

ECHO BUSINESS WEEK



Agent of change reaps rewards

WIRRAL ESTATE AGENCY ENTREPRENEUR WHO TOOK FULL ADVANTAGE OF THE DIGITAL REVOLUTION/ PAGES 4&5



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Small Businesses

By embracing new technology Karl Tatler stole a march. **Neil Hodgson** reports

KARL Tatler switched on to the digital age very quickly and, consequently, was able to establish a niche as an estate agent at the cutting edge of technology.

He quite likes the mantle of being the digital forerunner for the industry.

The first Karl Tatler branch opened in Pensby Road, Heswall, in December, 1997. He said: "When I opened it was typical for competitors to have black and white photocopied brochures, which is unthinkable today."

"There was no digital photography or internet. The internet was just becoming available at the time. I think 1995 was the first website."

"We were the first estate agency in the North West to have a website and to use digital photography and digital print."

He said stealing a technological march on competitors enabled the business to establish its own unique selling point, or point of difference.

"When you are trying to start a business, one of the biggest things is, can you find that point of difference? By embracing technology and moulding it to our industry we had a significant point of difference. That helped us establish ourselves."

The strategy was so successful Tatler posted a profit in its first financial year.

That achievement was even more impressive given Karl's branch was located between two of the biggest corporate chains on the market at the time.

"People thought I was mad opening this office right between them. But that is where I wanted to be, so people could see that very tangible difference that we have."

He revealed that his digital crusade was down to the Ludite views of a former boss.

After starting in the industry as a trainee surveyor in 1985 he

Karl reaps rewards of the digital crusader of estate agents

SMALL BUSINESS OF THE WEEK

KARL TATLER ESTATE AGENTS

ended up working in Heswall for a large independent chain: "I was really happy in the company but wanted to introduce digital and computers."

"Having done the research on the value it would bring to a business I did a presentation to my boss, but he wasn't sold on

it. I thought my boss would say it was a no-brainer. Clearly he didn't. But, for me, that was the best decision ever made for me. By saying no, it forced me to make a decision."

Karl presented his case to Nat-West bank, who liked the plan and model and forecasts, and

agreed to significant funding to get his own business off the ground.

He opened on Pensby Road on December 8, 1997, which, he says, made perfect sense: "If you think of a soft opening for a restaurant, they're not going to open on a Friday night and keel over, so by opening in the quietest time of the year you have really got yourself bedded in and in January when the market starts to pick up you are ready to give 100% customer service."

"We have opened all our offices in quarter four for that reason."



Karl Tatler, from Karl Tatler Estate Agents in Pensby, Wirral
JAMES MALONEY

THE FACTS

AGE: 49.

BEST ADVICE RECEIVED: When my boss said no to my idea my regional director said: "Karl, you will be a success in your own right, believe in yourself and your values and go for it".

AMBITION: To continue expanding and double the size of the business over the next five years. We are on a permanent recruitment drive and are looking to recruit around 40-50 people over the next 3-5 years and open another 4-5 offices.

HOBBIES: Spending time with my wife. I enjoy travelling. I find frequent short breaks beneficial. And I love Liverpool FC. I have been on a waiting list for a season ticket for 15 years. I play a little bit of football, too.

Tatler now operates five sales branches and two lettings branches, as well as a property management function.

From a staff of four in 1997 the firm now employs 64 and, says Karl, is on a permanent recruitment drive to match its ambitious expansion plans.

The workforce has doubled in the past two years and turnover has doubled over the past five years to £2.4m.

He is fully aware that everyone is digitally-savvy now, so the business has to offer a new point of difference to stand apart from its peers.

"Everyone is on digital printing and computers and websites, so our point of difference is the one thing people can't copy, which is our level of customer service."

He explained: "I have a full time employee obtaining feedback from our current clients to measure what they think of us, not what we think we are doing."

"And we are still seen as a market innovator for our offices, websites and brochures."

"Although the majority (of competitors) are a lot closer now, if you pick up our brochure compared with others you will see a subtle difference, and the same

with our offices and website, and everything, added together, makes a collective big difference."

