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accent
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A FORCE TO BE RECKONED WITH!

WELCOME

It's hard to believe that it is time again for the Accent Winter Magazine – which I guess means that we must have been keeping busy!

We have continued to embrace remote working to the full in 2022. We have seen the team at Accent expand across the UK and further afield, with three new developers joining our ranks. This gives our software teams greater flexibility and allows us to balance workloads across projects, but it also means that we have more developers familiar with each project, giving us greater resilience to change.

Alongside the team's expansion, this year has seen us put a greater proportion of our time into training and R&D. This ensures we get the most out of the technology we are using and keep on top of emerging technologies and best practices.

We have continued our focus on digital solutions, with projects for long-standing clients such as Agency Express, Property118 and Spectra Packaging, as well as welcoming new clients such as Trii and ESKA with branding and web development projects.

In this year's round-up, we introduce you to Niroshan and Haydon, we look at a couple of website projects and show off our own Formantic service. We also have several articles written by the team: Dave takes a dive into Google Analytics 4; Karen talks about being heard; Brenton stresses the importance of stress awareness; Haydon engages with the NextMind project, and Craig tells us how to stay connected as a remote worker.

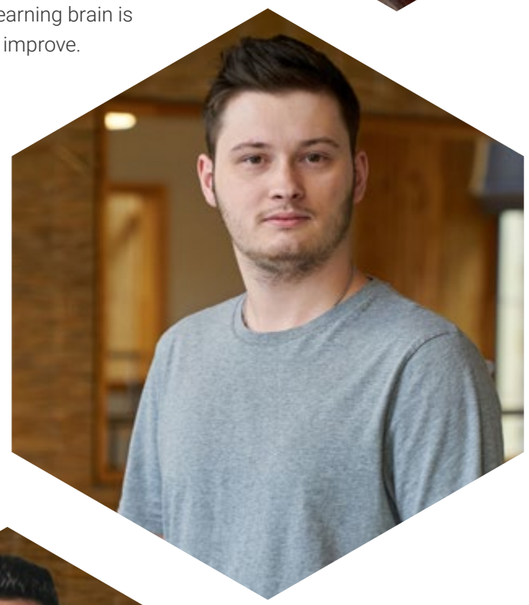
I hope that you enjoy our seasonal cogitations and would like to take this opportunity to wish you and your families a very Happy Christmas and a peaceful and prosperous 2023.

BEST WISHES
GEOFF

HAYDON HAS ARRIVED

A self-confessed programming sponge, Haydon enjoys programming in a multitude of languages, from c# and SQL to Python. His enthusiastic learning brain is always looking to streamline and improve.

Away from the office, Haydon is an avid role-playing gamer, in person playing Warhammer 40,000 and online, experiencing the universes of Final Fantasy XIV and Path of Exile.



JUNIOR DEVELOPER AND AVID GAMER

WELCOME NIROSHAN

Niroshan focuses on .NET. He's fascinated with the idea of human & machine collaboration and building a better future through software development, cloud computing, and data analytics. His analytical problem-solving approach is proving beneficial in developing and optimising applications.

Away from the office, Niroshan can be found on the basketball court or exploring mountains and beaches, observing nature in peace and tranquillity.

.NET DEVELOPER WHO LOVES BASKETBALL

UNDERSTANDING ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSIVITY

ARTICLE BY DAVE

Inclusivity and Accessibility have long since been essential components of the customer experience. They've recently become prominent, changing the focus from the organisation to designing for the people experiencing it.

Whilst similar, inclusive design and accessible design have fundamental differences.

WHAT IS ACCESSIBLE DESIGN?

Accessibility is all about designing to meet users' requirements, including those with disabilities. When creating content, the accessible design ensures everyone has equal access, and that no one is excluded.

By ensuring that your content is accessible, you're showing you intently care about their experience and want to provide a similar experience for all.

For those organisations that care there are laws governing the accessible design, read more about **WCAG 2.1.**

HOW DO YOU CREATE AN INCLUSIVE EXPERIENCE?

Inclusivity is creating content that respects a broad range of users and their various abilities, situations, and backgrounds.

Inclusiveness doesn't specifically address a user issue but instead provides a variety of tools and functionality for the end user to meet their requirements in that given situation. An inclusive experience goes further than Accessibility because it questions whether a user ***can*** and if they ***want*** to use something.

For Accent, inclusive design is all about understanding our audience. For example, we show diversity in our imagery, ensuring the representation of a broader demographic concerning ability, ethnicity and gender. This diversity helps users to relate to the content.

DO THE TWO GO HAND IN HAND?

The differences between Accessibility and Inclusivity are often confused as the two terms are frequently combined in the design world. Understanding how these differ and complement each other is critical to creating the best experience for your users.

