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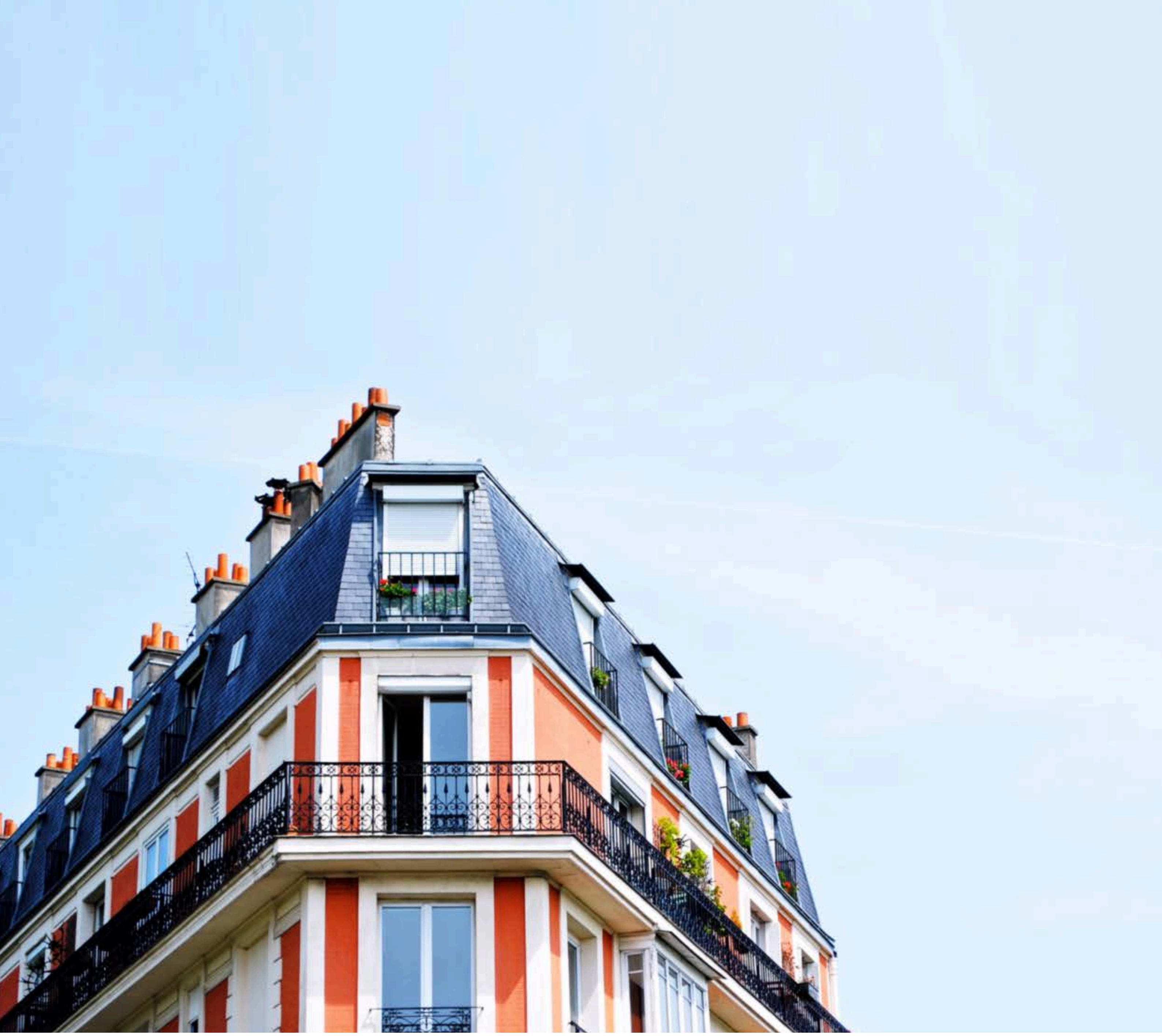
Viewpoint



The value of mortgage advice
Five reasons why our advice can be invaluable when it comes to helping you find the right mortgage.

