

Welcome to the latest issue of *The Information Professional*, a regular newsletter for Cobweb's subscribers and partners.

In this issue, we bring you up to date with news about our team's recent work supplying information services for business support professionals and practitioners.

GET IN TOUCH

Tel: 0191 461 8000

E-mail: enquiries@cobwebinfo.com

Website: www.cobwebinfo.com

Twitter: @CobwebInfo

Cobweb's 'Business Support Challenge'

There is an ongoing debate among policymakers, business support practitioners and the private sector about how to encourage small business owners to embrace the opportunities of digital inclusion, adoption and transformation.

The opportunities that arise from increased digital adoption in business are more than just about learning new digital skills, building a website or trading via Amazon and eBay. The real benefit to business owners of being more 'digitally enabled' is the ability for them to develop and exploit competitive advantage.

Digital competitive advantage enables firms to trade at lower cost, operate more flexibly and – both pre- and post-Brexit – do business in multiple locations. And this applies to every business sector – not just tech and creative – and not just to exporters or high-growth firms.

Cobweb's Managing Director, Marianne Whitfield, has been involved in the digital agenda for a number of years. With a background in technology that goes back to 1996, Marianne has been a long-standing advocate of women in tech, and has supported the development of the digital sector in the north east of England for almost two decades.

Marianne currently sits on the Leadership Group of Digital Leaders North East – the first regional franchise of the national Digital Leaders programme (www.digileaders.com). She recently presented a session at a national event that was run by Digital Leaders, on behalf of the Department for Business, Enterprise and Industrial Strategy (BEIS).

Our 'Business Support Challenge' will highlight and share best practice in micro-business support.



Marianne Whitfield, with Jamie Izzard of LEAP London, presenting at the BEIS Digital Day

Marianne also hosted roundtable discussions about the benefits of using digital tools in business at Buckinghamshire Business First's Digital Summit in October 2016. During these sessions, she advocated the use of digital tools to improve the productivity, efficiency and effectiveness of small firms, and to open people's minds to the significant impact they can have on a business, if used well.

In 2017, Cobweb and its partners will launch a project to engage with the UK business support community and identify innovative projects that embrace digital, in all its forms. Our '**Business Support Challenge**' will highlight and share best practice in micro-business support, where initiatives operate both digitally and via one-to-one interaction, and where digital know-how and engagement stimulate competitive advantage.

In particular we will be looking for initiatives which have substance and produce results, are innovative and cost effective, but more importantly target and reach communities with the greatest need. Above all, these initiatives will be sustainable and replicable elsewhere around the UK.

For more information, please contact Marianne at m.whitfield@cobwebinfo.com.

COBRA SUBSCRIBER CASE STUDY:

Barnsley College



COBRA IN COLLEGES

COBRA is used by several colleges across the UK to support student enterprise.

The top ten self-employment guides downloaded by college staff and students in 2016 were:

- 1 Coffee Shop
- 2 Hairdressing Salon
- 3 Barber Shop
- 4 Cake Shop
- 5 Photographer
- 6 Mobile Phone Shop
- 7 Florist
- 8 T-shirt Printer
- 9 Domestic Cleaning Service
- 10 Fish and Chip Shop

WHAT IS COBRA?

COBRA is our market-leading online business reference resource, which provides a unique range of guides to the key trading, compliance and market issues faced by 600 different types of small and micro business.

For more information about COBRA, visit our website or call Lucy Graves on 0191 461 8000.



Barnsley College has a reputation as one of the UK's leading institutions in student enterprise and entrepreneurship. The College's innovative approach to entrepreneurship is exemplified by its highly successful iTrust programme.

Since its launch in 2013, iTrust has initiated several student start ups by providing advice, guidance and start up grants. In recognition of the programme's success, Barnsley College was awarded a Duke of York's Community Initiative Award in 2015 and won the Innovation Award at the inaugural Educate the North Awards in April 2015.

At Barnsley College, **the use of COBRA has proven to be a vital resource** in helping students who wish to research and start their own business. The College delivers regular self-employment taster sessions where students are introduced to COBRA and how it can help them take the first steps of researching and assessing the viability of their business idea.

"We typically use COBRA to direct students as they carry out an initial assessment of their business ideas.

The concise nature of the COBRA factsheets, sector guides, local area profiles, events updates, and the way they are set out, makes it easier for our students to locate and extract the sets of data they are interested in.

"It is not difficult to see why many of our students regard COBRA as invaluable, from helping them research their ideas to completing their financial projections," says Rubina Rashid, Head of Barnsley College Enterprise Department.

For Barnsley College, COBRA is not just a great source of business information; it is also an invaluable learning tool. "While some students do go on to set up their own business, we have a strong focus on developing enterprise and entrepreneurial skills," says Dr Dagogo Kinigoma (Kini), previously Enterprise Adviser at Barnsley College.

For Kini, the depth and breadth of information on COBRA means he can concentrate on delivering tailored enterprise advice and support to students. **Kini uses COBRA to research and familiarise himself with a particular sector or business idea** before meeting a student for a one-to-one coaching session. "It has hundreds of business ideas. COBRA is very comprehensive," says Kini.

"Students are much better informed on their ideas when contacting us for one-to-one coaching with an enterprise adviser," he says. "It makes the coaching sessions far less time consuming and more productive for students."

