



Chester. The independent city.

Chester is a city where independents thrive. Would you like a piece of the pie?

This guide has been created to help you do just that.

Chester has always been an important trading post. The Romans arrived in 79 AD and since then the city has attracted a wide range of people from silversmiths to artificial intelligence developers.

Anyone who has been to Chester can attest to its charm. The centre of the city comprises an unusual mix of historic and modern buildings, the most striking of which are The Rows - several streets where commerce goes on both at ground level and above on the Row. All this makes for a unique ambience in which many independent businesses and smaller chains trade.

Over time, this has given rise to a significant number of units suitable for shops, cafés, and services.

“Chester pleases my fancy more than any town I ever saw.”

Letter from James Boswell to Samuel Johnson 1779

“I’ve never met anyone who doesn’t like Chester”

Ian Gordon, Owner Liquor & Co, and Craft & Co 2020



A location that works

The location of Chester - on the border of Wales, on the North West mainline (London is just 2 hours journey by train) and at the crossroads of two motorways - means that shoppers, many of whom are relatively affluent, come from a wide geography.

The visitor mix is also stimulated by a significant hotel building programme over the last few years which has delivered attractive, modern hotels in all price brackets.

Chester Racecourse is the oldest racecourse still in operation in the world. With the unique 350 degree view thousands of visitors flock to Chester for the race season (May - Sept), many coming from London and Ireland.



A supportive community

In recent years, a significant and lively independent business sector has emerged and thrived in Chester. This has spawned a supportive community of people who both run these businesses and support them with their custom. As a result, people in Chester are increasingly open to new ideas, collective values and a desire to try new things.

Chester BID is the Business Improvement District (BID) for the centre of Chester - roughly the four main commercial streets that make up the beating heart of the city. The benefit of opening a business in a city with a BID is a robust support system ensuring the local authority fulfil statutory obligations and the business community is well connected.

Chester BID has four specific areas of focus:

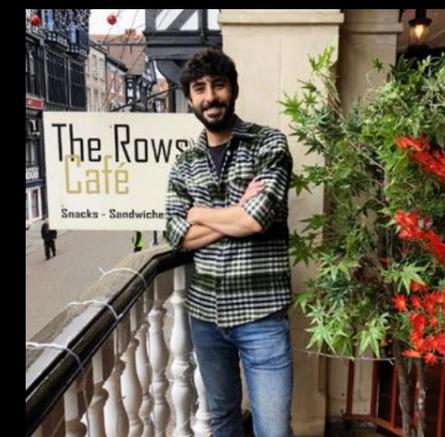
- 1** **ENHANCING:** deliver a wide and varied programme of maintenance and enhancements throughout the city centre, including regular cleansing programmes and the introduction of City Hosts enabling visitors to gain maximum benefit and enjoyment from their visits.
- 2** **PROMOTING:** deliver integrated marketing and PR campaigns to promote a positive visitor experience that will attract people to Chester, increase their dwell time and spend, and encourage return visits.

Develop and promote a calendar of high-quality city centre events that appeal to a wide range of visitors, raising Chester's profile and bringing real benefits to city centre businesses within the BID area.
- 3** **REPRESENTING:** act as a link between all businesses and key partners/agencies. Taking on the role of consultee for the city centre, ensure the businesses voices are heard, report on any findings, outcomes, changes or improvements.
- 4** **SUPPORTING:** provide business savings by securing discounts and using collective bargaining in order to help cut costs and develop business.

Post-COVID, city centres everywhere are struggling to redefine themselves to adapt to the new trading reality. However, an attractive city such as Chester has lots to offer especially to those who are thinking about setting up their own businesses or changing to a more balanced lifestyle.

This guide is specifically designed to encourage independent businesses to put Chester top of their list of ideal locations.

More general information is widely available from organisations such as BIRA bira.co.uk.



How does Chester work for indies?

Competitive Context

Before focusing on your actual proposition, it's important to understand the competitive context. There are several successful coffee bars in Chester so is there room for another? Ditto hairdressers. Ditto Italian restaurants. Yet in the past couple of years new coffee bars, new hairdressers and new Italian restaurants have set up successfully in the city centre because their offer was sufficiently different. On the other hand, what is missing? Don't forget to ask yourself, "Is there a gap in the market? And is there a market in that gap?"

Footfall

Certain things in Chester generate certain types of footfall. In 2017 the bus station moved from the city centre to the periphery meaning that people arriving by bus usually walk into the city down Frodsham St. People arriving by coach often do the opposite as they are dropped off on the south side of the city. Eastgate St and Foregate St are where most of the chains trade but Watergate St has an abundance of late-night bars (and interestingly art galleries!). Other drivers of footfall are Storyhouse and at certain times, especially graduations, Chester Cathedral.

The four main roads that meet at The Cross all have their individual character (as do their Row level shops) so it is worth thinking carefully about what sort of footfall would suit your business. It is also worth identifying some of the "destination" shops i.e. unique shops that people make a special trip into Chester to visit and thinking about whether you should locate nearby. And if students are your target do you need to be in striking distance of Primark or Nando's?

