

ALEX SET TO CHANGE COMPUTING

MEET ALEX! A MAJOR INNOVATION IN HOME COMPUTING THAT COULD GIVE MILLIONS OF PEOPLE THEIR FIRST ACCESS TO COMPUTING AND THE INTERNET.



Andy Hudson with Margaret Spoor who has tested the new technology

Designed and developed on Tyneside, Alex is the creation of the Broadband Computer Company which wants to make the computer as easy-to-use as the telephone.

Around 18 million people in the UK are currently 'digitally excluded' with little or no IT knowledge and no access to a home PC. Many of these are in the over 55 age range.

Alex aims to overcome the barriers and fears that prevent these people using computers. The operating system is intuitive and simple to use and designed as an antidote to current systems which can be confusing for non users. The software is now ready for sale following four years of development and extensive field testing with potential consumers.

Andy Hudson, chief operating officer at the Broadband Computer Company, said: "Alex has been designed so somebody with no prior computer experience can switch on their machine and be up and running immediately. It will enable millions of people to overcome their fears and enjoy the benefits of computing and the internet."

Andy came up with the idea of Alex after coming into contact with computers late in life and becoming frustrated with confusing operating software.

Maintenance of the system is carried out by the Broadband Computer Company so users are assured it is always working efficiently. They also benefit from a help centre support service if needed.

Andy added: "The fact that it's so easy to use will also make it attractive to frustrated and confused computer users. It takes its name from Alexander Graham Bell, inventor of the telephone. When asked why the telephone had been so successful his response was that it required absolutely no skill to use. Alex is exactly the same."

Broadband Computer Company received support from Tyne and Wear Development Company in its early stages when it was looking for an office in Newcastle with good transport links. The agency helped the company to find a suitable base in Newcastle city centre with space for expansion and growth.

Andy added: "Their support was critical and a key reason why we're based here. They helped us plan the move and put us in touch with the excellent network of business support services based in the region."



THE INVESTOR

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TESCO CHECKS IN TO TYNESIDE

THE LARGEST SUPERMARKET BANK IN THE UK IS TO CREATE 1,000 NEW JOBS ON TYNESIDE – THANKS TO SUPPORT FROM TYNE AND WEAR DEVELOPMENT COMPANY.

Tesco Bank has announced it will open a state-of-the-art contact centre at Quorum Business Park in North Tyneside as part of a major investment in its general insurances division which will be based there.

The announcement is a boost for the area's vibrant contact centre industry and a major success for the regional investment team that worked with Tesco Bank and its advisors for several months to attract the jobs to Tyneside.

The investment team was made up of Tyne and Wear Development Company, North Tyneside Council and One North East, which also supported the project with a £2million Grant for Business Investment (GBI). This will be used to cover significant fit out costs to create a world-class headquarters.

Paul Buie, manager of Tyne and Wear Development Company, welcomed the news saying: "Tesco Bank is emerging as a major player in the financial market and we're delighted that it will create 1,000 jobs on Tyneside. It's fantastic news for the area and a great endorsement that we've been able to attract such a major investment here."



(L to r) Sean Collier, North Tyneside Council, Fergus Trim and Paul Buie



(L to r) Tesco Bank chairman Andy Higginson and chief executive Benny Higgins

The agency set the ball rolling on the project, putting together a package of support that included supplying detailed information outlining the region's strengths, key demographic and workforce information. It also provided advice on property opportunities and funding.

Paul added: "It was a real team effort from partners across the region. We worked closely with One North East, North Tyneside Council and Quorum Business Park for many months to sell Tyne and Wear and make a strong case for the investment to be made here.

"Tyne and Wear has one of the strongest clusters of contact centres anywhere in the world. Tesco Bank is an excellent addition to an important sector and is testament to the strength of the region's workforce."

One North East chief executive, Alan Clarke, said: "This is an extremely exciting and important project, creating a state of the art financial contact centre and 1,000 jobs in North Tyneside. This is a real vote of confidence by Tesco Bank in the North East economy. They recognised the ability of the region's workforce to deliver an important project as it would have been simple to outsource these jobs to India.

"I am delighted that One North East has been able to support this investment, which has been supported closely by public sector partners to ensure the firm has everything it needs to establish this facility on North Tyneside."

Recruitment for the first 500 positions will begin soon with the centre expected to open in early 2010. North Tyneside Council is working alongside Tyne and Wear Development Company, One North East, JobCentre Plus, the Learning and Skills Council and Business Link to establish and co-ordinate a public sector 'response group'. It will provide a single point of contact for recruitment and training tailored to meet the specific requirements of Tesco Bank.

