

BUILDERS' MERCHANTS

HOW TO GAIN A

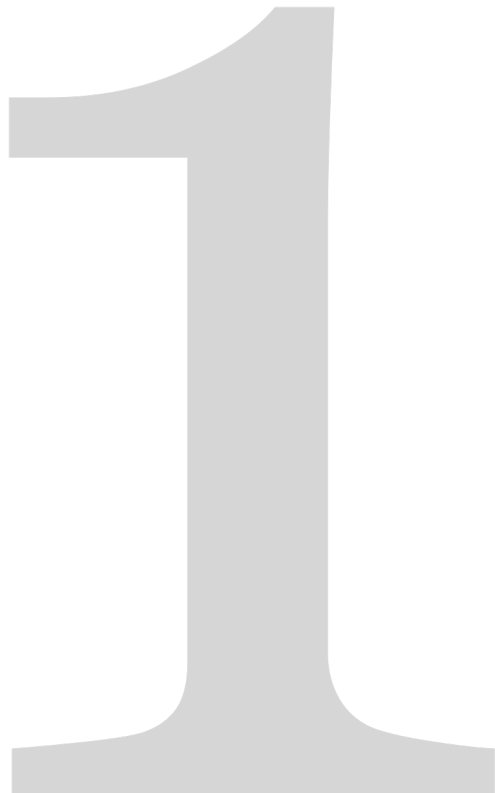
**COMPETITIVE  
EDGE**



# Contents

01	Introduction	Page 3
02	Keep your prices up	Page 4
03	Make your customers your besties	Page 8
04	Be the place to work	Page 12
05	Offer your customers something different	Page 19
06	Embrace new technology	Page 21
07	Take to the stage	Page 23
08	Let your personality shine through	Page 25
09	Delight your customers	Page 27
10	Get the most from your suppliers	Page 30
11	Conclusion	Page 36
	Additional resource	Page 37





## Introduction

Aleksandr Orlov, the “handsome and successful businesskat” from [comparethemarket.com](http://comparethemarket.com), along with his slightly annoying opera singing GoCompare counterpart, continue to save people money on insurance, bills and credit cards almost two decades after the first price comparison site was launched. The behaviour of comparing products before buying is now firmly ingrained in our culture but, the good news is that the majority of customers compare more than just price.

Think of the brands you purchase from regularly – Colgate, Heinz, Volkswagen, Apple. What is the reason you keep going back? You don't choose these brands because they are the cheapest, but more for their reputation, quality, expertise, innovation or service package. There are over 10,000 individual builders' merchant branches across the UK and Ireland, so how do you give yours the competitive edge?



## Keep your prices up

It can be tempting to drop your prices when customers say they have been given better elsewhere, but it won't necessarily improve your chances of winning the order. Only a small percentage of your customers will be pure price buyers. For the majority, price isn't actually the deal breaker despite what they might like you to think.

So, how do you know which customers are willing to pay for value? You may be familiar with the following three scenarios.



You will have customers who value the relationship they have with you over everything else. They are in it for the long haul and they don't change supplier often. They tend to be sceptical of low prices and prefer to make sure they are getting the best quality.



Then you have the customers who focus on return on investment. They will compare a few different suppliers extensively and will choose whichever one offers the best value for money and has the greatest impact on their financial results (for example, if you offer products that will save your customers labour time onsite then this will have a direct effect on their ROI).



Finally, you will have customers who either value the relationship you have with them or who focus on ROI, but they pretend to be price buyers. They have known from the beginning that they want to place an order with you, but they will convince you that they need the lowest price. They will play a few builders' merchants off against each other until their preferred merchant has dropped their price and the frustrating thing is, you would have won the business anyway.

How do you challenge them? Keep your prices up and see if you still win the business or give them the low price and strip away any extras you offer them. You will soon find out what they value most.

# 3

## Make your customers your besties

As mentioned in the previous chapter, you will have customers who value the relationship you have with them over anything else, so it is important to invest time and energy into forming real relationships with these people. Remember, customers will return to businesses run by people they know and like. Here are some tips:





Get to know them in person and don't just chat about work. Take them out for a coffee, a bacon roll or a pint and have a proper conversation. Find out what they are interested in, what challenges they face (this will help you to understand how you can offer a solution), learn about their families, where they are going on holiday, what car they drive or what sport they play and make a note of everything. This will prevent you from forgetting any important details. The next time you meet with the customer you can impress them and make them feel special by remembering to ask if their daughter's team won the football tournament or if their partner was happy with the surprise party.



