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Employee-owned Altar become first Tayside business to be named a Great Place to Work

Broughty Ferry business **ALTAR Group** is an integrated marketing, design and digital agency. The company became employee-owned in 2021 and employs 30 staff.

It operates design studio Avian, web design company Blue2 Digital and public relations firm Ginger PR.

It is one of only 17 companies in Scotland to achieve Great Place to Work accreditation.

ALTAR impressed the Great Place to Work organisation to earn the award.

The firm will now be considered for certification as one of the UK's best workplaces.

Vicki Anderson, director of finance and operations, Altar, said:

"Our people are our biggest asset. They drive our business forward and their creative skills and talents are our USP.

"That's why it makes complete sense to look after them and provide a working environment we can all be proud of."

"We are committed to creating an environment where everyone can thrive, contribute and find fulfilment in their work."

"No workplace will ever be perfect but we are confident we have created a working platform that empowers our employees to produce outstanding results for our clients."

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Employee Ownership Masterclass

Hear from two successful business that opted for employee ownership.

See [page 10](#) for more info.

Ms Anderson said the move to employee ownership had given staff more of a say in how the business is run.

She added: *“Their voices are heard and there is complete transparency over our financial results, with a fully approachable management team.”*

“This is just the beginning for ALTAR. We are using the feedback we received from our application to implement improvements that will make this an even better place to work.”

The group is living wage accredited, with employees also benefitting from tax-free profit-share bonuses as part of the employee ownership trust set-up.

ALTAR and Blue2 director Nial Chapman said: *“We’ve worked incredibly hard on creating a culture that inspires our people.”*



“If you have a happy workplace and care about your people, you significantly increase your chances of operating a successful business.”

New MD for i4PD as co-founder steps back

i4PD, the employee-owned product design & development consultancy, is embarking on its next phase of growth under new leadership. Ryan Fenton has been appointed to the role of Managing Director.

20 years ago, Brian Combe and his co-founders established i4PD with a vision to create exceptional design solutions, and today, their multi-disciplinary team is doing just that. Brian says, *“As the company has grown, I became increasing aware of the need to empower and trust the decision-making of other members of the team. I think one of the best decisions was to introduce additional capability within the company. Since our early days, our core expertise has been in industrial and mechanical design, and having worked on some projects where we subcontracted electronics and firmware, we thought, why can’t we do this ourselves? We hired some really talented electronics engineers and all worked out well.”*

“We wanted to leave a legacy of a sustainable and profitable company for the next generation. Ryan Fenton has all the qualities we need to lead the company to its next stage. I believe we’ve made the right choice.”



Ryan Fenton

OAUK News

Well, what a year that was! Certainly a lot happening in the EO world. We welcomed 25 new employee-owned businesses in Scotland from a wide range of industries with a number of firsts! **Dot Surveying** became the first surveying company in Scotland to transition to an EOT, and **Tough Construction** became the biggest EOT to date in terms of employee numbers.

As for number of companies, 2023 came in at fewer than we saw in the previous year. There were 30 new employee owned businesses in Scotland in 2022. This led to a conversation with the FD of a business currently undergoing the move to employee ownership. We pondered the total number of new employee owners each year – that would surely be a better measure of impact than counting the number of transitions. It seemed to be the case that we are seeing larger companies move to employee ownership: a few years ago, it was mainly smaller companies who made the transition. And of course, many of these earlier transitions have grown significantly such as **Woollard & Henry** and **Clansman Dynamics**.

In isolation with Covid over the break, I thought I'd do a very rough and unscientific calculation of the growth of number of employees. Bearing in mind I don't know every Scottish employee-owned company, and my knowledge may be out of date, the figures I came up with must be viewed as an indication rather than an accurate reflection of the true numbers. Very approximately, there are now more than 6.5k employee owners of Scottish headquartered businesses, with the numbers increasing steadily each year. More than half of that figure became employee-owned in the past three years. Let's hope for more of the same in 2024.

2023 also saw increasing interest from the politicians. Several employee-owned firms hosted visits from MSPs and MPs. Shadow Finance Minister, Daniel Johnson MSP, called a meeting of employee-owned firms and appeared to genuinely try to understand what can be done to help EOBs flourish. We also saw an encouraging initiative from the Westminster government with two consultations from HMRC. The first looked



specifically at how to incentivise more companies to offer shares to employees, and the second sought views on how the EOT legislation could be improved. The results of both are eagerly anticipated and expected in early 2024.

