



inBusinessForGood
Digital network and virtual events for small businesses

Report from In Business for Good summit 2013

You can hardly pick up a newspaper, business book or social media feed these days without finding a report on corporate social responsibility, social business, responsible business, sustainable business. The debate about the role of business in helping to sort out the complex issues our society and economy face is everywhere and touches every business.

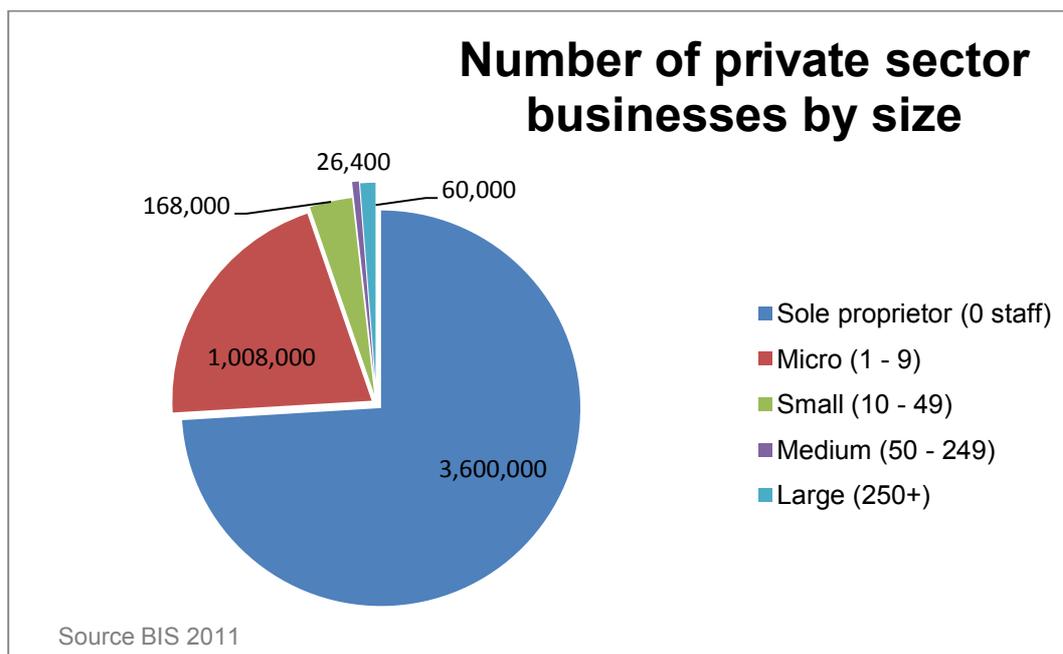
Or so you would think. But if you look a little closer you will find that the contribution made by small business is largely missing from the public debate. This report - and the In Business for Good activities it is based on - aims to shine the spotlight on small companies and the good they do for the economy and wider society.

The report is written by the directors of Wilson Sherriff, a small business that funds the In Business for Good virtual summit and digital network. We are immensely proud of the examples that we have found of small businesses putting people and planet before profits. This report is for them and we hope it does them justice. We also hope that government, policy makers, big business and the media will find it useful in understanding what small businesses do in Business for Good and how they can be supported to do even more.

Why In Business for Good?

If you are one of more than 4.5 million small businesses in the UK you could be forgiven for thinking that big business alone provides the jobs for those excluded from the current job market, drives sustainable consumption, works closely with communities and gives time and money to good causes. But the fact is, as Mike Cherry Head of Policy told the in Business For Good summit, 95 per cent of people, including disabled, long term unemployed and young people, come into the private sector job market by setting up or getting a job with a small business. The most environmentally friendly printing company is a small company and if every small business owner is only giving £10 a year to a charity - and we know they are giving far more than that - that is £45m that goes largely unnoticed.

So why In Business for Good for small businesses? Because it no longer makes sense, if it ever did, to ignore the power and effort of small businesses as a force for good in the UK and worldwide. But before we get carried away, let's tackle a few myths.



Small business is not small at all

Small business is in fact not small at all. The smallest businesses are the largest part of the private sector. More than 75% of private sector businesses are sole proprietors. 21% are micros employing under 9 staff and 3.5% are small businesses employing 10 - 49 members of staff (see table above).

Of course numbers of businesses are not everything. But small businesses also employ 47% of the private sector workforce - 11,233,000 people - and create 34.4% of private sector turnover - £1,066.4 billion. And these figures really are for the smallest companies. We have excluded medium-size businesses that employ more than 50 people.