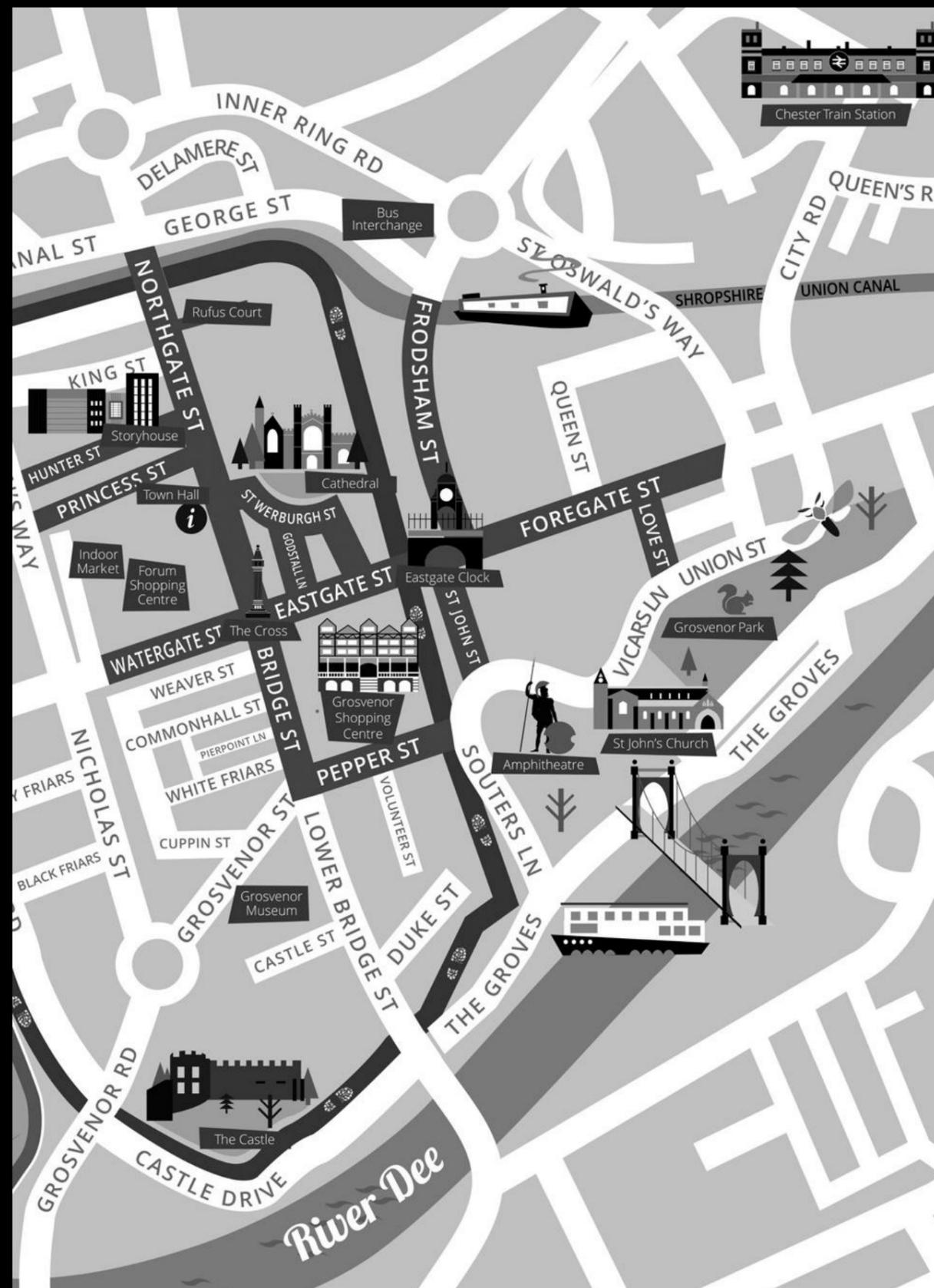
TOTAL FOOTFALL
FOR CHESTER CITY CENTRE IS OVER
20 MILLION
PEOPLE PER YEAR

CHESTER ATTRACTS OVER
8 MILLION
TOURISTS PER YEAR

HOME TO THE UNIVERSITY
OF CHESTER WHICH HAS OVER
18,000 STUDENTS
FROM 130 COUNTRIES

THE LOCAL CHESHIRE AND
WARRINGTON ECONOMY IS WORTH
20 BILLION A YEAR

CHESTER IS IN THE
TOP 10
BEST PLACES TO LIVE
IN THE HOT HOUSING
INDEX 2019



Seasonality

It's a good idea to think about how you will operate all year round. If your business has a strong appeal to tourists, then certain weeks e.g. school holidays will take on particular importance. If it is daily trade you are looking for, then local businesses and proximity to public transport might be key. The city centre's Northgate development will include a new market hall, a cinema, and a car park - are those audiences key to you?

Franchise Friendly

If you are keen to be your own boss but haven't got a fully-fledged idea, you might think about a franchise. Again, do your research - you might be inspired by concepts that are working in other countries. We have all heard of Starbucks and Swarovski but what will be the next new franchise to grab the imagination?

