

Summer
2008

National First for Pitstop



Pitstop's Jenny Craig with Prime's Jamie Skelding

Have you ever wondered what goes on when your car is serviced or MOT'd?

Do you trust your local garage to do what they say they are going to do, at the price they have quoted?

For the majority of us the answers to the above questions are no!

Well, one of Prime's clients, Pitstop, (a leading Warwickshire Car Care Centre), has come up with an innovative idea to allay the fears of its customers. It is launching a service whereby customers can access Pitstop's website and actually see their MOTs being conducted live on screen.

Jamie Skelding, a Prime partner commented: "We believe they are the first MOT centre in the country to install web cams in their MOT bays. Pitstop is a fantastic example of how businesses should look at positively differentiating themselves. By building long-term relationships with their customers they look set for a profitable future."

Jenny Craig, Pitstop's managing director said: "Pitstop isn't a regular "garage", we've put the customer at the heart of everything we do. From the look of our premises, to the service we offer our clients, we aim to provide a better customer experience. Allowing our customers to actually see their MOTs being conducted demonstrates that they can trust us!"

Prime Review

- helping your business work for you

Prime advises Reilly & Co Solicitors on acquisition.

Reilly & Co is a general practice law firm based in Hall Green, Birmingham (only 5 minutes from the office of Prime Solihull).

The practice was founded by Kevin Reilly in January 2008. Kevin had a vision to establish a law firm that strived to be different, that broke down the traditional barriers between clients and solicitors and offered a modern and efficient legal service.

In March 2008 the opportunity arose to acquire the firm of Williams Freeman & Lloyd, (a well established legal practice which has long served the communities of Hall Green, Shirley and Solihull).

Reilly & Co appointed Kevin Johns, (a partner at Prime) to access the financial viability of the transaction and to conduct the due diligence on the deal.

Kevin Reilly comments: "Reilly and Co had been actively looking for acquisitive opportunities that would allow us to strengthen the breadth and depth of the services which we could offer our clients. We approached Kevin due to his specific expertise in the legal sector, and asked him to ascertain the viability of this transaction. We are delighted that the deal has gone through!"



Karen Bissell and Kevin Reilly with Prime's Kevin Johns (Centre)

Kevin Johns comments: "The acquisition is a perfect fit with Reilly & Co's strategy to offer a comprehensive range of legal services to clients in the Solihull and South Birmingham area. I am delighted for Reilly & Co, with their focus on client service, comprehensive expertise coupled with their approachability they look set for great success!"

PARTNERS



Morgan Davies



Kevin Johns



John McDonald



Laurence Moore



John Osborne



Jamie Skelding

Casualties in ER

The adverse effect of the abolition of taper relief for capital gains tax (CGT) purposes for disposals on or after 6 April 2008 has been partially relieved by the introduction of Entrepreneurs' Relief. The use of the abbreviation ER is an unfortunate link to accidents and it is already clear that there are going to be casualties in this area.

The effects of ER

The relief works by reducing gains on qualifying assets by 4/9ths, leaving the balance of the gain taxable at 18%. By an amazing coincidence this gives a tax rate of 10%, the effective higher rate of CGT if an asset had qualified for full business taper relief.

ER may be available on gains of up to £1m over an individual's lifetime starting from 6 April 2008, so the impact of ER will be diminished once that limit is passed, whether on a single disposal or on a cumulative basis. The maximum ER which will be available is £444,444 (£1m x 4/9ths) and this means that the effective rate of CGT will climb towards, but will never actually reach, 18% for gains exceeding £1m.

The impact on commercial property

One particular area of concern is where an individual owns the premises from which a trader conducts their business. This might be their own business or a business run by an unconnected third party. Under the taper relief rules the gain on the disposal may well have qualified for some business asset taper. Under ER the disposal may not qualify for relief at all.

If the property has been used by the individual's own company and they sell the property at the same time as they sell the shares in the company, then ER may be available. A similar result may arise if the property has been used by a partnership of which the owner is a member. In either case, the sale of the property must occur as part of the individual's withdrawal from the business carried on by the company/partnership. In both cases the impact of ER may be heavily diluted if the property has been rented to the company/partnership at a market value rent.

In situations where the property has been let to unconnected parties ER will simply not be available and the full gain will be taxed at 18%. Without the benefit of indexation, which is also withdrawn for disposals by individuals and trustees on or after 6 April 2008, there could be a major increase in the potential CGT due on any future sale.

There are now different issues to consider if you are planning to purchase new premises for your business and, as well as the CGT issues, it is also important to consider the availability of Business Property Relief for inheritance tax purposes.

We are happy to advise you on these matters. Contact Sarah Nickols in Coventry on 024 7655 4310 or Jan Hornby in Solihull on 0121 711 2468.



Car - fully does it

Q Do you run your own business?

Q Does your business own cars?