Protection through the years
From buying a house to starting a family; insurance becomes more important at certain life stages.

Buying for the first time?
Getting onto the property ladder may seem like a daunting process, but there is help available.

Surviving the loss of a key person
The loss of a key person from a small or medium-sized business can have a dramatic effect.

What makes a good Buy to Let investment?
Despite changes to tax relief and potential rate rises, Buy to Let remains an attractive investment option.

Time for an upgrade
Products like critical illness insurance have changed, so it's important to make sure your cover hasn't become outdated.

The importance of protection
Millions of people have insured their pets, but who will pick up the bill if something happens to you?

The value of mortgage advice

With so many mortgage lenders offering their products on the high street and online, it can be tempting to cut out the middleman and 'go direct'.

When you're making such a huge financial commitment, the guidance you can get from a qualified mortgage adviser can be invaluable.

Here are five reasons we can make a difference:

1. We know what a good deal looks like

It's easy to underestimate the costs involved when buying a property or remortgaging. An attractive rate may appear good value, but this could change once you factor in things like fees and loan conditions.

We will compare a wide range of lenders and thousands of mortgages on your behalf looking beyond the headline rate so that you understand how the length and type of loan will affect how much you pay over the longer term. We'll highlight any additional costs you should be aware of (like administration fees, booking fees and valuation costs).

2. We know the market

If your mortgage needs or circumstances are 'out of the ordinary', you may find it more difficult to find a mortgage. We have knowledge of lenders' criteria and can save you time and hassle as you search for a suitable lender.

3. We can do the hard work for you

Selecting the right mortgage is just the start. We will work with you to complete the necessary paperwork, liaise with solicitors, valuers and surveyors on your behalf, and help make the process as smooth as possible.

4. We are professionally qualified

Unlike many branch and telephone-based mortgage sellers in banks and building societies, we are able to advise you on a broad range of lenders and products. This means you benefit from genuine choice coupled with quality advice.

5. We look beyond the mortgage

We consider the bigger picture when it comes to advising you on your mortgage. For example, we can help you safeguard your home by recommending products that can financially protect you and your family, should the unexpected happen. We can also recommend providers that can help with other elements of the home-buying process, including solicitors, surveyors and insurance providers.

And, if you want us to, we can stay in touch with you to make sure your mortgage and protection arrangements remain appropriate for your needs.

Conveyancing and surveying are not regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority.

Whether you're looking for a mortgage on your first home or dream home, we can help.

Your home may be repossessed if you do not keep up repayments on your mortgage.

OW0636 Exp. 20/04/18

Buying for the first time?

For first time buyers, getting onto the property ladder may seem like a daunting process, but there is help available.

If you want to discuss how we can help you to get on to the property ladder, please get in touch.

With demand outstripping supply in many areas, the average UK house price has been pushed beyond the reach of many of the UK's estimated 335,750 first time buyers. A report from The Land Registry (based on data from November 2016) shows an annual price increase of 6.7%, taking the value of the average UK property to £217,928.

When you consider that first-time buyers would typically put down around 20% against their first home, it's no wonder that finding a sufficient deposit is becoming increasingly difficult – especially for those currently renting. In fact, one of the major lenders reported the average first-time deposit has more than doubled since 2007 to more than £32,000.

If you're struggling to save a large deposit you may be able to find a mortgage rate of 90% or 95% – provided you can meet the lender's affordability criteria.

The bank of mum and dad

Meanwhile research by the Social Mobility Commission has found an increasing proportion are turning to their parents for help buying their first home. In fact, over a third of first-time buyers in England (34%) are relying on the bank of mum and dad, compared to one in five in 2010.

The 'bank of mum and dad' has been a useful financial foot-up for many, but what about parents who want to help their kids but don't have savings?

