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HOW TO TRANSFORM YOUR BUSINESS AND TAKE IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL

Q&A with Alex Beeston

Web Design & Branding Consultant | Amplify Brand Consultancy Ltd

Meet Alex Beeston, Founder of Amplify, based right here in the Cotswolds. Alex works closely with both local and international clients, helping them achieve business growth through strategic web design and branding. We caught up with Alex to get his insights on how to effectively transform your business.

Alex, your marketing talks about transforming a business; how do you achieve that?

The key is in recognising what often holds a business back, typically outdated web-sites and ineffective branding. Many fail to maintain a consistent and modern online presence. This can be detrimental as it's unlikely to authentically communicate your visual identity and what makes your business unique.

So getting the visual identity right is important to help a business grow?

Absolutely. Branding and web design are deeply interconnected. Good branding encapsulates your core values and purpose beyond financial gain, and communicates them in a way that effortlessly resonates

with your target audience. This branding should be vividly represented in your web design, engaging and turning visitors into customers, and customers into loyal advocates who choose you over your competitors every time.

So does a business need to keep refreshing its website?

Yes, definitely. Specifically, bespoke web design allows you to tailor experiences uniquely suited to your brand and your audience's expectations, without restriction of often overused template designs. Keeping your website fresh, functionally optimised and fully mobile responsive enhances user engagement. Every element of your site should serve a strategic purpose to maximise both impact and results. This builds trust and credibility, key factors of success.

Can you share any success stories featuring local businesses?

One of my local successes includes my collaboration with Amanda Hanley by Design in Burford. I refined their branding and launched a new e-commerce website. I continue to provide ongoing marketing support to ensure they have the professional backing they need to continually grow.

Amanda Hanley said, "May we say a huge, thank you for all of your amazing help with our website, we are so impressed with the outcome. You have been absolutely fantastic throughout the process and a delight to work with, and we have no hesitation in highly recommending you."

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
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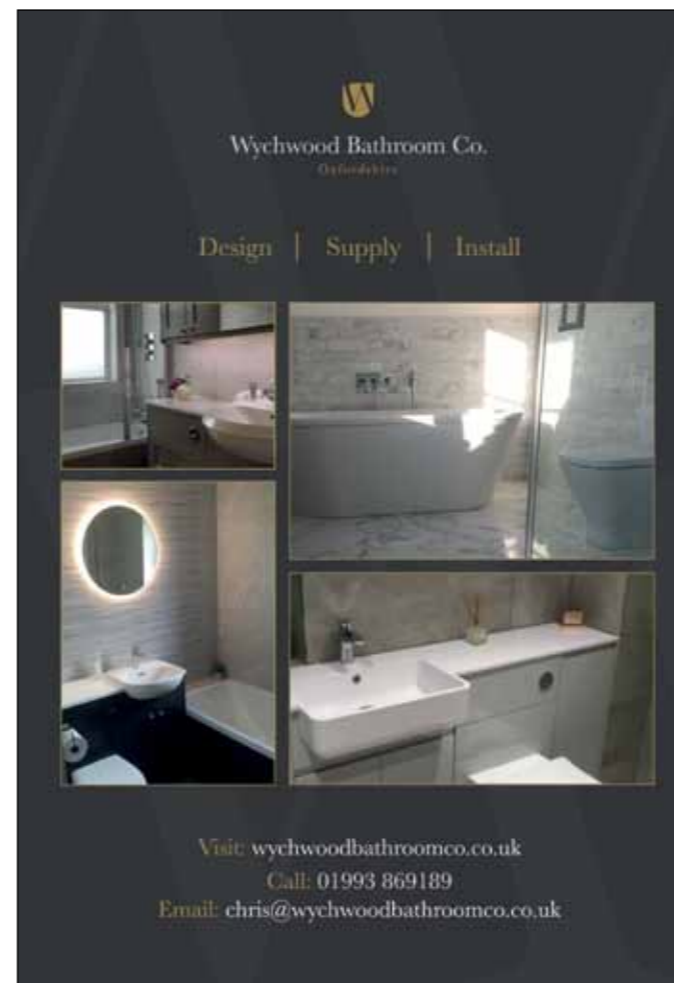
  

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Separation Anxiety – do you need help?

