



VODAFONE UK LAUNCHES DIGITAL SKILLS WORKSHOPS TRIAL FOR SMEs IN LEEDS AND LONDON

- Digital skills workshops will help small to medium enterprises be ready for the increasingly online and global marketplace
- 30 per cent of UK SMEs don't have a website, demonstrating the need to equip SMEs with the digital skills they need to be competitive
- Practical skills taught at the workshop, conducted in partnership with Freeformers, to include how to build a website including online payment functionality, practical tips on mitigating cybersecurity risk and how to use social media to drive sales and awareness

Vodafone UK is today launching a trial series of digital skills workshops for small to medium enterprises (SMEs), kicking-off today with the first of two one-day workshops in Leeds, followed by sessions in London in the coming weeks. The workshops, conducted in partnership with Freeformers, a digital transformation company, will provide SMEs with vital digital skills to help them be more competitive amongst larger players in a global marketplace and increase their revenue. Both Leeds and London are major business hubs within the UK and support a large and thriving SME community, making them prime areas for the trial workshops.

SMEs continue to be a vital part of the UK economy, making up 99 per cent of all UK businesses¹, however many risk falling behind the digital curve as they lack the digital skills they need to reach more customers, recruit the right talent and grow their business. Furthermore, approximately a third of SMEs in the UK² do not have an online presence at all, meaning they are potentially missing out on sales opportunities and the chance to compete with their local, national and international rivals. To help overcome this, the workshop series will provide SMEs with the knowledge and practical skills they need to do more with their business' digital and online presence and capability to better compete in today's digital marketplace. This may be by reaching more customers as a result of building a secure website and optimising it for mobiles; enabling online payments; setting up advertising on social networks or increasing awareness through social media campaigns.

¹ ONS 2014 Report:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/377934/bpe_2014_statistical_release.pdf

² https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/193555/bis-13-p74-small-business-survey-2012-sme-employers.pdf



Jonathan Kini, Head of Small & SME Business at Vodafone UK says: "It is no surprise that the way we do business is changing. This is driven by more and more transactions happening online and by customers' changing expectations. Customers want to be able to engage with businesses through multiple channels and to receive fast, responsive and quality customer service 24/7. Therefore SMEs need to adapt and be ready to take advantage of the online opportunities and benefits of being a digital business and not risk losing out by falling behind the digital curve. We are really pleased to be launching this new initiative which will help many more SMEs become Ready Businesses."

The first series of digital workshops will take place in Leeds today. SMEs from a range of industries and sizes such as Tarnished Studios, a Leeds-based SME helping clients' ideas come to life through animation and visual effects, and Red Hatch Classic Campers, a Bath-based business hiring out VW camper vans for road trips and special events, will receive hands-on training. They will learn how to build a website through coding and make it optimized for mobile devices, how to make the most of social media channels including targeted advertising and how to minimise the risk of cybersecurity, protecting their online business whilst ensuring customer data is kept safe and secure.

In addition, as part of the Freeformers' one_for1 model, for every SME that is trained, a 16-25 year old will be trained for free and take part in the day's digital workshop. By helping these 'digital natives' get the skills they need for today's job market and rapidly growing digital economy, they can both earn a better living and help proliferate digital expertise within businesses they join. It is then the role of SMEs to attract and retain this talent by sustaining their use of digital technology to support flexible working, creativity, business operations, efficiency and growth.

Dan Drori, commercial director of Freeformers says: "Recent research on the digital maturity of SMEs and charities in the UK highlights the need for greater digital skills among Britain's SMEs and indeed the workforce generally. It is naïve to think companies can prosper without robust digital strategies at their core, especially within mobile and digital technology. We believe it is the responsibility of UK's bigger businesses to help drive this wider change in our competitive position, and Vodafone are doing just that. This is an opportunity for large organizations to contribute back to the economy, up-skill individual workers and invest in the future of UK PLC. These one-day



programmes will demystify digital and provide SMEs with the practical skills they need to be more confident and competitive.”

Based on the outcome of the trial series of digital skills workshops, Vodafone will be looking at the broader opportunities to support UK SMEs. This forms part of its ongoing commitment to help to equip businesses with the tools they need to adapt and be ready for the constantly evolving digital landscape of today and tomorrow.

ENDS

Case studies:

[Tarnished studios](#) – Liz Paton, co-founder

“For us it's important to have a strong online presence. It not only allows our customers to find us but, more importantly, gives us the opportunity to interact and build relationships with them. A few of the ways we achieve this is via Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and our own website; www.tarnishedstudios.co.uk. We are hoping to improve our digital marketing skills through the workshop and discover new ways of communicating with our customers. I'm particularly excited about building a mobile app.”

[Red Hatch Classic Campers](#) – Gerald Chapman, Business Owner

"The adventure with RHCC starts from the minute you turn the key in one of our beautifully restored classic VW vans. So our website is vital for us to showcase our vehicles and provide info on how to hire them and we have found that Facebook enables us to add a personal touch and as a new business we need to improve our knowledge of how social media can enhance our customer's experience and increase awareness of our business for future growth."

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