

Business in the Parliament Conference (BIPC) 2023

Workshop 1 - Adoption of technology for SMEs

Hosted by Scottish Tourism Alliance (STA)

Overview

Technology is critical in enhancing the productivity of our businesses and economy and will continue to transform the way we do business across all sectors. The pandemic led to a surge in new digital adoption which was pivotal to many businesses survival through the pandemic, with added resilience, new products or services and beyond have shown how technology can improve business productivity and competitiveness, from now ubiquitous QR codes to ecommerce to data management tools. We have made progress in recent years, however, we know that many Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) and businesses struggle to successfully adopt technology and other don't even count themselves a digital business.

This workshop will address some of the common barriers that SMEs face, and will discuss how these can be supported. Attendees will be equipped with the knowledge and connections that will enable them to make informed decisions about the opportunities that are open to them.

It will focus on the support available to businesses currently and what else is needed, using case studies of Scottish companies across the Hospitality and Tourism sectors which have successfully adopted new technologies and the benefit that has had.

The purpose of this workshop is to:

- Address some of the common barriers to digital adoption and demonstrate the opportunity that successful digital projects bring.
- Share knowledge and connections to help businesses make informed decisions about the opportunities that are open to them, through the network of organisations.
- Provide practical advice and real-life examples of businesses that have successfully implemented a digital project by utilising available support

About STA

The Scottish Tourism Alliance STA is the largest member organisation for tourism businesses in Scotland and the leading representative body for its tourism industry. It comprises over 250 trade associations, businesses, destination groups and other organisations with an interest in tourism. The STA led and co-ordinated the development and launch of Scotland's tourism strategy, Scotland Outlook 2030, in collaboration with the Scottish Government and its agencies.

Background

Scotland's future will be forged in a digital world. It's a world in which data and digital technologies are transforming every element of our nation and our lives – people, place, economy and government. This is why the Scottish Government published a refreshed digital strategy in 2021 - [A changing nation: how Scotland will thrive in a digital world.](#)

SMEs are vital to Scotland's business base accounting for nearly all (99.3%) of private sector businesses, 41% of turnover and employing 55% of Scottish private sector employees – so interventions specifically supporting SMEs are crucial ([A Changing Nation](#)).

This is why Scottish Government specifically targeted interventions at SMEs adopting digital technologies, for example the [DigitalBoost programme](#), our national business digital engagement programme led by Business Gateway. This offers digital support to SMEs including workshops, 1-2-1 advice, health checks, online guides and tutorials.

In recent years we have also run multiple rounds of the Digital Development Grant and are still running our [Digital Development Loan](#), which combined have supported thousands of SMEs with their digital projects. Recipients of the grant have also been invited to the Digital Productivity Labs Pilot. The aim of this pilot is to gain insights into what added support businesses require to create a successful digital project and how this can be turned into one-to-many support for future mainstream digital support programmes.

[Traveltech for Scotland](#), an organisation which provides support to a community of over 200 Traveltech organisations within the tourism and hospitality sector, published a report in October 2022 [exploring the role of technology](#) in alleviating staff shortages in hospitality.

Key Challenges and Opportunities

The [2021 Digital Economy Business Survey](#) cites the following reasons from businesses for **not** adopting digital technologies:

- The technology in question was not relevant to the business
- Prefer current business model e.g. face-to-face interaction
- Don't understand the technology
- Lack of skills in the organisation

Scotland has made progress in recent years, but more can be done to encourage SMEs to start their digitalisation journey and help them overcome the barriers to increase their digital maturity and skills. The results of this across Scotland's business base could be transformational for Scotland's economy.

The Scottish Government's 10 year [National Strategy for Economic Transformation](#) has a focus on digital technologies with key actions which include:

- Establish a Digital Productivity Fund focused on supporting business to improve firm-level productivity through the adoption and successful integration of new and advanced technologies
- Develop joint programmes of action to increase digital understanding and adoption in sectors where business models have been transformed rapidly due to new technology. Examples include action to better use data and adopt cloud based services.

Work is ongoing with Scottish enterprise agencies, to identify how the full range of stakeholders delivering services in this area can best work together to deliver a single joined-up national service for businesses, to deliver the most supportive customer journeys possible. Outputs from this collaboration, along with findings from the Digital Productivity Lab pilot will determine next steps which will be taken forward as part of the National Strategy for Economic Transformation.