For dogs, separation anxiety (SA) is an anxiety or panic disorder. Clear signs of SA are if, when left at home alone, a dog barks or howls for long periods; they eliminate in the house when normally they are well housetrained; they destroy furnishings or try to escape by digging at the floor or walls at doorways. These behaviours only happen when a dog is left alone and are all symptoms of severe stress.

If you live with a dog who suffers from SA, you are not alone, although it often can feel like it. It's estimated that around 20% of all behaviour cases reported to vets are due to separation anxiety-related behaviours.

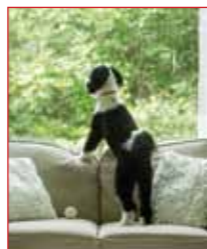
Living with a dog with SA is distressing and affects the whole family. Feelings of stress, guilt, frustration, despair, and anxiety commonly affect the human family and a dog with SA is at higher risk of being rehomed, relinquished to a rescue organisation or euthanasia. SA is truly a welfare and well-being issue for a suffering dog.

Helping a dog to overcome their SA can be a challenge and many families who reach out



to me have come to the end of their ability to cope and to hope of better times for them and their dog. SA is truly a disorder that affects the whole family; but I want you to know that there is hope and that you are not alone.

I am qualified as a specialist Certified Separation Anxiety Trainer (CSAT) and am one of only 9 CSATs in the UK. I understand the hopelessness that often comes with trying to support your dog to be ok with being alone. I am an expert coach, mentor and support to people who find themselves struggling with their dog's separation anxiety. I work with families using a programme of systematic desensitisation, which is tailored exactly to each individual dog. This is very



similar to treatment of human anxiety/phobias, and due to the highly individualised approach, the training programme I use has helped thousands of dogs worldwide to become content with home alone time.

Are you ready to take the first step to recovery for your dog? I offer a 30-minute consultation phone call or Zoom chat free of charge and commitment to discuss how the CSAT training programme can help you and your dog. If you are concerned that your dog may have SA, or you have been trying to help your dog but have only got so far, please get in touch. You can arrange your consultation by visiting www.sa-mentor.com/contact or by calling me on 07766 756 095.



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WHY SO HIGH?



As investors observe a stark contrast between faltering economies and soaring stock markets, questions are starting to arise about the factors contributing to this financial phenomenon.

The Puzzle of Surging Stock Markets Amid Economic Slowdowns

In February it was announced that the UK had entered a technical recession at the end of 2023, following two quarters of negative GDP growth.

We aren't alone.

Germany's GDP also contracted over 2023 with a steep downturn in their manufacturing sector; Japan recently slipped into recession and other major economies, like France, are dealing with fairly stagnant growth.

China's growth rate appears to remain high at 5.2% (over their 5% target) but their most recent quarter showed only 1% growth inciting fear that the world's second largest economy and key driver to global growth, may be also stumbling.¹

American exceptionalism is, as ever... the exception, with the US economy bucking recessionary expectations with solid GDP growth of 2.5% over 2023, ending on an impressive 4.9% in the 4th quarter.² However, with its major trading partners struggling and record high federal debt/gdp levels off the back of all that Covid spending, the US economic outlook is still somewhat uncertain.

Off the back of this rather bleak economic picture, one would be forgiven for thinking that the world's stock markets to be somewhat muted, if not depressed.

But this couldn't be further from the truth.

Defiant Markets

The Japanese stock market, in the face of a recession, recently hit new all-time highs for the first time in over 40 years. Similarly, Germany's DAX 40 just hit an all time high, as has Denmark's key index along with a plethora of other markets. The mighty S&P500, filled with US-listed multinational corporations reliant on the span of global economies, also continues to grind out new highs.³

What's going on? How can markets be hitting highs while the news on the ground seems to be nothing but bad?

Understanding Stocks

First and foremost, stock markets are forward looking. The current economic picture matters to the stock market only to the extent that it effects the level of future profits its constituent companies will make, and what those future profits are worth now.

At risk of being too technical - fundamentally a stock (when properly valued!) is worth the future cashflows it will accrue, discounted to the present.

Put more simply - two things matter for stocks: 1. Future profits and 2. The discount rate.

In terms of future profits - 2023 is in the books, so unless the economic picture is expected to continue as is, then it doesn't really matter for stock prices. What matters is the future economic growth feeding through to growth in company profits, and the stock markets shows that this is expected to be fine long term.

Interest Rates and Stock Prices

The second component, the discount to present, is a little complex - a mix of perceived riskiness of a market and the so called "risk free rate" or the time value of money.

