where I worked on the genetics of diabetes. During this time my mum was diagnosed with breast cancer and after a year I moved back to Norway to be closer to my family. I got a research assistant job at the Institute of Immunology, University of Oslo where I worked on the genetic analysis of family material with coeliac disease. Two and a half years later it was time to explore the world again and an underlying desire to work with cancer research due to my mum's cancer diagnosis. At the age of 32 I decided to leave everything I knew to move to Australia to do a Master's degree in Genetic Counselling, which also resulted in me undertaking my PhD here at the University of Newcastle in the field of cancer genetics. I have been very fortunate and been able to attract funding to keep my research projects going since I finished my PhD in 2007.

As you can see from my journey there have been a few coincidences and a lot of hard work to get to where I am today – but when you love what you do it does not feel like hard work. I have always said that even if I had more money than I needed (i.e. winning lotto) I would not stop working.

When you're not at work, where can we find you?

At the moment I only work part-time and when I am not at work I am home with my three young kids (they keep me busy...). Unwinding seems to be a thing of the past but I love reading books.

Where do you find inspiration?

Personally, I am inspired by people that take responsibility for their own lives and do well for themselves, by people that do a lot of volunteer work in addition to their own work/family and by women in leadership positions who manage to achieve a work-life balance. My mum's cancer diagnosis has definitely influenced my professional life as the overall aim for my research is cancer prevention by early detection.

What advice would you give to someone just starting out in your field?

For a few years I have been actively involved in mentoring year 12 girls at Maitland Grossman High School through the STEP-UP Program which is run by the Business & Professional Women's (BPWs) Club in Maitland in conjunction with the school. Young people's concern these days seems to be that they might choose the "wrong" direction – what if I start a teaching degree but don't like it... I usually then tell them my story and say that there isn't always just one way to end up somewhere. You are allowed to change your mind, start a different job/degree, etc. In addition, I also tell them about advice given to me from an early age "It is not always about WHAT you know but WHO you know" = network wherever possible.

What's something most people don't know about you?

When I was in high school there wasn't a pressure to get good grades so that you could get into higher education (tafe/uni) – hence I did not make much of an effort. Because of this (and how the education system is in Norway) I have done year 10-12 twice! This was to improve my grades so that I could get into the chosen degree at Uni.

How would you like to see the Hunter evolve over the next decade?

I would love to see the medical research field in Newcastle continue growing to attract more government funding. It is, however, amazing how much research activity has grown over the last decade. Throughout Newcastle and the Hunter, more than 1400 clinical and biomedical researchers and support staff are employed. I would like to see HMRI filled to its brim with brilliant researchers.

It would be great if the Hunter region had a bit of a makeover and became one of Australia's best tourist destinations, get the tourists visiting Sydney to Bar beach instead of Bondi – the beaches here are so much nicer!

Are you reading anything at the moment?

The last book I read was Jo Nesbø's book Police – the 10th crime novel featuring Detective Harry Hole. Nesbø has been lavishly praised by international critics for broadening the scope of the contemporary crime novel, and is today regarded as one of the best crime writers of our time. If you haven't read one of his books yet – do so, they are great.



Dr Bente Talseth-Palmer

The Value of "Thinking Time"

Paul Siderovski
SiDCOR Chartered Accountants

Over the last 20 years, I have practised "Thinking Time", which is 30-60 minutes of uninterrupted time, a couple of times each week thinking about a question. The questions are designed to help me think about a problem or situation where I've been hindered in making progress or where I might be about to do something stupid. It's not always easy, but if you're taking the time out to sit with each question, there is no doubt that you're seeing measurable results. So spend just 30 minutes and it will have a profound effect on the level of success you're able to achieve in your business and life.

Thinking Time allows me to side-step the problems before they arise and identify the core of it. Measuring is the tool that allows me to face reality and correct the activities causing my problems to begin with. Most successful businesses have an owner and management team who look for problems before they arise and correct accordingly. Thinking Time requires being sceptical about what might go right and seriously consider what might go wrong. It's a lot less painful (and less expensive) to avoid the problem than it's to correct it.

Some people hate to measure, so here it is on a bumper sticker:

Anybody who doesn't want to measure doesn't want to be held accountable.

For further information contact SiDCOR on 1300 743 267, email paul@sidcor.com.au or visit www.sidcor.com.au



Paul Siderovski, the founder and Managing Director of SiDCOR Chartered Accountants, has 20 years experience since starting as a chartered accountant with PricewaterhouseCoopers in 1995. Paul started Newcastle-based SiDCOR in 2002. Paul has a Bachelor of Commerce from the University of Newcastle and is a Member of the Institute of Chartered Accountants and the Taxation Institute of Australia as well as the National Tax and Accountants Association.



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Using KPIs to boost your business

Alan McKeown
Prosperity Advisers

A key performance indicator (KPI) is a metric that is generated to monitor significant elements of your business. The increasing use of cloud based accounting systems is streamlining the collection of data and enhanced add-ons makes this information available via dashboard reports and other reporting capabilities. The most effective use of KPIs promotes cross-functional areas within a business to monitor results, adopt timely changes and provide an element of accountability for results. This is not merely an accounting function; the use of KPIs should mandate a holistic company approach that will engage business owners, management, operations, human resources, accounting and other functional areas.

The integration of cross-functional areas under a holistic company approach will add value when setting expectations for the future. In a fast changing disruptive business environment simply looking in the rear-view mirror at past historical results will not provide the best map for the future. In addition, industry benchmarks and forecasts will further enhance the integration of KPIs by providing comparisons to your competition and indicators as to how changing economic conditions will have an impact on your business.

There are four common elements among companies that have effectively implemented KPIs:

- Engagement of an empowered team involving cross functional areas
- Assurance the data being utilized is complete and accurate
- Design of a plan that prevents information overload
- Execution of a strategy that translates knowledge into practical solutions

Customers

The focus for many companies has been on maintaining or growing the gross sales volume. Yet upon the implementation of KPIs, many companies have realized that they were working harder but yielding a lower bottom line than expected. Utilising KPIs can facilitate the analysis of revenue by customer, items by customer, gross profit percentage by customer, returns by customers and revenue by product line. In addition, this process may further identify customer concentrations and mitigate credit risks.

Suppliers

Inventory management techniques are a key component of supplier KPIs —understanding the costs associated with carrying excess inventory versus the lost opportunities involved with having low inventory levels. KPIs relating to suppliers should address product concentrations, supplier backlogs (promise versus actual), return orders processed and price per unit. In addition, this process may take into account payment terms, in-bound freight charges and order cycle times. The process of understanding your supplier's tendencies may identify unexpected results and expose opportunities for future improvements.

Personnel

In a flat economy, personnel discussions often involve talk of 'rightsizing' or implementing reduced working hours. However, KPIs can provide valuable insight into the workload of a company's staff and can enhance personnel decisions by taking

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into account data such as the average hourly rate, revenue per employee, allocation of head count by department, return orders by employee and employee order ratios. These KPIs provide the opportunity to assess production and departmental efficiencies which assist in the implementation of change. This process further validates the 'rightsizing' concept, if necessary.

Financial

The design of financial KPIs should be assessed on a quantitative and qualitative level, with both the balance sheet and income statement in mind. Credit risk is on the radar of most companies and encompasses accounts receivable aging analysis, collection periods and average days outstanding. Other key financial indicators include current and quick ratios, inventory turnover, debt to equity, return on assets, return on equity and gross profit percentage.

The most important word in the KPI acronym is key. Information overload can result from too much data, which in turn can lead to

difficulty understanding issues and making decisions. Establishing a key set of performance indicators will provide a company the opportunity to more effectively monitor performance, make decisions and implement change in an ever-evolving business environment.

For further information contact Prosperity Advisors Group on (02) 4907 7222, email mail@prosperityadvisers.com.au or visit www.prosperityadvisers.com.au

Allan McKeown is the CEO and Founder of Prosperity Advisers and has over 25 years experience providing growth advice to a range of business clients.



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Taking control of your super

Margaret Glenn
Rees Pritchard Pty Ltd

The rules around superannuation remain unchanged in the recent Federal Budget with the government further advising there will be no new taxes in its current term. This is good news for the half-a-million Self Managed Superannuation Funds (SMSF) and for those who are looking to establish one.

The number of SMSFs is growing at a rapid pace. During the past ten years, more than a million Australians have transferred their Super from industry and retail Funds to SMSFs.

It's all about taking back control.

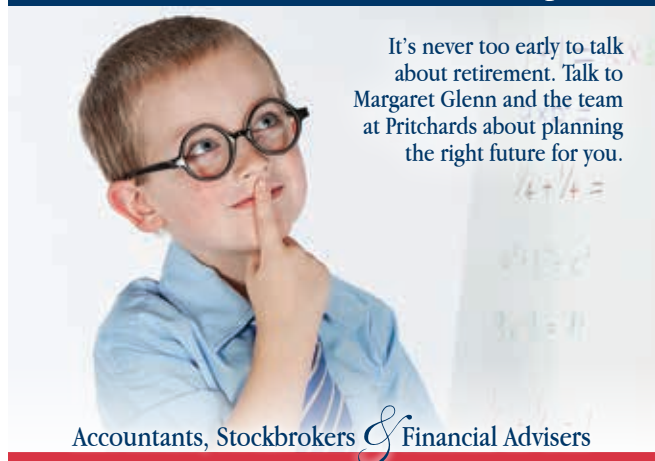
Many people ask us, why go to all the cost and bother of establishing a SMSF? The answer is because the long term benefits and security far outweigh the initial effort and time taken.

Having more say and control over your investment strategy means safe-guarding your financial future. It allows:

- Choice of investment options including cash, managed funds, shares, rental properties, commercial properties and other assets.
- One fund for the entire family. You can manage up to four members in one SMSF.
- Potential tax savings. Business real estate and listed personal shares can be transferred from members to the SMSF with favourable tax treatment of their returns. If fund assets are subsequently converted to tax free pension assets on retirement, then capital gains tax may be eliminated or reduced within the SMSF.
- Flexibility in Estate Planning. It may be possible to structure your SMSF so that member benefits may be paid to beneficiaries in the most tax effective manner.
- Potentially lower costs and higher returns depending on your investment decisions due to lower management fees, more effective investment strategy and less tax.



