

Business

With Nigel Scott



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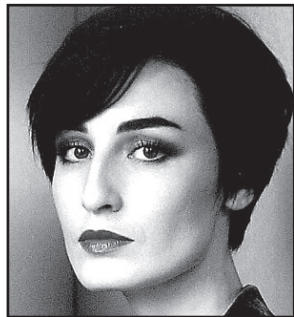
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Erin leads new M&S line-up



STAR FACE: Erin O'Connor

MARKS & SPENCER has employed a troupe of showgirls in its bid to win over shoppers this Christmas, it revealed today. In a break with tradition, the retailer's festive advertising campaign has abandoned its usual celebrity line-up to feature a cast of dancing girls, men and children. The advert, set in a theatre, will show the cast dressing up backstage and practising dance moves ahead of a performance.

M&S has typically relied on a series of well-known faces for its Christmas campaign. But this year's advert will see supermodel Erin O'Connor surrounded by a cast of unknown dancers.

BG pledges £1bn share buy back

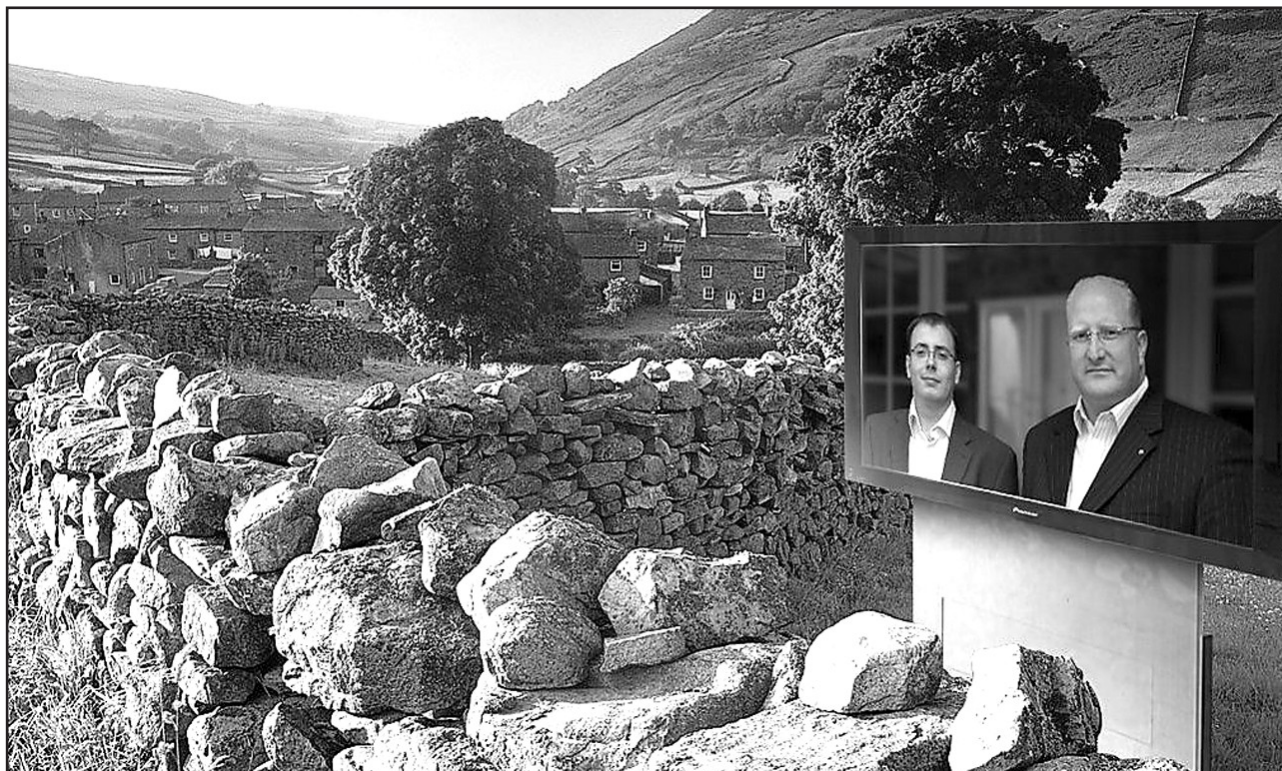
ENERGY group BG highlighted its financial strength by pledging £1 billion for shareholders and adding £500m to its investment budget.

The exploration and production group, which has operations in 20 countries, said a strong operating performance and higher commodity prices had been factors in the substantial improvement in its balance sheet. Earnings rose by 44 per cent to £308m in the three months to September 30 with BG remaining on track to deliver its production target for 2006, despite the completion of an extensive maintenance programme.

Admin 'wastes a month a year'

OFFICE workers are wasting up to a month every year struggling to keep up with administration, according to a new report today.