Government help

Although the Help to Buy: mortgage guarantee scheme ended in December 2016 the Help to Buy: Equity Loan is still available. The Government lends you up to 20% of the cost of your newly-built home, so you'll only need a 5% cash deposit and a 75% mortgage to make up the rest. Equity loans are available to first time buyers as well as homeowners looking to move. The home you want to buy must be newly built with a maximum price tag of £600,000.

Other initiatives to help first-time buyers include The Help to Buy: ISA which helps you boost your savings by 25%. For every £200 you save you receive a government bonus of £50. The maximum government bonus you can receive is £3,000.

Sound mortgage advice can take the complexities out of the home-buying process and maximise your chances of getting an affordable mortgage.

Your home may be repossessed if you do not keep up repayments on your mortgage.

At a glance:

335,750
first time buyers in the UK

£217,928
average value of a UK property

x2
first-time buyer deposits doubled since 2007

34%
of first time buyers rely on parents

OW0673 Exp. 31/12/17

What makes a good Buy to Let investment?

With property prices continuing to rise, Buy to Let can be an attractive way to invest. But whether buying your first Buy to Let property, or adding to your portfolio, it's important to consider what's involved.

If you'd like to find out more about Buy to Let mortgages, please get in touch.

Being a landlord

As well as the obvious duties of finding tenants and making sure they pay their rent on time, there are also a number of legal requirements that you need to meet as a landlord. For instance, you'll need to use a deposit protection scheme, have the right Energy Performance Certificates and arrange annual safety checks and certificates for the utility supplies. You'll also need to keep the property well maintained and respond to requests from your tenants if and when an issue arises.

Managing your finances

Then there's the question of managing your commitment to the mortgage lender. Interest rates may be low now, but if you're on a tracker mortgage and rates go up, could your income stand the rise? What if you have a gap in tenants and the rent dries up temporarily?

Previously, landlords could deduct mortgage interest from their rental income before calculating how much tax they should pay. However, from April, tax relief on Buy to Let mortgage interest will gradually be reduced. The restrictions will be phased in over three years, resulting in tax relief only being available at the basic rate of income tax (currently 20%) from April 2020. This could impact on any profit you're expecting to make on your investment so it's important to take it into account now.

Research before you buy

In terms of the property itself, have you thought about the location you're buying in? Take the time to look around the area you're considering. Is it up and coming or going down and out? If you're looking to rent to a young family, do the local schools have a good reputation? Does it have good commuter links for young professionals? It may sound obvious, but it's a good idea to put yourself in the shoes of your potential tenants and ask yourself what they would want. Their requirements may be quite different to yours.

Work out all the costs

Buy to Let lenders may require the rent you charge to cover up to 145% of the mortgage repayments, with many now requiring 25% deposits, or even larger. Once you know your mortgage rate and the monthly rent you're going to charge, you should also factor in maintenance costs.

And with stamp duty 3% higher than on a residential property, make sure you cover all the costs involved in buying your investment property – especially in view of the diminishing tax relief.

Protect your investment

It's important to protect your property, its contents, and your ability to keep up with your mortgage repayments should the unexpected happen and there are a range of different insurance products designed to meet these requirements:

- Buildings insurance
- Contents insurance
- Landlord's insurance
- Life insurance
- Mortgage payment protection insurance (MPPI)
- Critical illness insurance
- Income protection

Which product is right for you will depend on your individual circumstances, so it's important to get professional advice as part of the process.

Taking the plunge?

Like any investment, there are no guarantees with Buy to Let. But, despite tax changes and potential mortgage rate rises, strong demand from tenants and rising property prices mean many investors are still tempted to take the plunge.

HM Revenue and Customs practice and the law relating to taxation are complex and subject to individual circumstances and changes which cannot be foreseen.

Some Buy to Let mortgages are not regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority.

Your property may be repossessed if you do not keep up repayments on your mortgage.

OW0738 Exp. 31/10/17

The importance of protection

Millions of pet owners have purchased insurance in case of an expensive trip to the vet's, but who will pick up the bill if something happens to you?

The next time you're renewing your pet insurance, check your own level of cover too. If you'd like more information on the types of cover available and whether they are suitable for you, please get in touch.