Celebrate your future Planning is the key



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- SMSF can access additional funds for investment by borrowing using a limited recourse loan.
- Insurance such as life insurance can be established through your SMSF and for some insurance types the premiums are tax deductible.

I'd like to share two important pieces of advice. Firstly, before you get started, you need to have a good understanding of what it means to be a trustee of your SMSF, as SMSFs are not suited to everyone's needs. As a Trustee, you'll need to be mindful of your obligations as you are personally liable for any decisions you make. Although there is no minimum requirement, it is more cost effective to establish a SMSF when you have significant assets (\$200k or more) to invest. You should allocate regular time each week to manage your fund which must be invested for the sole purpose of accumulating future savings for retirement. Secondly, the very best advice on exactly what to do and how to do it will come from using the professional services of a trusted accountant and financial adviser who will guide you along every step of the set-up process. Importantly, choose an advisor that is experienced in this area as they can also provide ongoing and invaluable assistance on how best to take - and keep - control of your SMSF.

For further information contact Margaret on (02) 4920 2877, email margaret_glenn@reespritchard.com.au or visit www.reespritchard.com.au

Margaret Glenn is a Certified Practising Accountant and director of Rees Pritchard Pty Limited. Established in 1951, and locally owned and operated, The Pritchard Group offers a range of financial services such as financial planning and investment advising, stockbroking, shares and wealth management.



Control spending as your company grows

Kellie Wright

Partner

Forsythes Business & Financial Advisors

As your company grows, the opportunity for spending to spin out of control increases. This is extremely risky for a small business which, generally, has little redress for significant cashflow glitches.

Strangely, uncontrolled expenditure can also affect morale negatively. Certainty is the key plank in maintaining good morale so 'out of step' expenditure, which can sometimes also appear contradictory, can become a real issue.

One of the primary ways to keep costs under control is to coordinate all purchasing activities. Coordination of spending may seem straightforward, especially when all or most of it is done by the company's owner. But such purchasing should not be random.

Even a relatively small company can benefit by establishing a 'finance team' which would meet regularly to discuss and determine all important product and service spending. They would also prioritise expenditure and align it with the cash flow budget. The simple act of meeting in committee focuses greater attention on coordinating spending - and can save a small company thousands of dollars a year.

Once such a committee or team is formed, a master list of spending categories should be drawn up. Priorities need to be set, with an overall budget divided among the specific categories.

One of the central goals of spending control should be the definition of cost limits for all targeted products and services. For example, a growing business may contract with a supplier to recommend and supply computer equipment.

By using a 'scoping' document that outlines objectives, timing, responsibilities and performance, the total cost can be controlled while avoiding expensive 'scope creep'.

Many businesses purchase with credit cards. While this offers flexibility, speed and excellent record-keeping, it may prove risky to a

smaller business, which may be prone to cash-flow ups and downs. A finance team will ensure such payment methods do not unduly impact on the cashflow of the business.

As a company grows, the responsibility for indirect spending usually tends to move further from owners, who may prefer to be involved in more 'strategic' activities. Few things, however affect the long-term growth and profitability of a company more than the sum total of unforecast spending. Again, a small team tasked with the review and pre-emptive reporting of potential blowouts can provide the eyes and ears needed to ensure effective outcomes are achieved.

For many small businesses the surge in I.T solutions that assist in ensuring better financial control have proven very effective. One such innovation, Cloud based solutions have given rise to such services as virtual CFO, this service leverages cloud bookkeeping to allow your external advisor to become, well....your virtual chief financial officer.

For the average small business a CFO isn't an affordable option whereas the virtual alternative is as it can be tailored to suit individual business needs from basic bookkeeping through to services that typify the role of a true CFO, including:

- Full payroll function
- Sales invoicing & debtor management
- Creditor payments
- Developing budgets & financial forecasts
- Ensuring effective use of available cash
- Best practice benchmarking
- Timely delivery of Management reports
- Design and refinement of internal accounting systems...and more

Technology has widened the support available to small business to unprecedented levels. The opportunities to imbed your external advisors into your business while leveraging your own 'finance team' is no longer just a good idea it is now a must for those looking for sustainable growth with accompanying profits.

How effective is your expenditure control system?

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NEWCASTLE PERMANENT

Jennifer Leslie has been appointed as a Non-Executive Director to the board of Newcastle Permanent Building Society. She is a Fellow of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Australia and a Member of the Australian Institute of Company Directors. Jennifer has a well-established career forged in the Hunter Region, including ten years as a Director at a Hunter financial services firm.



THE BUSINESS CENTRE

Martin McKenzie has joined The Business Centre as Business Advisor and Trainer with responsibility for the Small Business Solutions program which is supported by the Australian Small Business Advisory Services (ASBAS) programme. Martin has over 20 years' experience delivering and managing programs across all levels of government. Tenures have included positions with the Office of Environment and Heritage, EPA, Hunter RDA and most recently for the Federal Department of Industry and Science.



NEW BUSINESS HUNTER

Grant Morgan has joined New Hunter Business as New Enterprise Incentive Scheme Coordinator. He brings a wealth of experience and networks in the community sector having worked at the Hunter Wetlands Centre and NUPSA Inc. at The University of Newcastle. Grant is a member of the Australian Institute of Company Directors and is deputy chairperson of Family Insights. He will graduate with a doctor of business administration later this year.



PORT OF NEWCASTLE

Geoff Crowe has been appointed as the CEO of the Port of Newcastle. Geoff has extensive experience in the Hunter's coal mining sector. He is currently the CFO and Company Secretary at Port Waratah Coal and has held senior management roles with a number of mining companies. As CEO, Geoff will lead a team of 89 staff who provide services including vessel scheduling, dredging and survey, trade and business development, and the management of 792 ha of port land.



DANITA

Trent Bagnall is the new Chairman of the board of Dantia, the Lake Macquarie Economic Development Company Limited. He will use his skills, knowledge and experience in business, technology and mentoring, along with his commitment to innovation to drive and attract investment and new businesses to Lake Macquarie. Trent has been a non-executive Director of Dantia since November 2013 and is also currently Director of the Slingshot Accelerator.



NEWCASTLE AIRPORT

Peter Cock has been appointed as Newcastle Airport's new CEO. Peter has a decade of executive experience at Perth Airport where he held the roles of Executive General Manager Operations and Customer Experience, Chief Operating Officer, and General Manager Corporate Risk. Most recently, Peter has worked as an independent consultant for a range of clients, including Perth Airport.

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Hydro site plans

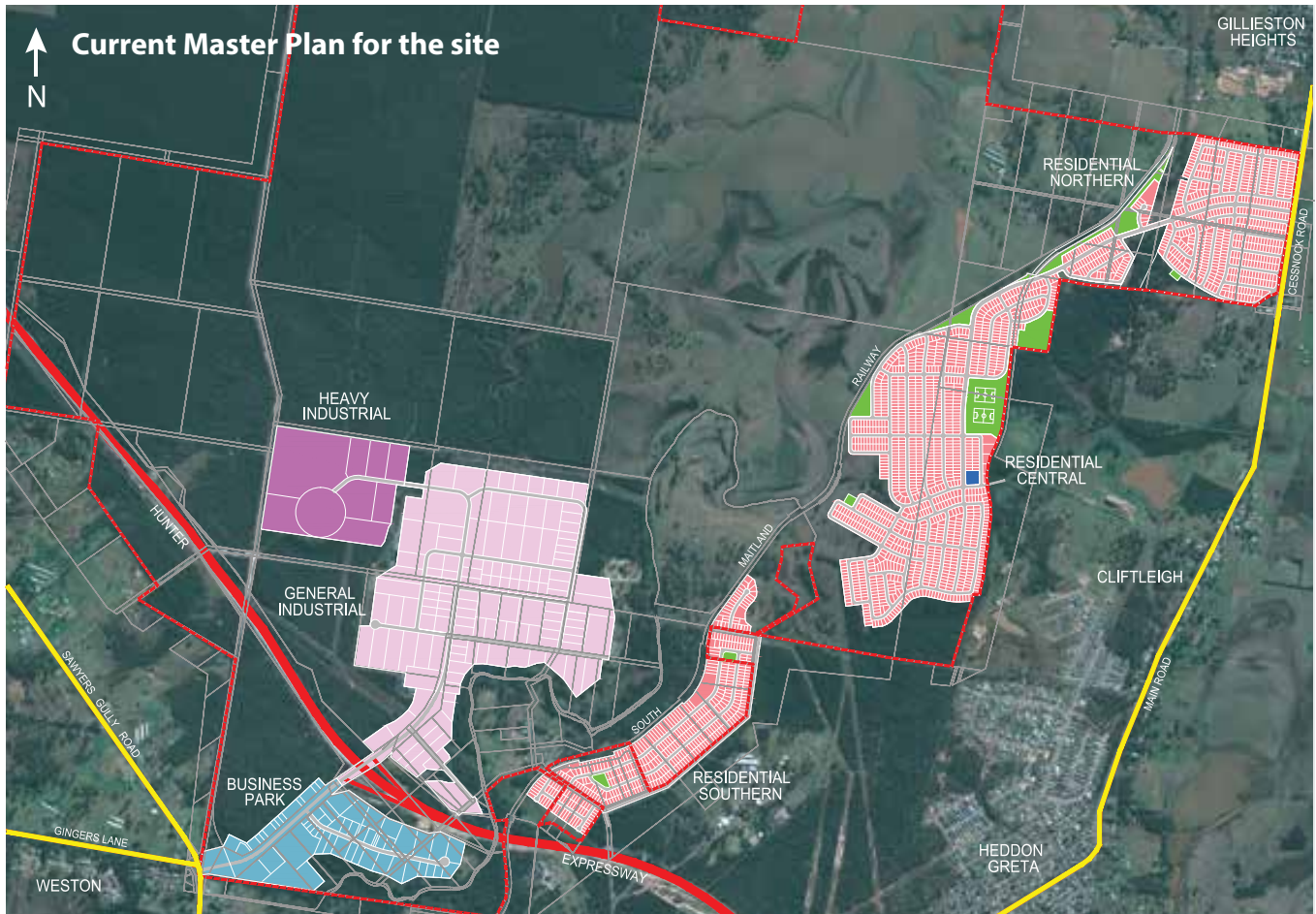
Plans for the future use of the 2000 ha site of Hydro's former aluminium smelter activities at Kurri Kurri are progressing and promise to provide a major economic boost for the region.