There were also a number of international developments. It was good to see that the Oxford Symposium on Employee Ownership has become an annual event, bringing employee ownership advocates together from across the world. Canada saw the introduction of EOT legislation following some very determined perseverance by a few enthusiasts, and indeed several other countries are looking to the EOT model as a means to encourage more employee ownership.

2024 is shaping up to be a good year for the EO world. Wishing you all much success and happiness in 2024.

- Carole
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Bumper bonus payment for Kilmac employee owners

Christmas came early for staff at Tayside civil engineering groundworks specialists **Kilmac**, where – for the first time since becoming an employee ownership trust (EOT) – more than 100 employees have enjoyed four-figure festive season windfalls.

Bonuses totalling more than £250,000 been paid out following a record-breaking year for the company.

Long-time Kilmac workers Stevie Roy, Colin Welch and Marie Bartlett admit the windfall could not have been timed better.

Mr Roy, a foreman, said: *“It has come as a very pleasant surprise. I don’t think anyone was expecting such a hefty bonus after becoming an EOT.”*

“I have been with the company right from the start and there has always been a close family feel to it. That hasn’t changed despite growing and moving into employee ownership.”

Mr Welch, who was also a member of the original Kilmac team when the company was

formed by directors Athole McDonald and Richard Kilcullen nearly 20 years ago, added: *“We had heard there might be a nice Christmas bonus in the pipeline so it’s very welcome.”*

Dundee office manager Ms Bartlett, who has been with Kilmac for nearly 10 years, said: *“A lot of the staff have been with the company for years and I don’t think any of us anticipated such a healthy bonus being paid out.”*

“It’s perfectly timed and sure to make for a special Christmas.”

Julie Scobie, Kilmac’s finance director, said: *“We are delighted that staff who have been with us for at least a year have been able to enjoy a substantial Christmas bonus.”*

“Anyone who has been with us for at least five years is entitled to the maximum tax-free allowance under the EOT guidelines and the figure is the same for every member of staff who qualifies, no matter their role within the company.”

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“We are on target to report a record turnover in the region of £40 million for the 2023/24 financial year.”

“That reflects the expansion we have been undertaking, adding offices in Livingston and more recently Dunfermline to our more traditional Tayside heartland.”

Determined to prepare the succession planning groundwork, founders Athole and Richard moved down the EOT path in March 2022.

“Many of our staff, whether in the offices or on the building sites, have been part of the team for years and the EOT bonuses have been designed to encourage businesses which have a track record of investing in developing and retaining their own workforce,” said Ms Scobie.



Marie Bartlett, Stevie Roy and Colin Welch

Nurturing and growing at ALTAR!

At ALTAR, we firmly believe that our creative talents are fuelled by having growth mindsets.

To inspire our innovative work and cultivate our community culture, every employee is given a plant to care for in the office with an annual prize awarded for the best kept one.