Make a Day and Night of it

Plan to spend a day in Chester from early morning to late at night. Use a basic street map to make notes and colour code areas that might work for you. Or if you are already with an agent ask about a Goad map: builtby.findmaps.co.uk/goad.html

To get an idea of availability, and chat with others already trading to understand what affects business daily and to pick up tips and ideas take a look at:

www.rightmove.co.uk/commercial-property-to-let.html

www.zoopla.co.uk/to-rent/commercial

www.shopproperty.co.uk/shops-to-let



Finding just the right spot



You could make a very expensive mistake if you do not find the right premises - location, cost, lease, size and so on. Chester agent **Tim Kenney** of **Kenneymoore Property Consultants** shared his experiences finding the right Chester premises.

Here are Tim's top tips:

1

Footfall

Footfall is a key factor in the cost of premises so think carefully.

Do you need significant footfall or are you unique enough that people will find you on their own? If you are the best vegan restaurant or a highly skilled accountant or facialist that could be true. Once that is decided, the appropriate locations are clear. You can check overall footfall on the Cheshire West and Chester Council dashboard, but you should also do your own investigation on busy days and, of course, not so busy days. Obvious footfall hotspots are The Cross and Eastgate St.

2

Position

Position: Sun or shade? For some businesses e.g. those with an alfresco terrace or those selling chocolate, this is important. How important is the window display? Do you need to be on a corner to maximise the window space? - often an important consideration for jewellers.

3

Trader

Are you a comparative trader - estate agent for example - or a destination trader - cigar shop?

Do you need to be close to your peers or can you go it alone by using marketing e.g. social media and PR to attract your customers? If you can, Chester is jam-packed with charming little lanes and alleyways - just off the main thoroughfares that are great for destination shops.

4

Selling

Do you need to make what you are selling? If so, do you need heat, refrigeration, extraction, gas, complicated IT? What sort of waste might you create and how can it be collected? How much storage do you need and where?

5

Stress-test

Have you "stress-tested" the space - this could mean checking how many people can comfortably use the building or whether you can open a fridge while standing at the counter.

6

History

Chester is an historic city - there are listed buildings and conservation areas all of which come with very clear rules about if and how premises can be modified and significant penalties for those who flout them.

7

Rent & rates

Remember that as a rule the more expensive the rent, the more expensive the business rates so do not forget to factor that into your business plan.

8

Landlords

Landlords: Because there is such a variety of premises in the centre of Chester, there is an equally wide range of landlords, from some family investors, to large pension funds for whom their Chester property is one of many and who can sometimes be bound by an inflexible letting policies. However, post-COVID, some landlords are eager to collaborate with a tenant to create a win-win situation where they attract a new tenant at a fair rent and deal enabling that tenant can get their business off to a good start whilst keeping overheads in check. This could be "turnover rents" where the rent is in proposition to the turnover or comprises a base rent with a turnover top-up or other kinds of partnership agreements such as "all-inclusive licenses". Landlords whose retail property is still empty after 3 months are obliged to pay business rates. Though this is **not** the case with listed buildings.

9

Lease

It is crucial that you agree the right lease - (the document that gives you the right to occupy the landlord's building) - this is not a job for amateurs. There is no such thing as a 'standard' lease. The agreement of terms should always be handled by a property professional before being passed to a solicitor to finalise the documentation. Things to consider are length, break clauses, rent review terms e.g. "cap and collar" deals, notice periods, repairs, legal costs, assignability (i.e. the ability to pass on the lease to someone else if the need arises) sharing space and the uses to which it may be put.. You should read up as much as possible. smallbusiness.co.uk/how-to-negotiate-a-commercial-lease-tips-for-negotiating-with-a-landlord-2549237

10

Now is potentially a good time to think about what opportunities there might be. Supply currently exceeds demand so there could be a slight softening of deals and some landlords prepared to be more agile and pragmatic.

To review what is available, here are some knowledgeable local property consultants in Chester:

kenneymoore.co.uk

legatowen.co.uk

bacommercial.com

boltonbirch.com

Coming soon...

The new Northgate Development is due to open in 2022 and is currently under construction behind the Town Hall.

This major development project will include:

- ▶ A new, reinvigorated indoor market
- ▶ A six-screen cinema - Picturehouse
- ▶ Cafés, bars and restaurants
- ▶ New parking
- ▶ Co-working office spaces

This project is not a shopping centre, but rather is a development of open streets, parades and plazas that will integrate seamlessly with the surrounding parts of Chester City Centre. The old library frontage will be transformed into a new arcade and provide a stunning arched entrance into the development, which will also be accessible from Hunter Street and Princess Street. The scheme will create a new public square for the city, linking the new market hall, Storyhouse and the Town Hall.

The northwest area of Chester city centre has already seen major growth with the success of Storyhouse, Chester's unique theatre, library, cinema and arts centre that opened in May 2017.

There has also been a surge of new independent eateries on Northgate Street adding to the appeal of Chester as a foodie destination.

If your business might be suitable for this sort of environment you can learn more and register your interest in becoming a Chester Market Trader here: newchester.market



Who can help with what?

During the process of setting up a new business you could need the services of a wide range of property experts:

- ▶ A project manager to manage all the various aspects of the project
- ▶ A planning consultant - there are many experts in Chester but for anything with heritage implications try Peter Miller mtpuk1@yahoo.com
- ▶ A solicitor - certain firms in Chester have significant commercial expertise e.g. Aarons, Knights and it is worth employing a local expert especially if you are seeking permission to alter the premises
- ▶ A quantity surveyor if you want to be sure exactly how much your project could cost
- ▶ A main building contractor if there are significant alterations

Let's talk money

The financial side of any business is critical to its success. As you would expect, Chester has a wide range of banks to consult, alongside finance brokers such as **Bathgate Business Finance** who work closely with funders and finance advisors in the area. The role of a finance broker can direct businesses to the right funding solution, saving time and providing guidance on what supporting information is needed to give the best chance of success.