COBRA SUBSCRIBER CASE STUDY:

Businessline in Wrexham Library



Businessline has been providing business support to start ups and established firms in Wrexham for more than 20 years. During this time, they have supported thousands of local firms to start up, grow and succeed.

Based within Wrexham Library, Businessline provides start ups and business owners with a range of support on a one-to-one basis, this includes compliance information, details of funding opportunities as well as **offering access to numerous specialist resources, of which COBRA is one.**

“We help a broad range of clients. It could be new businesses, start ups or anyone with an initial idea. They are able to come in and request information about what they need to do to start their business,” says Gareth Hatton, a Business Information Specialist at Businessline.

In the first instance, Businessline provides start ups and those considering self-employment with **a start-up pack – based on a collection of Business Information Factsheets (BIFs) from COBRA** that provide practical information about starting a business. “It answers any key questions that they might have and is something we can hand to people as soon as they come in. It’s a really good starting point,” says Gareth.

Businessline provides support to people from all kinds of backgrounds, whether it’s business students, job seekers, people made redundant or those that have worked in a particular industry and decided to start up on their own. Given the diversity of Businessline clients and the variety of business ideas they encounter, the breadth of information available on COBRA is key.

“In terms of how we use the resource to help these clients, it’s massively important for us. **We use COBRA on a daily, even hourly basis.** We use all sorts of information – the Business Opportunity Profiles (BOPs), the factsheets and the Market Synopses. Everything is vitally important,” says Gareth.

Gareth also finds COBRA, with its detailed information on market trends ideal for helping clients develop their business plan and secure funding. “The market synopses highlight trends in certain industry sectors. For grant applications, that information is useful for helping to back up a funding application or certain parts of the business plan. We make use of them frequently.”

While Businessline predominantly works with start ups, Gareth also uses the information on COBRA to support established firms. “It is well used by existing businesses. There could be something they haven’t done before that has come up. We would then dip into COBRA,” he says.

Through the delivery of an accurate and comprehensive business support service, Gareth believes Businessline generates significant benefits for the local economy. “The support has made a real difference to start up rates, I’d like to think,” says Gareth. “People have been able to make more informed decisions and do things properly from the very start.

“We make use of it so much. **If there are any business libraries out there that haven’t got COBRA, I would strongly recommend getting it,**” says Gareth. “I’d put it up there as one of the number one things to have as a business library.”

Welcome new **COBRA** subscribers

Over the last 20 years, hundreds of business support organisations have been using COBRA on a daily basis to support start ups and small business owners. We are pleased to welcome the following organisations as our most recent subscribers to the service:

- **Cumbria University** – staff in the Enterprise & Business Development team use COBRA to support students looking to start a business.
- **Jersey Business** – business advisers at this enterprise agency have access to COBRA to support their work with start ups and small firms in Jersey.
- **Jersey Library** – COBRA is now available as a business reference resource for library staff working with their members and clients in the library.
- **Bolsover Council and NE Derbyshire Council** – advisers from these two economic development teams have access to COBRA to help support start ups and small firms in their area.

Conferences, awards and bursaries



Cobweb was delighted to sponsor the 'FE Team Enterprise' award at the **National Enterprise Educators Awards** in September 2016. The award was presented to the Inspiring Enterprise Learning team from West Lothian College.

Cobweb also sponsored the National Enterprise Network's 'Unsung Hero' Award, which was presented to Lorna Oldham from WSX Enterprise at the **National Enterprise Network Conference** in London. We also sponsored the 'Business Adviser of the Year' award at the **Northern Ireland Enterprise Awards** in Belfast. Marianne presented the award to joint winners

Emma Pearson from NDDO and Meike White from Work West.

In 2017, Cobweb is delighted to be supporting **Enterprise Educators UK (EEUK)** by funding a Bursary in memory of their former Vice-Chair, Dr Richard Beresford. Richard had a deep commitment to supporting the personal development of colleagues working in enterprise and entrepreneurship education, and Cobweb will now be funding one Bursary each year.

This year, we are booked to attend the following events, and look forward to catching up with many of our customers and partners in 2017.

- British Chambers of Commerce Annual Conference
- LEP Annual Conference
- Business Librarians' Association Conference
- IEEC 2017

For more information, please e-mail **Lucy Graves** at enquiries@cobwebinfo.com.

Cobweb is a specialist publisher of information for professionals who support business start ups and small firms in the UK.

Cobweb Information Ltd
Unit 9 Bankside
The Watermark
Gateshead
NE11 9SY

To enquire about a **COBRA** subscription, licensed access, and a free trial please contact **Lucy Graves** on **0191 461 8000**.

COBWEB SERVICES

Thousands of business support professionals use Cobweb's unique range of information resources.

COBRA

Our premium business reference resource, available by annual subscription. For a free trial, call **Lucy Graves** on **0191 461 8000**.

BAD News

Free weekly current awareness bulletin for business advisers and support professionals. To subscribe, e-mail badnews@cobwebinfo.com.

News services

We accept commissions to write news content for newsletters and business support websites. For more information, call **Lucy Graves** on **0191 461 8000**.

Content curation

We supply Growth Hubs and other support organisations with feeds of information that are published on their own websites. For more information, call **Marianne Whitfield** on **0191 461 8020**.

Tel: 0191 461 8000
Fax: 0191 461 8001
E-mail: enquiries@cobwebinfo.com
Website: www.cobwebinfo.com
Twitter: @CobwebInfo