Elected Mayor of North Tyneside, Linda Arkley said: "I am delighted that the strong partnership working in this region has once again helped us to secure high calibre investors, such as Tesco Bank. As a council our role has involved supporting Tyne and Wear Development Company and working with One North East and Quorum Business Park to secure an attractive locational offer and support package that ensured we could bring these jobs to the region."

Fergus Trim, development director at Quorum Development Partners concluded: "When we re-launched Quorum earlier this year on the back of the new £180m phase of development, a major focus was targeting major PLCs from outside the region. North Tyneside and Quorum have so much to offer these companies and I'm delighted that Tesco Bank is hopefully the first of many to look to invest in and bring new jobs to the North East."

CONTACT CENTRE WINNERS CROWNED

THE WINNERS OF THE NORTH EAST CONTACT CENTRE AWARDS 2009 HAVE BEEN CROWNED AFTER A NIGHT OF CELEBRATION AT THE INDUSTRY OSCARS.

The annual awards bash, which took place at Rainton Meadows Arena in Sunderland, was full of its usual glitz and glamour with guests from many of the region's 145 contact centres attending.

Newcastle based EDS and Barclaycard from Stockton were the winners of the prestigious North East Contact Centre of the Year awards. Barclaycard won the prize for contact centres with more than 250 seats, while the Department for Work and Pensions Service Desk, EDS, walked off with the equivalent for smaller centres with less than 250 seats

Judged by an independent panel of industry experts, the awards were organised by Tyne and Wear Development Company in association with Sunderland City Council.

Paul Buie, manager of Tyne and Wear Development Company, said: "It's great to see two first time winners of the main awards as this demonstrates once again the strength and diversity of the industry within the region.

"The North East's contact centres are respected worldwide and the competition is incredibly tough here.

Congratulations must go to all the winners, runners-up and those shortlisted. It's a fantastic achievement."

The other team awards were presented to BT Mobile Help 2nd Line, which was named Contact Centre Team of the Year, for its fantastic achievements throughout the year. The final team award for Outstanding Contribution to the Community went to More Than for its campaign, More Than'll Fix It, which was praised for its innovative approach to community activities.

The remaining five awards went to the industry's star performers and included Kelly Swinney from JML in South Shields, who won Customer Experience Superstar; Ashley Davidson of Sunderland's More Than picked up Contact Centre Adviser of the Year and Team Leader of the Year went to David Clark of Fusion, also in Sunderland.

Adding to EDS's success on the night, it also picked up two individual awards with Mark Brannan winning Contact Centre Technical Adviser of the Year and Best People Developer going to David Beagan.

Councillor Paul Watson, chairman of Tyne and Wear Development Company and leader of Sunderland City



Department for Work and Pensions Service Desk, EDS and Barclaycard celebrate their success

Council, said: "Contact centres are a key sector in our economy and it's always a joy to celebrate their success and achievements.

"Our region's contact centres are among the best in the world and will continue to go from strength to strength with such a successful work force behind them, as we have seen tonight."

Sponsors of this year's awards were Sunderland City Council, One North East, Highbridge Business Park, developers of Cobalt, Infinity Contact Centre Solutions, Premium People Recruitment Group, North East Contact Centre Academy, Contact Centre Professional, Northern Recruitment Group (NRG) and Goodman, developers of Rainton Bridge Business Park.

Tyne and Wear Development Company Ltd is a controlled company within the meaning of Part V of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. The relevant authorities are Gateshead Council, Newcastle City Council, North Tyneside MBC, South Tyneside MBC and Sunderland City Council.

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TYNESIDE TECHNOLOGY DRIVES ELECTRIC VEHICLES

TECHNOLOGY ENGINEERED ON TYNESIDE BY A COMPANY WITH OVER FOUR DECADES OF EXPERTISE IS HELPING TO DRIVE THE WORLD'S ELECTRIC VEHICLES.

Sevcon, which is based on Gateshead's Team Valley, is one of the world's leading designers and manufacturers of micro processor based controls for zero emission vehicles.

Established in 1962, the Nasdaq listed company employs 100 people around the globe and supplies a diverse range of controls for everything from forklift trucks and utility vehicles to electric scooters and other on-road vehicles.

During this time, Sevcon's expertise has helped it to build an impressive client list of the world's biggest vehicle manufacturers including Toyota, Nissan, Hyundai and Ford.