Ian Adams from Bathgate has been helping businesses in the area since 1999 and has the following top tips:



- ▶ Work closely with a good finance consultant who can help in preparation of business plans and forecasts
- ▶ Understand what funding is available
- ▶ Start-up businesses should make use of Government start-up loans and asset based funding
- ▶ Once a business is established, it can help to have an understanding on the impact bank statements and personal and business credit ratings can have on finance applications
- ▶ Structure finance appropriate to the purpose of the funding
- ▶ Where an asset is to be purchased and a return on investment is over a few years consider asset finance and for working capital look into invoice finance
- ▶ Build a strong relationship with a broker who can provide ongoing guidance through the life cycle of a company
- ▶ Plan ahead and ideally be pro-active and not re-active to finance needs
- ▶ Maintain strong trading records to support business ability to service finance

Ellis & Co Chartered Accountants and Business Advisers www.ellis-uk.com have been advising independent and owner managed businesses in Chester since 1989.

John Farrell, one of the directors at Ellis & Co has shared his top tips for anyone planning to set up a new business in Chester:



- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>1 Firstly it is imperative that you are trading as the correct entity whether it be a sole trader, partnership or Limited Company.</p> | <p>6 Ensure you have knowledge of all business expenditure that is allowable for tax purposes. Again, this can be discussed with your accountant.</p> |
| <p>2 Make sure you have registered with the authorities such as HMRC and Companies House.</p> | <p>7 Consider if VAT registration is required for your business. You may find that VAT registration is actually beneficial to the business before you hit the turnover threshold.</p> |
| <p>3 Select the correct accounting package that will suit you and your business. This is important for the beginning so you can measure how you and your business are performing.</p> | <p>8 Keep a note of any business mileage undertaken in your private vehicle.</p> |
| <p>4 Set up a business bank account with a bank that will help you and your business move forward.</p> | <p>9 Make sure you are making provisions for tax liabilities at the end of the trading period. This will stop any unwanted surprises!</p> |
| <p>5 Discuss with an accountant any pre trading expenditure that has been incurred before commencement of the business.</p> | <p>10 For company directors, it is important that you are on the correct salary and drawing the right amount of dividends per month. A monthly profit and loss calculation can help this.</p> |

“All of the above points are essential when starting a business. A simple review of these can alleviate any possible pit falls and also ensure he business has every chance of being a success.”
 John Farrell, Director Ellis & Co

Fitting out your premises

Property expert **Jim Bishop** has worked both on the client-side with **Scottish & Newcastle** and **Sainsbury's** and on the consulting side. He also has had several experiences of acquiring and fitting out properties of various kinds in Chester.

Here are Jim's top tips:



1

When it comes to fitting out your premises, have a careful think about what you need and what you must spend. For example, the shape can often be more critical than the size e.g. a small "box" can work better than a larger "L".

2

Overall, it is best to try to avoid expensive structural changes, although you will need to be sure that the premises are structurally sound and fit for the purpose you intend. For example, if you need extraction on The Rows the work may need to pass through other premises. Many walls in Chester are old and rough - trying to make them smooth is expensive so maybe try to work with what is there. Remember if you decide to move on and have made significant changes that your landlord objects to, dilapidation costs could be significant.

3

If you have employed a project manager, you may not be involved in selecting some or all the subcontractors. However, here is a checklist of potential suppliers for the fit-out:

- ▶ Surveyor
- ▶ Plumber
- ▶ Electrician
- ▶ Mechanical and electrical technicians for air conditioning where appropriate
- ▶ An experienced decorator e.g. City & Guilds accredited
- ▶ A local security expert - fire, CCTV, alarms, barriers etc.
- ▶ An IT consultant both for the business and for customers
- ▶ A contractor to help with services - gas, water, electricity
- ▶ An interior designer

4

To give your space uniqueness, Chester has many interiors shops and galleries in the city centre, where you can pick up artwork and finishing touches relatively cheaply.

Further sources of information and help to check out

The business pages of the **Cheshire West and Chester Council** website:

www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/business/business.aspx is a very good place to start for information about how to operate a business in Chester. There is a huge amount of information covering everything you need to know: planning, business rates, health, and safety, living wage, licensing, highways and so on.

The council is also a landlord with properties to rent.

Have a look: www.letstalkbizcw.co.uk/Property-and-Sites/CWaC-Properties

You should also familiarise yourself with how to contact the emergency services.

As we said there is a **Business Improvement District (BID)** in the city centre. Businesses with a rateable value over £18k pay a 1% levy on their rates. Smaller businesses can join for a fixed fee. Chester BID can also answer some of your queries about trading conditions in the city and suggest people with local knowledge who can advise you.

You can get in touch with **Chester BID** via hello@chesterbid.co.uk

If your business is targeting tourists, make sure to say hello to the staff at the **Visitor Information Centre** in Town Hall Square. If you are offering accommodation or a tourist experience, get in contact with **Marketing Cheshire** who are the destination marketing organization based in Chester.