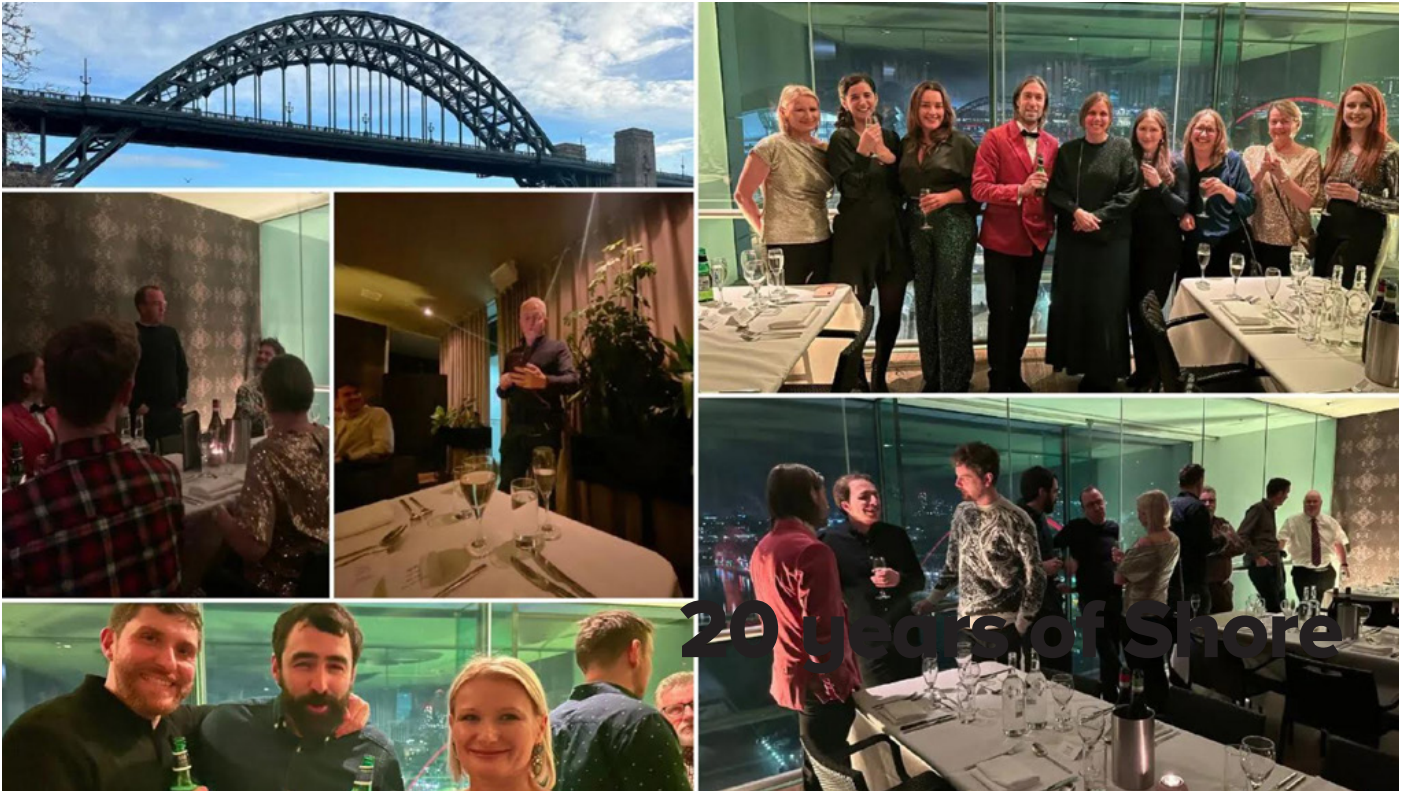
We invited Eliza Serban from **The Botanist and The Bee** to cast her expert eyes over our plants and she selected **Avian** designer

Fergus Middleton’s *Dracena Fragrans Compacta* as this year’s winner.

Our Italy based **Blue2 Digital Ltd** Developer, **Emanuele Brignone**, clearly knew what he was doing when he chose Fergus to carry out his plant care instructions - securing himself a Highly Commended from Eliza.

Last year’s winner, **Andrea Kirkwood**, Avian’s Client Services Director, was also awarded a Highly Commended for her botany skills.





20 years of Shore

Employee-owned product design consultancy, **Shore Group** is celebrating its 20th birthday.

Founded in 2003, Shore began its journey as a general product design company before specialising in medical design, initially focusing on orthopaedic devices before expanding expertise to surgical, diagnostic, and pharmaceutical devices.

Over 20 years, the company has built significant knowledge and established robust processes working across the entire spectrum of medical device development and with some of the world's largest companies.

The fully integrated service bridges the gap from concept design to engineering development, delivering an end-to-end product development service. The team have completed over 500 projects, generated over 100 device patents for customers, and delivered millions of devices.

Based in Edinburgh, and comprised of just under 40 dedicated professionals, Shore is now regarded as one of Europe's leading medical design consultancies, working with customers all over the world.

On Friday 1 December, the team marked the occasion with a night in Newcastle.

Founder and Managing Director, Nick Foley adds:

"It was great to celebrate the milestone with the team in Newcastle.

As we look back on 20 years, we're immensely proud not only of our track record in award-winning medical device designs, but equally our long-standing successful relationships with our customers and partners.