Q Are you, your spouse or any of your family members employees or office holders in the business?

If you can answer yes to these three questions, then you need to be aware of the benefit in kind that can arise on the provision of an employer provided car, more commonly referred to as the 'company car'.

A car benefit can arise where:

- a car is made available
- to an employee or office holder (low paid employees may be exempt)
- or to a member of their family or household
- by reason of the employment and
- is available for private use.

As you can see, the rules are specific and HMRC interpret them very widely. For example, HMRC have been known to argue that a car placed in storage, with no tax disc, insured third party only and with no wheels was available for private use – it could be cherished and admired by the employee! Mind you, it was a Porsche!

Not only did HMRC wish to assess the value of the car for several years, they also wanted to tax the provision of private fuel for the car paid for by the company. The potential bill ran into tens of thousands of pounds.

There are a number of situations where no car benefit charge will arise in respect of a car that is made available and actually used. These are where the car:

- is one that the employee is specifically prohibited from using for private purposes and which is not so used; or
- satisfies all the conditions to be treated as a pool car; or

- is used by a disabled employee under certain conditions; or
- is an emergency vehicle used under certain conditions.

The most common argument to try and escape from a potential charge is that the car in question is a pool car. However, in order for this argument to hold water, the car needs to satisfy **all** the following conditions:

- it is available to, and actually used by, more than one employee;
- it is not ordinarily used by any one of them to the exclusion of the others;
- any private use of the car by any of the employees is merely incidental to its business use; and
- it is not normally kept overnight on or in the vicinity of the home of any of the employees.

It is not impossible to satisfy these tests but HMRC would expect to see proof. As HMRC say, whether the conditions are met is a question of fact. Particularly useful is a full mileage log, indicating the date of the journey, the driver, the mileage of the car at the start and end of the journey and where the journey was to.

As you can see, the company car rules are very widely drawn and easy to fall foul of. Contact Sarah Nickols in Coventry on 024 7655 4310 or Jan Hornby in Solihull on 0121 711 2468 if you would like to discuss these rules and policies in more detail.

Illegal working changes

On 29 February 2008, the government introduced changes to the requirements which employers need to satisfy in order to avoid penalties and/or imprisonment for employing illegal migrants.

From this date the Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act 2006 increased the civil penalty which can be imposed on an employer to a maximum of £10,000 for every illegal worker employed in the UK. It also introduced a new criminal offence of knowingly employing an illegal worker, with a maximum penalty of two years in prison and/or an unlimited fine.

An employer can avoid both a civil penalty and committing a criminal offence by checking, on recruitment, that workers have a right to work in the UK but to obtain this protection the employer must make the checks before the individual starts work.

There are two lists of acceptable documents for checking identity, similar to the lists which employers have used since 1997.

- List A contains items, such as a British passport, which have no time limits on working in the UK and which indicate that the person has an ongoing entitlement to work in the UK.
- List B sets out a list of documents which carry restrictions on the amount of time individuals will be able to spend in the UK.

A significant change is that employers will have to carry out annual checks for those workers whose documents appear on List B, such as work permit holders.

Obviously, the changes to the rules are substantial and you may wish to implement new procedures to deal with them. If you have any questions about the new rules, please see the detailed guidance at www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/employers or get in touch with us to discuss how they might affect your business.



Non residence - the new maths

Those who wish to achieve the status of being not resident in the UK have, amongst other issues, to be aware of the time they spend in the UK in a tax year. If they spend more than 183 days in the UK in any tax year then they will be treated as resident here. Spending on average more than 90 days a tax year in the UK (measured over a rolling four year period) may also present a problem.

Old rules

The common question that is asked in situations like this is 'what is a day?' In the past, HMRC adopted an approach that said that they would normally ignore days of arrival and departure. This has meant that regular visitors back to the UK could discount two days on every trip.

Let's take James as an example. He works full time for a company in France but he likes to come home each weekend to visit his family and, in addition, he always takes a couple of weeks holiday at home. In the tax year 2007/08 he was home for 49 weekends (Friday to Sunday) and also had 10 weekdays in the UK. He will have to count 49 Saturdays (each Friday and Sunday will not count because they are days of arrival and departure) plus 10 other days, giving him a total day count of 59 days.

New rules

HMRC have changed the rules from 6 April 2008, admittedly not as severely as they had originally indicated, but still enough to cause James and others like him to look closely at their situation. Under the new rules, any day where an individual is in the UK at midnight will generally count as a day of presence. (The original proposal was to have both days of arrival and departure counting as UK days.)

This means that if James continues his visits on the same basis, he will now find that two days each weekend will count, because both Friday and Saturday will be days spent in the UK at midnight. He will find that he has 108 days counting – not initially a problem but if the pattern continued he would have some difficulty meeting the 90 day average. He may therefore want to reconsider his pattern of visits.