An accessible design ensures that everyone can experience the content; however, inclusive design requires you to think about the content itself. Accessibility requires suitability and rationale and is based upon objective, measurable facts such as alternative text, font sizes, browser versions, and contrast ratios. Inclusivity is more sensitive and personal, encouraging you to put yourself into the user's position to understand whether the experience is something they will enjoy or benefit from.

By considering and employing both design practices, you'll create a more well-rounded experience for your audience that feels their desires and needs.

Accent cares deeply about Accessibility and Inclusivity, so contact us if you're looking for help creating accessible and inclusive content that doesn't make your audience feel left out.

BEING HEARD IN A WORLD OF NOISE

ARTICLE BY KAREN

Communication is happening worldwide every second of every day. So how do you make your communication heard and understood within this noise?

My karate sensei recently explained his thoughts about Kumite (the sparring form) as a conversation between opponents. If one side is aggressive, the other backs away, so the ideal is an equal exchange of technique and dialogue. I've recently been thinking about effective communication on the web; essentially, what foundations should every website be built upon?

Communicating a clear message should be the foundation of every website, whether eCommerce, portfolio or blog. Communication fails if an attractive design or animation overtakes a clear message. Everything must balance in harmony and be accessible to everyone.

Consider your audience and how you can best communicate your message; this could be as follows:

TEXT

On a website, your message is most often communicated in text form. Therefore, write your content clearly and concisely with context and effective explanations. Consider the tone of voice and how it applies to your brand; avoid passive sentences and write in an engaging active style. Ask someone from your target audience to read through your work. Finally, use appropriate semantic HTML tags to aid accessibility for all viewers and easy SEO gains.

IMAGES

Images can often communicate faster than words. They can connect to the viewer more honestly, creating a more attractive website design. Consider the consistency of imagery, whether you use commissioned photography, stock images or illustrations. Ultimately, effective image use reinforces the core themes and messages of your written content.

VIDEOS

Where images reinforce your message, videos connect on a deeper level. Successful videos are used in different ways to entice your audience. For example, they could use a simple movement to attract attention, be informative with an interview style, and take your audience through a story that will aid understanding and trustworthiness. As a result, videos will not only retain the audience on the website for longer but also keep them coming back to watch again.

COLOURS

Colours conjure many different connotations and are a language all their own. Colours are a subtle way of communicating your message.

"Colours are the mother tongue of the subconscious." (Carl Jung)

It has been shown that colour has emotion-altering qualities. In marketing, colour choice can influence a customer's perception of brand personality. Pantone's Colour of the Year 2022, 'Very Peri', sits in the centre of the purple hue. Purple is a sensory-social colour and suggests warmth, sophistication and power.

STYLE

Establishing a consistent style for your website and branding needs to be appropriate for your message, preferred customer and sector. A successful style helps to communicate to your customers; your website was created for them, and you're a business they want to spend money with that they trust.

Communicate clearly and express your brand, as every visitor is different. Remember, it's your website. Content is king; without compelling content, your website will be dull and largely ignored.

THE WHAT AND THE WHY OF GOOGLE ANALYTICS 4

ARTICLE BY DAVE

Despite Google Analytics 4 (GA4) being around for the last three years, many users haven't had the time to understand the new interface or why it needed to change. In addition, widespread privacy concerns with the current Google Universal Analytics (UA) have forced Google to set a date of July 2023 to switch off UA.

The next generation of Google Analytics GA4 uses a privacy-first approach to recording information about website and application visitors to ensure better compliance with ever-tightening privacy regulations.

WHY UPGRADE?

Businesses have relied on insights from Google Analytics for over a decade, understanding user engagement and online performance data to make informed decisions. Whilst GA4 provides similar insights to UA, Google completely overhauled the application meaning its data will not be migrated from the old platform.

In 2018 the introduction of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) meant businesses were forced to take privacy seriously and get a better understanding of how they handled user data.

GA4 is Google's response to a future where users no longer want to store third-party trackers on their devices. With the help of AI, Google claims to allow businesses to continue tracking user engagement using machine learning to "complete missing data" for users who choose not to be tracked.

KEY DIFFERENCES

Google first introduced Universal Analytics in 2012, intending to provide a more reliable approach to Google Analytics users for collecting data. But unfortunately, the platform is still built on outdated foundations incompatible with today's web.

GA4 is an overhaul of Universal Analytics. It's built to track complete user journeys across multiple devices, allowing it to follow user sessions as they move between laptops, mobiles, apps, tablets, and other devices.