For our team, it's not just about designing the product, but us all working together with the common goal of delivering design solutions that meet genuine needs and improve people's lives.

When I look back over our product portfolio and observe the impact of our products in healthcare settings, the team can be very proud of the many medical devices we've brought to market.

As we celebrate this exciting milestone, we would like to thank our customers for their valued partnership over the last 20 years and look forward to many more."

To mark the 20 year anniversary, the team suggested their top 20 products from over the years. You can see the results [here](#).

What will 2024 bring?

Andrew Allan, Clansman Dynamics

2023 was another challenging, yet hugely successful, year for Clansman Dynamics and I'm convinced that EO played a major role in that success. Hangovers from COVID and the war in Ukraine are still paying havoc with supply chains, particularly in the manufacturing sector, and the ongoing energy crisis has had a significant impact on our ongoing costs and those of our suppliers. But thanks to the dedication of our employee owners (and some good will from our customers!) the challenges have been embraced and lessons learned going forward.

We go into 2024 in a strong position: a forecast record turnover for the current financial year, a team of 70 dedicated employees, and a full order book out past August. We will undoubtedly experience further challenges this year but are hopeful of another successful 12 months and beyond.

Magnus Swanson, Swansons Fruit Co

2023 was a challenging year for many with the cost of living issue and the rapid rise in interest rates. It was also a good year for tourism numbers and although prices to eat out increased sharply, people still managed to partake.

Our colleagues were glad of the EOT payments they received both in the Summer and at Christmas.

Eleanor Nielson, Dynam

It's an exciting time ahead for Dynam, and we're very much looking forward to the new year as an employee owned business. In the last six months since we've transitioned, the new model has further strengthened our culture and given the team a real sense of ownership and commitment to drive the agency forward.

Wishing everyone a successful 2024.

John Blair, Consilium CA

2023 was another positive year for EOT completions as awareness of the process continued to grow. An increasing number of business owners are considering a sale to an EOT as an attractive exit strategy and we have a strong pipeline of potential EOT transactions as we enter 2024.

Douglas Roberts, TLT

2023 saw continuing strong demand for employee ownership in Scotland, which is excellent, and that looks set to continue into 2024. One highlight of 2023 was attending an announcement to staff and speaking to employees whose jobs were saved by a sale to an EOT (the offer from a rival business would have led to the majority of the staff being made redundant). This reinforced my view that employee ownership really is life changing for many employees - it works and is not just a theory! We are delighted to have been instructed on other EOT deals for 2024. This year we are waiting to see HMRC's proposals following the recent consultation and I hope there are changes which make EOT's even better for employees, sellers and the UK economy.

(Continued)

Carolyn Moir Grant, Allstaff

For us it's been an amazing step in the right direction, lots of plans unfolding & as we approach our 1st year anniversary as employee owned we become more aware of the longer term benefits for all the team members & the business. We are fully engaged in remaining independently owned, whilst having a clear, progressive plan of longer term succession which we hope nurtures ambition.

We are looking forward to engaging & fully supporting the employee ownership network & are proud promoters.

Best wishes to all for a happy, healthy & prosperous 2024.

Tom Gallivan, Dot Surveying

2023 was a great year for the company moving to Employee Ownership. We are very excited to build on our success' from 2023 in 2024 now that the EOT has bedded in.

Ken Naismith, CAS Workpro

2024 is a leap year - at CAS we're looking to make it a "jump" year too, taking advantage of interest in the HR casework version of our Workpro software.

Traditional customers in the Ombudsman community, and people managing FCA regulated complaints in finance/insurance make up a loyal user base, meanwhile HR professionals in government and corporate organisations have really taken to Workpro for managing risk and getting the best possible outcomes from sometimes-tricky employee relations cases.

Example customers include DHL, TSB, NHS Trusts, Hampshire Fire & Rescue, British Heart Foundation, Crawford & Company (insurance claims) and retailers Home Bargains.

Christine Convy, Dunedin Advisory

Once again we reflect on a challenging year for businesses in 2023 – with the continued economic uncertainty, soaring costs and political unrest resilience and sustainability is key.

