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Insight

AUTUMN 2016



A cut above the rest

The retro barber shop with a modern twist



WIN!
AN iPad MINI



COMMUNITY

The car leasing company standing out from the crowd



NEWCASTLE

Gamerabilia is a haven for all video gamers

OUT&ABOUT

WITH
INSIGHT
EDITOR
CIARA
O'CONNOR



Reporting
outside
the newly
revamped
London Bridge
station

Welcome to the autumn edition of *Insight*. Summer's been and gone, but this issue is packed with plenty of colourful features to help chase away your post-holiday blues.

The Tour took us to Newport in Wales where we met Chris Lambert of Lambert's Barber Shop, who tells us what it's like to run your own business. We also met Shih Tzus Poppy and Pickles at Pretty Pooch Dog Grooming Salon and finally Mizan Ali speaks to us about the family-run Railway Tandoori. From there, we visited The Station Inn in Pembroke Dock – see pages 4-6.

Chatbots are fast becoming the way of the future. We look at how the automated computer programs can help small businesses on pages 8-9.

Northern Vehicles in Shrewsbury specialises in car leasing for SMEs. We speak to the team about finding success in a competitive market on page 7.

Newcastle is home to Gamerabilia, a treasure trove of gaming memorabilia. Owner Adam Brewer talks customers, strategy and Pokémon on pages 10-11.

On the back page, Alan Muir tells us more about his role, including the challenges and rewards of being a Network Rail director.

And finally, don't forget to enter our Olympic-themed competition for your chance to win an iPad mini.

Don't forget to follow us on Twitter – @InsightNR – for all the latest news and updates.

CONTACT US

If you have a story to tell or a question about the magazine

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Twitter: Join the conversation using our new Twitter handle @Insight_NR

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Change Please helps the homeless get back into employment

Change Please, a coffee cart chain with a difference, has opened two sites on London Bridge's new concourse.

The company works with The Big Issue to employ homeless people, paying them the London living wage to serve coffee to the public. Change Please already has carts at locations including the Shard, Canary Wharf and Kennington station, and is in talks to grow around the city and country.

"We are making a difference to people's lives while also offering high quality coffee to customers," said founder Cemal Ezel.

"We train our employees as baristas and also assist them with finding somewhere to live.

"The reaction from the public and our staff has been fantastic and it was a privilege to be approached by Network Rail to set up new carts."

Cemal has taken on 16 baristas so far, with the help of homeless charities such as Crisis and Centrepont. Each recruit works with The Big Issue for a month

before being referred to Cemal for a job opportunity.

"There are so many homeless people and it's great to be able to give them a chance and for them to be looked at in a different way," said Cemal. "The footfall has been incredible considering we started up less than a year ago and even Richard Branson has been in touch!"

If you are interested in the work Change Please does and would like to learn more, email hello@changeplease.org



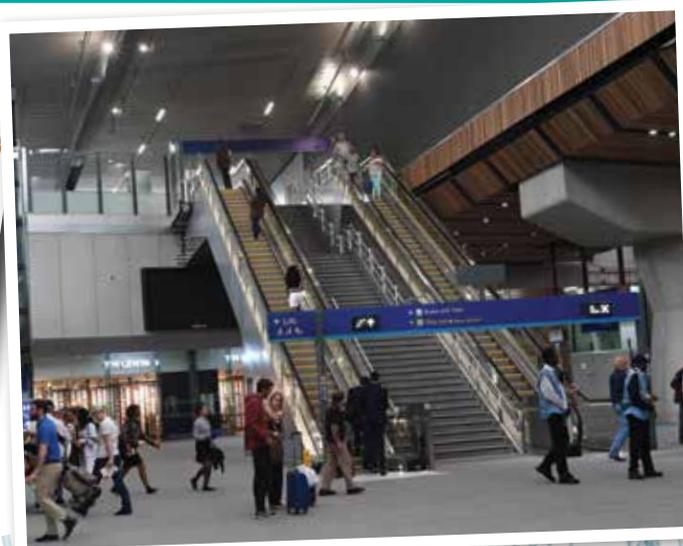
COFFEE WITH COMPLIMENTS



ASSESS YOUR FIRE RISK

All tenants will receive a Fire Safety Risk Assessment guidance note, setting out the latest legislation. It details the responsibility of employers and anyone with control of premises to assess the risk of harm from fire.