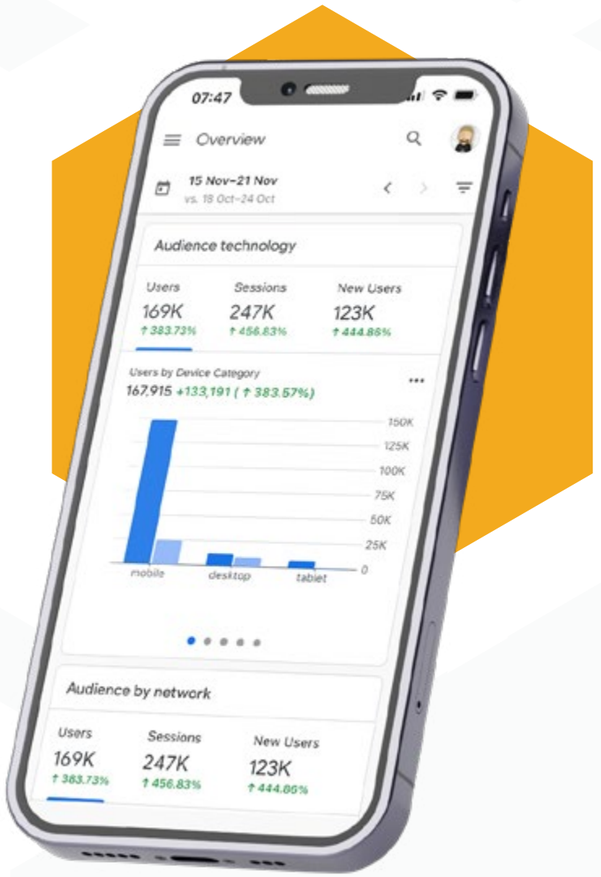
As the methods for gathering user data have changed, it's unlikely your traffic data will match up between the two versions of Google Analytics, which is why there's no easy way to migrate from Universal Analytics to GA4. The same goes for other metrics, including bounce rate and conversions.

SUMMARY

Have you been putting off switching to GA4? Now is the time to start. Even if you're not ready to leap, you can run the UA and GA4 analytics platforms in parallel. This will give you at least six months of GA4 data when the UA service is shut down.

Google Analytics can be a dark art, but GA4 represents a significant upgrade to the most comprehensive website and application analytics platforms. If you want to learn more about GA4 and use the new features to maximise your online goals, you should enrol on the **Google Analytics training programme.**

Confused? Not to worry, we will be in touch to discuss updating your website but feel free to call us for more information.



Google Analytics 4

MOBILE FIRST, DESKTOP READY

EASTERN SHOTOKAN KARATE ASSOCIATION

SPOTLIGHT
ESKA

ESKA are East Anglia's largest Shotokan association. Their previous website needed reorganising and simplifying, and we've worked hard to put the needs of the students first, as well as inspire potential members.

MOBILE-FIRST, DESKTOP READY

As 80% of their students use mobile-first, this was a primary consideration in the user experience. We've collected all the areas the students need into a specific members area and removed unnecessary steps to get to the information they most commonly need, including class timetable and booking. Under the hood, templates have been changed and optimised for mobile and media delivery has also been optimised.

BLAZING FAST WEBSITE WITH 100% GREEN HOSTING

The website runs from our servers hosted in a Cambridgeshire data centre that uses renewable energy supplies with no compromise on performance. When independently tested, the ESKA website runs 90% cleaner than other tested websites as it has minimal energy requirements to load the website from the front-end browser and the back-end server.

CUSTOM WORDPRESS BLOCK BASED THEME

Accent created a bespoke theme with very few plugins, none requiring third-party subscriptions. This allowed us to create a much cheaper website to maintain than your average WordPress configuration.

Additionally, the bespoke theme contains over 150 custom-built WordPress blocks that allow control over the content without fear of breaking the website's design for the content authors at ESKA.