As an EOT business we are proud to have a committed, positive, and engaged workforce – who work hard, get along together as a team and continually strive to maintain our exceptionally high standards. We reward our team with EOT bonuses each year and are proud to be a part of the EOT community where business sustainability and overall well-being and satisfaction of our workforce is at the heart of what we do.

We are delighted with the recent well-deserved promotion of our Supervisor Katie Martin to the role of Assistant Manager. Our case officer Jamie Grant has committed to studying for the Certificate of Proficiency in Personal Insolvency (CPPI) exam in June 24 and all our team is exploring new ideas to further enhance our working practices including the consideration to AI methods as new initiatives evolve.

Our Dunedin team are renowned as the go to independent business with a solution driven approach to difficult situations and supporting our clients navigate uncertainties to achieve best outcomes. We also endorse and recommend the EOT model to other business owners and regularly provide information and details of our experiences as an EOT business to owner managed businesses.

Our future thoughts revolve around the potential for renewed economic growth, driven by innovation and adaptability.

For 2024 we look forward to continuing the strong business relationships with our contract customers and work introducers and to serving our clients with our high-quality service in business consultancy, restructuring, debt advice and formal insolvency procedures – providing a crucial role in guiding businesses through challenging financial circumstances, offering expert advice and solutions to navigate complexities. Our commitment is to find viable strategies, preserve businesses wherever possible, safeguard jobs and to foster economic resilience. We look forward to a prosperous 2024 for all.

Stephen Rhodes, Highland Fuels

Thank you for the opportunity to share a couple of thoughts as we set out in our first full year as an employee owned enterprise. I am especially looking forward to this year, as I feel that there is already an ethos beginning to develop across the organisation that this is now our company and that we have a collective responsibility to drive it forward for all our betterment.

At an individual level I am expecting greater accountability in respect to delivering a positive culture, high engagement and a great performance in 2024 – as all of our colleagues are now so much more invested.

I am also anticipating that we will also be in a position to provide our colleagues with some extra value this year due the special tax incentives available for employee owned businesses – which I am sure will be very well received!

Exciting times!

MSP visits Clansman Dynamics

Clansman Dynamics hosted a visit from Paul Sweeney MSP recently. He reported that he was inspired by the world leader in the design & manufacture of robotic handling equipment. Clansman Dynamics has been in employee ownership since 2009 and exports 90% of its output.

The MSP was particularly impressed with the firm's employee ownership structure saying "It's the future of Scotland's industrial growth."



Grossart Associates welcome Rhonda to Board of Directors

Grossart Associates are delighted to announce that Rhonda Mongan has been promoted to the company's Board of Directors as Financial Director. Rhonda joined Grossarts in 2018 just as the company moved to employee ownership. Rhonda made an immediate impact, putting robust systems in place and keeping a tight rein on cost control. Managing Director Hector Munro believes this is a well-deserved promotion. He says, "Rhonda will be an excellent addition to the board, and together with our employee Director Stephen



Cowie and recent promotion Brian Hanley, as well as the guidance from our former owners Bill Grossart and John Macdonald, Grossarts is well placed for a very successful 2024."

Employee Ownership Masterclass

January 18th 10am – 12noon

Would you like to hear why two successful businesses opted for employee ownership? Tune into the next CDS webinar on 18th January at 10am hear market-leading IT support and solutions company Microtech Group and building supply merchants Caley Timber & Building Supplies explain what they considered in choosing employee ownership and how things have worked for them.

More information [here](#).



Microtech



Chris McMail, Microtech

Selling Your Business

Masterclass series focusing on employee ownership

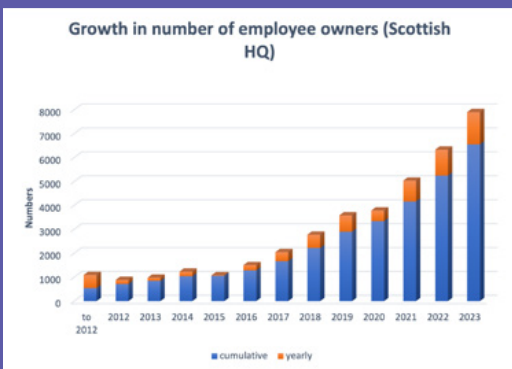
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