Promoting yourself

Chester is a wonderful place, but its geographic situation means it is somewhat peripheral to many of the main media channels that cities such as Liverpool and Manchester enjoy. There are few Chester-specific radio and news media options with good coverage including **Dee 106 Cheshire Live** and the **Chester & District Standard**.

Chester's proximity to North Wales and the Wirral and the relatively easy train journey to London can mean that these markets can be important for Chester businesses. So, for your business to thrive you will need to put together a marketing strategy that works for you and makes the most of what channels are available and then pursue it with determination.

Clearly, if you are both bricks and clicks (and many independent businesses in Chester operate successfully as both) your online presence and how the customer can find you via natural search, SEO and PPC is vitally important. Presence and tone of voice in social media is fundamental for independent businesses.

“Presence and tone of voice in social media is fundamental for independent businesses.”

Customer database

Keeping a customer database is pretty much a "must do" for most independent businesses because it will allow you to analyse your customers, reward them and find more like them. Choose your data capture strategy to fit your business and be sure to be **GDPR compliant**. During the lockdown, many businesses were able to use their databases to keep in touch with customers 121 even though their premises were closed and to quickly generate footfall once lockdown ended. You can also work with other organisations such as **@visitchester** and **@chesterbid** to promote yourself.

Local media

The local media need a constant stream of PR content to keep relevant and lively, so if you are opening or expanding, have a new service, have won awards, have raised money for charity or done anything newsworthy, make sure to let them know with a pithy and upbeat press release - don't forget the photo. You will not always get coverage, but it is worth a try. Try the **Chester Standard** and **Cheshire Live**. Make a point of tuning in to the local radio - **Dee 106** - and call them up if they are discussing a topic where you have an inside track.

Location

The border between England and Wales can throw up some marketing opportunities especially when the Welsh schools have different holidays than those in England and the odd message in Welsh might get you some attention.

Chester based social media guru **Rachel Quayle @fatgirlslimish** has some top tips:



Social media

On social media choose your platforms - you do not need to be active in every channel. Think about your target audience and choose which match your demographic best. If you sell beer, you will find the middle-aged men lingering around Twitter, not dancing on Tik Tok (hopefully). If your food or your hairstyles look gorgeous, then Instagram will be your friend. Instagram and Facebook work best for "visual" business. B2B and professional services operators might prefer more emphasis on LinkedIn and Twitter, as well as local networking organisations.

Sell your experience

Once you have done that, be sure to sell your experience. Show your surroundings and what makes your establishment unique, fully stocked shelves, comfy sofas, window displays, high tech kit etc. Give them a reason to come and see you in real life with an experience that you cannot buy online. You are promoting yourself, not Amazon.

Research

And remember to tag everything – hashtags, locations associated brands, these are all mini passports to your account. Research trending topics and fun dates like 'national burger day' and post relevant content.

Events

Pay attention to events in your area that your customers might enjoy and talk about them, giving your customer a reason to come into the city is giving your customer a reason to come and see you. If you are selling burgers and it is #internationalburgerday then go for it. Follow accounts such as **ChesterBid** who make a point of highlighting occasions or events that can benefit the city.

Schedule

Set a realistic schedule – algorithms favour accounts who post consistently. That does not mean you have to post daily. About four times a week is a good rule of thumb. And be clear about when you are not available and set boundaries.

Shout outs

Share the love – give other businesses a shout out now and again. This is great for two reasons. People love to see businesses supporting one another, but also the establishment in question are likely to return the favour and you will be exposed to their audience as well.

Quality content

Think quality not quantity – no content really is better than bad content. If the first time a potential customer sees your post and wants to "delete" rather than "follow", you have failed.

Selfie spot

If your premises permit, create a selfie spot. Having a space that looks good in photographs is shareable and it is an easy way of getting your venue tagged on other people's profiles.

Be social

Do not forget to be social on social – if people chat with you, interact keeping the chat nice and professional, "like" their reactions.

Influencers

Several local social media influencers have excellent reach, so it is worth setting out your social media stall and engaging with them. The legendary **@shitchester** (who is a champion of all things Chester) has nearly 30k organic followers on Twitter.

Resilience

And finally, do try not to take any negative feedback too personally. Not everyone will like what you are doing.

Katie Jones, owner of independent toy store **Weasel and the Bug**, has shared some of her top tips on how to make your idea work before and after you have opened up:



Business plan

Write a business plan! This is a **MUST!** Having an idea is great, but how does that work in real life? I also recommend re-writing it every year and keep revisiting it to ensure your hitting those goals!

Demographic

Is there a target demographic for your business 365 days a year?

Competition

Be very aware of who is around you. Competition is good but not when you are doing the exact same thing. There is only so much money in an area, so you need to “do you brilliantly” whatever that looks like.

Research

Know and understand your industry and I do not mean just have a passing interest. You need to research and then research some more! Every sector will have their own industry events, make sure you go to those to network and discover new products and brands that will help your business to thrive.

Branding

Build a brand and an ethos and be loyal to it. People will like knowing what to expect when they come to your business.

Network

Make friends with peers. It is good to have a sounding board and someone who understands as well as offering great advice. In fact, create relationships with everyone that surrounds your business, they will be your biggest fans and recommend you.

