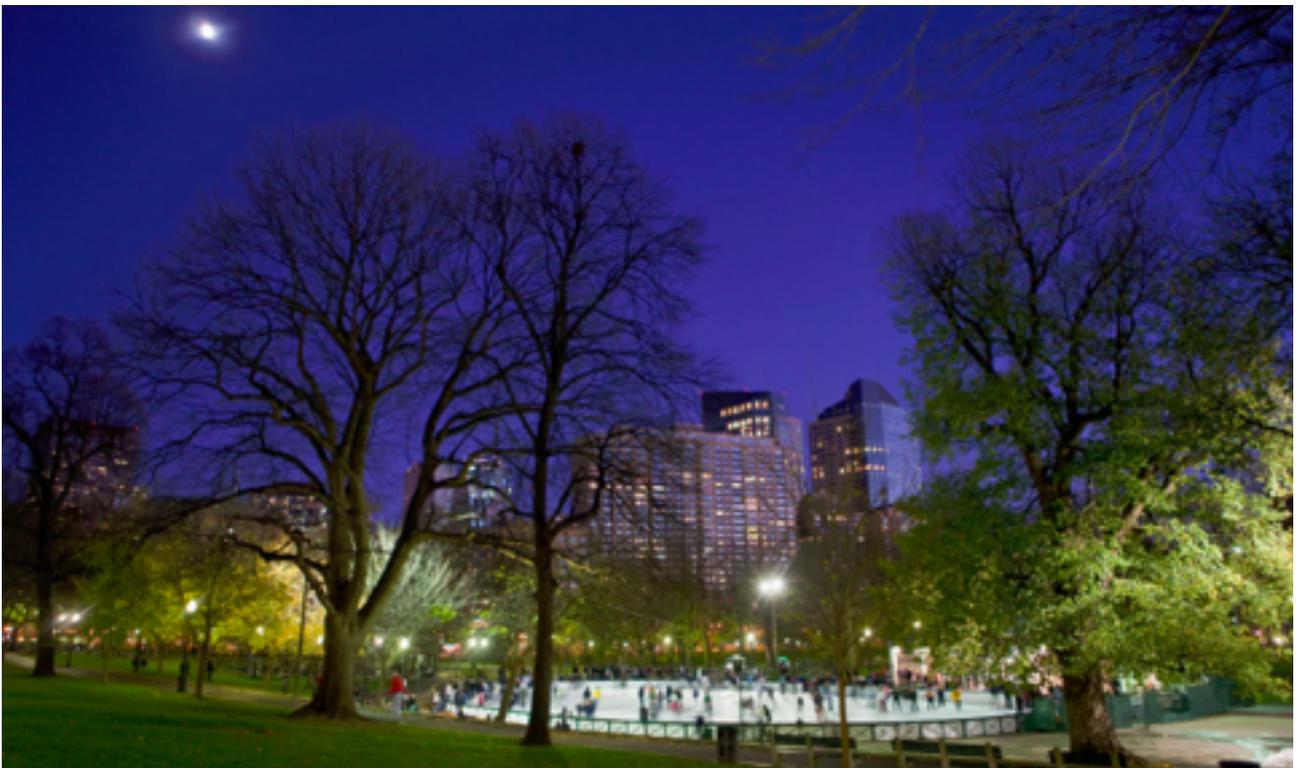


# the guardian

## Ten of the best events to attend as a small business owner

With the calendar stuffed full of SME events, which should you prioritise? To help, we've rounded up 10 of the most useful:



### **Chew The Fat, by 3Beards**

Small business events group 3Beards run a number of different sessions that entrepreneurs can really benefit from, but Colin Pyle, founder of CRU Kafe, a premium coffee brand, would recommend Chew The Fat above all others. It's a panel discussion curated by one person, followed by a discussion between key entrepreneurs in the room.

"I love to hear entrepreneurs' stories, no matter what stage they're at. It's just such a great way to learn," says Pyle. "Chew The Fat is focussed towards the tech scene, I guess, but even if you're selling tyres you can learn from it. The lessons there transcend the space and time of entrepreneurship."

### **Build a Great Customer Experience, by Rant & Rave**

Customer experience has always been a huge part of almost every business, but social media has really increased users' understanding of what they can demand of, and expect from, the businesses they interact with.

Ian Golding runs a small customer experience firm, and he spoke at Rant & Rave's last customer experience Day, focusing on the importance of storytelling in building relationships with customers. He illustrates this by telling a story about his 102-year-old grandmother, and the bond she built with the people who served her morning coffee every day for years.

"Customer expectations for small and large businesses alike are higher than ever," says Golding. "Eighty percent of a company's revenue comes from 20% of its customers, the loyal ones, so it's vital for businesses, whatever their size, to immerse themselves in the evolution of customer experience."