Ask them for feedback. Customers love their voice to be heard and asking them if there is anything you could improve with your product and service offering will not only encourage engagement, but it will strengthen relationships too – especially if you act on their suggestions. Make sure you thank them afterwards!



Keep communicating with them. Don't just contact them when you want their business. Give them a call to see how they are, tell them about an event they might be interested in or about improvements to your product and service offering.



## Be the place to work

You might have heard the saying “happy employees make happy customers”. Studies have shown a direct link between satisfied employees and increased revenue, some stating that profit will quadruple with a good company culture. People want to buy from companies who treat their staff well. These businesses will attract the best talent who in turn will provide the best service for their customers. So, how do you create a happy team?



## Training and development

Employee training and development can have a huge impact on your organisation's profitability. Employees who receive the relevant training will have more confidence in their role and will therefore perform better, not to mention the fact it will improve job satisfaction and morale and reduce employee turnover.



## Show your appreciation

If you value your employees and what they do, tell them. It is very easy to get bogged down with the everyday jobs and expect your team to get on with theirs with very little contact, but you will be surprised at how saying “well done” or “good work” with a personal note (e.g. “Great work on reducing those stock levels. It really helped to...”) can make a big impression and keep your team motivated and loyal.



## Look after their health and wellbeing

According to the CIPD, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, investing in employee health and well-being can lead to increased resilience, reduced sickness absence and higher performance and productivity. For larger companies, it is likely a programme has been implemented by head office that encourages workplace initiatives and activities to support employee health and well-being but there are also some simple things you can do at branch level...



Encourage people to take their breaks and have a proper break room. This will improve productivity.



Encourage a work-life balance. Employees who work long hours are more likely to become ill or 'burn themselves out'.



Provide free fruit as a cheap and easy way to encourage healthy eating.



Set up a lunch time walking group – fresh air, social interaction outside the branch or office and endorphins through exercise can really improve fitness and mental health.





## Create a fun work environment

Industry leaders Google and Apple have realised that happy employees can achieve amazing things. Now, we understand that most companies will not have the same budget to create the fun work environment enjoyed by Google and Apple employees, but there are a few things you can do to boost office happiness.

Photo source: <https://www.lifehack.org/articles/work/10-ways-make-your-office-fun-work.html>



Celebrate the little wins together. Buy in some pizza or bring in a home cooked curry to share with your team after hitting targets.



Organise a team night out or drinks after work on a Friday. Having friendships within the workplace can lead to higher levels of satisfaction and teamwork, as well as a reduction in sick days.



Have breakfast together on a Friday. Preparing a few loaves of bread with bacon or jam won't break the bank and is something that all the team can look forward to and enjoy.



Take photos of your employees working, in meetings or enjoying team events and hang them up in your canteen or break room. It will create a talking point and encourage interaction and engagement.



## Offer your customers something different

The right innovation will allow you to offer something unique to your customers. Builders' merchants all tend to sell similar products, but you can stay ahead of your competitors if you lead the market by introducing innovative products that add value for your customers.

Some of the latest modern construction materials include translucent wood as a renewable alternative for windows and solar panels, pollution absorbing bricks that filter the air, the energy efficient light generating cement or fully finished interior mouldings such as SAM Zero that will save your customers time and money.

Championing innovative products makes brands stand out and makes it easy to increase revenue.



