9 February 2026

BUSINESS NEWS – Round up

Welcome to our weekly round up of the latest business news for our clients. Please contact Cedar + Co. to talk with us about how these updates may affect your business. We are here to support you!

One Million Miss the Tax Return Filing Deadline



HMRC has estimated that around a million people missed the 31 January 2026 Self Assessment tax return filing deadline.

It confirmed that 11.48 million people filed their tax return on time, with most people filing online.

As usual, there was a significant rush on deadline day itself with nearly half a million people filing on 31 January, including more than 27,000 in the final hour before midnight. The busiest hour was between 5 pm and 6 pm, when almost 33,000 returns were submitted.

Despite this, it seems that a million people missed the deadline altogether.

If you missed the deadline

Anyone who still needs to file should do so as soon as possible. HMRC applies a fixed £100 late filing penalty immediately, even if no tax is owed.

Further penalties apply the longer the return is outstanding:

- After three months: £10 per day (up to £900).
- After six months: 5% of the tax due or £300, whichever is higher.
- After 12 months: another 5% or £300.

There are also penalties for paying tax late - 5% of anything unpaid at 30 days, six months and 12 months - plus interest.

If you need help filing your tax return, please get in touch. We would be happy to help you.

What's coming next

Making Tax Digital for Income Tax will start from April 2026 for many sole traders and landlords.

From 6 April 2026, Making Tax Digital (MTD) for Income Tax becomes mandatory for sole traders and landlords with qualifying income over £50,000.

MTD involves keeping digital records and sending quarterly updates to HMRC.

If you need help getting ready for MTD, please get in touch. We can help you with all aspects of MTD, including choosing suitable software, bookkeeping and submitting the quarterly updates and end of year return.

See: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/1148-million-beat-the-self-assessment-deadline

Salary Sacrifice: Tax Efficient Options for Employers and Employees



With costs rising, many employers and employees are looking for practical ways to reduce outgoings without cutting benefits. Salary sacrifice can be an excellent tool to do this, but many businesses overlook it.

In short, salary sacrifice lets an employee give up part of their gross salary in exchange for a benefit such as a pension contribution, an electric car or a bike. Because the exchange happens before tax and National Insurance (NI), both sides can save money while staff gain a more attractive package.

A proposed cap on National Insurance relief for pension contributions received heavy publicity after the Autumn Budget 2025 announcement. However, the cap will not come into force until 6 April 2029. Until then, the advantages existing under the current rules remain available.

For employers, salary sacrifice can be an effective way to enhance benefits, improve recruitment and retention, and reduce tax costs. For employees, it can make benefits they value more affordable at a time when cash flow really matters.

If you want to understand how the numbers stack up for your business, we would be happy to help you calculate and compare the tax and NI position and show you exactly how salary sacrifice could work in practice for you and your team.

CMA Proposes New Rules to Give Businesses More Control Over Google Search



The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has announced a set of proposed measures aimed at increasing fairness, transparency and choice for businesses and consumers using Google's search services in the UK.

Given that Google accounts for more than 90% of general search queries in the UK and took over £10 billion in UK search advertising spend last year, these changes could have a meaningful impact on how businesses promote themselves online.

Google was designated with Strategic Market Status (SMS) in October 2025, which doesn't imply wrongdoing, but it does allow the CMA to impose conduct requirements.

Below is a summary of what is being proposed and what it may mean in practice for businesses relying on Google to reach customers.

Improving user choice in search

Google is normally set as the default search service in its Android operating system and Chrome browser.

The CMA is proposing that it be made easier for users to choose which search service they want to use and be able to switch services more easily. If implemented, Google would be required to display more choice screens and give users the ability to change which search service they want to use at any time.

This change intends to help users select alternative search providers rather than defaulting to Google. That might mean a need to review advertising spend with Google but could also lead to lower advertising costs if competition between the various search providers increases.

Publisher choice and transparency

Content publishers, such as news outlets, blogs and others producing specialist content, are seeing a decline in the number of 'clicks through' to their websites because of generative AI features that Google is using.

The measures proposed would allow publishers more control over whether their material can be used within AI features, such as AI Overview, including being able to opt out.