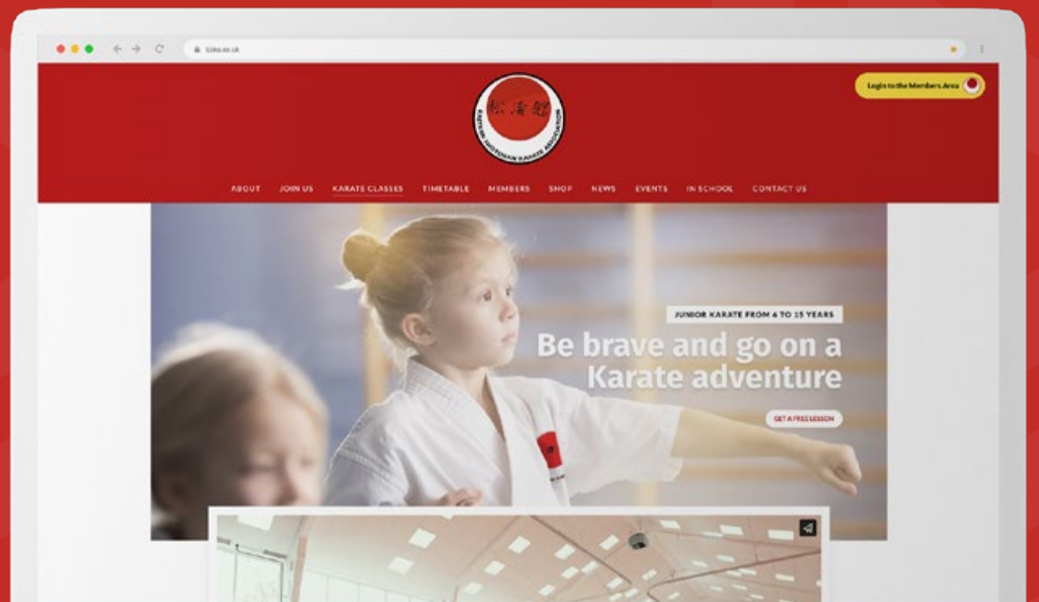
MOVING PORTRAITS

Martial arts can be challenging to photograph and capture the feeling and deliverance of movement and technique. Elevating the Sensei photos from static to dynamic moving portraits on the new ESKA website, the Sensei's spring into action on mobile and desktop as you scroll over their profile, demonstrating a signature move!

WOOCOMMERCE APIs

Due to the differing requirements of the prospective students compared with the existing members, Accent created a separate Members' website to deal with Events and the Shop for martial arts supplies. A separate theme was used, again using the existing WordPress blocks functionality which avoided the usage of heavy and expensive page builder plugins.

The shop is powered by WooCommerce, the most popular eCommerce software in the world, for which Accent developed a bespoke API endpoint that allowed us to link dynamically to products stored in the external Members Shop. This allowed us to show special offers and product details from a single install of WooCommerce across two websites.



trii SENSORY START-UP JOURNEY

SPOTLIGHT
TRII

BRANDING

When a new company comes to us for branding, we consider the big picture. Your brand is the promise, the big idea, the reputation, and so much more than a logo.

Trii is a solid body care range of washes, exfoliators and moisturisers designed to take you on a sensory journey and enhance your ‘me time’ in a busy world. Their brand values - simple, honest, calm, sustainable, minimal, and contemporary - needed to be reflected across all elements of the business, from logo to photography and website design to packaging.

PRODUCT VISUALISATION (3D, PHOTOGRAPHY)

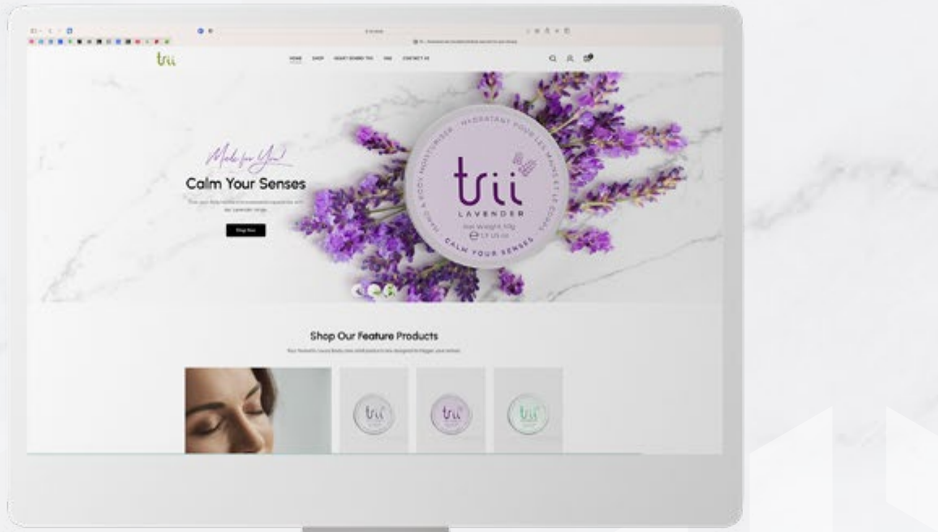
A mixture of 3D visuals and photography was used to bring the packaging to life, ensuring the products were seen at their best with no compromise.

PACKAGING (SCENT DESIGN)

Good packaging tells a story, and we had to ensure the packaging was consistent with the brand values. The design needed to work across many scents and promote a clean and simple sensory experience that is part of your daily routine.

WORDPRESS WEBSITE

WooCommerce is the most popular eCommerce software and is a plugin for WordPress, the most popular CMS in the world. WordPress + WooCommerce allows total ownership over the website, is flexible and scalable, and easily integrates with external accounting and fulfilment services. Accent developed and configured the website to prepare the WooCommerce platform for the rapid growth of traffic and orders in line with the Trii business strategy to ensure their big ambitions become a reality.



The Accent team speaks WordPress fluently; our priority is maintaining themes and plugins and providing fast, knowledgeable support. The support for the website doesn’t stop when it’s live. Training and advice are given on an ongoing basis to ensure Trii can make educated choices in the future maintenance and development of the website.

