

Taking technology into the community

If you are taking the first steps into business and want some good advice, you will soon be able to stop off at your local community centre. The DEVICES project will be there with the latest technology to help link you up to the best professional help.

The project is being offered by the award-winning Luton and Dunstable Innovation Centre, with its partners, Business Link for Bedfordshire and Luton, and the Chamber.

DEVICES aims to help teleworkers feel less isolated when they work from home alone. With the aid of the latest technology, people can see and talk to each other - and be linked up to professional advisers and business support organisations.

Access

DEVICES has its own team at the Innovation Centre who provide technical support and create a virtual network for teleworkers using Instant Messenger, Skype and webcam. The local community centres are the latest organisations to be linked within this network.

Leon Powell, enterprise manager, Business Link, explains: "We want to help people in the community who need access to the available Business Link Support services and DEVICES

is a great way to do that on their doorstep. They can come to their local community centre or reach us from their home."

He added: "It is easy for people to access and will help people to use IT in ways that mean something to them. They might have transport problems, or for some other religious or cultural reason, feel more comfortable dealing with someone at their community centre."

"It means far less time and cost on both sides. It will also help community centres and outreach centres communicate with each other more easily. "We are setting up a small core group of centres to start with and when that is successful, we will build on that."

Lynette Warren, social enterprise manager at the Innovation Centre, said: "The DEVICES project can be used not only to help local people access business support but also to link up community centres with each other, enabling them to share resources and spread best practice and support."

"Also people can utilise the DEVICES tools to link up with businesses - as well as friends and family members - anywhere in the world."

Sam Dalton, at the Ashcroft and Ramridge Community Centre, said:

"We are delighted to be able to offer this valuable networking service to local people. It means they can learn and share information - without leaving the comfort of their home patch."

"We hope it is the start of great things and will encourage our clients to be the successful business people of the future."

Creating

The Innovation Centre recently won an award for this kind of innovative project work, which helps to regenerate Luton and Dunstable's economy.

The award was presented at the recent Luton and Dunstable Partnership's tenth anniversary celebrations at the Putteridge Bury Conference Centre.

The Innovation Centre received funding from the Partnership towards their work stimulating the local economy by encouraging the set-up of small businesses and creating jobs.

The funding helped the Innovation Centre to become one of the Partnership's top success stories.

In just six years, the Innovation Centre has expanded to four locations, where new businesses can rent offices at a reasonable cost from the Innovation Centre team.

The centre now has more than 50 small companies as tenants.



◆ **Innovation Centre celebrates more success: Centre staff (from left) Lynette Warren, Mike Anstey, Val Newman, Sarah Leeming and Dimitra Vitsa.**

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The DEVICES project, run by the Luton and Dunstable Innovation Centre, at The Spires, Adelaide Street, is funded by the Department of Trade and Industry's Phoenix Fund and a Building on the Best Award.

For more information visit www.innovationcentre.co.uk/projects or for business advice visit www.bl4bl.co.uk

Project is making worldwide connections

THE newly-launched DEVICES project, aiming to help people to run small businesses and social enterprises from home, is already forging links across the globe.

From its base at Luton, the DEVICES Telework Centre has connected regionally with the St John's Innovation Centre in Cambridge, as well as internationally with its new tenants Your Property in Poland and Tiscover from Austria.

Help and advice comes from the specially-trained DEVICES team at the Telework Centre and a DEVICES Support Pack includes aids for a rapid business start-up: a web camera, microphone and i-key. Teleworkers can see and talk to each other and link up to professional advisers and business support organisations.

Information technology consultant Dr Tim Rowsell not only helps DEVICES with IT support and development but also uses its links to help his own home-based business Rowsell Research. "I have links with the Innovation Centre in Cambridge and they will be getting the benefits of DEVICES in their aim to link innovation centres across the region," he says. "Working from home can be quite an isolating experience. Linking up with DEVICES gives you good opportuni-

ties both socially and financially. It is like extended networking. If you are someone working in rural Suffolk, you may be able to access some skills and advice locally, but linking with DEVICES means you extend your reach.

"You can access the specialised business services that the proactive Luton Innovation Centre has to offer and beyond. The contacts you make are also more like personal recommendations, so it gives you confidence in the advice you're getting."

CASE STUDY 1

RENATA Ray is looking forward to a long relationship with the Innovation Centre and its DEVICES project. Her new company Your Property in Poland sells Polish property to buyers both in Britain and internationally.

"We work from home and are part-time tenants of the Innovation Centre," she explains. "We are impressed with the centre's innovative technologies which we will be able to use as our e-commerce business grows."