Resilience

Be resilient! There **WILL** be complaints, things **WILL** go wrong and will go so far off track at times. You simply cannot plan what will go wrong. As an example, in the 4 years of business, we have had a flood and a global pandemic - who would have known?

Be Nice

Be nice! It is as simple as that, it will get you further than you think.

Innovation

“Don’t sit on your laurels”. Just because one thing worked one week or one year, does not mean it will work the next. Once established it does not mean you get to rest, it means you work even harder! Continue to be fresh and innovative.

Passion

My biggest tip is to ensure that you have passion and belief in what you are doing, as this will be the force that will drive your business forward.



“My biggest tip is to ensure that you have passion and belief in what you are doing, as this will be the force that will drive your business forward.”

Katie Jones, Owner Weasel and the Bug

Final word

So hopefully you can see that Chester is **Open for Business** – your business perhaps.

Running your own business is never ever easy, you must be prepared to put the hours in and make it work, but as someone once said: 'It's just about luck. But do you know? The harder I work the luckier I get'

We at Chester BID will give you as much support as we can, and the local professional services businesses are, as a rule, a friendly bunch and happy to extend a helping hand to assist where they can.

We all want Chester to be a safe, prosperous, thriving, interesting, attractive City, and we all need to be prepared to do our part to help make that happen, and then keep working at it to make it even better.

“I never dreamed about success, I worked for it.”

Estee Lauder



Sherrington Associates Executive Search

We founded Sherrington in July 2014 with an appetite to build a boutique executive search business, recruiting and coaching senior leaders for clients in the North West. We chose to base ourselves in Chester due to its convenient geography in relation to Liverpool and Manchester, but also because the city is home to business leaders and CEOs of large businesses from right across the region.

In the world of executive search your network is key. Having lived and worked in the city for 14 years prior to founding Sherrington, our network was already established, but to gain a reputation as a new business we had to invest in marketing the business from day one. Not everything worked but you soon learn what's right for your business and adapt accordingly. For a small business like ours we soon realised that as much as embracing social media and digital technologies can help, there's nothing as effective as human interaction – I dread to think how much coffee we've drunk over the years networking at events and awards ceremonies and meeting clients for catchups in the city's coffee shops and cafés!

Another big learning was the importance of place. For our first office we chose a Grade 1 listed town house on Watergate Street called Booth Mansion because of its central location and sheer quirkiness! We soon outgrew it though and relocated to our office on Nicholas Street which overlooks the racecourse and Welsh mountains and makes the perfect location for executive coaching. If I could give two tips to any 'would-be' company directors looking to setup in Chester right now, the first would be to be authentic. Being true to your values brings confidence and customers are drawn to businesses with confidence. The second is to make sure your business is in a sector that you are passionate about. We are in work for too long each day not to enjoy it. Our business is the people business and we love it and we could not think of a better city to be doing it in!

“...make sure your business is in a sector that you are passionate about. We are in work for too long each day not to enjoy it.”

Rob & Joanne McKay,
Sherrington Associates



Watergate Street Art Gallery

Celebrating our 25th birthday next year, Watergate Street Gallery is a fine example of a long-established independent Chester retailer that has reinvented and revived itself constantly.

Starting our distant life selling Victorian watercolours, we have invested and evolved into a 3000 sq ft unique and quirky space with 1000s of paintings by 100s of artists, and today are the largest independent contemporary art gallery in the north.

Sourcing work not only locally but throughout the world, we are the go to art gallery for emerging and established artists alike and our flexibility and agility keeps our space and proposition continually fresh and ahead of the market which builds trust and learning for our amazingly loyal customers.

We are amazed and thrilled by the remarkable growth the business has experienced since deciding we needed to reinvigorate our offer.

In 2019 we extensively refurbished throughout, with new flooring, lighting, and investment in a street level entrance, giving the gallery an immaculate contemporary look. After restoring the historical cavern an exciting light and airy arty space was “created” downstairs where we hold ‘meet the artist’ events, ‘paint and prosecco’ evenings, ‘art and music’ workshops, ‘wine and beer’ tastings and numerous ‘pop ups’ that bring the place to life in an exciting and ever changing way. Anything goes and we are happy to take risks! Scary stuff financially but we constantly reinvest in customer experience as well as stock!

We won the only award that really matters to us. Voted by our customers and mystery shoppers, the Chester BID customer service award for “best independent retailer” has been proudly displayed for 2 years and that ethos naturally runs through our veins.

Social media is also important for the independent, and for us is all about getting our personality and proposition across. We are visual, informative, and eagerly awaited by our followers and as well as building our brand it now generates sales.

During lockdown we fought to the death, we emphasised our online abilities more heavily than before, putting phone consultations, online chats and video consultations if requested, at the centre of the online buying process.

We switched our selling message to arty ‘facts’, information and getting personal. Virtual curated tours, virtual hanging rooms, an art club loyalty / rewards scheme, online painting workshops, virtual exhibitions, ‘get personal’ artist studio tours, Q&A’s and blogs, free delivery and collection, 0% finance and pre-paid gift vouchers are now the norm. We took those online changes and brought them into our bricks ‘n’ mortar store and are currently trading stronger than ever before.