Suggested Discussion Questions

- What more can be done to encourage more SMEs to adopt digital technologies?
- What are the most common barriers to adopting digital technologies and how can these be overcome?
- How can SMEs be incentivised to test and try new technologies?
- How can the current business support and landscape (Business Gateway, Enterprise Agencies and other private and public sector bodies) be simplified for businesses to navigate it easily?
- Does sustained peer-to-peer support offer a longer-lasting and more successful alternative to training courses for SMEs using technology?
- How can communities of local businesses use technology collaboratively for their collective benefit?

Business Organisation Workshop Hosts



Marc Crothall - CEO of Scottish Tourism Alliance

Marc Crothall has been Chief Executive of the Scottish Tourism Alliance since 2012. Prior to taking up his current post he has held many front-line senior management and executive positions across various sectors of the tourism, hospitality and leisure industry in different parts of the world. His wealth of first-hand experience and knowledge about the industry has been gained from working for leading corporate and independent organisations. Marc was awarded an MBE in the Queen's Platinum Jubilee Birthday Honours and awarded a "Fellowship" by the Scottish Hotel industry in 2020.



Joshua Ryan-Saha - Director of Traveltech for Scotland

Joshua Ryan-Saha has been Director at Traveltech for Scotland at Edinburgh Futures Institute (University of Edinburgh) since 2020 where he leads the application of data-driven innovation for the tourism and festival sectors. He has an interest in the application of data science and machine learning in the travel industry and cultural sector. He previously worked at The Data Lab, leading programmes to improve data science skills across Scotland. At Nesta, he led the research and prize design of the Longitude Prize, the first ever incentive prize shaped by a public vote.

Business Organisation Workshop Panellists



Ronnie Somerville - Founder 5pm.com & simpleERB

Ronnie Somerville is an entrepreneur, and investor in the hospitality space. A former restaurant owner who ran a small chain of restaurants in Glasgow, his experience in working closely with local markets and brands helps his companies to focus on product development and service offerings. Ronnie is the co-founder of 5pm, a restaurant and hotels reservations portal, and founder of simpleERB, a CRM for restaurants. He is also an investor in Swipii, a loyalty and data company for SME's. He is a former board member of Culture Sparks an audience and data advice service for the arts.



John Snyder - Founder CEO Rose Hospitality

John Snyder is the Founder CEO of Rose Hospitality, bringing more than 30 years of experience in leading and scaling software companies. John has spent his whole career in the field of information retrieval and keyword technology. He sold his last software company, Grapeshot, to Oracle Corporation; having grown the start-up into a global market leader of digital advertising data. Now, as an owner of hospitality businesses, John is on a mission to revolutionise the hospitality industry, changing the way owners, operators and every team member interact and use data.



Mary Campbell - Founder & CEO Blas Ltd

Mary is an international corporate finance specialist, working with owners, entrepreneurs and industry leaders to show them how to maximise the value of their businesses. Mary qualified as a CA with Ernst & Young and her CV includes being CEO of a Venture Capital Fund, CEO of two Strategic Advisory Firms, Director of the Investment Banking Arm of a Clearing Bank and NXD of several businesses. Mary currently splits her time between the Blas bases in Edinburgh (2002) and Manhattan (opened 2012). She was awarded an OBE for contribution to economic development.



David Clelland – Founder of Olivia Technologies

David is an experienced Restaurateur and Software Developer with over 2 decades in the hospitality industry in the US, UK, and Europe. His experience and expertise include finance, operations, food & beverage, technology, and open innovation initiatives.



Lesley Judge – TravelTech for Scotland

Lesley Judge is a tourism specialist with over twenty years in the industry, developing digital and data-driven strategies for tourism organisations. At Edinburgh Innovations, University of Edinburgh, she project-manages the Traveltech for Scotland Cluster, in addition to developing tourism sector engagement for Interface, matching businesses with academic expertise.

Lesley has been an active board member of Women in Tourism since its inception, leading on digital communications. She is a graduate of the Destination Leaders Programme and a Chapter Leader of global travel network Travel Massive.