Matt Boyle, chief executive of Sevcon, explains: "We're a North East company with a global reach that's a leader in its field. There are only four or five companies in the world that develop controls for zero emission vehicles.

"Tyneside is our engineering centre of excellence and where the intellectual property for product development resides. We have a skilled team of 60 continually working to enhance and develop innovative technology. We do this in partnership with vehicle manufacturers and suppliers, such as Polaris, to ensure our technology is engineered to fit."

Sevcon supplies blue chip brands like Ford and US giant Polaris – a maker of utility vehicles – with products to vary vehicle speed and movement, integrate other functions and prolong battery life. This includes motor controllers, electric steering systems, converters for lighting systems, battery gauges and chargers - each one designed and developed in Gateshead.

And with interest in electric vehicles – particularly in the on-road and leisure markets – expected to rise in the future, the company is in the process of developing a new generation of controllers.

Matt added: "We've been developing controls for forklift trucks, utility vehicles and access platforms for years. While industrial vehicles will remain core markets,

we anticipate interest in on-road vehicles to grow as the search for more sustainable forms of transport continues. Whether it's electric scooters or hybrid cars, Sevcon is in a strong position to supply this market as it develops."

Sevcon has received help in its quest from Gateshead Council and Tyne and Wear Development Company. Through the agency's Strategic Account Management (SAM) programme it has been able to provide long-term business support. This has included assistance with a new logistics programme to enhance efficiency and lean working at Team Valley as well as advising on access to finance and support for product development.

Alma Harrison from Tyne and Wear Development Company said: "Sevcon is really flying the flag for North East engineering. Controls designed and developed on Tyneside are used to drive and control some of the most complicated battery powered vehicles around the world. It's an exciting sector with significant long-term potential and any support we can provide to Sevcon to develop its business is good news for the region."



Alma Harrison with Matt Boyle

RELOCATION HELPS LANGUAGE SCHOOL GROW

ONE OF THE UK'S LEADING ENGLISH LANGUAGE SCHOOLS IS RELOCATING FROM ITS CITY CENTRE BASE AS IT EXPANDS ITS OPERATIONS IN NEWCASTLE.



Carole Clark from Tyne and Wear Development Company with Trevor Udberg

International House is moving from Stowell Street in China town and investing in larger four-storey premises on Gallowgate after support from Tyne and Wear Development Company.

The language school, which currently employs around 22 full-time staff and enrolls around 1400 students a year, offers general, business and academic classes as well as teacher training courses. The new school is looking to open its doors to students in January 2010.

The move will pave the way for International House to cope with growing demand from students around the world wishing to study in Newcastle and is likely to create a number of new posts in the months ahead.

Trevor Udberg, managing director of International House, said: "We take students from all over the world and the numbers are growing. Western Europe has always been popular but enrolments from the Middle East, South America and the Far East, particularly Korea, are now increasing.

"Numbers are rising as students increasingly want to take advantage of Newcastle's great location and the outstanding attractions. Alnwick Castle,

in particular, is very popular with Harry Potter fans. We've also worked hard to market the school more internationally.

"Moving premises will provide more space and help us to improve the high standard of services we provide to our students."

International House initially contacted Newcastle City Council which then referred the organisation to Tyne and Wear Development Company. The Company helped the school to identify its new site and also attract funding from regional development agency, One North East, to support the investment.

Mr Udberg added: "With the help from Tyne and Wear Development we are now able to look to the future. Everyone's really enthusiastic about the new premises and what they mean in the development of our school and services."

Carole Clark of Tyne and Wear Development Company said: "This is excellent news for the region and the school. International House attracts a growing number of students to the area every year, which is great for the regional economy and our profile worldwide.

"The new site is in an excellent location in the heart of the city and will help them to enhance the services they offer. It's been a pleasure to work with them and support their investment plans."

COMBINING UTILITIES IN ONE

AN AMBITIOUS NEWCASTLE COMPANY OFFERING A GROUNDBREAKING UTILITIES BROKERING AND BILLING SERVICE HAS INVESTED IN CITY CENTRE PROPERTY.

Utilitiesin1.com, which is run by young entrepreneurs Andie Stokoe, 21, and Salem Sinawi, 22, has moved into the new Lime Square development in Ouseburn with the support of Tyne and Wear Development Company.

The web-based service – the only one of its kind – is aimed at students and young professionals living in multi-occupancy lets, brokering the best deals on electricity, water and gas and billing each tenant individually.