The Kurri Kurri smelter started production in 1969 and ceased production in September 2012. The site has been in 'care and maintenance' mode since then.

The overall project, which has now been renamed ReGrowth Kurri Kurri, includes plans for business and industrial development on and near the current smelter site, residential development between Loxford and Gillieston Heights, to the west of Cessnock road, and the conservation of around 1300 hectares of the site.

Hydro has commenced investigations into land capability and future land uses for the site. A detailed contamination assessment has been completed across all landholdings and remediation strategies are being developed. Hydro has also started discussions with the Department of Planning and Infrastructure, Cessnock City Council, Maitland City Council and other agencies regarding the site.

To facilitate future land use, Hydro is seeking to have the land rezoned. It is also expected that the Department of Planning and Environment would place an environmental impact statement on public exhibition mid-year.



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Tenancy 9	U/CONTRACT
Tenancy 10	LEASED
Tenancy 11	AVAILABLE
Tenancy 12	AVAILABLE
Tenancy 13	AVAILABLE

Property now Australia's biggest industry

The property industry's share of GDP rose to \$182.5 billion in 2013-14 – the highest of any industry in the country, according to research commissioned by the Property Council.

The Economic Significance of the Property Industry to the Australian Economy report shows that property directly contributes 11.5% to Australian GDP – one ninth of total economic activity. When indirect contributions are included, the property industry now makes up nearly 30% of the economy.

The industry is also Australia's second biggest employer – directly creating 1.1 million jobs, more than mining and manufacturing combined. When flow-on jobs are included, the industry generates 2.7 million full time equivalent positions.

Findings from the report were released at the Property Council's annual Property Leader's dinner in Canberra in front of the nation's political leaders, including Prime Minister Tony Abbott and Treasurer Joe Hockey.

Chief Executive Ken Morrison says the report provides the strongest possible evidence base for reform that enables the industry to grow.

"Our contribution to jobs and growth eclipses that of any other industry. One in four Australians draws a wage from property, either directly or indirectly. Our economy needs the property industry to do well, particularly as we transition from the mining investment boom," Mr Morrison said.

The report also finds that Australia's property industry pays more than double the amount of tax than the OECD average. In 2013-14, approximately \$72.1 billion in combined Australian and state government tax revenues and local government rates, fees and charges revenue were collected – equating to 16 per cent of all taxes paid.

Morrison argues that governments must abolish "distorting taxes" and streamline planning processes to make housing more affordable for all Australians.

"We know that governments at all levels are looking for ways to secure strong and consistent economic growth. This report confirms that they should be focused squarely on property as the industry that can deliver this for them."

Housing Awards entries now open

Entries into the 2015 HIA-CSR Hunter Housing Award are now open.

All entries for the Housing and Kitchen & Bathroom Awards must be received at the HIA Hunter office by 5 pm on 31 July 2015. Entries for the Professional Builder and Business Partner Award categories must be received by 26 June 2015.

Winners will be presented at a gala awards function on October 2015 at Wests Leagues Club, New Lambton.

Further information, including entry forms, is available from hia.com.au



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Your guide: Sinking to maintain strata buildings

Brad Gribble
Lake Group Strata

A common question many businesses have is how maintenance of strata properties is determined and funded. Here are the three main steps.

1. Establish a sinking fund

A sinking fund is set up by the owners corporation to cover the costs of future capital expenses such as painting the building, driveway refurbishment, replacing common property items or lift overhauls. Owners in two-lot strata schemes may be exempt if certain conditions are met and the owners corporation passes a unanimous resolution not to set up a fund.

2. Create a 10 year plan

Strata schemes are required by law (Section 75A of the Strata Schemes Management Act 1996) to have a 10-year sinking fund plan in place. There are no penalties in the legislation for not developing the plan but any owner can apply to the Consumer, Trader and Tenancy Tribunal for an order to develop a plan.

The plan shows how the owners corporation will repair and maintain common property and fund the works. The amount required for the plan will vary between schemes. A sinking fund plan should reflect a scheme's individual needs. Newer schemes generally require less money than older schemes with more repair work due.

The plan must cover 10 years from the date of the first AGM in the 10 year cycle. A decision on who will prepare the plan is made at the first AGM. The plan must be completed in time for the following AGM. The fifth year AGM is generally a time for review and adjustments.

Owners corporations can put the plan together themselves or engage an outside expert such as a quantity surveyor or property valuer. If you are doing it yourself, follow these three basic steps.

Step 1. List all common property. Whilst water re-use systems, rainwater tanks, lifts, swimming pools, pool filters or heaters, gymnasiums and gardens are obvious items, remember to include hot water services, plants, pots, screens, pergolas, awnings, retaining walls, TV antennas, the letterbox, intercom, lighting and paving.

Step 2. Estimate when repairs will be needed. Guarantees from previous work, warranty statements and service plans may help.

Step 3. Estimate costs. Service plans, previous quotes or new quotes can all be used.

3. Raise the funds

The owners corporation can decide how they want to raise contributions from owners. The sinking fund plan must show how funds for particular expenses will be raised so all owners and prospective buyers know their future liabilities.

Putting sinking fund monies into interest bearing accounts with approved financial institutions gives owners corporations the opportunity to earn interest on their investment.

Contributions to the fund can be levied regularly - yearly, half-yearly, quarterly or monthly. Others agree to use a large special levy or borrow money when major work needs to be done. You need to carefully weigh up the financial implications of the options.

At each AGM a resolution must be passed for the amount to be credited into the sinking fund for the following 12 months. Money that is not required for the fund can only be distributed back to owners by unanimous resolution.

For further information contact Brad Gribble on (02) 4942 3305, email brad@lakegroupstrata.com or visit www.lakegroupstrata.com



Brad Gribble is Director of Hunter-based strata and community title manager, Lake Group Strata.

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Date: Wednesday 8th July 2015

Time: 6pm

Venue: Tony Cant Real Estate Offices
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Rutherford property changes hands

Tony Cant Commercial recently sold a versatile commercial property in the thriving Rutherford Industrial precinct to an expanding stonemasonry business. The property at 1-5 Burlington Street is located on a corner block, with dual access and offered a 222 sqm panel shop and spray booth, as well as a 900 sqm combined RTA approved pit bay, workshop, wash bay and storage shed with awning and 137 sqm freestanding fully air conditioned reception area and offices. Realising the versatility this property could offer, Nicole Holmberg, Tony Cant's Commercial Sales and Leasing Consultant, discussed the options this facility could provide with a local business person looking to expand their current operations who otherwise would not have considered the property and gained a successful sale.



Final industrial properties clearing

Over recent weeks, Bobby Suminoski of Fourwalls Commercial has successfully negotiated the sale of three lots on behalf of APGF (Australian Property growth Fund), developers and owners of Muswellbrook Industrial Park, Tomago Industrial Estate and Steel River. The three estates are now in the final stages of being completely sold with only a limited number of lots available. Following a recent EOI campaign, two adjoining lot sales at Muswellbrook Industrial Park were sold for a total of \$180,000 plus GST with a total site area of just over 9000 sqm to a Newcastle developer. Only three adjoining lots now remain with areas from 6722 sqm to over a hectare.

In the Tomago estate, Bobby Suminoski sold 4 Kilcoy Drive to a local owner occupier for \$275,000 plus GST.

Wickham commercial office sold

Alan Tonks of Raine & Horne Commercial Newcastle has recently sold Suite 4, 18 Throsby Street, Wickham for \$830,000. It is a brand new commercial office with onsite parking for seven vehicles, north facing sunny terrace and excellent amenities with air conditioning. Located on the edge of Newcastle's CBD, it is approximately 330 sqm. Alan now has this unit for lease for \$88,000 + OGs + GST.



"Despite the softening in mining and the general industrial market, owner occupiers and developers are taking advantage of the low interest rates and investing in good industrial land that is priced very competitively, preparing themselves for future demand and growth."

Bobby Suminoski
Four Walls
Commercial



@HBRmag



Calculating Return-on-Investment (ROI) from eLearning

Stephen Phillips
Catalyst eLearning

eLearning has revolutionised education and training and this is especially true in the workplace. Corporate training directly impacts an organisation's productivity in at least three ways:

1. The costs associated with training - including direct costs such as staff, delivery systems, travel, per diems and opportunity costs
2. The costs associated with lost productivity during training time, and
3. The benefits that accrue to the organisation as a result of formal training- including increased productivity.

These impacts are further amplified when taking into account the obligation to train not only employees, but anyone who performs work on behalf of an organisation including contractors and volunteers.

For example: if an organisation sends 100 employees on a three-day course (assuming average on-costed wages are \$45/hour), the cost in wages alone is \$108,000 (100 people x \$45/hr x 24hrs = \$108,000). When all costs such as travel time, room hire, trainer hire, plus the costs of creating or purchasing materials and general administration are factored in; these costs can add a further 25% or more to the training budget – meaning that total training costs are in the order of \$135,000 plus.

In our experience, Catalyst's customers are saving in the order of 40-60% of their training budget when incorporating eLearning into their workplace development program. Opportunities for cost savings include:

- reduced training expenses such as printing of training materials, room hire etc.
- reduced staffing expenses, including travel to and from training venues
- reduced reporting and record-keeping expenses
- reductions in training time

- reductions in orientation time
- improved staff performance
- increased consistency of training materials
- increased utilisation of training platforms

As an accounting exercise, calculating ROI is relatively straightforward. But it is equally important to include other key factors when determining the true value of eLearning in the workplace.