Small businesses are not shrinking violets. They are easy to reach

The sheer size and diversity of small businesses is daunting. Reaching out to them can take time and effort but small businesses are hardly shrinking violets hiding themselves from the limelight. Social media, particularly Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook, have revolutionised the way that small businesses communicate and promote themselves and therefore the way that you can reach them. The Financial Times [reported in May 2011](#) that more than a third of small businesses use Facebook regularly and at that time 1 in 6 used Twitter. [Simply Business](#) calculated that a third of all small businesses use social media daily with LinkedIn being the most popular but Twitter rapidly challenging that position.

If you use social media, you can reach and engage a significant and growing number of small businesses. This report shows how the In Business for Good summit and network used these channels to reach and involve thousands of businesses.



The best way to reach small businesses is through other small businesses

There is a view that the best way to reach small businesses is through the supply chain of large businesses. We have found this can cause problems and resentment. One business owner said it was like 'being treated like a child' - the adults talked above your head about what you liked to do!

As well as a perception problem, this approach has practical problems. It is not in the interests of many small businesses to become tied into a single large business supply chain particularly in tough economic times. Many small businesses trade with other small businesses or direct with consumers rather than with large organisations. Also, running a small business is quite different to running a large business. Quoting Mike Cherry once again, small businesses are not small versions of large businesses. They are quite different. Few large organisations understand what small business feels like.

Our experience suggests that it is much more effective to approach small businesses via other small businesses and through the networks they already trust and engage with.

Small businesses are interested in being In Business for Good

The words 'corporate social responsibility' don't resonate with small business owners. That doesn't mean that they are not interested in being in Business for Good. While we don't yet have quantitative data, it is becoming clearer that small businesses actually do more than larger companies. Once we started to look, we found examples everywhere – even in our own supplier network we have an IT company offering free computer classes in the local library, the bottled water company supporting water projects in the developing world, a cleaning company supporting local sporting activity, a restaurant supporting local community development, and the pro bono work our associates do for social enterprises and charities. The big difference is that small companies are less likely than large ones to define what they do as a strategy or a policy. And it is much harder for them to get publicity for their efforts.

Defining what small businesses do beyond the bottom line

As you can tell by opening of this report, we are struck by how larger organisations engaged in corporate social responsibility initiatives can attract national and international publicity, while smaller organisations seem to go unnoticed. One of the issues is that that small businesses don't call what they do 'corporate social responsibility' nor do they have another label to describe their activities. They often don't think of what they do as separate from business as usual.

In 2010 when we ran our first virtual summit, we tried to build consensus around a suitable name for the different ways that small companies create positive results in communities and in society, and also sustain themselves for the long term. This is where 'In Business for Good' or #inbiz4good originated.

Our first virtual summit built on the growing use of social media and online tools to bring together government ministers, officials, experts and small businesses to discuss the



broader, longer term aspects of how small businesses can look after their communities, their businesses and themselves. We found clear evidence that businesses that look beyond the bottom line and take the longer view stand a better chance of success.

In 2013 we went further than an annual virtual summit. We supported a network with three main aims

- to showcase the wide and creative range of things that small businesses are doing that is for more than profit
- to help small businesses connect with and learn from each other, helping them become more strategic, and get the most out of what they are doing in business for good
- to help government, larger businesses and public authorities understand more about what small companies are doing, value their contribution, and improve the way they communicate with small companies.

What does it mean to be In Business for Good?

We asked small businesses how they look beyond the short term and the bottom line – despite hard economic times – to add value to their businesses and achieve wider goals. Through these conversations we have gathered together many wonderful examples and identified five areas of focus that characterise a company that is in Business for Good. They are

- How you treat your staff, associates, suppliers and partners – are your relationships with your people based on mutual understanding and trust? Do you seek solutions that are win-win rather than focused on financial goals? When you have a problem do you keep it to yourself or welcome the involvement of other people?
- How you treat your customers – most businesses recognise the importance of customers, but do you think of them as part of your business or as an external force? Do you involve them in adapting, creating and implementing products and services they need?
- How you are involved in society and the community – this may be outside your front door or in the global community, but do you have an interest in the impact your company has beyond its products and services?
- How you minimise your business's impact on the environment - taking action on sustainability, minimising waste, recycling and reuse
- How you invest in health and wellbeing - promoting the health and wellbeing of the business, your staff and yourself.

Not every company focuses on all five of these areas. Indeed because of their size, smaller companies tend to prioritise one or two of them. The companies that do best are those that link the different aspects and integrate them with their business strategy.