In short it is very reliant on the prevailing interest rate set by the relevant economy's central bank and its predicted path has a big impact on stock prices.

Basically high rates -> high discount -> low stock prices.



Again, similar to profits, for stocks it's less about the current rates (which are generally high vs recent history) and more about predicted future interest rates. All this economic gloom has prompted the belief that most central banks (usually led by the US's Federal reserve) will start cutting rates soon as post covid inflation has eased and economies need the boost of cheaper borrowing costs.

This prediction of lowering interest rates, perhaps very aggressively, has therefore prompted a surge in stock prices in the relevant economies.

Different Stories in Different Markets

Each market also has its own narrative. Denmark is a prime example with its index up significantly since the start of the year due to having over 50% of the Danish stock market weighting in a single stock - Novo Nordisk⁴ - who's breakthrough GLP-1 diabetes/weight loss drugs (Ozempic, Wegovy) has been shown to be a potential blockbuster with a wide variety of use cases against many modern ailments.

Japan's long slumber

For Japan, the recent stock market rally is more a story of corporate governance. Japanese stocks have long traded at a substantial discount to their western peers. There are a few reasons for this, a key one is Japan's fairly stagnant growth since it's economic bubble in the 80's and 90's combined with worrying demographic trend towards a rapidly aging population. Another is their odd corporate governance with management teams hoarding cash (rather than investing it in growth or returning it to shareholders) or insisting on strange cross holdings e.g an industrial widget manufacturers owning a portfolio of golf courses.

While the former issue is unlikely to change anytime soon, the latter has been cracked down on by the Tokyo stock exchange threatening to name and shame those businesses with poor capital management. There is great hope that putting this stored value to work will help spur growth anew - something investors are clearly waking up, pushing the market to highs not seen for more than 30 years.

The United States of AI

The US stock market has a very high concentration of large (\$100bn+ market cap) and Megacap (\$1tn+ market cap) technology stocks some of which (Apple and Microsoft) are larger on their own than the entire UK stock market.

While most technology stocks are booming, the stock of the moment is Nvidia, a GPU (graphics processing Unit - think fancy computer chips) company whose product is considered the gold standard for AI computation. GPUs were initially developed for the complex compute necessary to render immersive video game graphics. GPUs (and Nvidia) also came to the fore during the crypto craze in the late 2010's and early 2020's as they were well tuned for solving the complex puzzles needed to mine tokens such as Bitcoin. However, it is in more recent times that GPUs have shown their true potential, as the critical component necessary in data centres for the massive computing power needed to train AI models.

AI suddenly becoming much more mainstream since the release of OpenAI's ChatGPT, has caused businesses to scramble, either to produce their own AI product or at least incorporate AI into their business processes, both of which require a substantial investment in datacentres boosting technology spend much of which trickles through to Nvidia.

After a blockbuster earnings, Nvidia was up nearly 30% in February alone, an insane rise for a trillion-dollar company, now the 3rd largest listed company in the world.⁵

This boost to technology stocks, along with a general uplift from the hope of near term rate cuts from the US's central bank (the Federal reserve) has pushed the US market to new highs, even while the valuations of many smaller businesses in less fashionable industries are left behind.

What to Do When Markets are High

The current state of the stock market can appear puzzling, with high values in tough economic times. However, it is essential to carefully consider whether these market valuations are based on real growth or simply speculation. Remember that prudent investing involves a comprehensive analysis and thoughtful strategy. Although swift market surges can imply risks, this is not always the case. Indeed there are nearly always pockets of opportunity to be found - the subdued prices in the UK's market could signal opportunities for investment, even in less prosperous times.

Ultimately, a clear understanding and forward-looking approach are crucial in making informed investment decisions that align with your long-term financial goals.

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¹ Reuters - <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/view-chinas-gdp-growth-q4-misses-market-forecast-2024-01-17/>
² BEA, US Gov - <https://www.bea.gov/news/2024/gross-domestic-product-fourth-quarter-and-year-2023-second-estimate>
³ Yahoo Finance, world indices - <https://finance.yahoo.com/world-indices/>
⁴ MSCI, MSCI Denmark - <https://www.msci.com/documents/10199/5db4fa3f-1775-4d39-8838-e2609d72b94>
⁵ Yahoo Finance - <https://finance.yahoo.com/quote/NVDA/>

Revision Help!



"I KNOW I SHOULD HAVE REVISED EARLIER BUT WHAT CAN I DO NOW?"