Appropriate fire safety measures should all be considered and the leaflet includes information on what to look for. When your property is inspected as part of the continuous process, we will ask to see your fire risk assessment, which is included in the leaflet.



NEW CONCOURSE ON TRACK

Two-thirds of the new concourse at London Bridge station opened in August as part of a redevelopment.

Once it is completed in January 2018, it will be bigger than the pitch at Wembley Stadium and the largest of any station in Britain. Passengers will be able to access all platforms from one concourse at London Bridge for the first time.

The redevelopment is part of Network Rail's railway upgrade plan and the government-sponsored Thameslink programme, which includes new track and modern

trains to provide more reliable journeys for passengers.

Mark Carne, Network Rail's chief executive said: "This is a big step towards the bigger, better railway passengers deserve. We are essentially rebuilding Britain's fourth busiest station – the tracks, the platforms and the infrastructure, which enables trains to run – while keeping the station open and doing our best to keep passengers moving."



Network Rail joined forces with ecologists to protect bats



Network Rail is working with ecologists on a study into the impact the new railway upgrade between Oxford and Bedford will have on bats in the area.

Members from Network Rail's environmental team have been tagging bats found in southern England and southeast Wales, along the project route to learn more about the number and type of species in the surrounding habitat.

The study will help the team understand how the project might affect the species and how they can work to ensure the bat population in the area continues to thrive.



NEWS

NURTURING NATURE

Lambert's Barber Shop



Using social media to attract new clients

Be friendly and show your customers you care



Lambert's Barber Shop is a mix of old and new



Manager Criss Lambert tells us about his retro barber shop with a modern twist



Tell us about your business:

Most of my customers are aged between 20 to 40, and quite a few have beards. A beard trim can take an extra 15 minutes to do, but the customers don't mind waiting.

How long have you been here?

I took on the shop nine months ago. Before I was working in a mobile barber's, and when I reached 30 I decided if I was going to get my own shop, it would have to be then. After two months things started to pick up, and before long I had a stream of regular customers.

Did it take a lot of work to re-design?

We had to re-plaster the walls three times,

and there was a lot of clutter to clear out. My Dad is a graphic designer and he helped produce our logo and some of the other artwork on the walls.

The most expensive thing was the 1940s French barber's chair. It was worth it to give the shop a welcoming, traditional feel.

I recently sold some T-shirts featuring the logo online, and they'd all gone in three hours.

Is it tough being on your own when it gets busy?

People are generally willing to sit and wait, they like to talk to each other. And that's great for me, as I don't feel rushed. It doesn't even feel like a job – I just come in, cut some people's hair and then go home!

Insight TOUR

SOUTH WALES



COVERED: 107 miles

- Gocompare.com was founded in Newport
- Newport is home to the UK's first dedicated software university
- The Millenium Falcon from The Empire Strikes Back was built in one of Pembroke Dock's aircraft hangars

1457

Henry VII was born in Pembroke Castle



Manager Tanya Demarco tells us why you'd be barking mad not to pop in with your pooch...

"We offer a number of services, but the standard treatment is a bath and blow dry before trimming their coat. On a busy day we'll do 17 dogs, with about an hour and a half for each one.

"It's best to start bringing them in when they are younger so they get used to being groomed. I've been trimming Shih Tzu Pickles since she was six months old, and her sister Poppy is a regular too.

"You might expect the big, strong dogs would be more difficult to groom, but actually

they tend to be softer.

"We've been here for four years, and we pick up most of our new customers through word of mouth. We also use Google and Facebook to promote the business.

"What makes us different is that we take the time to do a thorough job, rather than get as many through as possible.

"Looking ahead, I've taken on assistant to help with the growing workload, and I might expand the business to groom cats."