In Business for Good summit 2013

In June 2013 we held the virtual summit entitled In Business for Good and launched the virtual network.

The virtual summit focused on health and wellbeing at work. We were responding to two needs: a strong drive from government for small companies to open up dialogue with their staff about health and wellbeing; and a strong sense from small companies that in economic hard times it is important to look after themselves and their staff to maximise their capacity and scope for innovation.

Summit speakers and contributions through social media explored what businesses can do to help staff stay healthy and improve their wellbeing. They also emphasised that business owners themselves are often subject to stress and overwork, and how important it is for business owners to look after themselves so they can look after their business.

Keynote presentations at the summit

The summit featured both national and international experts or policy thinkers, and small businesses with a story to tell about how they were supporting health and wellbeing at work.

The list of speakers is over the page and you can download the podcast interviews by clicking on the links.



Summit speakers and podcasts

Earl Howe and Dame Carol Black, Department of Health, described how the government is seeking to support small companies improve health and wellbeing at work
[Earl Howe and Dame Carol Black on the Public Health Responsibility Deal](#)



Sarah Trethowan, TRAC Services, set out how they are reducing sickness absence through a simple workplace activity programme
[Sarah Trethowan from TRAC Services on wellbeing at work](#)



Mike Cherry, National Policy Chair at the Federation of Small Businesses, showcased the major contribution small companies make to economic health and helping people find work
[Mike Cherry from FSB on small firms, employment and growth](#)



Simon Wilson, Director of Wilson Sherriff explained what it means to be In Business for Good
[Simon Wilson from Wilson Sherriff on what it means to be In Business for Good](#)



Alicia Thornthwaite, AfroDeity Ltd, explained how this new business sells hair products ethically sourced in the Caribbean
[Alicia Thornthwaite from AfroDeity on ethical sourcing for a new business](#)



Professor Steve Bevan, Work Foundation, discussed how small businesses can create mental health and wellbeing
[Steve Bevan from the Work Foundation on business owners' mental wellbeing](#)



Carol Sherriff, Wilson Sherriff, considers how business owners can look after their own mental health and wellbeing
[Carol Sherriff from Wilson Sherriff on mental health and wellbeing](#)



Susan Chambers, Sage Editing and Research, reviewed the conclusions of her research into social responsibility for microentrepreneurs on both sides of the Atlantic
[Susan Chambers from Sage Research on microentrepreneurs and social responsibility](#)



Greg Parsons, Managing Director of cricketer farm described how a company producing healthy cheese is supporting sport in the community
[Greg Parsons from Cricketer Farm on healthy activity at work and in the community](#)



Rob Cave, Kilriver, described the work of the Mind Clinic which offers practical support to staff in small companies.
[Rob Cave from Killriver on Mind Clinic](#)





What we found

Nearly two thousand small companies participated actively in the summit through Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and via the In Business for Good website <http://www.inbusinessforgoodsummit.co.uk> listening to and commenting on the podcasts.

During the week and for several weeks after, we asked small businesses to let us know what they did in Business for Good. The response was amazing.

On the final side day of the Summit, we reviewed some of the best examples. You can download the podcast here. [Carol Sherriff and Simon Wilson – reflection on the summit](#)

Then as businesses continued to respond, we created this 'storify' highlighting more than 140 different business examples.

<http://storify.com/Inbiz4good/smallbusiness-in-business-for-good>



Just one example is Sheabutter Cottage www.twitter.com/akuawood supporting communities in Ghana including paying health insurance, sourcing sustainable products and supporting their local community in the UK.

We didn't quality control any of these examples – they are simply ways in which small businesses themselves describe what they do.

The enthusiasm with which small businesses respond to the opportunity to promote what they do In Business For Good can be seen on the twitter feed [#inbiz4good](#).



We continue to invite, share and promote the examples weekly <https://storify.com/Inbiz4good>.

Small businesses supporting each other

One of the most satisfying findings was the extent to which small businesses and enterprises support each other. These include formal networks such as:

- Enterprise Rockers, a highly active community interest company 'making life better' for micro businesses <http://www.enterpriserockers.co.uk/>
- Organisation for Responsible business, which sets standards for Responsible Business <http://www.orbuk.org.uk/>
- Trading for Good, which showcases businesses trading for good, gathers statistics on the value of their contribution and encourages customers to choose them <http://www.tradingforgood.co.uk/>

There are also a large number of 'business hours' on Twitter and groups on LinkedIn that enable small businesses to promote their services and share information with each other. We found that these proved to be a valuable way of reaching out to small businesses and finding out what they do.