"We are currently setting up our database and we will be relying on photographs and detailed descriptions to sell our estate agency services. But

with the DEVICES project I can see that we could make very good use of the webcam as well as gaining good business advice from their great links. Communication is the key to our success."

"We are confident that with the interactive IT resources available, rapid increase in networking, selective advertising and the imminent launch of our new book, the first English language detailed guide to buying property in Poland, we will go a long way very quickly."

For more information visit www.yourpropertyinpoland.co.uk

CASE STUDY 2

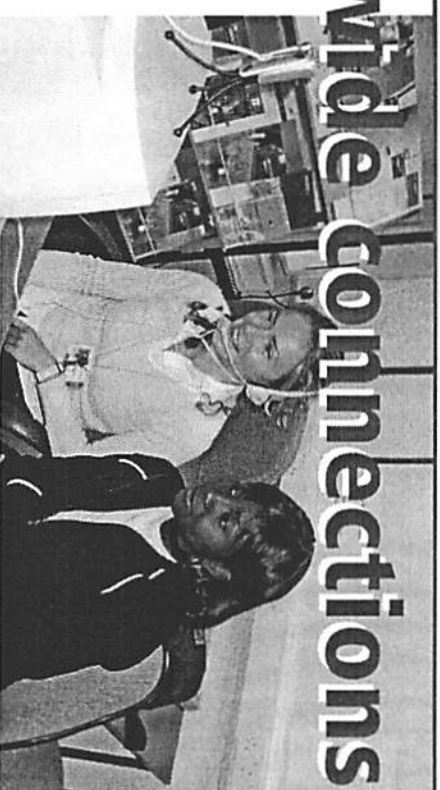
TISCOVER was looking to set up in the UK and, with East of England Tourist Board being a key customer, the Innovation Centre gave them the perfect location and opportunity.

As a leading destination management system provider, Tiscover supplies the web presence for East of England Tourist Board's entire region, covering the counties of Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Norfolk and Suffolk.

Since launching in the UK earlier this year, Tiscover has also announced agreements with numerous destinations including Plymouth Tourist

■ **DEVICES team members Lillian Iruene (left) and Dimitra Vitsa are ready to help you link up at the Innovation Centre, at the Spires building in Luton.**

The DEVICES project, run by the Luton and Dunstable Innovation Centre, at The Spires, 2 Adelaide Street, Luton, is funded by the Department of Trade and Industry's Phoenix Fund and a Building On The Best Award. For more information visit www.innovationcentre.co.uk/projects



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Leading the way on environment



◆ Simon Hall

✧ EcoStyle Sustainable Design

For further information, please contact EcoStyle Ltd on 0870 432 7897 or 0870 428 2274, email info@ecostyle.co.uk or visit www.ecostyle.co.uk

The Luton & Dunstable Innovation Centre is committed to all things green and environmentally friendly. This includes helping the companies, which are tenants at the centre to address their environmental responsibilities, as well as running a number of initiatives to support them.

The centre hopes to establish a Centre for Sustainable Technologies in the near future in order to expand this support and create a new cluster of environmental companies.

One of these exciting new businesses, EcoStyle Ltd, is already established in the Innovation Centre.

As a young and innovative product design company, EcoStyle Ltd appreciates the advantages of using the latest communication technologies. Established in November 2002, the company design, manufacture and distribute renewable energy products. It manufactures a range of educational products

developed in conjunction with the National Energy Foundation, consisting of a desk-mounted wind turbine kit, solar cell kit, and a solar water heater kit.

EcoStyle Ltd is a virtual tenant at the Innovation Centre, which means remote contact with the staff at the centre is essential.

This is supported by the Centre's DEVICES project. This provides a support network to keep Centre tenants up-to-date with the latest technologies, and to stay in contact by e-mail, VOIP and video conferencing.

With a worldwide client-base, and one of the company directors based in Athens, effective communication is essential.

EcoStyle Ltd Director, Simon Hall, said: "Initially, we used a combination of Skype for VOIP and Microsoft Messenger for the video feed. Now, however, Skype have launched Festoon (V-Skype), which allows video calls to be made through Skype."

The company is currently negotiating an agreement with an Estonian company which wishes

to distribute the renewable energy kits within Estonian schools. Utilising Skype and email provides a free and effective means of contact.

Simon added: "The biggest hurdle to overcome with utilising new communication technologies is spreading the word and encouraging other companies and individuals to adopt them. It is natural to be sceptical or concerned about new systems but it's best to try Skype first-hand to fully appreciate the benefits in terms of convenience and cost-effectiveness."

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From Russia with love

The DEVICES project has proved its effectiveness in urban Russia and rural England for one of the Innovation Centre's virtual tenants.