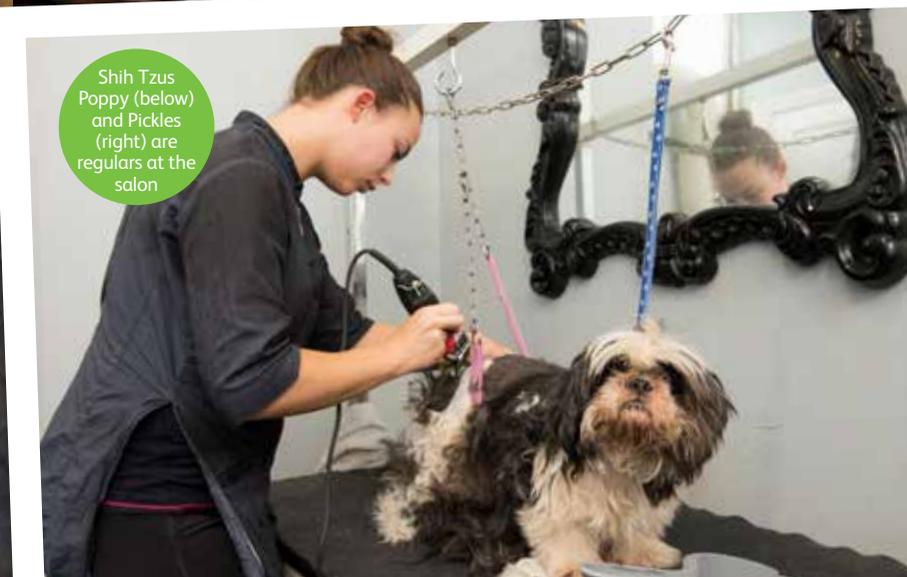
Pretty Pooch Dog Grooming Salon



Providing a quality service in a saturated market



Don't take on too much too quickly



Shih Tzus Poppy (below) and Pickles (right) are regulars at the salon



Railway Tandoori

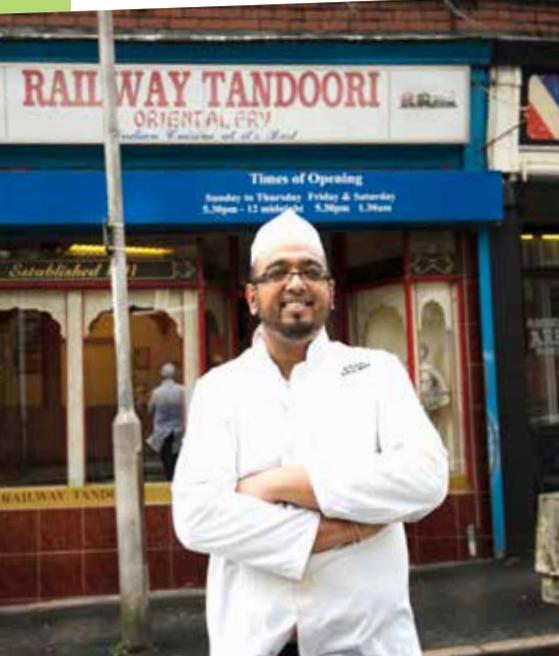
For 27 years the Railway Tandoori has been spicing up local cuisine. Manager Mizan Ali comes in at 2pm every day to fire up the Tandoor, the clay oven where the naans and other dishes are cooked, while also boiling large pots of rice in anticipation of the evening's orders.

"We often get through all the chicken I've been preparing in the afternoon in a night and have to cook the rest by order," Mizan said. "There are four of us who work in the kitchen and three in the front."

Mizan took over running the takeaway from his father six years ago, leaving behind his job as a bus driver in London to take on a fresh challenge.

He said: "It was a big change for me and my family coming to Newport, but I quickly adapted to the new routine."

"I've been able to make a few changes myself to how we do things. The way Indian takeaways cook food around here is different from how it is done in London, and I'm pleased I've been able to modernise our menu."



The Station Inn



Manager Don with members of the team

Authentic ales, hearty, traditional food and live music – an interesting offering for what was once a ticket office.

The pub is now part of the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA) and attracts a mix of regular customers and tourists passing through Pembroke Dock.

Manager Don Esmond took over the establishment in 2000, while it was still only partially converted.

He said: "The traditional ales are particularly popular with older customers, but it's a massively growing industry. We also serve old-fashioned, home-cooked meals, a lot of which I prepare myself."