SECURE

Using state-of-the-art independent WordPress-tuned application firewalls, threats are blocked before reaching the hosted website. Vulnerabilities to plugins are proactively reported and patched.

Made for you!

INTRODUCING FORMANTIC - FORM NIRVANA

SPOTLIGHT
DAVE

Formantic is a secure web-based form builder *that makes it easy to create secure forms and collect essential data.*

Formantic is the brain-child of the Accent team who oversee its growth and development because we believe paperwork shouldn't slow you down. We're dedicated to **making online data collection as effortless as possible**, allowing you to build a better workflow while building your business.

Accent is offering the Formantic service to all its clients for submitting web and app forms — no programming or backend scripting is required. Simply, connect your web/app form to Formantic, and we will take care of storage, spam filtering, and email notification.

formantic

BUILD THE FORM YOU NEED IN MINUTES

Formantic comes with many benefits, including:

• Create professional-looking forms with no coding using Formantic's Online Form Builder. Then style your forms with your logo, fonts, and colours.

• The Formantic system hosts and secures your form data, so you avoid having the technical and security overhead of forms within your website or app.

• Freedom and control over your forms away from your existing website or app solution.

• Machine learning Anti-Spam works hard in the background to ensure genuine enquires reach your Inbox.

• Data will only be kept as long as it needs to. Auto purging of submissions is designed to complement your existing data protection policies.

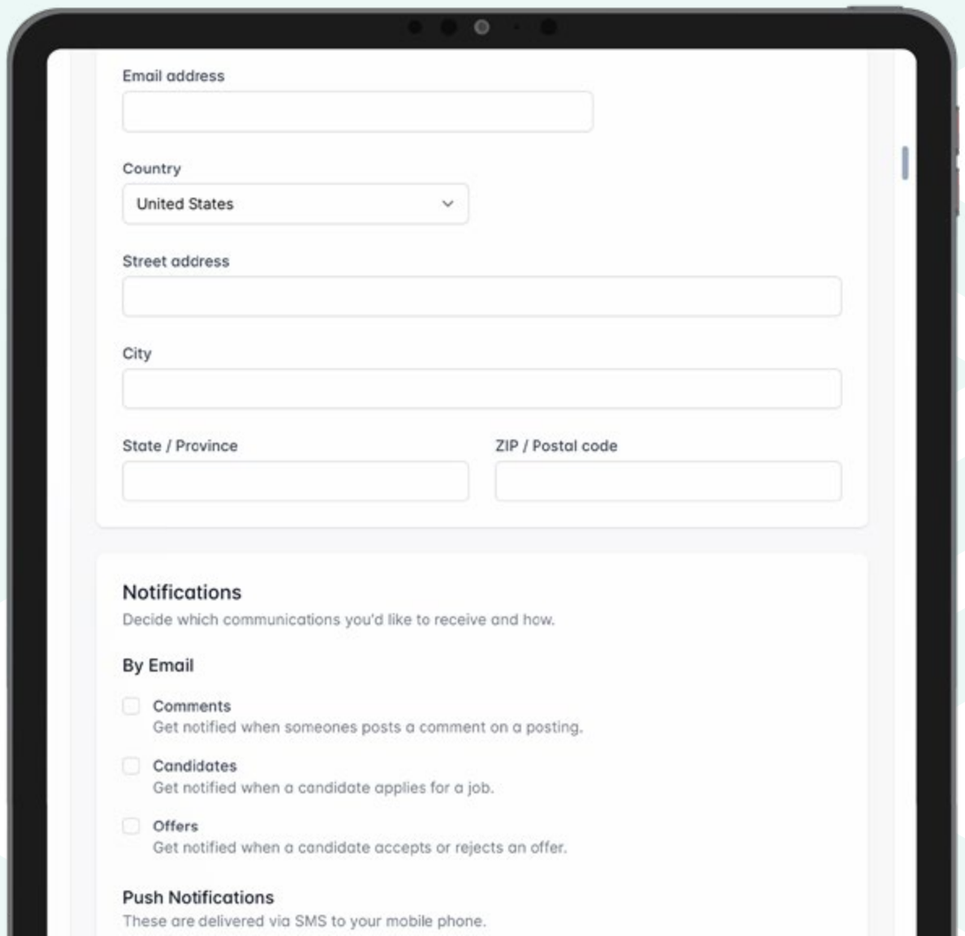
ONE INBOX TO RULE THEM ALL

Stop cluttering your Inbox; use ours and delegate who gets notified of new submissions. With the Formatic Inbox, you collect submissions from all your Formantic forms allowing you to access the data securely without the unnecessary copying of that data to multiple external inboxes.

