

## **Discussion Paper – Digital opportunities in rural economies**

**Host:** Mr Mackay, Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution

**Facilitators:** Theresa Swayne, Senior Development Manager – Digital, Highlands and Island Enterprise; Karen Riddick, Owner, Second Nature

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### **Overview**

Technology is transforming the ways we live our lives. It connects us in new and different ways. It allows us to develop new products and services; to collaborate; to access information in new ways; to develop successful, global businesses; and can help us reduce the costs and increase the quality of public services. The advantage of being digitally connected is that location should not matter. Digitalisation affords individuals, small businesses and communities opportunities that previous industrial and manufacturing booms did not. The big question is how do we exploit this opportunity?

This discussion group will provide an opportunity to hear from those who have successfully used existing digital technologies to grow and enhance their businesses. The Scottish Government recognises the ever increasing importance of high quality digital connectivity to Scotland's economy. However, this discussion will not focus on connectivity but rather will focus on using available technology and being safe doing so. There will be opportunities to explore how to make better use of digital technology to help grow your own business, or do things more effectively, whilst maintaining safe and secure technology.

### **Scottish Government ambitions**

The Scottish Government is committed to ensuring that Scotland is a vibrant, inclusive, open and outward-looking digital nation. We want to help business and society to make the most of the opportunities that new and changing technologies will bring. How we intend to do this is set out in our [Digital Strategy](#). This is a strategy for Scotland, not just the Scottish Government. No single organisation can hope to have all the answers. Our ambition is to create a culture and environment of partnership in which we take collective action to ensure that nobody is left behind and we all remain safe, secure and confident about the future when using digital technologies.

### **Cyber Resilience**

Digital technologies bring enormous opportunities for organisations, but they also bring new threats and vulnerabilities that we must manage. There will be an opportunity to hear about how the Scottish Government is working with partners across sectors to embed cyber resilience practice within business planning.

### **Second Nature**

[Second Nature](#) is a locally based, fair-trade online business specialising in the import and retail of eco-friendly soft furnishings. Based in a rural location, establishing and growing Second Nature meant overcoming challenges common to many rural business, including not being an expert on online matters. During this discussion group, you will have an opportunity to hear from Karen Riddick, Owner of Second Nature, on how she overcome those challenges, and how she has successfully grown her business, including making the most of digital services, such as Amazon Marketplace, to extend Second Nature's possible reach.

### **Highlands and Island Enterprise (HIE) case studies**

[HIE](#) investment in the highlands and islands region's digital infrastructure is providing enormous opportunities for businesses and social enterprises to develop new products and services, and present their goods to market in new and innovative ways. A recent [report](#) published by HIE found that 75% of businesses said digital technologies are essential or important to their business now, and to their future growth. HIE focuses on helping

organisations to understand the power and capabilities of digital technology and provides assistance to capitalise on the opportunities it presents. HIE also assists businesses and social enterprises to optimise their business models to take advantage of digital connectivity, and provides intensive digital support including 1-1 specialist advice, digital masterclasses on relevant topics through the #hellodigital centre, and an awareness raising programme for cyber resilience. During the discussions, you will hear about examples of businesses who have successfully grown by making use of available technology. It is likely that some of the techniques used can be applied to your own business.

### **Examples of the type of support currently available**

#### **DigitalBoost**

The digital world is moving fast and changing the face of business as we know it. While this presents huge opportunities for Scotland's small and medium enterprises, embracing digital transformation is not without its challenges. To make digital part of your business future, you can gain free access to workshops, guides, an online digital Healthcheck and expert support through the [DigitalBoost](#) programme.

#### **Digital Tourism Scotland**

[Digital Tourism Scotland](#) is a partnership that's made up of seven organisations; Business Gateway, Scottish Government, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Scottish Enterprise, Scottish Tourism Alliance, Skills Development Scotland and VisitScotland. It offers online and face-to-face advice to tourism businesses on learning how to use digital marketing and technology. In many circumstances, the advice and technology used can be applied to business regardless of the sector it is part of.

#### **Points to think about in advance of the discussion**

- What digital resources/technologies does your business use at the moment?
- Does your business have a digital plan in place?
- What alternative digital resources have you considered and ruled out? Why?
- Do you have confidence in your own digital skills and knowledge?
- Do you feel you have the tools and knowledge to keep your business safe online?
- Do you have plans in place to effectively handle a cyber security incident?
- What do you need in order to help you consider ways to use digital to allow your business to meet its potential?
- Would encouraging the uptake of digital tech and enabling a digital skills increase see a return on investment for a small SME?
- Would you mentor another business or be open to mentoring around digital skills?
- What could larger scale businesses do to help your business – e.g. Amazon, Google, Microsoft, FedEx?