

taste of  
businessLet's celebrate  
our partnership

Birmingham's biggest successes have been achieved through working in partnership. By joining together and creating "One Voice" we ensure that the best of our expertise and resources are channelled effectively into generating results for the city and its businesses.

Look at initiatives such as the Big City Plan, developments such as the super-hospital and New Street station, or events such as the political party conferences – everyone with an interest in these projects has come together to make them successful and ensure that we all gain the maximum benefit.

Different business sectors can be viewed in a similar way. For example, the business improvement districts in the city are proving very successful, representing the interests of retailers, entertainment venues and now, with the new Colmore Business District, professional services organisations. Birmingham Forward is founded on the principle of partnership and exists to represent the interests of its members and improve the business environment.

A big theme developing across the city is events being created to promote different sectors, to improve perceptions of the businesses operating in them and to attract visitors and customers.

→ **WEB:** [www.visitbirmingham.com/taste](http://www.visitbirmingham.com/taste)

This is another way of working in partnership and representing a united voice. For example, the arts scene in Birmingham is rich and vibrant, but it is the innovative events and festivals that make a real impact in people's minds. They capture people's interest, encourage them to think about venues and activities they may not have considered before and send them away talking about it to friends and family, and media.

Our food and drink sector is another asset in Birmingham and one making a real name for itself through the efforts of particular independent restaurateurs and Michelin-starred chefs, and the diversity of the food being produced and served here.

Taste of Birmingham will be an opportunity to present one new voice for this sector, to grab people's attention, benefiting the individual businesses by association. It will also enable them to profile themselves at the event to existing and potential customers.

The icing on the cake will be Taste of Business, the city's biggest networking event, which will open the festival on Thursday, July 9. It will be an opportunity for businesses to make contacts and represent Birmingham. We are all partners in this city and we should celebrate how well we work together.

To attend Taste of Business register for free at [www.visitbirmingham.com/taste](http://www.visitbirmingham.com/taste).

Richard Brennan is chief executive of Birmingham Forward

# Bankruptcy can be your

When historic Perry Barr fixtures firm Savekers went into administration in March, it was the end of four generations of family control at the firm. **Dani Saveker**, the last of the family to lead the company, told the *Birmingham Post* what it's like to be a victim of the recession – and why her new consultancy work will emphasise the human cost of business failure.

When a company goes into administration you want to hang on to it – we were very much bought up as humans to fight and hang on to things, but unfortunately there comes a time where you are forced to let go, and coming to terms with that can be difficult. Particularly with a family business, the feeling of letting go of the family duty.

But then once the decision is made there is probably a little bit of relief because you commit to that, and then you are at the next stage of the process.

It was quite a duty for me and I've realised when you get to that point there are a lot of negative feelings that come out, so I'm glad that at every point we have tried to stay as positive as possible.

When the announcement to the workforce was made, it really brought it home. You read so much each day about the likes of Woolworths going into administration and I think we are all guilty of just sitting there reading these things and saying 'that's another one gone'.

But it's the human fall-out that I think I have really taken on board.

Insolvency practitioners have got a job to do but they don't have the time or the experience of trading to deal with it sometimes. The practitioners know there are gaps but they aren't equipped to deal with them. The support for everybody is lacking on a human level.

I insisted on making the announcement rather than the administrators – I felt that was my role and it was important to me. I was fully expecting the workforce to direct their frustrations and their upset at me personally but what actually happened was hugs and kisses of support. It will stay with me forever.

We were 55 and went down to 22 immediately – everyone was called together. Administrators Begbies Traynor read a list of who was staying and who was going – I didn't know they were going to do that.

People just accepted that everything had been done. That stage was so different, we had got the shock of the company going, and then the impact on the people there. It was quite surreal. Once the decision was made I spoke to my mum – a shareholder – and that broke my heart. But, for me, it's the best thing that's happened.

In a family business there are a lot of responsibilities above and beyond running a company. Decisions you make are with the family's best interests in mind and the employees' best interests in mind and never your own.

The recession, I think, makes people

take account of their processes, staffing levels, everything. It's a time for getting your house in order, I suppose.

One of the things that I feel very strongly about is that we give support to the shopfloor workers, and the office workers, but nobody is giving support to directors, executives and management.

Ultimately, they are our business leaders and if they don't look at their strengths the shopfloor workers aren't going to have companies to go into.

There are 40,000 companies facing insolvency this year, an enormous number of people whose businesses could fail – a lot have fantastic skills but are feeling a little bit lost.

We also need to improve the insolvency process to provide human support if people are going to come out of the end of it. I have already spoken to a number of insolvency practitioners – Begbies Traynor planted the seed of the idea into my mind when I sat down with them.

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I am looking to work with practitioners and see what value I can add. Quite often there will be a recommendation of using an insolvency practitioner and, having spoken to some advisers, they said they would be more inclined to deal with these issues. Insolvency practitioners are sometimes seen as the enemy – they get a lump sum for dealing with the administration. Having someone to explain the human side of it would make things better. Equally, when you have got things like pre-pack deals set up people can need reassuring. Trust becomes a huge issue.

Every situation is individual, it comes down to the human side – communications, working with people and just helping them through it. Quite often people say "What's your consulting experience?" I think it's life, it's business training, it's common sense. We should focus on the strengths of individuals and organisations rather than the weaknesses. If someone's got a weakness and you help them through that, it's damage limitation really. Bankruptcy can be an opportunity.



Dani Saveker was chief executive of Savekers and is now using her



Dani Saveker-Marshall with Philip Walters, former works director at the opening of the new Electroplating Plant in 2003