Catalyst's customers have reported that employee retention is something they consider when contemplating the need for online training along with the value of using a familiar work tool (such as a personal computer, mobile phone or tablet computer) as a teaching tool. This is seen as increasingly important, particularly when training remote workers, field-based crews, contractors and volunteers.

Other benefits cited include:

- increased job satisfaction
- increased organisational commitment and morale
- improved teamwork
- improved customer service
- reduced customer complaints, and
- reduced internal conflicts

The effectiveness of any educational program will determine the ultimate ROI. There is no point in focusing on the amount of money saved by a proposed eLearning solution if that solution does not produce real learning in the form of changed behaviour, level of knowledge or personal growth of the learners. This is not a function of instruction being online or in a classroom, but is purely a result of successful learning strategies.

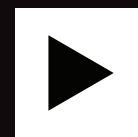
For further information contact Catalyst eLearning on (02) 4926 4401, email stephen@catalystlearning.com.au or visit www.catalystlearning.com.au

Stephen Phillips is the General Manager for Catalyst eLearning with extensive senior-executive experience in public and private sectors. He well understands how eLearning contributes to sustained business improvement in demanding stakeholder environments.



Angela
Hunter TAFE Award Winner

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Hunter students prepared for global workplace

A historic partnership between Nagasaki International University and Hunter TAFE was formalised during a visit to the region last week, which will deliver greater opportunity for Hunter students to gain international experience during their studies.

Nagasaki International University (NIU) President, Naoki Abe and NIU International Centre Director, Kazuyuki Tsukaharain visited Hunter TAFE in May when the two organisations signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU). The MOU will open the gateway for increasing levels of collaboration, cultural experience and educational exchange between the two international education organisations.

Initially, the partnership will seek to establish an International Student Exchange Program that provides Tourism and Hospitality students with the opportunity to travel, study and gain practical work experience in local organisations, both here in the Hunter and in Nagasaki, Japan.

The program is part of an increasing demand for students to be work-ready, ensuring that graduates from the Hunter gain the practical training, skills and experience required to succeed in the global marketplace.

The International Student Exchange Program is the first of its kind that NIU have established with an Australian education provider, adding to existing programs with organisations in North America, United Kingdom and the Philippines.

Hunter TAFE CEO, Christine Warrington said the program is an important step for the two organisations and will pave the way for international exchange and practical training programs for the region.

"We are proud to work in partnership with Nagasaki International University to provide the opportunity for students to gain skills and experiences for a global marketplace," said Ms Warrington.

"We look forward to developing this program and working with NIU to expand and strengthen this partnership in the future and provide greater international opportunities for students in both the Hunter and Nagasaki."



Nagasaki International University (NIU) President, Naoki Abe with Hunter TAFE CEO, Christine Warrington.

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Technology in education

Erica Thomas
Newcastle Grammar School

One of the constant questions in an educational setting surrounds the direction of technology and how it can be utilised to enhance educational outcomes.

Currently at Newcastle Grammar School we are evaluating new Learning Management Systems that make student 24/7 learning possible and give parents access into student records, teacher comments and reports. At the same time, traditional textbooks are being phased out while new digital texts become a normal part of lessons and by 2016 for most students will not only make the school bag lighter but also give access to a range of books through an 'app'.



Five years' ago, Smartboards and a BYO/ipad programme were the main areas that schools need to think about - these are now part of a students' expectations of their school experience. Using appropriate technology and being able to identify a range of technologies to solve problems are integrated into assignments across curriculum areas and assist students to develop knowledge and understanding in a modern educational setting. Teachers use technology to enhance motivation and ensure that students have the tools needed to contribute successfully to their world.

One popular co-curricular activity on a Monday after school is the robotics programme where students from Year 4 -12 enjoy working together to build and programme robots to complete tasks. Robotics hasn't yet taken the place of more traditional sport and music activities – many of the students involved in robotics are also involved in other activities – but it does point to a growth in a desire to extend knowledge in this area. In Science Club for Year 7 and 8 students last week, students used QR codes at Newcastle Museum to solve a mystery.

One old truth remains... At the centre of all good learning is a great teacher. A great teacher sees the potential in the technology available and utilises it effectively for learning. It takes more than the technology alone to teach the student – the human factor is still essential.

For further information contact Newcastle Grammar School on (02) 4929 5811, email office@ngs.nsw.edu.au or visit www.ngs.nsw.edu.au

Erica Thomas has been the Head of School at Newcastle Grammar School since September 2014. She is passionate about developing quality 21st century education, whilst maintaining a genuine commitment to the pastoral care of students.



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Innovative training partnership success

Earlier this year, HVTC embarked on an innovative training program that saw the company employ 15 promising electrical apprentices and enrol them in an accelerated skills training program via an intensive customised Electrotechnology course at the HVTC Skills Centre.

The Youth Employment Skills (YES) Partnership depends on local businesses to host apprentices and help them consolidate their workshop skills training through YES placements. The apprentices spend four week blocks of YES placement with host employers, the first of which is free of charge to businesses.

"We need local businesses to say YES and provide valuable on-the-job experience for our electrical apprentices as part of their training delivery," says HVTC CEO Sharon Smith. "We are calling on business owners to consider hosting one or more of our electrical apprentices for YES placement, with an option of continuing support for the remainder of the 2015 program."

After the first round of placement, Rutherford business Ultrafloor offered their YES candidate, 19 year old Jacob Klumpp of Thornton, a full time apprenticeship with the company.

"It's important that these apprentices have these opportunities to broaden their experience," Ultrafloor factory manager Neale Green said.

HVTC developed the YES Partnership in direct response to the Hunter's skills shortage and increased youth unemployment rate.

"With our above state average youth unemployment rate, partnerships such as this offer a genuine way forward to start reducing that alarming statistic," Ms Smith said.



Neale Green from Ultrafloor and apprentice Jacob Klumpp



HVTC YOUTH EMPLOYMENT SKILLS (YES) PARTNERSHIP

HVTC thanks the following businesses for saying YES and providing a promising young electrical apprentice with workplace skills training!

Austest Electrical Group, Austindo Consulting Services, Custom Solar, Dave Langman Electrical, Gatt Electrical, Hunter Water Corporation, JA Martin Electrical, Mainlec Australia, Patsan Electrical, Port Stephens Council, Roy Palmer Electrical, Sandvik Mining & Construction, The Plumbing & Electrical Doctor, Tim Walsh Electrical, Ultrafloor Australia.

CAN YOUR BUSINESS HOST ONE OF THESE 15 JOB READY ELECTRICAL APPRENTICES FOR A FOUR WEEK BLOCK OF WORK PLACEMENT?

The first block of YES work placement is free to host businesses, with the option of continuing support for the remainder of the 2015 program.

In partnership with HVTC, you could help address the high youth unemployment rate and electrical skills shortage in our region.



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Benchmark training empowers staff

A collaborative program between Caltex Australia and Hunter TAFE has set the benchmark for workplace training and delivered more than 300 staff qualifications in the process.

The partnership commenced when Caltex Terminals Group approached Hunter TAFE to develop a program that recognised and up-graded the skills and knowledge of more than 50 staff across Australia.

After sustained success with the Terminals Group the program was implemented into the Refineries Group where an elite group of Caltex employees were integrated into the Learning and Development delivery team. Training was heavily tailored to the refinery environment and offered a mix of online and paper-based delivery to maximise learning potential, whilst meeting national competency standards.

Training was successfully rolled out to a further 250 staff in seven different qualifications utilising the partnered training approach. The 97% completion rate is testament to the commitment of both the Learning and Development team and the students.

The program provided an opportunity for hundreds of Caltex employees to gain formal accreditation and recognition for skills and knowledge developed over many years working within the organisation. This accreditation has allowed many to be very successfully re-employed in other parts of the oil and gas industry.

Hunter TAFE Teacher and program coordinator, Dr Graeme Fullick said the key to the program's success was the genuine commitment of the company and its employees, a collaborative approach and strong ownership of the program.

"At Hunter TAFE we take the time to make sure we develop the right programs with our partners that will deliver long term results, and our ongoing relationship with Caltex is testament to that," Dr Fullick said.

"The program has set a benchmark for how RTO's and companies can work together to provide tailored, integrated and cost effective solutions for workplace training. This approach can be adopted by other organisations to provide staff with nationally recognised qualifications," he said.

New workshops for women sole traders



Women have needs in self-employed that differ to mens', and to how business is run in the corporate world or other employment. When becoming a sole-trader, many challenges arise that are often hard to predict or even understand, until they are happening. Self-employment by definition engages the 'self', and so some self-reflection and knowledge go a long way to growing a successful, profitable, and long lasting business.

A series of empowering workshops will run in the Hunter Valley from September for women sole-traders. These unique workshops are the brainchild of women's empowerment facilitator Shemiran Ibrahim, and local Hunter Valley Equine Assisted Learning facilitator Louisa Farthing from Unbridled Results.

Horses are partners in the learning as they respond to body language and emotions. They are experts at reading intention and respond instantly and honestly with their actions. No riding involved, all work done on the ground in a safe environment. In addition, workshops include a fun introduction to the healing dance of Middle Eastern women to embody deeper learning.

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A new landscape provides diverse choice

Educational pathways are more diverse and accessible with the traditional areas of higher education, vocational (VET) and lifestyle learning becoming blurred writes Rowan Radvan.

With major reforms in the VET sector and moves by some of Australia's major universities to reposition themselves, there is much to be gained by those who are looking at study. Improved pathways, fees assistance and diversity of skills learning form the new frontier for the education landscape.

For more than 100 years WEA Hunter has been at the forefront of quality and lifelong education. Best known for its specialist offerings in lifestyle programs and short courses the organisation has continued to evolve and diversify to meet the ever changing needs of its customers and the wider community.

Most recently this has included geographic expansion across the state, the introduction of specialised qualification training and further expansion of the highly regarded Alesco School.

WEA Hunter has refocused its business and is now well positioned as a competitive and quality provider of education that is diverse, affordable, flexible and multimarket suitable.