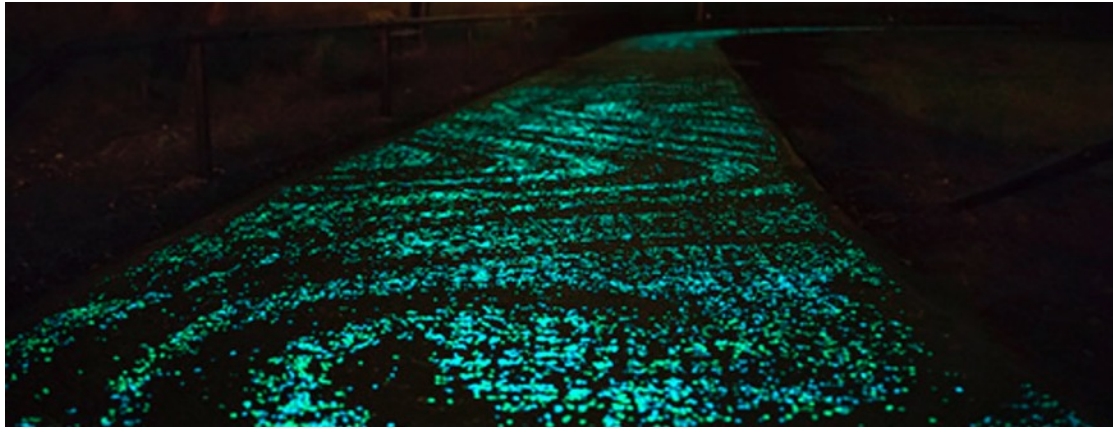
### Translucent wood

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/apr/03/scientists-invent-transparent-wood-in-search-for-eco-friendly-building-material>



### Pollution absorbing bricks

<https://www.fastcompany.com/3047345/mit-students-create-a-brick-that-could-end-pollution-from-dirty-brick-kilns>



### Light generating cement

<https://phys.org/news/2016-05-highways-light-emitting-cement.html#iCo>



### SAM Zero fully finished mouldings

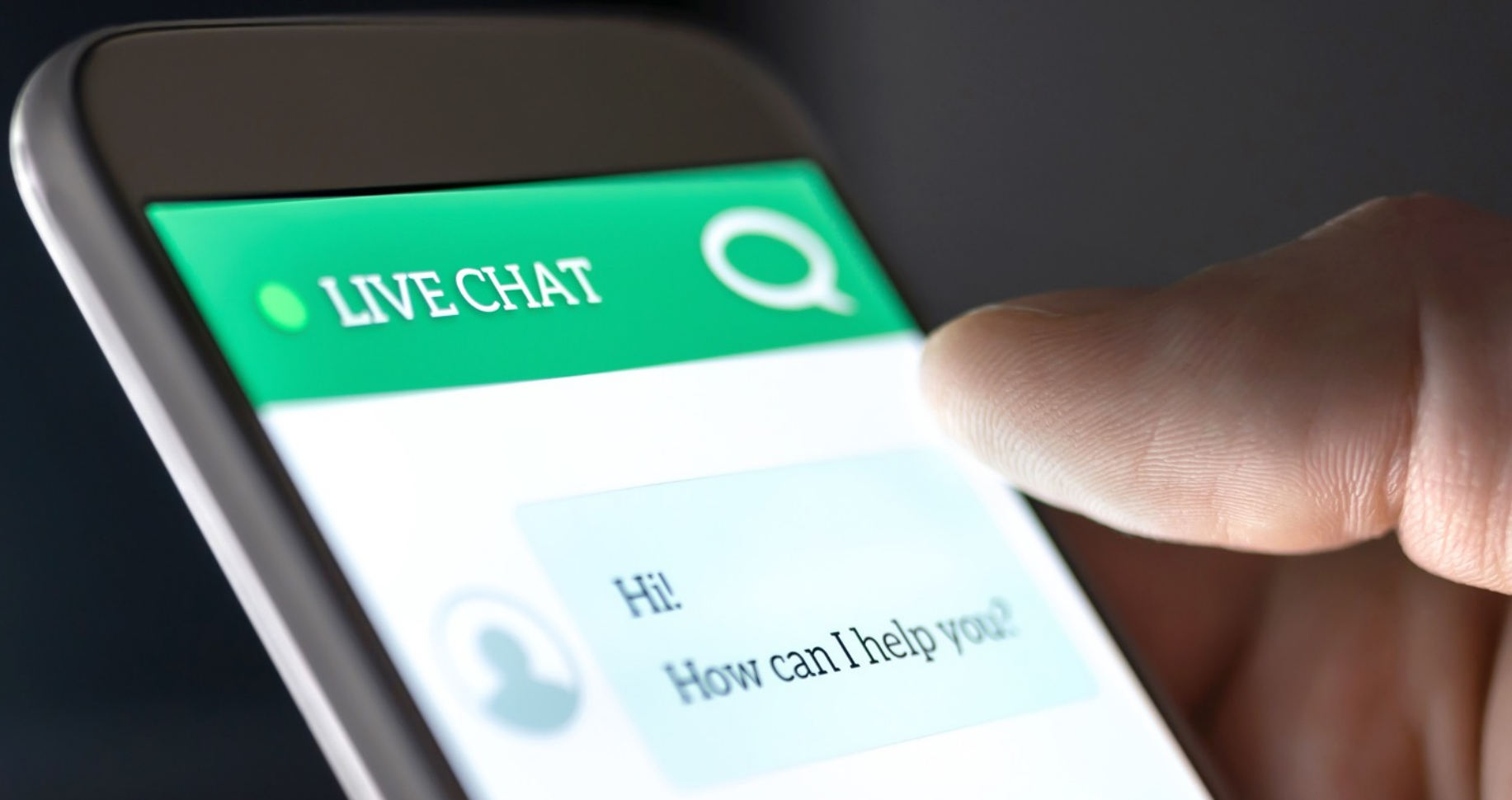
<https://marketing.samonline.co.uk/fully-finished-interior-mdf-mouldings>