We learned during lockdown that we can be imaginative, creative, positive, resilient and instantly reactive like only indies can be. Nurturing our staff, our local network, and our customers alike, independents have a uniquely open and giving support structure almost hard-wired in their DNA - that is what makes us special.



“Social media is also important for the independent, and for us is all about getting our personality and proposition across. We are visual, informative, and eagerly awaited by our followers and as well as building our brand it now generates sales.”

Alex Sharp, Owner
Watergate Street Gallery



Powells Jewellers

I am the third generation in our family business. Powells was established by my Grandfather in North Wales in 1968. We opened our first shop in Chester in November 2002, Chester was a natural progression for us, moving to 'the city' from the North Wales seaside towns of Prestatyn and Llandudno.

Initially we offered both new and pre-owned jewellery from the one shop and did well but felt we were limited by the size of the shop. In 2010 we opened our 3 Bridge Street Row shop. We sold vintage and antique on Eastgate Row and new, contemporary jewellery on Bridge Street. With the reinstatement of an old doorway the two premises were linked. This provided us with an easily managed expansion, by employing just one more employee we are able to staff two outlets with different offerings and customer segments/ audiences. This expansion enabled us to grow both in terms of turnover and brand. The move to Chester had exceeded all our expectations.

Powell's top tips

Research

Ensure the market exists for your offering at a sustainable level. Research the competition too – what can you do better than them or what can you do that they don't do at all?

Vision

Having a clear vision gives you something to focus on and work towards this is vital in order to grow your business. Your vision can be split into stages or just be of the desired result, give yourself a realistic timescale and go for it!

In 2018 Lowe & Sons on Bridge Street Row, one of the oldest Jewellers in the country, announced it was to close its doors after 248 years, coincidentally this coincided with my completion of the Goldman Sachs 10,000 small businesses programme. With our shared passion for antiques and craftsmanship my father and I had always admired Lowes, in 2001 it won antiques retailer of the year. We were interested, but how would we make it work? We would not want the three shops to be direct competitors.

After some contemplation we felt we could make it work by separating the vintage and antique element of Powells. Lowes would offer the antiques it had always been known for and Powells would offer the vintage jewellery we had developed a solid customer base for. Since moving to Chester, we have developed into a brand with three shops each having a different target audience and a different offering. The acquisition of Lowes was part of the business growth plan I put together to graduate from the Goldman programme.

Core Values

With your audience/customer and offering/ product/service in mind define your businesses core values and live by them.

Focus

Remaining focused on your core values will make you a stronger business.

Resilience

Starting and running a business is seldom trouble free. Being more resilient is vital to overcome stumbling blocks you may meet along the way.



“Having a clear vision gives you something to focus on and work towards this is vital in order to grow your business.”

Will Powell, Owner
Powells Jewellery

Chez Jules

Is there ever a day when you do not see the beauty of Chester? Rain, hail or shine the city has a very alluring appeal and is a great place to live and work. It also has an excellent balance of trade - tourism, locals and day trippers all help to make Chester a great place to set up a business.

When I opened **Chez Jules** in 1997, Chester had a lot less restaurants than now and those that were opening then, tended to be chain restaurants. We saw an opportunity to open an independent rustic French bistro that appealed to Cestrian's love of authenticity and quality. In 1997 our menu changed daily, everything was fresh and made 'à la maison' - we did not have a freezer. Today, nothing has changed, and we still do not have a freezer!! All produce is sourced locally wherever possible to create imaginative, seasonal daily changing menus using a great local supply network.

Since 1997, more and more restaurants have opened which we have actively encouraged and supported. Independents and food artisans have entered the Chester dining scene and the City has continued to attract passionate restaurateurs and food lovers alike. If you truly believe in what you do and deliver authenticity, quality and value, there is opportunity to succeed here.

The city provides a mix of demographics and customers who really appreciate independent restaurants alongside our more familiar chains. This local support has been key to sustained success and whilst more restaurants have opened so has the appetite for dining out and diversity. Chester also provides an excellent talent pool. The university's popularity has increased student numbers in the city and many foreign nationals are attracted to live in Chester providing a fantastic diversity of people looking for work.

Storyhouse's opening and further investment in the Northgate Development should only further enhance Chester's popularity. The key is quality, most people can open a restaurant, but sustaining growth and delivering consistency year in year out, takes passion, determination, and lots of hard work. Chester is a city where these endeavours can be rewarded, and it is a beautiful place to be.



Jason Ellison's top tips

1 It helps to network effectively in Chester – use local lawyers, accountants, designers etc. if you can.

3 Support your fellow businesses – eat out (elsewhere) – spend in the city – carry shopping bags – it makes a HUGE difference!

2 Get involved – with local support groups like ChesterBID etc.

4 Best way to build a brand is through word of mouth – recommendation – only as good as your last meal still exists – even in a social media frenzied world.