There would also be clearer information for publishers on how their content is being used and Google would be required to take steps to ensure that any content used is properly attributed to the publisher.

Fair ranking

Search services are a key way of finding online customers, but many businesses lack confidence in how Google ranks websites.

Google can make changes to its algorithms at any time. This can result in additional costs to businesses as they try to understand what has changed and adjust their websites to ensure they stays visible in search rankings.

The CMA is looking to impose some 'fair ranking' conduct requirements. These include:

- Google not being allowed to discriminate based on whether the website has chosen to advertise on or has some other commercial arrangement with Google. A business opting out of its content being used in Google's AI features could also not be discriminated against.
- Greater transparency on search rankings and a requirement to provide sufficient notice and information on upcoming changes.
- A clear and accessible process for complaints, with accountability to the CMA.

For businesses that rely heavily on search visibility, this could offer more confidence that search performance isn't being undermined by opaque algorithms or unfair advantages.

Data portability

Google currently offer users the ability to transfer their search data to another provider. However, this is provided voluntarily, and the CMA is looking to make it a legal requirement.

What happens next?

The CMA is consulting on the proposals, and feedback is open until 25 February 2026. A final decision will follow once the responses have been assessed.

To review the consultation and participate, see: https://connect.cma.gov.uk/google-search-conduct-requirements

Tech Giants Join Push to Improve Workplace Accessibility



The government has brought together major technology companies - including Google, Meta, Microsoft and Amazon - with disability charities to discuss how modern tech can help remove barriers that prevent disabled people from finding and keeping jobs.

The focus was on practical tools that are already available and how these could be more widely adopted. These include screen readers, real-time captioning and new AI-powered visual description tools.

This roundtable ties in with wider government plans, including the Connect to Work programme which is aiming to help 300,000 sick or disabled people into employment.

Plans are also afoot to overhaul the Disability Confident scheme with tougher standards and tailored support for smaller businesses. 19,000 employers have already signed up.

If you are an employer, the increased focus on making the workplace more accessible for disabled people may mean there are increasing opportunities to unlock talent that could both provide benefits to the community and improve your business.

See: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/tech-giants-meet-disability-sector-to-break-down-barriers-at-work

Lanarkshire to Benefit from New AI Growth Zone



Lanarkshire is set for a major investment boost with the launch of a new AI Growth Zone around DataVita's data centre site in Airdrie.

Working with AI cloud firm CoreWeave, the project is expected to create more than 3,400 jobs over the coming years, including around 800 higher-skilled roles linked directly to AI and data centre operations. Fifty apprenticeships will also be offered to help develop the next generation of AI expertise.

Alongside the jobs, the project includes a substantial community fund. As the site expands, up to £543 million could be invested into local programmes over 15 years, supporting skills and training packages, after-school coding clubs, and local charities and food banks. DataVita's parent company, HFD Group, will also contribute £1 million a year to local charities.

Once completed, the Lanarkshire site will be one of the most advanced AI sites in the world. This is the fifth AI Growth Zone announced in the past year, joining sites in Oxfordshire, North and South Wales and the North East of England.

For local businesses, these zones could mean opportunities during the construction phase, as well as longer-term demand for specialist services once the site is up and running.

See: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/more-than-3400-jobs-and-targeted-support-for-local-communities-to-help-tackle-the-cost-of-living-as-lanarkshire-named-latest-ai-growth-zone

Deadline Approaching for Business Rates Valuation Checks

Enterprises that pay business rates are being encouraged to check their current property valuation and make sure the details held by the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) are correct.

If you believe your valuation is wrong, you have until 31 March 2026 to request any changes to your current valuation.

After that, a new rating list comes into effect on 1 April, and you will only be able to request changes to your new 2026 valuation from that date.

To request any changes, you need a business rates valuation account. If you haven't used yours recently, it's worth checking that you can still log in. The verification process to claim a property can take up to 15 working days, so it's sensible not to leave this until the last minute.

You will need a Government Gateway user ID or a One Login account to sign in to your account.

Support is available on GOV.UK for anyone needing help with registration.

See: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/deadline-for-challenging-your-business-rates-valuation

Please do contact us if you would like to talk about any of the articles. We are here to support you and your business!

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