## Embrace new technology

The impact of new technology can now be seen across every industry. It allows us to offer better products and services to our customers. In an article posted by the Professional Builders Merchant, it states that “recent findings from the MIT Centre for Business show companies that have embraced digital transformation are 26% more profitable than their average industry competitors and have a 12% higher market valuation”.

Now, we aren't suggesting that you make an impulse online purchase for a team of robots and drones - the technology you invest in needs to be aligned with your business strategy – but even offering a service as simple as 'live chat' on your website can set you ahead of the competition. If your customers are comparing products online and you can give them an immediate answer to their query through live chat, who do you think they will choose?





## Take to the stage

It isn't everyone's cup of tea, in fact even the mere thought of public speaking is enough to induce heart palpitations and sweaty palms for some, but presenting at the right events can position your company as a thought-leader within the industry. These events provide a neutral playing field to demonstrate your expertise, engage your target audience and most importantly, generate qualified leads for your sales team. If you have never delivered a presentation before, start off small. Invite a small group of customers to your branch for some pizza and present on a topic that would interest them e.g. how to deliver building projects on time and within budget and explain how you can help.

Preparation is key, so if this concept is new to you there are some good tips on delivering presentations [here](#). Before long, you could be on the big stage at UK Construction Week voicing your opinion on fire safety, offsite construction or affordable housing.







## Let your personality shine through

People choose to do business with people they like. A well-known quote from Maya Angelou, the American poet, storyteller and activist, explains it perfectly, “People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

It is easy to be yourself and let your personality shine through when interacting with customers face-to-face (everyone loves a bit of banter over the trade counter!), but you should also use the same humour when communicating with prospects and customers online.

Why is your personality important? It is what sets you apart from everyone else and it is what people connect with. None of your competitors will offer your customers the same personality as it is unique to you and your business, so if you provide your customers with a particular positive feeling when they interact with you, they won't be able to go anywhere else to find it.

# Sad sink :(

[i.imgur.com/22qSm....](https://i.imgur.com/22qSm....) 



Social media humour

[https://www.reddit.com/r/Pareidolia/comments/mabv9/sad\\_sink/](https://www.reddit.com/r/Pareidolia/comments/mabv9/sad_sink/)



## Delight your customers

Hubspot, software products developer for inbound marketing and sales, defines customer delight as 'exceeding a customer's expectations to create a positive customer experience with a product or brand'.

Many larger companies have invested heavily in customer journey planning with dedicated personnel focusing on the customer experience, and we can understand why as according to Trustpilot, 'leaders in customer experience deliver, on average, 17% of revenue growth within 5 years'.

So, how do you delight your customers at a more local level?



To start with, and possibly most importantly, it is crucial that you are open and honest when communicating with your customers. They want transparency and it is key to building trust and ensuring your customers keep working with you after any setbacks (because there will be a few!).



