



**Media release for immediate use**

**September 2006**

## Broadband bears fruit for business

Two enterprising Rossendale businesswomen are singing the praises of broadband after harnessing the technology to offer a unique secretarial service.

Since setting up Apple Transcription in Edenfield last year to solve the problem of recruiting qualified secretarial staff, Debra Mitchell and Pamela Cleasby have saved dozens of companies the hassle of organising secretarial holiday cover, training temporary staff and paying retainer fees for temps even when there is a shortage of work.

Their internet-based service simplifies the process of outsourcing transcription work by enabling businesses to securely upload digital voice files to the company website. Each file is then picked up by one of Apple's experienced transcribers who types up the recording and loads it back on to the website to be downloaded by the client.

The business began to take off after Debra and Pamela approached the Lancashire Digital Development Agency for advice on developing the company's encrypted, password-protected software.

The LDDA's long-term goal is to switch local companies on to a better understanding of the significant business benefits of broadband and ICT adoption.

Debra said: "Pamela and I recognised when we started Apple Transcription that the business would have to operate online to allow our transcribers to work remotely and keep overheads down so that we could, in turn, pass on that saving to our customers.

"To enable the business to be successful, broadband was of paramount importance. Without it, we would have found it extremely difficult to handle large audio files and would struggle to turn work around within tight deadlines and budgets.

"With backgrounds in the medical and legal sectors, though, Pamela and I knew that we would require advice on the technological side of the software required. We knew what we needed – a secure online uploading facility that would allow our clients to have complete faith in the confidentiality of their data – but were not certain of the technicalities or the right questions to ask of a software developer.

"By speaking to us in plain English and constantly making themselves available when we needed advice, the LDDA were able to assist us in firming up our software requirements so that we felt confident in approaching a developer to progress with the concept."

Apple Transcription's internet-based system, dubbed AppleLiveWire, is 128-bit-encrypted with a dedicated hardware firewall, reducing threats from viruses and rendering it totally secure. Numerous back-up mechanisms are also in place to ensure user data is protected against loss or theft.

Debra explained: "From both the client's and transcriber's point of view, everything is encrypted and password-protected. All they have to do is log in to the secure area to upload or access work.

"Once a job comes through from a client, it is assigned by the administrator and a notification email is automatically sent to the selected transcriber, who completes the work according to the client's deadline.

"The completed document is then reviewed by the administrator, who sends either an SMS or email alert to the client informing them that their work is ready for downloading, in printable format, from the website.

"Clients can track the progress of their work along the way but, with the high speed of broadband, we are able to offer guaranteed turnaround times of less than 24 hours."

With the business up and running and Apple Transcription's first clients beginning to come on board, the LDDA began to champion the company at a series of events throughout Lancashire, helping to bring in new business from a variety of sectors.

"The LDDA saw the potential in our idea from day one and gave us confidence in the viability of the concept," said Debra. "By putting us in front of a large audience of Lancashire companies, they have helped to generate good word of mouth which has seen us win contracts with several high-profile organisations and expand to a network of 10 transcribers."

Jane Law, of the LDDA, said: "We are delighted to see entrepreneurs like Debra and Pamela recognising the benefits that broadband can bring in terms of lowering overheads and providing a fast, efficient resource upon which to build new businesses.

"Apple Transcription is a perfect example of the new generation of companies which are thriving thanks to this technology, and we are thrilled to have been able to help Debra and Pamela realise their vision so successfully.

"For those interested in learning more about broadband and ICT, and the benefits to businesses, we also organise a range of free seminars and events across the region, which are open to all."

The LDDA is funded by the Northwest Regional Development Agency (NWDA) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), working in partnership with Business Link Lancashire and the East Lancashire Chamber of Commerce.

Kevin Morley, NWDA Head of ICT Policy, said: "We are pleased to see people throughout Lancashire responding so enthusiastically to broadband and ICT, and harnessing these technologies to both improve operations and provide new, cutting edge services.

"By recognising the high speed and low cost of these technologies, businesses can vastly improve their productivity and efficiency."

For further information on the LDDA, to receive free and impartial advice, or to find out more about future events, please contact Simon Westgate on 01254 356488 or visit [www.ldda.org.uk](http://www.ldda.org.uk).