The branches feature, in a prominent position, 'thank you trees' containing an impressive variety of cards and notes from satisfied clients as testimony to staff efforts.

Karl said: "Those cards on the tree don't just arrive."

"People have to write them, or deliver flowers or champagne to our staff, and you have to do something special for that."

"Our people have to know what 'great' looks like, and that is part of our training and induction process."

He says the current housing market is affected by uncertainty over Europe: "I don't think anyone knows what impact it will have if we come out."

However, he says the market is steady, with plenty of house sales, and post-EU Referendum he believes the economy will improve.

"We can see that from our buyers and the number of applicants registering to have their houses valued."

"Properties, at the right price, are in demand right across the board."



Thank you card tree inside the office of Karl Tatler Estate Agents

Loans body helps create 584 new businesses



Kirsten Little, left, with business partners Liam Kelly and Alex Kelly

By **NEIL HODGSON**
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LIVERPUOLIANS are turning their hobby into a business, after more than 500 of them established their own company last year using the Government-backed Start Up Loans Company scheme.

Internal data showed that it helped 548 Liverpool residents successfully opened new businesses.

Furthermore, 36% of these businesses were started by people aged between 25 and 30; 34% were opened by 31-49-year-olds, and a fifth by 18-24-year-olds.

Almost 10% were established by residents aged over 50.

Interestingly, almost half of the start-ups who successfully started their business were previously unemployed.

Kirsten Little started her commu-

nity interest company, Ninety Squared, with the help of a £3,000 Start Up Loan.

Ninety Squared brings together like-minded people and provides a platform for their creative businesses to grow and develop.

Kirsten, an artist, found it difficult to locate the resources and the space necessary to carry out her work.

So, to address this Kirsten, alongside her business partners Liam and Alex, decided to start their community interest company to offer studio space for creative people to come together and share their skills and resources.

Ninety Squared, in the Baltic Triangle's Elevator Studios, can cater for up to 25 residents at one time.

The incubator is rentable by the hour, day or week, and Ninety Squared also aim to provide a mentoring service where residents come together and share their skills and experiences.

Skin clinic expands

TWO Liverpool entrepreneurs behind a skin treatment clinic have spent £100,000 expanding the business with two new outlets in Chester and Leeds.

Glenn Pringle and Dean Hunston are co-founders of Liverpool Lipo which offers a non-invasive facelift treatment called 3D SkinMed.

The treatment was pioneered by Dr Leah Totton, winner of TV's The Apprentice in 2013. Lord Sugar backed her venture to the tune of £250,000.

The Liverpool Lipo business was launched initially as a mobile service

with only one member of staff, to then progressing to opening a clinic in Rodney Street.

Mr Hunston told ECHO Business: "Since the move to Rodney Street the business has grown rapidly. We now have six therapists working in the Liverpool clinic and we are looking to employ more soon."

"That success has enabled us to invest £100,000 into opening two further clinics in Chester and Leeds

"Both are proving a success and we are in the process of expanding the Chester clinic which means more employment opportunities."

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ADVICE FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

THE Commonwealth Enterprise and Investment Council has launched CommonwealthFirst, a three-year programme aimed at encouraging UK small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to export to the Commonwealth. CommonwealthFirst mentors will help kick-start their international

leading, export-ready UK SMEs to become Commonwealth Export Champions over the next three years, focusing on 25 companies in the first phase by providing intensive training and mentoring support. The CommonwealthFirst

trade and investment journey while tapping into their network of international contacts. By showcasing the success of the Commonwealth Export Champions, the programme will highlight the trade and investment opportunities for UK businesses across the

Commonwealth - a free association of 53 countries, representing one third of the world's population and fast-growing markets. Members include India, Australia, Canada, Malaysia, Singapore, Nigeria and South Africa. The programme is led by the Commonwealth Enterprise and

Investment Council with the support of Royal Mail. Companies interested in applying to become Commonwealth Export Champions have until June 15 to complete the online application process via the website www.commonwealthfirst.org