Each year WEA Hunter provides education to more than 4,000 people and this year will grow its student body by offering a range of new VET and higher education products that are designed to meet emerging skills area needs while at the same time creating WEA Hunter centers of excellence in skills markets not already offered in the region.

Our point of difference is quite simple - accessibility and affordability to all people in our community.

Like all other education providers and registered training organisations WEA Hunter must also move into this new 'pay as you learn' model. Through working partnerships with our community and the business sector we are designing innovative models that will help students access affordable pathways.

Part of this work has also been to become approved to offer students VET FEE-HELP. VET FEE-HELP is a Commonwealth supported loan scheme that helps eligible VET students pay their tuition fees for higher-level VET

qualifications. It is now available to WEA Hunter's existing and new students, for all full qualifications at Diploma level and above.

WEA offers quality higher learning options in the areas of business, marketing, naturopathy, nutritional medicine, herbal medicine, training design and development, as well as a range of lifestyle courses and quality secondary education programs through Alesco.

We are very proud of WEA Hunter's (Workers Educational Association Hunter) position as the 5th largest provider of community based adult learning in NSW and we are committed to working hard to ensure that we can grow and deliver the right educational products now and into the next 100 years.

Rowan Radvan is the General Manager of Workers Education Association Hunter






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INNOVATION

Hunter Innovation Festival 2015

The Hunter Innovation Festival has been an annual event since 2007 and in true innovation style there have been many iterations of how we have presented the festival. This year, in developing the festival theme, we have seen many exciting collaborations resulting in a diverse and stimulating program.

Collaboration is crucial to the success of any business. As businesses find diversification essential to their long-term sustainability, we are seeing more and more left of field collaborations taking place. Great examples are the increasing number of collaborations between fashion designers and big brands, including the successful partnership between Stella McCartney and adidas and closer to home, Peter Morrissey and Big W.

The events this year are collaborations between the University of Newcastle and Hunter TAFE, between New Institute and Newcastle NOW, between The Business Centre and Davies Collinson Cave. The strategic partners, including Hunter Research Foundation, are cross promoting and sharing social media campaigns.

The theme for 2015 is Smart Ideas. Simple. Everything must start from an idea. And in our current evolutionary cycle, where technology is abundant and can be seen to be taking over so much of our lives, we remember that to be of optimum benefit, technology must engage with our humanity.

We invite you to join the Hunter Innovation Festival as thought leaders, transformers, game changers, ideators, disruptors, challengers or observers. The Hunter Innovation Festival will serve as a platform to exchange ideas about trends occurring on a global level and what is happening in our own arena. By keeping abreast with new ideas and technologies, and marrying those with our humanity, collectively we will be unstoppable in creating a vibrant city where opportunities are plentiful.

The Hunter Innovation Festival will run from 14 -17 July.

Below is the list of events when this issue went to print.

Please visit www.hunterinnovation.biz for a full list of events and speakers

Tuesday 14 July

Collaboration – Hunter Innovation Festival	Smart Ideas for a Smart City Newcastle entrepreneurs with global reach (TBC)	Watt Street Arc	7am
Newcastle Now and New Institute	Smart Cities and The Internet of Everything	Newcastle City Hall	6pm

Wednesday 15 July

The Business Centre, Design Anthology, Davies Collison Cave	Design to Product – An Innovation Journey IP	TBC	10am
University of Newcastle	50 years of Innovation in the Hunter	The Conservatorium	7pm

Thursday 16 July

The Business Centre, Design Anthology, Davies Collison Cave	Design to Product – An Innovation Journey IP	TBC	10am
Collaboration – Hunter Innovation Festival & UoN	Breaking Through the Gender Barrier – Women in Innovation. Facilitator – Melinda Smith	The Lock-up Cultural Centre	5.30 - 8.30pm
Newcastle Port Corporation	Tour of Harbour (TBC)	Harbour	8.30pm - 5pm

Friday 17 July

Hunter Research Foundation	Hunter Economic Breakfast	Wests, New Lambton	7am - 9am
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Can I patent my App? Protecting ICT inventions

Simon Reynolds
Davies Collison Cave

With a fast moving and ever changing online landscape, knowing what can and can't be legally protected by IP rights like patents can be tricky. Yes, it certainly is possible (and advisable) to protect a mobile app with a patent in the right circumstances.

Inventors should explore the possibility of filing a patent application for their mobile app right at the outset of development. Given that the mobile app industry is extremely crowded and competitive, the advantage provided by a patent or patent application can go a long way toward the success of your mobile app.



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What are the patent requirements?

In order for your mobile app to be patented, your mobile app must be:

- novel
- inventive
- patentable subject matter

Inventors should compare their mobile app against available mobile apps and publications (such as published patents and patent applications) to determine whether there are one or more features of your mobile app which are at least unique (i.e. novel) and are not obvious (i.e. inventive).

Inventors should conduct a thorough search of the various mobile app platforms, such as Apple's App Store and Google Play to ensure that there are no similar mobile apps already available. However, that won't give you thorough results and you should consider investing in having a professional 'novelty search' conducted to ensure your app is unique.

Patentable subject matter defines which types of inventions can be patented. Generally, a mobile app which has some form of technical character that solves a technical problem is likely to meet the patentable subject matter requirement. Furthermore, mobile apps which utilise one or more of the integrated components of the mobile device (such as the accelerometer, gyroscope, GPS receiver, etc.) in a novel way are generally considered patentable subject matter.

Patent attorneys who specialise in preparing patent applications to protect mobile apps can assist inventors to assess whether a mobile app can be patented.

Quick protection

Unlike other forms of technology in the mechanical and chemical arts, mobile apps can be developed relatively quickly. This means that a patent filing strategy tailored for these circumstances is required.

Use of the Australian Innovation Patent system is an ideal way to obtain quick and enforceable patent protection in Australia. Additionally, the inventive step requirement is lowered for Australian innovation patents, therefore providing a greater chance that the mobile app can be patented in Australia.

Accelerated examination processes can also be used by inventors to quickly seek patent protection in Australia and abroad. The Global Patent Prosecution Highway (GPPH) for example can be utilised to speed up the examination of a US patent application when it has already been granted by the Australian Patent Office, so that enforceable rights in the US can be obtained as soon as possible.

A 'Bump'er success

Bump was invented by Bump Technologies, Inc. back in 2010 and was an incredibly popular mobile app, having been downloaded 125 million times via Apple's App Store. The Bump app allowed users to physically bump mobile devices together so that files could be shared between the devices in a simple and fun manner.

The Bump app cleverly used accelerometer data, geo-location data and timestamp data to allow a server to identify mobile devices which had been bumped together and then transfer the files between the mobile devices via the server.

When the Bump app was invented, this file sharing process was both novel and inventive. Furthermore, the use of the accelerometer and the GPS receiver of the mobile devices meant that the Bump app was also patentable subject matter.

Bump Technologies filed a US patent application for the Bump app, and was subsequently awarded US Patent No. 8,577,292. The company was later acquired by Google for reportedly between US\$30 to \$60 million, and the US Patent undoubtedly had a large influence on the sale price.

This patented technology is expected to be incorporated into a Google app called 'Copresence' in the near future which enables sharing of maps, music, photos, websites and the like between mobile device users.

Conclusion

So while there are a large number of mobile apps available on the market, you should not let your mobile app get lost in a crowd of copycats.

Patenting a mobile app can provide a useful competitive advantage. The value of a patent covering a mobile app can be extremely useful when approaching investors or setting up your company for an acquisition.

If you are in the process of developing a mobile app, consider arranging a meeting with a patent attorney at Davies Collison Cave to explore your options for patenting your mobile app.

For more information contact Simon Reynolds on (02) 4960 8366, email sreynolds@davies.com.au or visit www.davies.com.au

Simon Reynolds is a Senior Associate and Patent Attorney at intellectual property specialists Davies Collison Cave. He focuses on the preparation and prosecution of patent applications in the technical areas of electrical devices and systems, computer-software and hardware, embedded systems, business-methods, telecommunications, and general mechanics



Smart Specialisation to drive international competitiveness

RDA Hunter is applying the proven Smart Specialisation system as a catalyst for new activities to strengthen the economic development of the region. Smart Specialisation helps define our competitive advantages.

Smart Specialisation is implemented widely across the European Union and has proven highly successful. It establishes priorities for investment and research that maximise the competitive advantages of a country or region through innovation and collaboration.

The essential elements of Smart Specialisation for the Hunter are:

- It's a local, place-based endeavour which builds on existing skills and capacity;
- Hunter stakeholders (not central planners) identify and prioritise a limited number of areas of shared strength;
- The entire innovation system of the region is involved; and
- Current areas of expertise combine with new opportunities to drive the global competitiveness of the Hunter's economy.

Smart Specialisation is an integral part of RDA Hunter's ongoing work to grow the Hunter's international competitiveness through innovation and builds on the outcomes of the 2013 and 14 Hunter Innovation Scorecards.

Based on framework developed by the OECD that is implemented widely across the European Union, smart specialisation establishes an agenda for economic transformation by analysing regional competencies and discovering new areas of opportunity.

RDA Hunter's Smart Specialisation is a first for regional Australia and is supported by Australia's Chief Scientist Prof Ian Chubb AC, NSW's Chief Scientist Prof Mary O'Kane, and the European Union Delegation to Australia who comprise the initial reference group.

"The aim of RDA Hunter's Smart Specialisation project is to identify, build on and promote the Hunter's strengths so that we can focus government resources for stronger economic growth," said Todd Williams, CEO RDA Hunter.

"Our Smart Specialisation initiative builds on the outcomes of our Hunter Innovation Scorecards by identifying the region's key sectors, developing innovation activities that will grow these sectors further and directing resources to realise that growth," continued Mr Williams.

Ash Maurya and Slingshot partner to deliver Bootstart

Ash Maurya, one of Silicon Valley's most influential authors and recognised global thought leaders in the startup space, has chosen Slingshot as the first accelerator outside of the US to be the official partner of his Bootstart program.