Anyone who is regularly moving in and out of the UK will find the new rules a headache. The more visits they make, the bigger the problem, because an additional day may count each time. It is also important to keep a very careful record of movements in and out of the UK, so that if HMRC want to see evidence in support of a claim for non residence, it can be supplied. Whilst this may seem tedious, the time and effort spent could save real aggravation later on if enquiries are made.

Be careful

This article only features on one particular facet of the non residency rules, how to count a day! Non residency is an area that HMRC are currently very interested in and you may wish to talk to us about their current approach.

NMW changes

The National Minimum Wage (NMW) will rise to £5.73 (£5.52) an hour in October 2008.

The hourly rate for 18 to 21 year olds will increase to £4.77 (£4.60) and for 16 and 17 year olds to £3.53 (£3.40) an hour.

HMRC have an ongoing programme of targeted enforcement. The sectors currently subject to special attention include hairdressers, childcare providers and the hotel industry.

Please do get in touch if you have any concerns in this area.



Companies Act 2006 update

The phased implementation of the Companies Act 2006 (the Act) continues and at the time of going to print six commencement orders, which bring the sections of the new Act into force, had been published.

The landmark implementation date of 6 April 2008 has now passed. This saw a number of important sections of the new Act that relate to accounts and reports and audit come into force. We have been busy deciphering the detail of the latest changes and there are a number of matters that may be of particular interest to you.

New size limits - is your company small or medium-sized?

Higher limits that determine whether a company can benefit from certain exemptions have been introduced. They apply to accounting periods beginning on or after 6 April 2008 and are as follows:

Individual company limits	Small company limits	Medium-sized company limits
Turnover not more than	£6.5m (£5.6m)	£25.9m (£22.8m)
Balance sheet total not more than	£3.26m (£2.8m)	£12.9m (£11.4m)
Number of employees not more than	50 (50)	250 (250)

Group limits	Small group limits	Medium-sized group limits
Net turnover not more than	£6.5m (£5.6m)	£25.9m (£22.8m)
Gross turnover not more than	£7.8m (£6.72m)	£31.1m (£27.36m)
Net balance sheet total not more than	£3.26m (£2.8m)	£12.9m (£11.4m)
Gross balance sheet total not more than	£3.9m (£3.36m)	£15.5m (£13.68m)
Number of employees not more than	50 (50)	250 (250)

These limits are important as they determine whether a company can benefit from the preparation of simpler accounts, file abbreviated accounts on the public record at Companies House and qualify for audit exemption.

Higher group limits - but will you need to prepare group accounts?

Importantly for medium-sized groups, the exemption from the preparation of group accounts has been abolished under the new Act, so those affected should pay particular attention to the new higher limits.

Don't be late!

Proposals to increase the penalties associated with late filing of accounts at Companies House have also been finalised. The increases will be introduced from 1 February 2009 and if accounts are filed late under the new Act in two successive years the penalties will be doubled.

Length of delay, measured from the date the accounts are due:	Private company		Public company	
	Current	New	Current	New
Up to 1 month	£100	£150	£500	£750
1 to 3 months	£100	£375	£500	£1,500
3 to 6 months	£250	£750	£1,000	£3,000
6 to 12 months	£500	£1,500	£2,000	£7,500
More than 12 months	£1,000	£1,500	£5,000	£7,500

Remember that the new Act also shortens the filing deadline to nine months from the year end for private companies and to six months for public limited companies, with effect for accounting periods beginning on or after 6 April 2008. That will be April 2009 year ends and onwards for most.

The demise of the company secretary?

The law no longer requires private companies to have a company secretary, although they may continue to have one if they wish. Many of the tasks that the company secretary performed remain and directors will have to ensure that these are still completed.

It is worth reiterating that because of the way that many of these sections of the Act are being implemented (for accounting periods beginning on or after 6 April 2008), you may not see the full effects of some of these changes until April 2009 year ends and onwards.

Please contact us if you would like to discuss any of these changes in more detail.

Budget round up

Alistair Darling presented his first Budget on Wednesday 12 March 2008. The main Budget proposals included:

- plans to stop the tax savings available to businesses by

'income shifting' were delayed for one year

- the annual charge on non-domiciles has now been introduced but some relaxations have been made to the original proposals

- the introduction of a flat rate of CGT for individuals of 18% and a new Entrepreneurs' Relief
- a significant change in inheritance tax relief for spouses and civil partners.

We have provided more detail on some of these announcements in the newsletter but if you would like to discuss any of these issues further, please do get in touch.



29 Warwick Road, Coventry, CV1 2ES
 DX: 11221 Coventry 1
 Tel: 024 7622 0208
 Fax: 024 7622 1065
 Email: coventry@primeaccountants.co.uk

Marlborough House, Warwick Road,
 Solihull, West Midlands, B91 3DA
 Tel: 0121 711 2468
 Fax: 0121 711 1701
 Email: solihull@primeaccountants.co.uk