Changing technologies and new ways of working are driving up demand for business support skills, but many people are not being given proper training to cope, it is claimed. A survey of 800 managers and workers showed many believe workers' skills are not up to scratch. One in three employees said they had not received proper training, while one in five managers describe the basic skills of staff as average.



SCENIC IMPRESSION: Logical Minds' directors, from left, Andy Travis and David Weaver, enjoy the Yorkshire countryside.

Yorkshire Bank in branch move

YORKSHIRE Bank today unveiled plans for a new flagship branch in the centre of Leeds – alongside the closure of two existing city branches.

The new Leeds Central branch will be on Albion Street and will open its doors to customers on January 16, 2006.

It will replace the Leeds City, located on Infirmary Street, and Merrion Centre branches. All 18 employees currently working in the two branches will move to the new outlet.

The news came as the National Australia Bank Group – owner of the Leeds-based bank – released full year results for its UK banking and wealth management operations, announcing cash earnings, before tax, of £297m for the 12 months to September 30.

The company, which has been culling Yorkshire Bank branches across the UK

as part of a drive to reshape its UK operation, which also includes the Glasgow-based Clydesdale Bank, said the figures showed that profits had stabilised.

Lynne Peacock, chief executive officer, National Australia Group UK, said: "We have taken the hard decisions that were needed for our business to be efficient, nimble and competitive and to develop an offering that is distinctive and strongly differentiates us from our competitors."

Growth

"We are getting costs under control and have made great progress in re-engineering processes, simplifying management structures and improving our efficiency."

She said the bank believed it was generating the momentum needed to see sustained growth.

Mrs Peacock added: "Mortgage volumes have increased substantially, with Clydesdale Bank writing an additional 40 per

cent, which now includes the sale of Clydesdale mortgages through mortgage brokers, while Yorkshire Bank was up 15 per cent on the previous year. Business lending volumes have also increased, with Clydesdale Bank up 19 per cent and Yorkshire Bank up 40 per cent.

But she added: "There is still a great deal to do to complete our turnaround."

This year NAB has sold two of its UK operations, National Irish Bank and the Northern Bank, to the Danske Bank Group.

Its rolling branch closure programme will see the demise of 64 Clydesdale Bank branches and 38 Yorkshire Bank branches – a decision which NAB says reflects the changing needs of customers and the different ways in which they are banking.

Further to that £7m is being invested in upgrading NAB's UK internet banking platform with a further £3m upgrade to ATM software.

How to protect against company ID theft

BUSINESSES in Yorkshire are being warned to protect themselves against company identity theft.

Fraudsters who steal an identity and then trade under the legitimate company's name are thought to get away with more than £50m a year, a senior local chartered accountant has warned.

Nick Reed, president of the West Yorkshire Society of Chartered Accountants, said: "This type of fraud, though not yet common, is growing rapidly and is likely

to be devastating in its effect. According to police, the proceeds of such a crime are typically over £2m."

System

He advises companies to take four simple steps to help protect themselves from cloning:

- Check the company's registered details are correct at Companies House and have not been fraudulently changed.
- File documents on-line and sign up for

PROOF at Companies House. PROOF is a free, password protected on-line system for companies to alter their details on the register.

● Sign up to Companies House Monitor, an e-mail alert system which warns if any changes are made to company details.

● Don't rely solely on Companies House records when deciding whether to lend goods or services on credit but check a customer is legitimate through other means as well.

Picture this! Logical way of helping screen firm

LEEDS-based bespoke business software company Logical Minds has helped to put Screen Yorkshire in the picture.

It has developed an internet resource designed to promote the film, broadcast and digital media industries across Yorkshire on behalf of the film agency.

The web presence is an important information portal for a wide range of users – from film producers looking to support Yorkshire film projects, actors and scriptwriters looking for training and job opportunities and local filmmakers looking for grants and advice.

Logical Minds designed and developed a bespoke content management system that allows Screen Yorkshire to cut out the cost and delays involved in getting third parties to update content and enabling staff to add new information themselves within minutes.

Priorities

The system also allows Screen Yorkshire to create tailor-made online questionnaires to gather information more efficiently from users.

Screen Yorkshire marketing and communications manager, Jacky Dickins, said: "The new content management system enables us to constantly reflect the changing priorities of our fast-moving industry."

"Having an up-to-date presence, which underlines the strength of the Yorkshire film and media industry, is an essential part of building our profile across regional, national and international markets."

Logical Minds has also developed an e-newsletter for Screen Yorkshire customers.

Managing director, David Weaver, said his company aimed to provide long term software solutions and applications programming support for all of its clients.

Logical Minds has also just launched its own quarterly newsletter, which can be downloaded from its website www.logical-minds.co.uk


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