A lot of the meals come under a popular '2 for £10' offer, while one of the standard real ales available is the Welsh dark bitter 'Reverend James', a favourite of the locals.

Don said: "It's the staff that make this place what it is. The guys in the kitchen and on the tables are very presentable and a real asset to me."



Combining great staff with great food and beer



Northern Vehicles creates gap in the market for vehicle leasing by focusing on small businesses

SHIFTING GEAR

Finding a unique way to be stand out from the competition has helped Northern Vehicles, a short-term leasing company, find success in a crowded marketplace.

"Our industry has notoriously strict criteria, preventing new business starters or customers struggling with credit history from leasing hire vehicles," says David Cooke, operations director.

"We are different and underwrite our own risk, which means we can be flexible and look at things on a case-by-case basis."

David called on two decades of experience in vehicle rental to set up Northern Vehicles four years ago and its been full throttle ever since.

He said: "Our customers have responded strongly to short-term lease agreements

between six and twelve months, which aren't widely available elsewhere.

"We have customers all over the country, primarily from small businesses like ourselves, and the feedback has been really encouraging."



He rented a second premises near Shrewsbury station eight months ago, with the aim of enhancing customer experience and creating a new hub for the growing business.

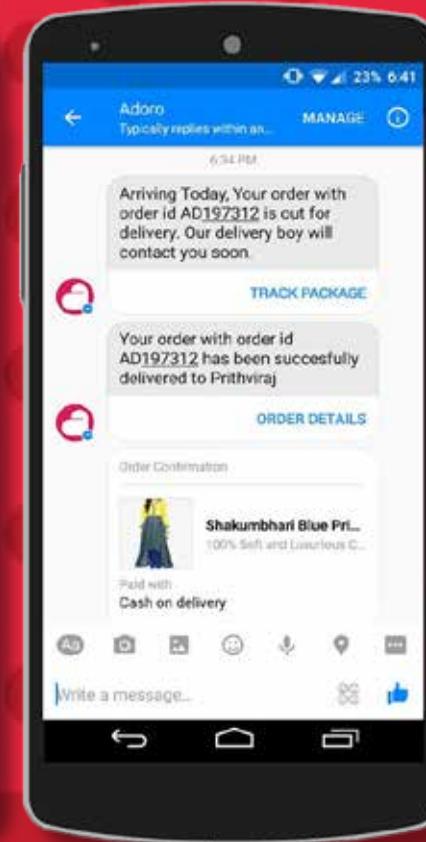
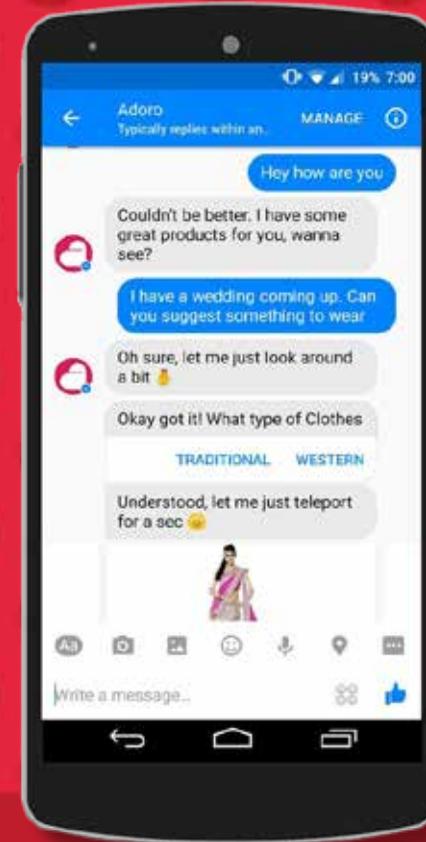
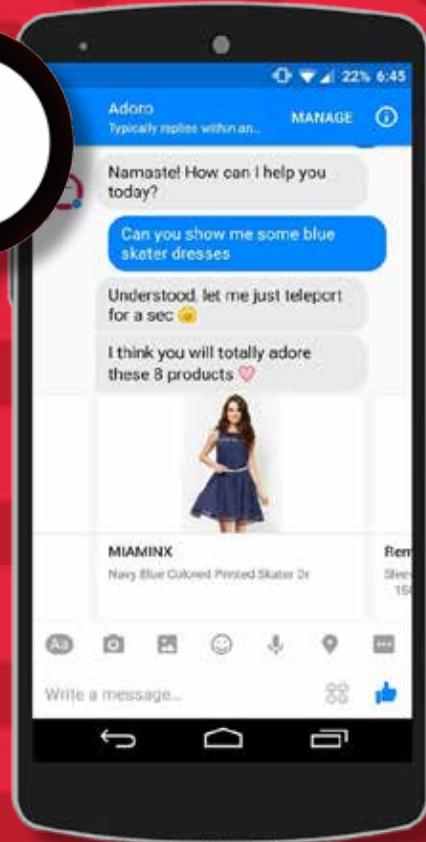
"The unit has been really important to us because of the facilities and location. We're right next to the train station, which means customers can reach us easily and also drivers can get back from delivering vehicles with no fuss.