Unlike other utilities services, Utilitiesin1.com combines bills into single monthly direct debit payments for each tenant, ensuring they only pay their share of the utility costs for the property. Several lettings agencies in Newcastle have already signed up for this service following its launch.

Andie explains: "Nobody else offers a service like this combining all bills in one and dividing it between tenants. It's a unique model which saves tenants living in shared accommodation time, money and effort. It's easy to register and is totally transparent, combining payments into one monthly fee and splitting the cost between each person.

"There's no hassle dividing bills, carrying out meter readings or hunting for the best deals – we do all of that for the customer.

"For landlords and agents it's a great management tool as well. It removes the threat of arrears or unpaid bills at the end of a tenancy. We collect the money so there's no risk to them of CCJs from tenants disappearing and not paying their bills. We constructed the business from day one to be beautifully simple for our customers."

Utilitiesin1.com is one of a portfolio of companies run by Andie and business partner Salem, which includes a promotion business specialising in student nights; a lifestyle magazine for young professionals and lettings agency, Central Residential.

The company has been supported by Tyne and Wear Development Company, the area's leading business development agency, which helped to identify the new property in Ouseburn. The agency was able to secure the deal in a very short space of time, working closely with the Newcastle office of Storeys:ssp, the property agent for the Lime Square development.

Salem added: "We understand the student market extremely well and Utilitiesin1.com is a natural fit with our other businesses. There are around 60,000 students in the city and along with the young professional sector is a very attractive market. This is where our initial focus is but it's a very scalable model.



(L to r) Andie Stokoe, Lauren Young (Storeys:ssp), Salem Sinawi and Deborah Fletcher

"We wanted somewhere modern, attractive and with space to grow to reflect the ethos and ambition of the firm. We needed to move very quickly to secure the property and Tyne and Wear Development Company and Storeys:ssp were fantastic. Tyne and Wear Development Company showed us a portfolio of around 15 properties and we quickly narrowed that down to the one we wanted. It's an excellent choice in a great area."

ATOMHAWK SET TO SOAR

IT'S BEEN A CASE OF ONE DOOR CLOSING AND ANOTHER OPENING FOR GATESHEAD ENTREPRENEUR CUMRON ASHTIANI.

In July this year, Cumron was one of over 70 employees to be made redundant when Tyneside games developer Midway Games was forced to close its doors after its American owner fell into financial difficulties.

Fast forward a little over three months and Cumron has made the swift transition to entrepreneur and owner manager, running a successful digital artwork

and design company – Atomhawk Design – alongside former colleagues at Midway.

The expanding company is part of Gateshead's burgeoning creative industry sector and employs the talents of Pete Thompson, Steven Pick and Corlen Kruger. Supplying a range of services including 2D and 3D artwork, video production and web content, Atomhawk is already working with several top tier clients in the games, film and online sectors.

With plenty of creative ability, the team has over forty years of industry experience between them. Cumron said: "There was some fantastic talent at Midway. We'd worked on games like Wheelman (featuring Vin Diesel) so it was a real shame when it closed. We might have been able to buy the company but the speed at which everything happened prevented that.

"Fortunately, we recognised that there's a growing demand for outsourced design work. Many firms need

design work but don't have the necessary expertise – particularly in the games sector. I'd been working with some of the best talent in the industry so it seemed a perfect time to start something on our own."

Cumron turned to Tyne and Wear Development Company and Gateshead Council for business support and advice on funding. One North East supported the project with a Grant for Business Investment (GBI).

Cumron added: "We were originally looking for a management buy-out which is how Tyne and Wear Development Company came into the equation. Obviously, we disregarded that idea and focussed instead on starting something new. Paul Buie and his team were absolutely essential in the whole process, acting as a real mentor, putting us in touch with the right people and guiding us in the right direction.

"Gateshead Council has also been hugely supportive, particularly in quickly locating an office for us and funding from One North East was very welcome."

With a growing client base and skill-set that Cumron believes is virtually unmatched anywhere in the world, the former Midway maestro has ambitious plans for growth. Atomhawk hopes to expand its workforce to 15 over the next three years and is already in discussions with Gateshead Council about moving to a new property in Gateshead to match these ambitions.

Paul Buie said: "Atomhawk is a company with exciting prospects in a dynamic and growing sector. The contacts, expertise and unique services Atomhawk offers means the company is in an enviable position to meet this demand. It's great news for the region and our creative sector which is vitally important to the area."



(L to r) Cumron Ashtiani, Paul Buie and Mark Carrigan from Gateshead Council