Many pet owners will know the stress and financial burden caused by an expensive vet's bill and have taken out pet insurance to avoid having to make difficult decisions at stressful times. In fact, figures show 3.9 million dogs and cats are covered by pet insurance.

However, it seems we place more value on our pet's wellbeing than our own, with almost 8.5 million people in the UK potentially needing some sort of insurance cover, having none.

Why aren't we insuring ourselves?

One in four breadwinners does not have life insurance in place, risking leaving their families in financial difficulty if they were unable to work – or worse, died. It seems women are in a worse position than men, with 38% protected by some sort of policy, compared to 45% of men.

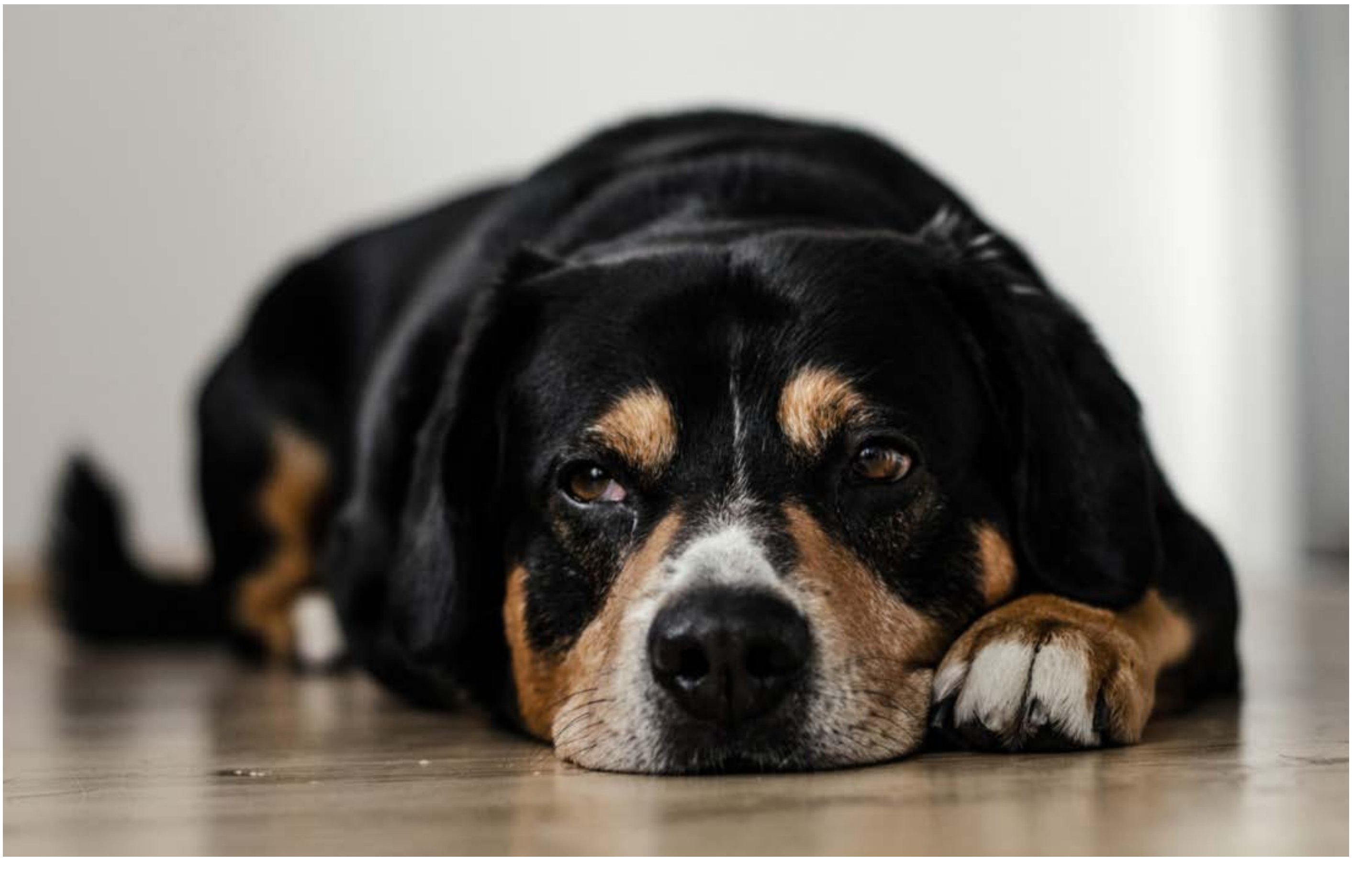
So what is it that puts us off buying insurance? Perhaps it's the thought of paying out each month but not seeing any benefit from the cover.