"We're now putting plans in place to take on the unit next door and make that a proper centre for customer collection, turning the whole experience into a premium experience that makes our buyers feel special.

"It's been a challenge to get the business going but we've found a niche that we believe in and works for both us and our customers."



CHATTY CHANGES



THERE ARE TOOLS OUT THERE TO EASILY SET UP A CHATBOT



Marketeer Dave Heinzinger from US-based flok

Discover the digital innovation that can reduce the time you spend answering common queries and speed up your customers' decision to buy from you.



Small businesses are using chatbots, computer programs that simulate human conversation and can be coded to respond to certain questions, to significantly streamline their workload.

The chatty interfaces can be linked with multiple information sources to provide breaking news or other information, while also remembering user preferences such as

their location and the products they are most interested in.

We spoke to Dave Heinzinger, vice president of marketing communications at flok, to get his perspective. flok is a US tech company that develops marketing solutions such as chatbots and mobile apps for small businesses.

He said: "If the nature of your business means that you are constantly on your feet, having a chatbot to answer common questions is a big help.

"For example, if you're a restaurant you can use it to make reservations or tell customers what your specials are. They have also become very popular in the vaping industry, with businesses with a global customer base using them to answer customer queries."

Automated messaging has been around for many years, but it has only recently started to be widely taken up by smaller enterprises. Dave explained: "The technology has become more accessible, while consumer behaviour has changed.

"It's quite difficult to ask people to change their behaviour, but now that there are tools out there to easily set up a chatbot, small businesses can easily create their own."

Programs for setting up chatbots commonly come with templates for common queries such as opening times or product details, and the questions can then be suggested to the customer when they initiate a conversation with the chatbot. flok also encourages its customers to promote special offers such as loyalty cards through the automated assistant.

Research by flok of its network over the last year found that interaction by customers increased when they were sent automated, personalised messages rather than manual push messages or emails. Push messages are notifications from an app that appear while it is not in use.

The tech innovators found that its pushed/ emailed notifications had 18% engagement, while automated notifications had 69% engagement. Only 1.2% reacted to pushed/

emailed requests for an online review, while 11% engaged with automated requests.

Dave said chatbots have a particular appeal for younger entrepreneurs: "When young people set up a business, the first thing they think about is mobile platforms and promoting their business there. The magic of a chatbot is that it feels like texting an actual person when you access it via mobile."

Dave also said that small businesses are perhaps best situated to gauge the usefulness of chatbots, as they will quickly see their effects on customer interaction, colleagues' use of time and sales.

But will the chatbot craze continue? Dave takes a moderate view: "This year may have been the summer of the bots, but a lot of businesses are yet to discover them.

"Like any major technological change, they are having their moment and they will help businesses to develop, but how small enterprises will change as a result will be interesting to see."



TOP 3



In the heart of Newcastle, round the corner from the main train station and colleges is a treasure trove of official video game memorabilia.

Staff at Gamerabilia at Forth Good Yards in Newcastle are all gamers – just like their customers. They've gained a reputation as specialists in official merchandise and appeared in publications such as FHM, The Observer, The Guardian, Stuff magazine and the Metro newspaper.