The scheme, providing help, advice and access to the latest communication technologies, has received a decisive 'Da' from Thomas Bailey. His successful web design business Applixa runs on the enhanced DEVICES communications technology. Applixa specialises in web design, e-commerce, databases and programming.

For two years Thomas was based in Moscow and found the advances of the instant messaging service, web cam, microphone and i-key support essential.

"It is really valuable for those companies who can't fit into normal work patterns because of location or mobility," he says. "It supplements face-to-face meetings if they are at a distance to the people they work for or with and is far better than just e-mail or telephone."

Thomas moved to Moscow after meeting his Russian-born wife Natalia on the internet. While living and working in Russia, Thomas saw his business benefit tangibly from the virtual networking of the Innovations Centre.

"The online networking works well. While I was in Moscow, it kept me in touch with things at home and I was able to continue working for my existing clients. I picked up some additional projects through the Innovations Centre and created new business contacts."

Now back in the UK based in rural Derbyshire, Thomas believes the economic potential for the DEVICES project is immense. "It has the potential for not only providing regular business networks for people who can feel isolated because of



◆ Thomas Bailey

their location or work environment or mobility, but it has immense potential for saving valuable resources. Using this technology can stop very many unnecessary journeys."

During their time in Moscow, Thomas and Natalia became the proud parents of a baby boy, Aidan. He was introduced to the world via the web cam.

The Baileys are avidly keeping the new technologies in the family.

"There is a big social use for this technology," says Thomas. "My wife uses it to keep up links with her family, as it is the next best thing when you can't meet face-to-face, particularly the instant messaging which is easily accessible for everybody and which needs no extra hardware."

Thomas is now working with the Innovations Centre developing the pack to promote the DEVICES project to help new virtual tenants to benefit as effectively as he has. "Effectively I've been a guinea pig for the technology and now I'm helping to develop it. I believe it has immense potential and really helps people to keep in touch much better."

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For more information about Applixa visit the website www.applixa.com



◆ Christine Clavey and Ian Holohan

You'll never work alone

TWO NOVICE entrepreneurs are making the first tentative steps into business from home using the expertise of the DEVICES project.

The project, based at the Luton & Dunstable Innovation Centre, aims to help teleworkers to be less isolated when they work from home alone.

With the aid of the latest technology, people can see and talk to each other - and be linked up to professional advisers and business support organisations. DEVICES has its own support team who link up teleworkers using Instant Messenger, Skype and webcam.

Ian Holohan, a graphic designer, who can boast His Royal Highness Prince Charles as one of his first customers, was delighted to try out the technology as a 'virtual tenant' of the Innovation Centre.

"I've been really keen to take part in order to make contacts and network as I'm now working from home," he says. "With DEVICES, I can be part of a community of people doing the same."

Ian was made redundant after seven years working full-time for an advertising agency. "The company was sold and our part of the organisation was shut down," he says. Following a business planning course at Business Link, he decided going alone was the answer.

"I think that following my own path is a good idea, if daunting. So I'm going for it now and feel more confident with DEVICES backing me in my venture. The main thing I have found is that I feel more involved and less isolated. When you are not in an office environment, you want to feel included in some way."

One of his former clients was delighted. Ian is now working on literature for The Castle of Mey, the former holiday residence of Queen Elizabeth, The Queen Mother. Prince Charles is the president of the

Trust involved in opening it up to the public. Ian is also working on a website and brochures for another historic site, Castle Sinclair Girnigoe.

His other clients have included P&O, Champneys Health Resorts, the Yorkshire Tourist Board, The Environment Agency and London Luton Airport.

Christine Clavey joined DEVICES as a way of keeping in touch with other people who could help her make a success of her new accounting services business.

"I am looking at marketing my accounting services and being part of a network has helped me contact people, like the Business Link e-business club, for example," she says. "I can also use the Innovation Centre facilities. It's a good business address and provides meeting rooms to take clients to."

Christine had a series of financial roles at the University of Luton over seven years including management accounting, and financial accounting, as well as a systems role and training. She took redundancy and now she is setting out on her own with a licence to practise from the Association of Accounting Technicians.

Christine is targeting the growing market of social enterprises as customers, a market she considers challenging and worthy.

"I hope to help worthwhile groups like local charities. They send statutory accounts to the Charities Commission and can usually find volunteers to help do those but it's more difficult when it comes to expanding and increasing their income."

"I can help them with that. I have a lot of experience bidding for funds for projects. I am also experienced in training on accounting packages which is something often needed."

The Luton & Dunstable Innovation Centre has several social enterprise tenants and supporting them contributes to one of their aims, the regeneration of Luton. The centre's social enterprises specialist, Lynette Warren, says: "Social enterprise businesses operate in all parts of the economy and have a defined social purpose."