Whilst politicians inexplicably openly criticise the quality of the present day education system; regardless of the adverse effect that their comments may have on the younger generation. The present cohorts of A Level and GCSE students will be finding this summer's examinations anything but easy.

From experience I have found the present generation of school children are under far more pressure than we of the older generation ever were. They now need the support of everyone at this moment in time without the distractions of; dare I say it, "Social Media".

By the time you read this, many of the students will be approaching Study Leave. I am personally against it. In all fairness, it is normally granted as a privilege and all schools have contingency plans of support readily available for the students who may encounter problems during their home based study. Now it is with us, we need to turn Study Leave into a positive experience.

There are always self-motivated students who know what they want to achieve in life either by means of a professional career or just simply wanting to achieve their best. However; there are also those who find it difficult to sit down at home for long periods of time, and revise

without supervision, for perhaps the first time in their life. It is these students who are in most need for the motivation to study.

How to motivate yourself

- **Be positive;** enjoy the actual experience of learning.
- **Set yourself a goal for each session** and reward yourself when you have completed it.
- **Look at the rewards of studying.** This is the first step you are taking towards a successful career, the better your grades are, then the more options you will have in life.
- **Establish a routine.** In the past this has been done for you within the school time table. You now have the opportunity to treat Study Leave as one of your first steps into adulthood where you have to take on the responsibility of your own planning. No longer are you being treated like a child.
- **Don't dally,** the majority of stress and effort in revision is in thinking about doing it rather than actually getting stuck into it.
- **Contact the school should you have any problems.** The teachers want to help you, and will be only too pleased to do so.
- **At the end of each day allow time to review what you have revised.**

Good Luck to all those taking examinations this summer. Hoping that you all reach your personal goals.

John Harris

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May Garden Tips

1. Watch out for late frosts. Protect tender plants
2. Earth up potatoes, and promptly plant any still remaining
3. Plant out summer bedding at the end of the month (except in cold areas)
4. Water early and late to get the most out of your water, recycle water when possible
5. Regularly hoe off weeds
6. Open greenhouse vents and doors on warm days
7. Mow lawns weekly – but consider leaving some areas uncut for wildlife
8. Check for nesting birds before clipping hedges
9. Lift and divide overcrowded clumps of daffodils and other spring-flowering bulbs
10. Watch out for viburnum beetle and lily beetle grubs

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WHERE ARE THE PLANETS?

It is summer of course and one would not expect to observe planets in the sky due to the light nights; but not so; we do have periods of darkness in which the keenest of astronomers enjoy casting their eyes under the dark skies very late in the warm summer evenings and early morning skies.



Summer Solstice – Thursday 20th June 21.50 hours BST

The moment that the Sun reaches its furthest point North and gives us our longest day. You can follow the build-up and watch it live on Facebook. To join the event and enjoy the build-up log in to Facebook and join: "Summer Solstice 2024 Live From Stonehenge"

Meteor Shower 6th May – Eta Aquariid – Occurs when the

Earth encounters the debris of the tail left behind by Halley's Comet. Visible in the UK from around 04.00 hours BST. Look East South East for the radiant i.e. the point from which the

paths of the meteors appear to originate.



Noctilucent Cloud displays

Possibility of appearing in June. Noctilucent Cloud displays appear at dusk at a height of 200,000 feet (61,000 metres). Far higher than normal clouds and appear as blue, silver, orange or red in colour, and can even be seen when darkness appears due to reflecting the light of the Sun.

Mercury: Difficult to observe during May. Reaches superior conjunction on 14th June - this is when the Earth and the other planet are on opposite sides of the Sun, but all three bodies are nearly in a straight line.

Venus: Unobservable during May and Venus reaches superior

conjunction on 4th June.

Mars: Towards the end of May Mars may be seen on the Eastern horizon during twilight hours. By the end of June will be rising 3 hours before sunrise.

Jupiter: Unobservable during May as it passes through a Solar conjunction - this is when the Sun obscures the planet from being observed, and in this case the Jupiter, Earth and Sun are not in a direct line with each other. Exceptionally difficult to observe during June as it rises with the morning Sun. (Do not observe the Sun without proper eye protection, the Sun can permanently damage the eyes - sun glasses are not for observing the Sun.)

Saturn: Hardly visible in the morning sky during May, but visibility slightly improves by sunrise during the month of June.

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