Bootstart is designed to take entrepreneurs from initial idea to early traction. The online program runs over an eight-week period and is open to anyone who wants to start a new business or launch a new product, with the inaugural intake in mid-June. It will include access to Mr Maurya, live webinars and mentor meetings.

Mr Maurya is the author of the startup bible "Running Lean", a five star-rated book that has received wide praise and validation from the business and startup community, who believe it is a must-read for anyone seeking to create successful companies.

"Having met Slingshot earlier this year on my last trip to Australia I was hugely encouraged that they shared the same philosophy as I do regarding developing startups," Mr Maurya said.

"We both recognise that the foundation of great businesses is the business model not the idea and I am looking forward to seeing the outcome of the next Slingshot intake using Bootstart's content," Mr Maurya said.

Slingshot will also use the Bootstart content in the first four weeks of its accelerator program to ensure that participants in the Slingshot accelerator have robust business models that are scalable. The remainder of the program will involve leveraging Slingshot's resources to refine business models, marketing strategies and customer acquisition before pitching to secure additional capital for growth.

Lake Mac: Smart City, Smart Council

Lake Macquarie City Council is investigating new technologies to drive innovation in sustainable practices and to encourage economic growth across the City, ultimately enhancing the lifestyle of residents.

Local business leaders and industry experts are working with Council to explore ways in which digital technology can inspire a new wave of job creation and productivity and efficiency improvements, which will increase the number of ways in which Council provides its services to its residents and the City.

Council's Manager Integrated Planning, Sharon Pope, said a Digital Economy Strategy is being developed to help the City embrace a future of high-speed broadband-enabled technologies.

"This is all about making Lake Macquarie a more connected and sustainable City through the increased use of digital technology," Ms Pope said.

"Council is investigating how we can be a 'future proof' organisation, by using intelligent infrastructure, data gathering tools and by sharing even more information with our community.

"Technology we use in the City might soon allow Smart watering systems for playing fields, further enhance community engagement and allow for sensors that monitor real-time use of parking spaces, roads, footpaths, and cycleways to help residents decide where and when is the best time to use these services."

Smart City technology will make Council even more efficient and cost effective. Smart watering systems will water fields when they need it, allow for more sophisticated methods of collecting stormwater, and monitor permanently and accurately water and power usage at Council facilities such as pools and centres.

Council is also working to innovate its IT and communication systems, including improvements to its website, online engagement activities, and application of geographic information

system (GIS) software in infrastructure planning and analysis of information during decision-making. All of this will be available as part of a Smart City approach.

Dantia's Chief Executive Officer, Adam Cogle, said access to efficient and reliable communication services unlocks the growth potential for businesses across Lake Macquarie and makes it more attractive for businesses to move or start-up in the City.

"The forthcoming NBN connectivity, in accordance with a Digital Economy Strategy, will provide opportunities for businesses now and in the future to drive innovation, gain a competitive edge and create operational efficiencies," Mr Cogle said.

Community consultation with the City's residents later this month will ask, "how can we use technology to make Lake Macquarie an even better place?"

If you would like to get involved and share an idea with Lake Mac City Council, jump online www.haveyoursaylakemac.com.au/smart-city.



Smart City expert Mr Frans-Anton Vermast of Amsterdam, Netherlands, presenting at Lake Macquarie City Council's Smart City event held in March.



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Front End Innovation Conference Boston, Massachusetts 2015

Christina Gerakiteys
Ideation At Work

The possibilities opening up to businesses at this time of incredible change are exciting, though it will be challenging for some to release old beliefs. In order to see the possibilities and seize the opportunities, our eyes must be wide open.

The Front End Innovation Conference in Boston focused on innovation and collaboration, in particular on topics such as Front-End Development, Creativity, Technology, Software and Software development. I am an innovation tragic, and with speakers the calibre of Seth Godin (business and marketing guru) and Tom Kelley (IDEO) I made the trek to Boston to soak up as much I could.

A variety of terms have been used to describe innovation over the last few years. We have sustainable, incremental, disruptive and destructive innovation. One that was repeatedly used at the Boston Innovation Conference that resonates well was transformational. After all, isn't that what innovation truly does? It transforms?

We have entered a time period where the consumer is the boss. With a plethora of choices, why wouldn't they be? And we know the importance of the Tribe (and our reliance on those who share similar thoughts and interests) is growing as is Conscience Purchasing (with more consumers considering the social and environmental implications) and Connectivity (and the growing importance and influence of our networks). So how do we take all of these elements and write them into a business plan? Well actually, we don't.

There is a distinct movement away from writing the traditional sixty-page plan - the one you spend hours putting together with five and ten year projections, then slip into the bottom drawer until someone reminds you it's time to look at it again. What is preferred is a Business Model Canvas. The Business Model Canvas is a visual, agile and simple template that allows you to strategically develop your ideas/products/business. And whether you're planning incremental or transformational innovation will determine which Model Canvas you go with. In either case, it's important that you're prepared to pivot.

Strategy is definitely valuable but prototyping and testing your product, idea or service are worth more, and this is where pivoting comes in. Pivoting is the new business agility - when you need to, turn a little! Tried it and the client isn't reacting? Pivot. Tried it and the client has a problem with it? Pivot. Traditionally we measured our progress against our (dusty) business plan and if there was a misalignment, we felt the fault was ours. How could the plan, which was constructed on a number of sound assumptions, not be accurate? Change the plan. Pivot. Until you find the right match. Pivot. We talk about flexibility but we're not really walking the talk. And if you pivot to the point where you're dizzy, go back to square one.

It's tough to be in business. More than one business guru has told us that a business designed for success in the 20th Century is inevitably also designed for failure in the 21st Century. The Industrial Economy is over and we are heading into a Service Economy for a Connected Community, so much so that we are being offered a multitude of services for free. Google are currently trialing air balloons that allow free Internet access via satellite transmission. They are managing to keep them in the air for 200 days in spite of the nay sayers. The plan is to have enough of these in the air to provide worldwide, free Internet access. Imagine what that would mean for isolated communities, for medical practices, for education, for your Internet provider!

Networking is integral to the Connective Age. HR positions are set to be filled not by those with impressive University



qualifications, but by those with impressive networks. Seth Godin is an advocate of 'date your client'. As the lines between work life and social life continue to blur, we want to know whom we are doing business with. We want to connect.

Significant transformational innovations have a slow diffusion rate. In other words, it will be a while before you reap the benefits. But if you go back and plot the growth of the last product or service you offered, you would find that from ideation to execution, it took a while to reap the benefits from that as well.

Students at the Singularity University in California invest 80% of their time in looking towards the future, yet how many businesses spend even 20% of their time or resources doing this?

Here are some questions you can ask at your next board or team meeting or ask yourself, if you are a one-person operation, to test where you're at:

- How much time do you spend looking forward?
- When was the last time you talked to and observed your clients? Out of the office? Really listened?
- How do you improve your client's experience of life? What value do you add?
- Can you move/react quickly and effectively?
- Does your "culture eat strategy for breakfast"? Do you have the kind of workplace people want to spend time at?
- Are your meetings productive? Do people contribute or roll their eyes and watch the clock?
- Have you got the right people on your team?
- What is your core competency ability? What is your strength?
- Are you authentic? Do you do what you say you will?
- Are you giving it 100% or holding back? Why are you holding back?

The good news is you don't have to make radical changes to your entire business. What you do need to do is give permission to take even a little of it to the edge.

For further information contact Christina on 0425 236156, email christina@ideationsatwork.com.au or visit www.ideationsatwork.com.au

Christina Gerakiteys is the CEO and Creative Director of Ideation At Work. She consults as Business Advisor for the Creative Industries at The Business Centre and has developed the Rippler Effect Innovation Program.



Tips and Traps – What every inventor must know about patents

Andrew Caska
Caska IP

Tips

1. Keep it Quiet – As a general rule you need to file a patent application before disclosing your invention (such as by offering your invention for sale or showing your invention on a website). It is recommended that you work out your IP protection strategy upfront and before any disclosure.

2. Look before you Leap – You can't obtain valid patent rights unless your invention is new i.e. it has not been done before anywhere in the world. It is suggested that at least basic background and patent searching is conducted to determine if your invention is new, and likely to be patentable.

3. Consider the Commercials – No matter which way you slice it, the cost to properly patent an invention will set you back at least a few thousand dollars and in some cases in the tens of thousands if you seek patent protection in a few countries overseas. Accordingly, you should conduct some initial investigations into how much your invention will cost to develop and make, and estimate the kind of commercial return you may expect in the first, say, 5 to 10 years. Will this estimated commercial return exceed the costs to patent protect your invention?

Traps

1. D.I.Y Patents – According to IP Australia about 98% of self-represented inventors fail to achieve a granted Standard Patent. Many inventors who attempt to draft and file their own patents either lose their rights or unnecessarily limit their rights. It is

recommended that you seek advice early to avoid jeopardising your patent rights.

2. Not understanding the Value of Patents – Some inventors become caught up in the mantra “we’re not going to enforce our patent rights so why bother...”. However, the real value of patents lies in the patent “deterrent” others from copying your invention to avoid potentially breaching your patent rights. This “deterrent” ultimately provides commercial leverage such as investor appeal, market share, product price point and company value. In fact, for the vast majority of inventors your patent will work behind the scenes to keep your competitors at bay without you ever needing to consider enforcing your patent rights.

3. Waiting until the Patent Grants – Patents can take years to grant, so don't get caught in the waiting game. It is suggested that you pursue an aggressive commercial strategy as soon as your patent application is filed and work toward commercial goals such as a licensing deal or the launching of a new business.

For further information contact Andrew on (02) 4910 4052, email acaska@caskaip.com.au or visit www.caskaip.com.au

Andrew Caska is the founder and principal of Caska IP. Andrew is a registered Australian Patent and Trademark Attorney and a registered New Zealand Patent Attorney.



Crowdfunding set to raise \$3.4 billion

Previously most ‘life changing’ ideas lay dormant, talked about over beers with friends as “the one that got away”. These days, ideas transform to possibility thanks to crowdfunding sites such as Indiegogo and Kickstarter.