START FREE

Do you want to register your first form? This is how it works: Complete the Registration form on the Formantic website. Then, we will create a free user account and send you a message with the activation link.

Call Accent for more information, and join us on the journey to form Nirvana.



SOCIAL MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS

HIGHLIGHTS BY BRENTON

Twice weekly, we post on our social media channels. We like to think this gives more of an insight into the personality of Accent, the beating heart of the company, if you will. We curate a range of stories, showcasing new and old work, social musings, or creativity and inspiration. We hope there's something you find engaging, and we look forward to seeing you there!

Please give us a thumbs-up on the following social media:

THE ART OF FOCUS

ARTICLE BY HAYDON

Technology has been a massive part of my life which I've always taken an interest in. Recently I discovered a project in development called NextMind, which looks to explore how we can interact with the software we develop and use daily.

NextMind is an innovative leap into the human mind's power and what it can achieve. It uses cutting-edge AI to translate your brain activity into digital commands, which allow us to interact with visual interfaces in real time.

It does this by augmenting visual objects with a NeuroTag, a faint overlay optimised for the visual cortex and uses these to identify compatible software for the NextMind kit. The Sensor then uses non-invasive EEG (electroencephalogram) technology to detect signals from your brain to be decoded by the software.

Image credit: NextMind

These signals are then fed into NextMinds machine learning algorithms and decoded to recognise what's in your active visual focus. Once the algorithm determines your focus, the selected object receives your command via the NeuroTag and executes the command.

This technology has already been used to create an alien fighting game where you use your brain to defeat the enemies instead of the typical weapons or abilities, and it's been integrated into an intelligent home system to allow the users to interact with their entire house to turn lights off or change the channel on the TV.

I'm looking forward to seeing how this new technology develops and have signed up for a software development kit so I can get hands-on with the future of interface.

Watch this space for exciting developments.

STRESS AWARENESS AND MANAGEMENT

ARTICLE BY BRENTON

As remote working has become the norm for many, including Accent, mental well-being can be challenging to manage through the disconnection of a computer monitor. That's why it's essential to stay connected, build resilience and reduce stress.

Stress is personal to the individual and is defined as when a situation - pressure or change exceeds our coping abilities without adequate recovery. Stress can occur after the accumulation of life-changing events or when there's a change to an everyday routine. In turn, this has an impact on our resilience. The question is how to handle this and what steps we can take to reduce it.

When it comes to effective stress management, it's essential to focus on several factors within your control. Here are Accent's nine tips to help you make time, relax and de-stress.

1. LOAD UP ON HEALTHIER EATING:

One survey-based study found decreased rates of stress & anxiety and a better mood in those eating a vegan/vegetarian vs omnivorous diet. However, if you can't let go of meat, try adding wholegrains (such as quinoa and brown rice) or oatmeal to your diet. It's also good news for chocolate lovers, as daily eating of small amounts of flavonoid-rich dark chocolate reduces stress.

2. GET ADEQUATE SLEEP TO BETTER HANDLE THE DAY:

Improving sleep quality helps reduce amygdala activation, which is linked to the fight or flight response.

3. GOING FOR A STROLL OR MODERATE EXERCISE:

Exercising drives up the activation of the parasympathetic nervous system releasing feel-good chemicals. It's a great distraction from the stresses in your life and can also improve social connectivity.

4. LISTEN TO SOOTHING AND UPBEAT TUNES:

Research has shown that listening to music can reduce anxiety, blood pressure and pain & improve sleep quality, mood, mental alertness, and memory.

Try Accent's Playlist

5. ENJOY A CHANGE OF SCENERY IN NATURE:

Getting amongst nature generates many positive emotions, such as calmness, joy, and creativity and can facilitate concentration. Nature connectedness also lowers depression and anxiety levels.

6. PUSH OUT THAT LAUGHTER WITH SOME COMEDY:

When we laugh and smile, cortisol levels decrease. Cortisol is the stress hormone, so lower levels are better for mental health and stress reduction. Laughter, therefore, increases our stress resilience.

7. SURROUND YOURSELF WITH OTHERS WHO HELP LIFT YOUR SPIRIT:

Community gives us a sense of connection, enabling us to feel accepted and supported. Laughing and chatting with others temporarily distracts us from our worries and ultimately reduces loneliness, enhancing our mental health and well-being.

8. SPEND TIME WITH YOUR PETS:

Interacting with animals decreases levels of cortisol and lower blood pressure. Other studies have found that animals can reduce loneliness, increase feelings of social support, and boost your mood.

9. CHALLENGE YOUR BRAIN:

Hobbies bring a sense of fun and freedom to life that can help minimise chronic stress. Those who feel overwhelmed in their job benefit from hobbies as they provide an outlet for stress and something to look forward to after a stressful day.