### **The One Retreat for women, with Shaa Wasmund**

Economist turned journalist, turned sports coach, turned business owner, Shaa Wasmund hosts an annual three day retreat in Kent focussing on female entrepreneurs

Kara Rosen is the founder of cold-press juice company Plenish, and she attended The One Retreat in the early stages of setting up her company. "Being a sole business owner can be challenging if you don't have the right support network. In the early stages of Plenish, as we were starting to scale up, I ate, dreamed and breathed business challenges all day long," says Rosen.

"It was a great environment to mix with other female business owners, also juggling building a business, and some managing small children too. When you are running your own business, you seldom have time out to refocus your strategy, re-define your short and long term goals. This weekend retreat is a great environment to do that while getting and giving support to a fantastic group of women."

### **Spring Fair, at NEC Birmingham**

The Spring Fair is one of the country's largest retail trade fairs, with more than 64,000 visitors, it's key in setting trends for the Autumn-Winter sales season. Fancy Metal Goods is a family-run business specialising in gifts and grooming products. Oli Woodyatt is the fourth generation to look after the business, and he explains that Fancy Metal Goods hasn't missed a Spring Fair in 40 years.

"It's hugely important to retailers," he says. "Not so much in terms of writing orders at the shows, but more because it's such a unique chance to showcase entire ranges in front of national and international buyers. For smaller businesses starting out, I would say if you're only going to go to one fair, this has to be the one, as you'll definitely have the highest exposure to buyers."

### **The Business Show, at ExCeL**

The Business Show is one of the biggest events of the year in the UK SME scene. Hosted at the ExCeL in London, the two-day event attracts more than 25,000 exhibitors, looking to improve and expand their businesses.

Jonathan Pfahl is the managing director of Rockstar Hubs, which offers advice, funding and expertise to small businesses. They've been attending the show for 17 years, and Pfahl thinks it's a must for any business owner's calendar. He explains that as one of the biggest and fastest-growing shows, all entrepreneurs attending will take home ideas and inspiration.

### **What Journalists Want, with Janet Murray**

Janet Murray is a journalist and PR coach who hosts masterclasses and training sessions to help entrepreneurs pitch their businesses to journalists and get the coverage they need.

Claire Shiels runs a small PR firm herself, but attended the London sessions to refresh her knowledge and gain additional insight. She says: "I was introduced to a varied selection of

broadcasters and editors and learned what it was they wanted from me and my clients, and was given the opportunity to pitch ideas directly to them. Jan's workshops are unique in this sense and my clients have benefited directly, earning valuable national publicity."

### **Creative England Live**

Hosted by self-proclaimed 'Tech Cool Hunter' and TV Presenter, Laura-Jane 'LJ' Rich, this one day conference includes masterclasses, workshops and keynote speeches meant to inspire and advise small business owners.

Sean Murphy is a director at Evidential, which provides solutions for criminal and civil lawsuits. He says: "At what other event could you one minute be talking to an investor, the next minute an MP, then a fellow entrepreneur, a journalist and finally the head of Google Labs, all in the space of five minutes? I learned so much and made some amazing contacts while feeling proud to be part of such a gathering that flies the flag for England's wealth of creativity and also encourages SME innovation and growth."

### **The Happy Startup Summer Camp, Sussex**

**This three-day event is currently invite only, but you can become an ambassador of the brand to guarantee yourself a ticket. While most of the event is not specifically focussed on the business itself, it's an opportunity to get a break from your environment, recharge batteries and go back to work feeling inspired and reinvigorated.**

**Susanna Halonen is an author and happiness coach. She spoke at the event in 2014 and says it's a great way for business owners to start enjoying their work again. *"It provokes your creativity in an original way and challenges what you've been taught about building a business. It brings a much more human approach to startups and helps you to make sure that you're building a business that you'll love working on."***

### **Inbound, Boston, USA**

Although travelling overseas for a four-day conference might seem excessive to an entrepreneur, Glenn Elliott, founder of employee engagement software company Reward Gateway, assures all business owners that it's absolutely worth the investment.

"It is the most valuable, inspirational and ground breaking conference in the world for entrepreneurs," says Elliott. "It sets a bar that nothing else comes close to in terms of the quality of the keynote speakers and the way they connect the dots on technology, customers, sales and marketing. If I only had £3,000 left in my business I would use it to get to Inbound via any method of travel I could."

### **HMRC's entrepreneur events**

HMRC hosts a number of events for SME owners, from the basics on how to start a business, right through to recruitment and management training and they are almost always free.

Michelle Prichard is the founder of Find Your Spark, a coaching company focussing on helping at-risk young people. She would recommend all entrepreneurs attend HMRC events where possible. "It may not sound like the most exciting thing to attend, but I went to one early on and found it incredibly beneficial, much to my surprise. Their events explain tax, PAYE and how to record your monthly income and expenses in straightforward way. It is useful to get support from those with expertise in other areas other than yours," she says.

*Content on this page is paid for and produced to a brief agreed with Kia Fleet, sponsor of the Guardian Small Business Network Accessing Expertise hub.*

---

**Article originally appeared in The Guardian online in this link: <http://www.theguardian.com/small-business-network/kia-fleet-partner-zone/2016/feb/17/ten-best-events-attend-small-business-owner>**