The Crowd Funding Industry Report released by Masssolutions found that crowdfunding has seen huge international growth and is set to raise \$3.4 billion in funding worldwide this year.

“Crowdfunding allows new businesses to avoid going to banks and getting into debt too early in their lifecycle. Australian’s are full of entrepreneurial spirit and crowdfunding is an extra vehicle to allow them to reach their goals”, said Michelle Young, Inventor, THEIA.

Once the birthplace of tech startups, crowdfunding has been diversifying and is now becoming more commonplace in Australia as the launch-pad for industries ranging from health & beauty to film and community projects.

With over two million small businesses in Australia accounting for 68% of employment, it’s not surprising that Australians are picking up on this trend as a fail-safe method to finance small business start-ups without the pressures of finance repayment before business becomes profitable.

“Over 40% of businesses have had successful launches from crowdfunding campaigns demonstrating big ideas can indeed be turned into reality.

Hunter Valley Electric Vehicle Festival

The Tom Farrell Institute organises the Hunter Valley Electric Vehicle Festival (EVFestival) to grow interest in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) in high school students with a view to careers in the electric vehicle industry, and to grow interest in manufacturers/developers/entrepreneurs in sustainable energy manufacturing particularly related to transport.

Running annually since 2011, the EVFestival consists of three parts:

1. An electric vehicle construction and racing competition called the EVPrize held on 13 August.
2. An EVworkshop/conference held on 1-2 October to bring the latest in Electric vehicles and autonomous transport research to the attention of the government planners and the community at large in an attempt to promote the move to electric transport.
3. An EVShow on 3 October to put on display for the public all manner of electric vehicles and associated technologies. In 2012 the EVShow attracted some 8,000 persons to the Newcastle foreshore, and in 2014 some 5,000 to the Kart raceway at Cameron Park.

Further information, including sponsorship opportunities, is available at www.hunterevfestival.net

“THEIA is the world’s first product of its kind. It removes fake tan in minutes, and is perfect for women, anywhere in the world. Our current crowdfunding campaign plans to make this super simple product, a reality for tan lovers worldwide”, concluded Young.

With more and more jumping onto crowdfunding sites to start their business, we can expect Australian consumers to follow suit and begin heading to crowdfunding sites to pick up the next game changing product.

Innovating to solve regional problems

Every Hunter business looking to thrive in the current global economic environment needs to innovate. Non-profit organisations face similar challenges to other businesses.

The Hunter Research Foundation (HRF) has fostered a culture of innovation since it was established as an independent regional research organisation in 1956. Pursuing original research into the economic and social issues holding the Hunter Region back has generated a spirit of invention at HRF when it comes to defining the issues, designing research aimed at providing practical solutions and finding support to enable it to happen.

This spirit was demonstrated recently in the HRF's YOUnite youth connectedness project.

HRF's social researchers wanted to tackle the Hunter's skyrocketing youth unemployment (18.5% at the end of March) and widespread reports of increasing youth disengagement from school and community. They developed their YOUnite youth project involving three pillars of innovation - collaboration, inventiveness and experimentation.

Firstly, HRF invited input from the public at its community lecture series event, which included an interactive panel discussion involving young leaders. They then consulted a Youth Stakeholder Group – educators, trainers, youth service providers – during a workshop to define the issues the research should address. The missing piece in the information puzzle was the voice of young people themselves.

Secondly, they designed an innovative methodology that put young people (14-24 year olds) at the heart of the YOUnite project. HRF wanted young people to conduct the research and analysis as well as be the subject of it. So they recruited six under-25s as research assistants and guided them to conduct 540 face-to-face interviews with young people in places where they meet – beaches, malls, trains and buses.

Thirdly, HRF staff experimented by coaching three of the research assistants to present the survey findings at a Youth Summit in Maitland in February. This also involved facilitated workshops with more than 60 under-25 year olds to find potential solutions to the issues the young researchers had defined. HRF took these results back to their Youth Stakeholder Group to

try and identify practical programs and initiatives that can be delivered to make a difference to the outcomes of young people in the Hunter.

YOUnite will wrap up with a final report in June 2015. To read HRF's YOUnite Project research paper, visit www.hrf.com.au

Australian Government to help Hunter businesses grow

The flagship Entrepreneurs' Infrastructure Programme aims to improve business competitiveness and productivity. There are three main elements to the programme:

Business Management – which offers practical support to build management and business capability, to help businesses realise improvement and growth. A network of regional business advisers can provide Business Evaluations for local companies that highlight areas for potential improvements. Initial contact can lead to further advice and reviews and other Australian Government business services.

Research Connections - a brokering service to link businesses with knowledge and research groups, such as universities. This may include a matched funding grant to assist research capability.

Accelerating Commercialisation – which offers guidance, connections and matched funding grants for Australian entrepreneurs, researchers, inventors, start-ups, and small and medium sized businesses wanting to bring their novel product, process or service to the marketplace.

Also at business.gov.au you can find information on the R&D Tax Incentive. For companies engaged in R&D it provides a targeted tax offset to encourage research and development.

For example, Rutherford-based Pipe Lining and Coating Pty Ltd has used the R&D Tax Incentive to help it become a leading supplier of high quality fabrication, cement lining and surface treatment services associated with water industry infrastructure. Another useful business service is the Industry Skills Fund. The fund will help businesses preparing to take up growth opportunities outside of their normal day-to-day business operations, to build a highly skilled workforce that can take advantage of these opportunities and adapt to rapid technological change.

Students' innovation in robotics

Five talented students will make history as the first Hunter TAFE team to participate in the National Instruments Autonomous Robotics Competition (NIARC).

The NIARC is a student robotics competition designed to encourage development and innovation.

The team is supervised by Hunter TAFE Electronics Head Teacher, David Leask and comprises electronics students Conrad Neilands, James Dyson, Ben Brown, Jonathan McDonald and industrial design student, Oliver Bamford. The diverse skills sets from the five students means that Hunter TAFE has fielded the only non-university team from 26 entries across Australia and New Zealand in the competition.

Over seven months the team is tasked with developing an autonomous robot that will ultimately compete in a live competition, completing milestones each month until the national live competition in Sydney this September.

The challenge will put the students to the test as they train with assistance from industry expert teachers at Hunter TAFE. During this time they will develop new skills including in complex Electronics, microcontroller technology, laser guidance, collision avoidance, navigation and visual recognition systems.

Mr Leask said the robotics task will revolve around the logistics and transportation industry.

"The challenge is set on a scale model of a shipping container loading terminal. This will require the team to create a robot from

the ground up, capable of navigating its way around obstacles and over bumpy terrain," said Mr Leask.

"This is a great challenge for the students. These skills the students will develop are in high-demand in industries such as industrial automation, smart manufacturing, environmental monitoring, drones and automated vehicles," he said.

The team has also gained support from the local organisations including Newcastle Stevedores, Hummingbird Electronics/Redarc, TEFOL Rutherford, Solar Sailor and Novecom which are providing support to the students through mentoring and site visits.



Hunter TAFE robotics team - James Dyson, Jonathan McDonald, Oliver Bamford, Ben Brown and Conrad Neilands.

Mt Thorley home to Bridgestone's Institute Global Mining Solutions

A global centre for tyre excellence opened at Mt Thorley in April to better support the economically vital mining sector both here and overseas.

An industry first, the Bridgestone Institute Global Mining Solutions (BIGS) will develop high-quality, total solution packages for the mining industry around the world.

"We could have established BIGS anywhere in the world, but Australia's first-class resources and construction sectors make it an excellent location for us to develop the new technology and new integrated service packages to help reduce operating costs and downtime for our mining, construction and earthmoving clients," said Tsuyoshi Kamiya, Managing Director, Bridgestone Institute Global Mining Solutions.

"This is the first time anyone in the tyre sector has attempted this, but Australia has the mining, construction and earthmoving technology, the qualified personnel and the infrastructure to make BIGS a huge success."

As a global tyre leader, Bridgestone already has a worldwide commitment to these industry sectors, providing everything from application-specific tyres and retreads to smart services and real-time on-site problem solving. BIGS will take that commitment to an even higher level. Using data and concepts collected from Bridgestone's global network of tyre production facilities and distributors, BIGS will not only create the next level of industry-specific tyre technology, it will also act as a training hub to ensure its service solutions can be reproduced in any location around the world based on consistency of quality and expertise within these areas.

In the resource and construction industries tyres are vital to production and safety, but are an on-going cost and maintenance issue. As they can represent a significant component of a customer's operating costs, it is important to prolong the life of the tyre.

To that end, Bridgestone is not just focusing on the tyre but also on improving the quality of support services to ensure a tyre has every opportunity to meet its maximum work-life.

"BIGS will not just be looking at the tyres, but at the tyre's entire lifespan – from design, fitting, maintenance and inspection through to on-site servicing and engineering, rim management, repair, retreading and disposal," Mr Kamiya said.

Reflecting the importance Bridgestone places on BIGS, the site opening was attended by special dignitaries from Bridgestone Japan; Mr Mitsuhiro Shimazaki, Vice President and Senior Officer International Tire Business Operations; and Mr Tomohiro Fukuda, Vice President and Officer Specialty Tire Business and CQO, Specialty Tire Business.

Established as a subsidiary of Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres, BIGS is located in the Hunter Valley for easy access to the region's coal mines while still being relatively close to Sydney for international visitors.

It is expected BIGS will employ a number of specialists in the coming years, and host dozens of trainees every year.



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Mining industry ahead in the fight against ice

The war on drugs has a new focus, highlighted by recent media coverage on the menace of methamphetamines – ‘crystal meth’ or ‘ice’ as it is more commonly known. This, and Prime Minister Tony Abbott’s plans for a federal taskforce to tackle Australia’s drug problem has turned attention back to workplace policies and procedures in managing and enforcing zero tolerance.

The use of ice, synthetic drugs and other illicit or non-illicit drugs has the potential to impact on safe work practices, as well as social and cultural issues.