Thirst for information

Many small business owners are time poor and have to concentrate on the day to day business. It is a challenge to digest all the different information and advice coming through to them, particularly via Twitter. We found a thirst for information brought together in one place. We have set up a daily In Business For Good paper that focuses on news and information of relevance to small companies and in Business for Good <http://paper.li/Inbiz4good/1370982879>.

What we learned

Small companies are contributing to social and environmental goals, supporting their staff and promoting health and wellbeing in an almost limitless range of different and diverse ways. This includes how they support their employees, engage their customers, act in the community, and go green. **Economic growth and social progress in the UK and other countries will be driven by what small businesses do as much as by the actions of large corporate companies.**

Business owners are central to this. Social responsibility for small companies derives from the heads and hearts of business owners and their staff and their personal commitment is key. However they often fail to recognise the importance of looking after themselves, and **a particular commitment to the health and wellbeing of business owners should be a national priority.**

There is great scope for small companies to learn from each other and for larger businesses and government to understand what they are doing and how to contact them. Small



companies are building new ways to engage almost daily, but there is **an important role for support networks to facilitate collaboration and drawing together the threads of good practice.**

Most of these activities are not validated or formalised by systems such as corporate social responsibility checklists. From the discussions at the summit, we have developed an initial checklist to help organisations get started. This can be downloaded [here](#).

Public authorities need to recognise that small companies make an impact not by policy statements (which they don't need) but by taking action, often unsupported by a policy statement or formal commitment. However small companies benefit from taking a strategic approach – for instance linking walking to work (health and wellbeing) with environmental gains (carbon reduction). Also, we found that once they have started down the track of being in Business for Good, some companies found it helpful to benefit what they were doing against national standards such as the Public Health Responsibility Deal pledges or environmental standards.

Social media are transforming the way that many small companies communicate and opening up new channels for marketing, but also for how small businesses connect with each other. An example of this is the role of 'business hours' scheduled on Twitter in which businesses network and market to each other, and which provide a great opportunity to engage businesses around broader themes.

Government and public authorities at present are rather out of step with the communication channels now used by small companies and would benefit from using them more. We found that the government's initiative around the Public Health Responsibility Deal had not found much of an echo with small companies. This was not a question of the content but more to do with the need for government and public authorities to communicate with small companies in the ways they communicate today.

Systems and products designed with large companies in mind simply do not 'cut through' for small ones and a sustained engagement process will be needed to achieve that effect. Not all small companies are engaging through digital media. In this as in everything else there is a wide and diverse range. But social media have great value as a cost-effective way of reaching large numbers of innovative businesses.

In Business for Good... for good

In Business for Good is here to stay as a network linking small companies for as long as they find it useful. We are run by a small business for small businesses and see our particular role as facilitating discussion and co-development among small companies and between small companies, corporate businesses and public bodies, using social media in particular. We want to help small companies showcase what they do In Business for Good and share experiences of what really works for small companies.



Our aim is to celebrate and explain the role small companies have in the economy and in creating our societies and communities, and ensuring sustainable development. This is a story that needs telling and which will help us all understand the real face of business in the UK and more globally.

We will do this by prompting and seeding debate through social media on a continuous basis. In 2013 /2014 we see a number of specific opportunities to explore including

- The UK government review of corporate social responsibility which needs to be fully informed by what small companies are doing
- The scope to develop a 'small companies plan B' to run side by side with the initiative taken by Richard Branson and his '[B team](#)' to put people and planet alongside profit
- The need to understand and support the health and wellbeing of business owners.

We aim to hold specific themed virtual discussions regularly, and make the case to international, national and local government. We will continue to hold an annual virtual summit to take stock and identify key issues for the future.

Conclusion

We are continually inspired by the range, creativity and commitment of small companies and their owners. What they are doing to make the world a better place needs to be understood and celebrated. And small businesses and their owners have a lot to learn from each other.

In Business for Good is dedicated to making that happen.

*Carol Sherriff
Simon Wilson
Wilson Sherriff / In Business for Good
August 2013*

Wilson Sherriff

[Wilson Sherriff](#) is a small business based in the UK supporting collaboration, co-creation and innovation within and between organisations. We work with international, UK-wide and small companies, and with public sector bodies. We help them engage with their stakeholders, partners and customers to co-create robust goods and services that contribute to the greater good. In Business for Good is part of our own contribution to being a responsible social business.