"They come in many forms such as job creation, training, the provision of local services and goods, mutuals, co-operatives, fair trade organisations, trading arms of charities, community businesses and private companies limited by guarantee. The businesses reinvest their surpluses to support these aims, rather than maximising profit for shareholders and owners."

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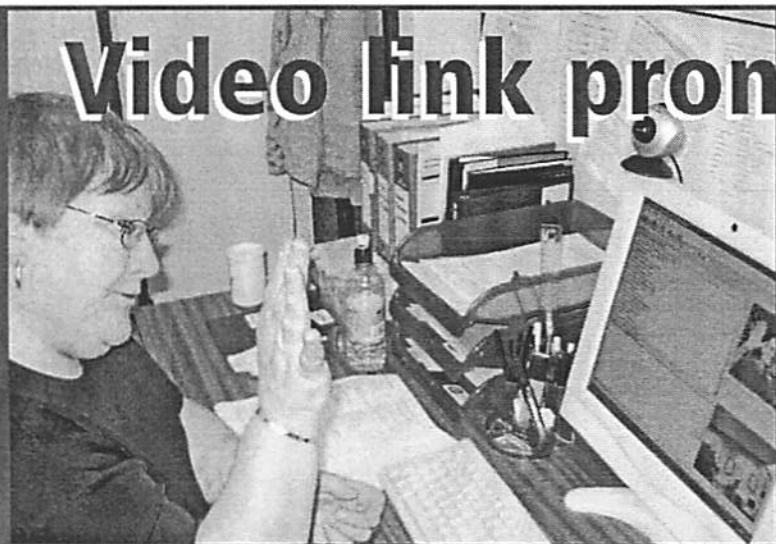
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Video link promotes cohesive teamwork



◆ At Employment Opportunities, Agnes Buckwell waves goodbye to Tim O'Donovan over the webcam.

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For more information about Employment Opportunities visit the website at www.opportunities.org.uk

For more information about Stampede visit the website www.stampede.co.uk

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Employment Opportunities, a charity that helps people with disabilities find the right jobs, has linked up two of its offices using the expertise of the DEVICES team.

The team, based at the Luton and Dunstable Innovation Centre, helps people run small businesses and social enterprises. DEVICES enables people to see and talk to each other – without the trauma of traffic jams – and links them up to professional advisers and business support organisations, using the latest technology.

Employment Opportunities has offices in Luton and Bedford and these now have been linked by DEVICES using Instant Messenger, Skype and webcam.

The charity's regional director for Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire, Ian Hutt, says: "The newly established video link between our two local offices certainly helps promote effective and cohesive teamwork."

"It is great to be seeing the person on the end of the line and it saves money on travel – charity finances are always tight. It also helps us in sharing ideas and best practice. The staff have really embraced the idea and are enthusiastic thanks to the support from the

DEVICES team at the Innovation Centre where we are tenants.

"Although we aim to get disabled people out of the house and into the workplace so that they are not isolated, if they are forced to work from home because of their circumstances, this technology could certainly be used to help decrease the potential isolation."

The charity has 25 offices around the UK and, as a result of the Luton initiative, its head office now is exploring the possibility of all offices being similarly linked in the near future.

"It is a very expensive project to bring all staff across the country together physically and this technology could provide a viable alternative," says Ian.

The Luton and Dunstable Innovation Centre believes that supporting the charity, or any of their social enterprises tenants, contributes to one of their aims, the regeneration of Luton. Lynette Warren, the centre's social enterprises specialist, says: "New initiatives addressing long-term unemployment and social exclusion are part of our aims to enable exciting new developments for the town."

"We have a wealth of talented people here in Luton waiting for the opportunity to realise their potential and it is a privilege to be part of this

new business dimension.

"Social enterprise businesses operate in all parts of the economy and have a defined social purpose. They come in many forms such as job creation, training, the provision of local services and goods, mutuals, co-operatives, fair trade organisations, trading arms of charities, community businesses and private companies limited by guarantee. The businesses reinvest their surpluses to support these aims, rather than maximising profit for shareholders and owners."

Another Innovation Centre tenant, film maker Stampede, based at the Hat Factory, has been helping to promote the DEVICES project. The company, which makes documentaries, has made two short films showing how DEVICES works.

Head of production Dave Allison says: "We had offices in London originally and it was due to us talking to staff at the Innovation Centre on a webcam that made us set up in Luton as their tenants."

"Now I am trying to set up a project trying to start a TV station creating a community for film makers. DEVICES means that film makers can edit at home but still talk directly to other members of their production teams and filmmakers."