"We understand our customers don't want a hoodie just to keep them warm, an action figure just to play with or a mug simply to hold coffee," said owner Adam Brewer.

"Once they've grown to love a particular game, they want to surround themselves with its imagery and characters. That's everything from Assassin's Creed hoodies to The Legend of Zelda lamps or Pokémon hats.

"Our sales are largely dictated by which games are popular at any given time, so we have to keep abreast of when games are released and what gamers are saying about them. It can be a very seasonal business.

"We moved to the arches from an office block in January. We'd gradually taken over more and more office space for the online business and it was time to move on. We weren't going to open the shop until the run-up to Christmas, but customers started to ask when they could come in so we brought the opening forward to May."

Adam knew he didn't want to take on a retail space in Newcastle's central shopping area just yet and the arches offered a great alternative. "I'd been aware of these arches and it's a great location for me and my staff as well as our customers.

"Of course, we serve gamers young and old, but we also sell a lot to parents, so our demographic is really wide. We opened with just a few tables and displays at the front of our premises but as the shop grew busier, we rapidly expanded and now have a wide range of our products on display – all organised according to the games our customers love."

MY SUCCESS Respond quickly when your business changes. We opened early to let customers browse

MY INSIGHT Choose your location wisely: our customers love the character of the arches



TOP 3

Keeping on top of your finances has never been easier with these brilliant bookkeeping apps.

xero From **£9.00** a month

Xero

This easy-to-use accounting software means you can log in from any device, any time, anywhere to access an overview of your finances. It also allows you to reconcile, send invoices, create expense claims and much more.

From **£5.00** a month **qb**

QuickBooks

With more than one million SME users worldwide, this accounting package allows you to complete your general accounting tasks, add photos and send notes so you don't miss anything. Its multi-currency facility also makes doing overseas business easier.

ClearBooks From **£7.20** a month

ClearBooks

This app was developed in the UK with British businesses in mind and allows you to access your finances. It offers a variety of reports. There's also a multi-currency option and the facility to receive payments via direct debit.

CUSTOMERS AT THE CORE

As director of commercial estate, Alan Muir puts customers centre stage. He enjoys the opportunities he gets to see the regeneration of Network Rail property around the country

What does your job entail?

I head up the commercial estate function that is part of the overall property management of Network Rail. With a team of 90 people, I am responsible for all the railway arches and the areas we own around the railway itself. It's really exciting to see the different uses customers make of our property.

What skills are important to the role?

This is primarily a leadership role, so it's all about the people in commercial estate. I want to help maximise their potential and give the best opportunities within our business. Obviously, I have financial, safety and asset management duties as well making sure we are using all our property effectively for the business and our customers.

How do you help Network Rail customers?

We aim to be flexible for all our customers in the arches around the country. We try to make the lettings process as quick and easy as possible and help people grow. We've seen customers expand into neighbouring

arches or to bigger premises elsewhere, and we help as much as we can.

Describe a recent success

There are three projects we've worked on recently which are outstanding – Devonshire House is a beautiful redevelopment of a property that had been on the English Heritage at risk register. Then there are Burrell Street and Union Yard arches, both in Southwark, south London, which look stunning with an exciting range of customers.

What is the best thing about your job?

The people. When I came in, I had lots of new ideas and they've accepted me and bought in to those ideas and we're making great progress.

People would be surprised to know you: taught English as a foreign language in Warsaw

Hobbies: Football as a supporter and running as a participant

Favourite place: San Francisco

Plan B: if you weren't a Network Rail director, what would you choose to be? Probably something combining my interests in music and the radio, potentially a DJ.



OLYMPIC FEVER GRIPPED THE NATION THIS SUMMER. CAN YOU IDENTIFY PAST HOST CITIES FROM THESE ICONIC LANDMARKS?

Send your answers, with your name, place of work and contact number by email to insight@abcomm.co.uk or tweet us @Insight_NR. You can also post your answer to Insight, AB Publishing, Unit B, Gemini House, 180-182 Bermondsey Street, London SE1 3TQ. Holly Sellen won last issue's iPad mini.



WIN!
AN iPad
MINI