Chester Together Campaign

In March 2020 as the UK approached a national lockdown in reaction to the COVID-19 outbreak, **Chester's Business Improvement District (BID)** launched the **#ChesterTogether** campaign, focused on:

- ▶ The immediate needs of businesses recovery
- ▶ Consumer engagement connecting supply and demand
- ▶ Communication plan with safety and welcome messages to drive spend and footfall



Between 16th March - 31st August 2020 the campaign delivered:

RADIO
6 WEEK PROMOTION WITH
3852
AIRTIME CREDITS FOR THE
CITY CENTRE BROADCAST TO
63,000
LISTENERS

PLAN YOUR VISIT MAP
'KNOW BEFORE YOU GO'
MESSAGES ABOUT
PARKING
QUEUE MANAGEMENT
HAND SANITIZER
FACE COVERING
PEDESTRIANIZED AREAS
& **ONE WAY SYSTEMS**

ADVERTISING
FOUR FULL PAGE ADS IN LOCAL PRESS,
& FOUR PAGE LEAFLET DROP TO
15,500 HOUSEHOLDS

INSTALLATIONS
18 LARGE SCALE VINYL BANNERS
ACROSS THE CITY CENTRE, **DIGITAL POSTERS**
AT CHESTER RACECOURSE AND CHESTER
VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRE

PRINT
SUITE OF POSTERS &
SOCIAL DISTANCING
FLOOR DOTS
FOR BUSINESSES

DIGITAL HIGH STREET MAP
ONLINE MAP WITH LINKS AND INFORMATION ON HOW
TO REMOTELY ACCESS/SPEND WITH CITY CENTRE BUSINESSES

During that same time the campaign's outcomes included:

SOCIAL MEDIA REACHED
975,000+
ORGANICALLY WITH
#CHESTERTOGETHER
USED IN OVER 1000
POSTS AND CREATING
#CHESTERTOGETHER
FACEBOOK GROUP OF
3000 FOLLOWERS

PR
60 PIECES
OF POSITIVE PRESS
COVERAGE INCLUDING
10 RADIO INTERVIEWS
(BBC RADIO
MERSEYSIDE, DEE 106)
2 TV FEATURES
(ITV NEWS, BBC NORTHWEST)

WEBSITE
67,000+
VIEWS ON EXPERIENCECHESTER.CO.UK

FOOTFALL
STEADY INCREASE
PERFORMING
APPROXIMATELY
10% BETTER
THAN THE UK AVERAGE

PARKING
800 FREE SPACES DAILY,
SECURED FOR OVER 4 MONTHS
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH
CHESTER RACECOURSE

Independent and proud

Chester is a city with a long tradition of not giving up; a Roman fortress, a frontier town on the edge of two nations, a civil war strong hold, and now a thriving visitor destination with a long-established reputation for independent retail and hospitality experiences.



We are a proud city, keen to show off our history. We are a welcoming city, always happy to see people come here to live, work, learn, visit and set up new businesses. With a broad catchment area spanning North Wales, Wirral, Liverpool and Manchester, and a much wider audience of national and international tourists, we know people come to us because they are attracted by our city's unique sense of place.

Chester's historic high street and distinctive two tiered shopping system, known as 'The Rows', is set amongst some of the Country's best preserved Roman sites and medieval architecture, with artisan traders thriving alongside national retail and restaurant chains, an award winning market and our internationally acclaimed cultural centre called Storyhouse.

There is also plenty of green space for long walks and fresh air in our glorious 20-acre, Grade II listed, Grosvenor Park, we have the world's oldest racecourse just off our city's historic walls, and you can promenade along the banks of the beautiful River Dee and the meadows - which run elegantly into the heart of our city.

The Council is clear that maintaining and evolving our sense of place, so that we drive growth, footfall and commercial success, is business critical. With a commitment to Climate Change and re-imagining our towns and high streets, the Council continues to make significant investments in major schemes such as the Northgate Development and new market newchester.market; our Heritage High Street Action Zone, the Railway Station and City Gateway upgrades and our city-wide wifi initiative. We know that our role, now more than ever, is to ensure that Chester is a place where businesses can thrive and residents and visitors can enjoy - not just today but for long into our future.

All that's missing is you! Now is the time to start thinking about your business plan and the Council provides a range of services including valuable and supportive regulatory advice and guidance, as well as an experienced team of business support professionals who can help you with creating and growing your independent business in Chester. Please visit www.letstalkbizcw.co.uk for further information. We also work closely with Cheshire and Warrington Growth Hub and the Chamber of Commerce to provide free start-up support and advice.

We would encourage you to visit the City when it's safe to do so, and make use of all of the support the Council and partners such as Chester BID can offer you including introductions to some excellent local business networks.

On behalf of the Council we very much hope you will choose Chester and become part of our proud, unique and independent community!

Councillor Richard Beacham
Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and Growth



"We looked at other cities to open in, having worked in London for many years. Chester was by far the friendliest and most welcoming - and a champion of the independent restaurant scene."

Giacomo Guido, Owner
Stile Napoletano

"Chester's always been a unique indie hub of the north, the city is laid out for the small and esoteric. The rows littered with hidden gems old and new. Step off the main streets into worlds of culture spanning music, clothing, food, drinks and history. It's a little liberal gem in the heart of Cheshire."

Calum Adams, Co-founder
Shrub



"We chose Chester because it has such a vibrant community of independent businesses. In such a short amount of time it has grown and changed in so many ways and we wanted to be part of the ever-evolving Chester family."

The Greenhouse



Brought to you by
Chester's Business Improvement District



Making things happen
in the heart of Chester city centre

www.chesterbid.co.uk



www.experiencechester.co.uk