



Thrings meets... James Shepherd of HSBC

HSBC left this year's Insider Dealmakers Awards as winner in the Banking category. James Shepherd tells Mike Tomlin, Head of Banking and Finance at category sponsor, Thrings, what makes the South West resilient and worth investing in.

Awards judges were impressed with the quality and breadth of your deals. Can you give us some highlights?

I'm proud to say that, over the last year, HSBC has supported nearly 3000 start-ups in the South West and, at the other end of the scale, backed several multi-bank facilities worth upwards of £100m (and everything in between). To give you a taste, we supported Bristol Uniforms with a £19m facility. They're one of the city's oldest businesses and the principal supplier of firefighter uniforms in the UK. We were also pleased to back the relatively new, but fast-growing, British Corner Shop, which borrowed against the value of its intellectual property.

You cover and serve a diverse customer base...

The South West's varied economy is its strength - it helps make it resilient. We have a strong professional services sector, manufacturing (including aerospace), an exciting tech sector and thriving universities which are generating spin-out companies. That's why HSBC has made sure it can offer the full commercial banking service across its offices - from Truro to Cheltenham - not just the major cities.

How is the year ahead looking for you and businesses seeking finance?

There is plenty of liquidity in the market. We're having another strong year, despite uncertainties, and good businesses should not (in my opinion) find it difficult to access funding.

What are your customers' biggest challenges today?

I was hoping to get through the interview without mentioning Brexit, but it's clearly still creating uncertainty more than three years on from the referendum. While I believe the region's economy can withstand the shock, I think investment decisions are being delayed by some businesses and there is justified concern around the impact of fluctuating exchange rates.

What would be your advice to borrowers?

Plan ahead and speak to potential funders early to ensure that all options are explored. Working with borrowers and advisors will help you structure a funding package that is deliverable - and we can indicate our appetite to lend and flag alternative options before plans become too advanced.

What do you look for in an advisor?

Commerciality, proactivity and good communication.

What has winning the award meant to HSBC?

These are the leading awards in the South West for the deal-making profession, so it's great to be recognised by them. At times, we underestimate or fail to articulate the great work the advisory community does for the local economy, job and wealth creation, and I think awards like these help to acknowledge that.

When you're not realising business dreams, how do you like to spend your time?

Like many of my colleagues, I have a young family who I love spending time with. It's incredibly important to me to allow our team the flexibility to work hard while recognising and supporting colleagues through different stages of their lives. That aside, I do like the odd round of golf.

For more information about Thrings, please visit | www.thrings.com or email Mike | mtomlin@thrings.com

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