The mining industry has an instilled safety focus, yet workers may continue to use and be affected by these substances. Users may experience altered memory, lack of concentration or impaired coordination which can delay reaction times and increase the risk of accident and injury – not just to themselves, but to their co-workers.

Mark O’Neill, General Manager CS Health says there are several components to maintaining vigilance in the fight against drugs in the workplace. These include maintaining an effective drug and alcohol policy, implementation of testing programs, worker education, awareness of current laws, legislation and the ever changing substance market.

“With any substance abuse, safety in the workplace remains the number one priority to ensure all workers are not impaired in the performance of their duties. The key in meeting the challenge of illegal substance use is workplace education on the dangers of all drugs and fostering the development of a zero tolerance approach to anything that places workers health and safety at risk,” said Mr. O’Neill.

“Within the NSW mining culture, the use of illicit drugs is quite low. CS Health conducted almost 16,000 drug and alcohol tests in the Hunter Valley over the last 12 months, with only 0.21% of all tests returning a positive result for methamphetamines.

There has been no increase over the past three years. This result doesn’t mean that we can rest easy. We need to remain vigilant; particularly given this is a growing issue in our community.”

“Most mining employers have had strict drug and alcohol policies and procedures in place since the 90’s, which prohibit the use of illegal substances. These programs are working to successfully discourage drug use within our industry.”

“The issue of substance abuse is one that we need to approach as a collective group so as to gain some level of control. Other industries could benefit from implementing programs similar to those maintained within the mining sector to help secure workplace safety and community health.” Mr O’Neill concluded.

CS Health has been conducting drug and alcohol screening and education since 1996 and offers urine and oral fluid screening methods. They also provide assistance to updating company drug and alcohol policies on request. Advice regarding synthetic drug screening is also available.

For more information about drug and alcohol screening and education services, please contact CS Health.



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1,300 jobs closer to being secured at Mount Thorley Warkworth

The jobs of 1,300 Upper Hunter miners are another step closer to being secured following today's recommendation by the New South Wales Department of Planning and Environment that mining should be allowed to continue at Mount Thorley Warkworth, subject to stringent environmental conditions.

"Today, the 1,300 workers at Mount Thorley Warkworth and their families have another reason to hope that their economic future may be secured for years to come," NSW Minerals Council CEO, Stephen Galilee said.

"Today's recommendation by the Department is welcome news for the mine workers, and everyone who relies on the ongoing economic stability of the Upper Hunter."

"Hundreds of people employed in local businesses that supply Mount Thorley Warkworth will also welcome the recommendation as it means their jobs are also looking more secure. In 2014, Mount Thorley Warkworth spent \$188 million with more than 270 suppliers in the region, so it's critical that this project be allowed to continue," he said.

The Mount Thorley Warkworth continuation has strong support from the local community, as most people understand its importance to the economic strength of the Upper Hunter.

"Following the six week public exhibition period for the project, 1,891 submissions received or 85 per cent were supportive," Mr Galilee said.

"Importantly, around 90% of these supportive submissions were from the Hunter region, demonstrating strong local support for this project and the jobs it provides."

"Until final approval is given, thousands of jobs still hang in the balance. Ultimately, this is a test for the NSW planning system, and the NSW Government's commitment to local jobs," Mr Galilee said.

Drayton South EIS on exhibition

The New South Wales Government has placed the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Drayton South coal project on public exhibition.

Anglo American Coal CEO Seamus French said this second EIS directly addresses the reasons given by the Planning and Assessment Commission (PAC) in 2014 for the project's refusal and outlines how Anglo American has incorporated all the recommendations to ensure no adverse impact on the neighbouring horse studs.

"There is no reason to choose between 500 local jobs at Drayton South and the horse stud industry as we have demonstrated our commitment to coexistence by listening to the PAC and accepting all the recommendations made in 2014 to ensure all industries in the region can prosper and have a successful future," Mr French said.

"We have kept all mining activities behind the PAC nominated second ridgeline which has decreased the project footprint by a further 25 per cent, doubled the buffer between the mine and neighbouring horse stud operations and keeps mining activities at least two kilometres away from the horse studs operating areas.

"These changes made to the Drayton South coal project, including the removal of two mining areas closest to the horse studs and a reduction of a third area totalling 45.5 million tonnes of coal resource, remove the risk of adverse impacts to equine health and the operations of Coolmore and Darley, thereby ensuring the viability of the horse stud industry is not compromised."

Mr French said the project will provide a 15 year continuation of the existing Drayton operations, keeping 500 local jobs, work for 140 local businesses and continue to provide \$50 million per year in local procurement spend while injecting \$60 million in state royalties and taxes to the NSW Government annually.



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Our new mine plan addresses the NSW Planning Assessment Commission's recommendations by reducing the mining area by another 25%, increasing the distance between our mine and the neighbouring horse studs, keeping mining activities

behind the natural ridgelines while ensuring the local environment is protected.

By making these further compromises we have found a solution right for everyone. Drayton South will keep 500 employees in jobs for another 15 years and allow us to continue to contribute to the local community to benefit local schools, sporting groups and the 140 local businesses who work with us.

Please help our employees, their families, local community groups and local suppliers get this critical project approved by making a submission to the NSW Department of Planning in support of the project. It's important that we all tell the government how important this project is and why it must be approved.

Find out how at www.voiceformining.com.au.

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Local innovation reduces fire risk in engine bays

Local business Funnel Web Fire Systems has developed a secondary system for engine bays which acts as a backup when the primary system fails to extinguish a fire or a fire restarts.

Initially the system is being aimed at the mining industry, but would also have applications in other industries including construction, heavy transport and buses.

Currently the only backup system for an engine bay fire is manual extinguishers, which potentially puts personnel at risk, or a water cart, which doesn't normally directly reach the engine.

The system developed by Funnel Web Fire Systems allows the fire to be attacked at a distance with a water cannon. The water floods the engine fire, including the traditionally difficult to reach locations such as between the engine and the tyre.

The system has a simple design, is non-clogging and once installed requires no maintenance.

As well as offering safety benefits for people, the relatively low cost system has the potential to pay for itself many fold, with some of the mining excavators costing up to \$16 million. Potential down time can be even more costly.

Funnel Web Fire Systems has recently worked closely with the Anglo-American Drayton mine to design a version of the system specifically for their Hitachi 5500 digger.

The fire safety system is the brainchild of Steve Burgess, who has spent 45 years in the civil construction and mining industries. All his mining career was in the Hunter Valley black coal open cut pits.

He held positions as an Operator, On-Site Trainer, Step-Up Relief Supervisor and Training Consultant for a local contracting company.

His passion for safety in the mining industry led him to invent and develop the Funnel Web Fire System.

As a small business, Funnel Web Fire Systems has been grateful for the help of many local business and organisations, including DB Mining at Carrington, Travis Bates of Coal & Allied at Singleton, HunterNet and a number of business chambers.



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A woman brings ten-year-old Johnny home from a play date with her ten year old daughter, Mary. Johnny's mother opens the front door is immediately confronted by Mary's angry mother who informs her that "Johnny was caught playing doctors and patients with Mary in their games room!"

Johnny's mother says: "Let's not be too harsh on them... they are bound to be curious about sex at that age."

"Curious about sex?" replies Mary's mother. "He's taken her appendix out!"

When Albert Einstein was making the rounds of the speaker's circuit, he usually found himself eagerly longing to get back to his work. One night as they were driving to yet another rubber-chicken dinner, Einstein mentioned to his chauffeur (a man who somewhat resembled Einstein in looks & manner) that he was tired of speechmaking.

"I have an idea, boss," his chauffeur said. "I've heard you give this speech so many times. I'll bet I could give it for you."

Einstein laughed loudly and said, "Why not? Let's do it!"

When they arrived at the dinner, Einstein donned the chauffeur's cap and jacket and sat in the back of the room. The chauffeur gave a beautiful rendition of Einstein's speech and even answered a few questions expertly.

Then a supremely pompous professor asked an extremely esoteric question about anti-matter formation, digressing here and there to let everyone in the audience know that he was nobody's fool.

Without missing a beat, the chauffeur fixed the professor with a steely stare and said, "Sir, the answer to that question is so simple that I will let my chauffeur, who is sitting in the back, answer it for me."

When a three-year-old opened a birthday gift from his grandmother, he discovered a water pistol.

He squealed with delight and headed for the nearest sink.

His mother was not so pleased. She turned to the grandmother and said, "I'm surprised at you. Don't you remember how we used to drive you crazy with water guns?"

The grandmother smiled and then replied, "I remember."

Young Simon was walking around his local supermarket picking up a few items for his evening meal when he noticed an old lady was following him. He tried to ignore her but every direction he went she followed.

Eventually he went to the checkout, but the old lady managed to push in front of him and turned to speak to him.

"I beg your pardon," she said, "I am very sorry if I have alarmed you by following you around, but you look just like my son who died recently."

"I am very sorry to hear that," replied Simon, "that must be very disconcerting for you. Is there anything I can do to help you?"

"Well there is one thing that would cheer me up a bit," she said. "As I'm leaving, will you call out 'Goodbye mother' to me?"

"Of course," answered Simon and as the old woman was leaving, he called out, "Goodbye mother!"

The girl on the till checked out his items and said "That will be \$185"

Simon was shocked. "How can my bill be \$185?" he asked, "I've only bought a few things!"

The checkout girl replied, "Your mother said that you would pay for her!"

A policeman searched Charlie in a nightclub toilet and found a small bag of drugs.

"It's not my fault," Charlie said, "Every time I try flushing them down the toilet they magically appear back in my pocket again."

"Do you really expect me to believe that?" the policeman laughed.

Charliel said, "I'll prove it to you if you want me to!"

"Go on then," he smiled, handing back the bag.

After they were flushed, the policeman looked up and said, "Well, show me your pocket then."

"What for?" Charlie asked.

He said, "The drugs."

"What drugs?"

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"Creativity, as has been said, consists largely of rearranging what we know in order to find out what we do not know. Hence, to think creatively, we must be able to look afresh at what we normally take for granted."

- George Kneller

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