KEEPING CONNECTED REMOTELY

ARTICLE BY CRAIG

In the recent global pandemic (sorry to mention the "p" word!), a lot's changed in so many ways, which goes for how we work at Accent. We've gone from a vibrant studio and team mainly based in Norwich to a diverse and exciting team that spans the country and the globe.

As those of you who I've worked with personally over the years may well know, I've worked from home in Kent since I moved here over ten years ago, so in that regard, Accent was ahead of the remote working trend! This has left me in the unique position of knowing what does & does not work for remote working.

So, let me share how I keep connected to both the Accent team and the wider tech community; I'm sure much of this can be applied to your remote working settings.

INTERNAL PRESENTATIONS & KNOWLEDGE SHARING

A team is full of individuals with different skill sets, interests, and specialities, it's certainly the case at Accent, and I wouldn't want it any other way! As a result, coming together to share that knowledge always helps us connect and strengthen our knowledge. Often, one person will give an informal presentation or demonstration, and we'll all discuss it together. It always results in good conversations, and you learn a great deal.

My advice: Encourage all to share, even if it's just 10 minutes explaining a concept, process, or product they like.

"PAIRING UP" & WORKING TOGETHER

Whilst gathering as a group is all well and good, sometimes that's not what is needed. Sometimes, it's just a case that you need a hand, the second pair of eyes, or some advice on something that's come across your desk. That is where it's great to pair up with someone else, to get a draw upon both people's experience. For me, this tends to consist of short, focused discussions and more formal pair-working sessions.

My advice: Depending on the situation, try and book time in advance, even for the more minor activities, as the others may have their priorities.

VIRTUAL-SOCIAL

We all perhaps got a little fed up with the "Zoom quiz" when the lockdown was a thing, but with a diverse remote team, these kinds of virtual-social activities do have a place. Taking time out to join together without a work-focussed agenda can help break down barriers which be harder to get around when you're talking in purely a work sense.

My advice: find activities that work for your team (Mario Kart was a big hit here!), perhaps settle on a regular timeslot and don't force participation; if someone doesn't want to participate, that's cool too.

IN PERSON TEAM MEETUPS

As much as a Zoom video call is massively better than a phone call, getting together with your team in person is even better. Our team tries to get together regularly to take a day out from the daily workflow to discuss the broader concepts and plan for the future. It's always an enjoyable and productive day!

My advice: To get the most out of it, there needs to be a plan and a set agenda; share this beforehand. Oh, and don't forget to plan for breaks, as it can be a full-on day!

CONFERENCES

A conference allows you to get fully immersed in a subject for a day or two, listen to talks, and participate in workshops on a subject. At Accent, we've been to plenty of tech-focused conferences over the years, but also some of those relating to our partners' industries; both are great and valuable.

My advice: Despite the cost an in-person nearly always trumps a virtual one for overall experience, but a virtual conference gives you the flexibility to fit things around your schedule.

OPEN-SOURCE PROJECT COLLABORATION

Keeping things tech-specific here, but Accent loves to support open-source software, which comes back to the principle of sharing innovations with others worldwide. Platforms such as GitHub provide users with a place to store their code and apps and an entire ecosystem for collaboration and communication with like-minded individuals worldwide.

My advice: Every contribution is essential, no matter how small, sharing a project, reporting an issue, or making a suggestion, so start small and see where it goes!

MEETUPS

No matter what industry you're in, wherever you are, it's highly likely someone is already running a regular meetup to get together and share knowledge, thoughts & ideas about a subject with like-minded people. They range from casual discussions in a pub to formal presentations with invited speakers. Both are great, and both bring their own merits, but in either scenario, it's always a fulfilling experience.

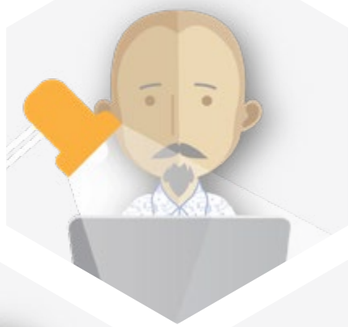
My advice: Attend as locally as possible but travel a little further for those you think are worth it.

CONCLUSIONS

I've gone through many ways we work together and try to connect as a team at Accent and ways and places to keep connected more widely. Look into what works for you, try things out, and see what suits you and gives you value!

In short, nothing beats connecting in person. Still, you can come close by encouraging good knowledge-sharing practices, getting together as a team, and supplementing them with broader social-professional endeavours. See what works for you!

HOME WORKING TECH N TIPS



Greater flexibility with my time; I can walk the dog during the day and finish work after dinner.

Geoff

A Plantronics headset allows me to have clear conversations regardless of the noise around me.

Dave

MacBook Pro M1 laptop is powerful and allows me to have dual screens.

Abdul

A 900mbps internet connection, which I can justify by working from home.