Another way to delight your customers is to send them a personalised thank you card or email. A special thank you after a new customer places their first order with you could end up turning them into a regular customer. It makes a great first impression! To reward loyal customers, you could send them a thank you or small gift to celebrate the anniversary of their first purchase.



Simple gestures such as offering a free paper and coffee on a Friday or serving bacon rolls for breakfast once a month go a long way and won't break the bank. It could be a tradition your customers look forward to.

Remember, customers want you to solve their problems, they want timely responses and deliveries, value, a good personalised service and they want to be listened to. Delighting them is about exceeding all those basic expectations.



## Get the most from your suppliers

Our natural focus may be to put all of our effort into building relationships with customers, however, there is another relationship that should be nurtured as it is just as important. Whether you choose which suppliers you work with, or the decision is made at head office level, it is important to build a good working relationship with your suppliers as this can lead to an increase in sales.

So, how can good supplier support affect your profitability?

Research carried out for the annual Working Relations Index Study published by consultancy Planning Perspectives found the better the relationship a car manufacturer had with its suppliers, the greater its profits were.

The report explained that the economic value of the non-price benefits offered by the supplier such as sharing new technology, providing the best team support and providing support that went beyond the supplier's contractual obligation greatly exceeded the economic benefit realised from suppliers' price concessions. On average, this can be up to four or five times greater according to the research.

How do your suppliers support you? You may want to consider suppliers who offer the following...



Expertise and sound advice on their products and services (e.g. letting you know which products would sell best in your area so you avoid having slow-moving stock)



Tailored price lists to reduce your time waiting on quotes



A good website with all the information you need to sell their products including installation videos, help and advice, technical information, training, sample ordering or FAQs



A dedicated marketing team who can quickly provide you with product literature and samples for your customers, who can work with you on tailored promotional campaigns to help you to reach your targets and who can organise case study photography and content writing





Product training so you are equipped with the knowledge and tools you need to meet your sales targets



Innovative products that increase your profits and offer your customers time and money saving solutions



Multiple ways to contact them – email, fax (yes, some people do still use it!), telephone, website forms, live chat, etc.

**Reliable suppliers are vital to the success of your business. Make sure your suppliers understand your needs and expectations and communicate with them often and openly. Treat your suppliers as part of your team.**

SAM offers all of the services listed on the previous two pages and more to its customers. You can see examples of this on the next page.

To discuss how we could help you reach your goals, please get in touch by calling +44 (0)28 9442 8288 or email [team@samonline.co.uk](mailto:team@samonline.co.uk).

## SAM innovative products



Andy

External Sales

2w

We were delighted to supply this amazing Trimax Cladding, sourced to be colour matched to the clients exact preferred RAL colour, if you want it, we will source it! #cladding #thecompletebuildingsupplier



## Customer feedback



Well... I'm pretty sure @sammouldings win Supplier of the Year from our branch! Thank you!



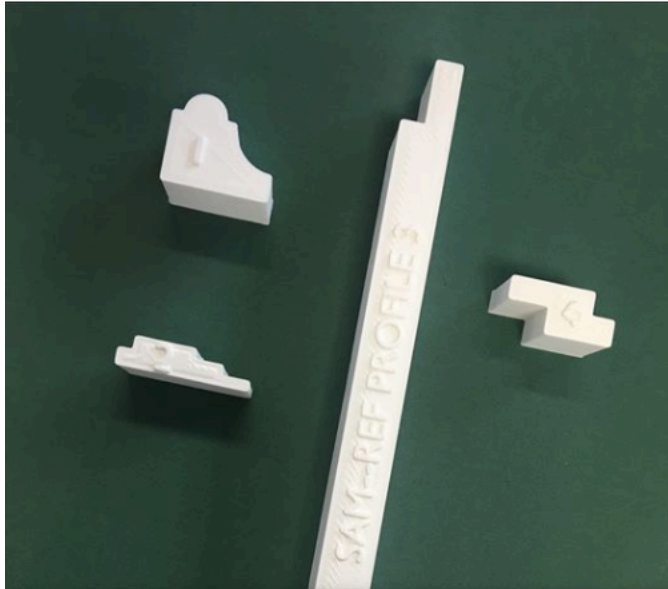
## SAM sample service and customer feedback



SAM

Published by Hootsuite [?] · 4 July at 09:38 · 🌐

Need a bespoke profile for your next project? We provide 3D samples for bespoke requirements so you can see your desired profile before ordering. Find out more: <http://ow.ly/ELih50uTfyr> #MDF #interiors #renovation



Stephen  @

Re: SAM 23 & 29 Mouldings

To: Team

Hi Michelle,

Thank you for your email - that is very helpful.  
I shall give David a call.

By the way: this morning I received samples from you in the post - this was about the fastest delivery I've ever had. I am sure I only ordered them online 24 hours ago!

Best regards

Steve

Resources section on the SAM website providing everything customers need to sell or use SAM products.

The screenshot shows the SAM website's navigation and a resource menu. The top navigation bar includes links for BLOG, NEWS, VISIT NORTHERN IRELAND, FAQs, contact information (+44(0)28 9442 8288, team@samonline.co.uk), and social media icons. The main navigation menu lists ABOUT, PRODUCTS, FINISHES, DISTRIBUTORS, RESOURCES, TESTIMONIALS, and CONTACT. A dropdown menu for RESOURCES is open, listing: SAM Brochures, CAD Drawings, Order Samples, Certificates, Technical Information, Installation Guidelines, Help & Advice, Training, Completed Projects, Blog, Visit Northern Ireland, and FAQs. Below the navigation is a banner for 'SAM Stock' with the text: 'Short lead times are no problem with the new SAM Stock range. Choose from our extensive range of primed products that are ready to ship or collect from our warehouse.' Below the banner, it states 'LEADING MANUFACTURER OF INTERIOR MDI' and 'Plus exterior cladding and roofline products'.

### SAM Live Chat

The screenshot shows the SAM Live Chat interface. At the top, it identifies the chat partner as 'Michelle, Nesha' with the note 'We typically reply in a few minutes'. A chat bubble contains the message: 'Hello! Is there something we can help you with?'. At the bottom, there is a text input field labeled 'Write a message' and a send button.

## Conclusion

With so many builders' merchant branches across the UK and Ireland, competition is fierce, and it has never been more important to differentiate yourself. Most customers are willing to pay for value, which is why it is important to focus on benefits you can offer them such as quality, expertise, innovation and service package before lowering your profit margin to increase market share.

We have all heard the phrase 'the customer is king' and it is true that without customers, businesses would fail. On the other hand, customers will choose whether or not to return to your company based on their experience with your employees and the service they received, so it is equally important to treat your team well.

Finally, building strong relationships with your suppliers and using their expertise to your advantage teamed with delighting your customers and creating a great environment for your employees to work in will undoubtedly give you the competitive edge.

## Additional Resource

<https://elearningindustry.com/gain-competitive-advantage-employee-development>

<https://www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/content/advantages-staff-training>

<https://geniebelt.com/blog/10-innovative-construction-materials>

<https://professionalbuildersmerchant.co.uk/feature-articles/connected-tech-and-the-merchant-sector/>

<https://medium.com/rocket-mouse/6-ways-to-give-a-kick-ass-presentation-359b206a045d>

<https://www.mindtools.com/CommSkill/PublicSpeaking.htm>

<https://www.ukconstructionweek.com/>

<https://www.inc.com/lolly-daskal/9-easy-ways-to-show-your-employees-you-value-them.html>

<https://www.coburgbanks.co.uk/blog/staff-retention/20-ways-to-boost-employee-wellbeing/>

<https://gethppy.com/employee-engagement/10-ways-to-make-work-more-fun-and-increase-productivity>

<https://www.inc.com/rhett-power/10-reasons-why-it-is-important-create-a-happy-workplace.html>

<https://www.cips.org/supply-management/>

<https://uk.pcmag.com/business/94323/online-charisma-why-personality-matters-in-social-media-marketing>

<https://blog.hubspot.com/service/customer-delight>

<https://uk.business.trustpilot.com/reviews/5-reasons-why-customer-experience-is-the-pulse-of-every-business>

For more information on the products and services available from SAM, please get in touch:

T: +44 (0)28 9442 8288

E: [team@samonline.co.uk](mailto:team@samonline.co.uk)

W: [www.samonline.co.uk](http://www.samonline.co.uk)