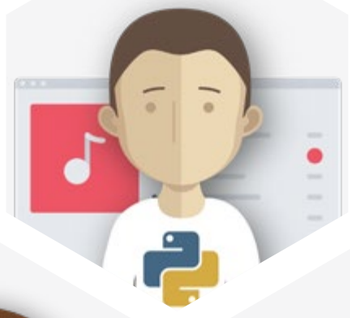
Craig

Height adjustable laptop stand, which improves my posture and relieves neck strain.

Niroshan

Cuddling Apollo, my Ragdoll cat; he's a great stress reliever.

Karen



Listening to my own choice of music.

Stuart

To be able to work with a fantastic team across the world whilst being with my family and friends.

Reza

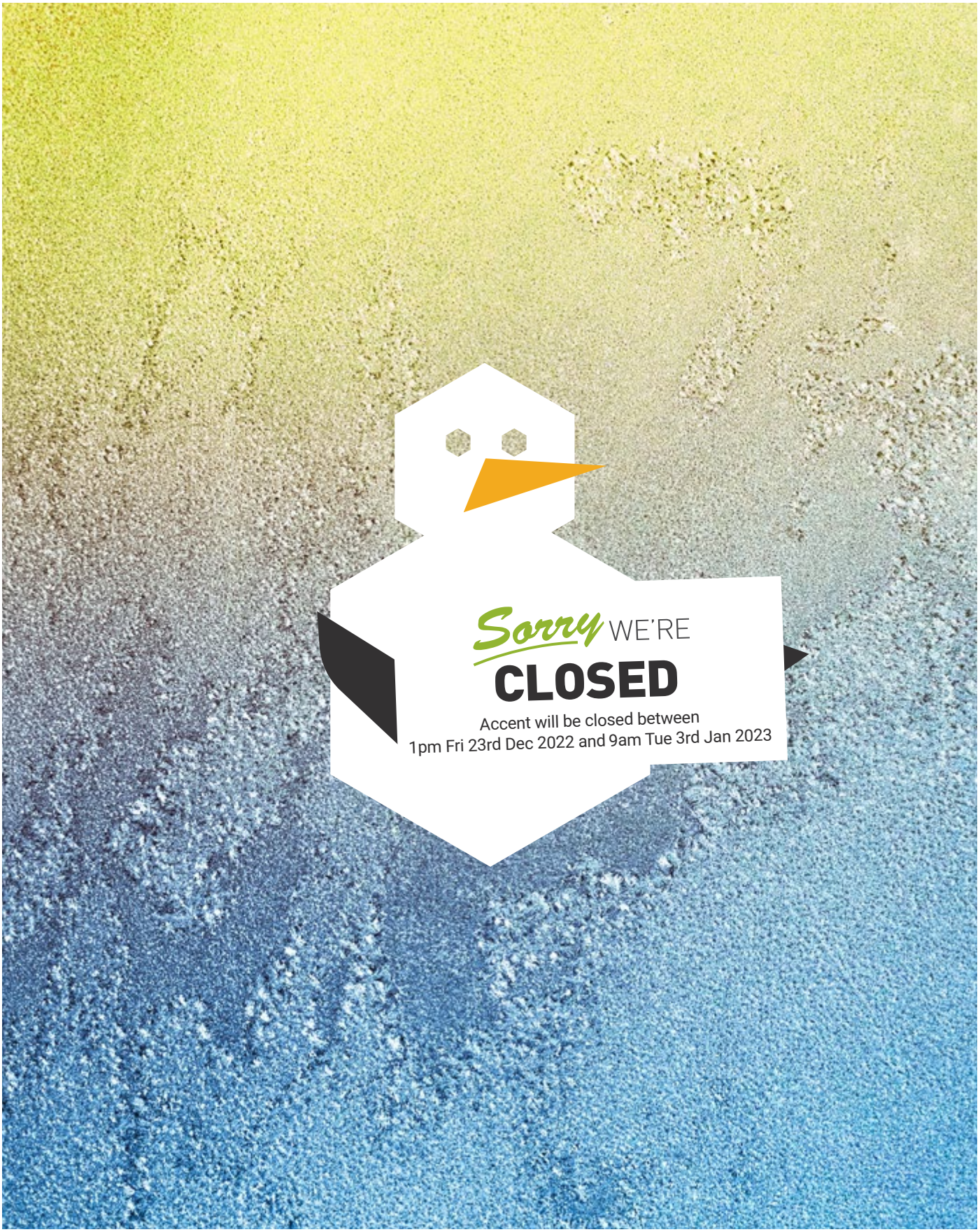
USB cup warmer and a nice office chair make working from home comfier.

Nick

More screen space working with 2 x 27" iMacs.

Brenton

2023 HERE WE COME



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CREATIVE DIGITAL SOLUTIONS