Far from being a luxury, protection insurance should be considered essential. If you suffered a serious illness or injury you may lose your income, and this could lead to you losing your home. Similarly, if you died, would your loved ones be able to maintain their current lifestyle without your income?

If you think it's not going to happen to you, you may be surprised to know:

- half of people in the UK born after 1960 will be diagnosed with some form of cancer during their lifetime
- In 2015/16 8.8 million working days were lost due to musculoskeletal disorders
- there are up to 175,000 heart attacks in the UK each year

Insurance policies can provide funds to help deal with the financial consequences of illness, an accident, unemployment or death. Whether that's to help pay the mortgage, maintain your family's lifestyle, or even help pay for medical treatment or specialist nursing support.



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Protection through the years

Contact us today for a Life and Protection Insurance review.

When it comes to protection insurance, we hold two firm beliefs:

1. It should form the foundation of your financial plan.
2. Cover should be reviewed regularly to make sure it continues to meet your needs.

The latter is particularly important when you are at a particular 'life stage'. Whether that's buying a house, getting married, starting a family, setting up in business, or all of the above, protection insurance will help to protect your loved ones and your financial responsibilities.

So what type of cover is right for you?

- **Term Insurance** pays out a lump sum if you die within the agreed 'term' (the amount of time you have chosen to be covered for). Suitable for mortgage protection or while children are financially dependent on you.
- **Whole of Life Insurance** pays out a lump sum when you die, whenever that is, as long as you are still paying the premiums. Suitable for estate planning or to cover things like funeral expenses.
- **Critical Illness Insurance** pays out a tax-free lump sum on the diagnosis of certain life-threatening or debilitating conditions, like cancer, heart attack or stroke. You may decide to buy Critical Illness Insurance when taking on a major commitment, like a mortgage or starting a family, but it can be bought at any time to provide peace of mind.
- **Income Protection Insurance** pays out a regular, tax-free income if you become unable to work because of illness, injury and (on some policies) unemployment. It could help you keep up with your mortgage or rent payments, as well as other living costs, until you're able to return to work.

Things change – and so should your cover

You may already have one or more of these in place, but it's still worthwhile reviewing your current cover levels – especially if your circumstances have changed. Ask yourself:

- *Whether your family could cope financially if either you or your spouse/partner died?*
- *How much income would you have if you were taken seriously ill and couldn't work?*
- *Would your business survive without you or your key people?*
- *How would your lifestyle change if you had an accident and couldn't do the things you do today?*

OW0505 Exp. 19/12/17

Surviving the loss of a key person

If something happened to you, your co-owners or employees, could your business survive?

According to research by Legal and General, if a business suffered the loss of a key person:

- 40% of businesses would cease trading in less than a year of the death or serious illness of a key person
- 63% of sole traders would cease to trade immediately
- 46% of new businesses (less than two years old) would cease to trade immediately

The loss of a key person within a small or medium-sized business can cause unexpected costs and disruption. Not only would the business have to fund the cost of recruiting and training a replacement, but it would also risk suffering from a:

- loss of profits
- loss of important business contacts
- loss of knowledge and expertise
- Customers and suppliers losing confidence in the business

Business protection insurance can help mitigate or even avoid these risks altogether

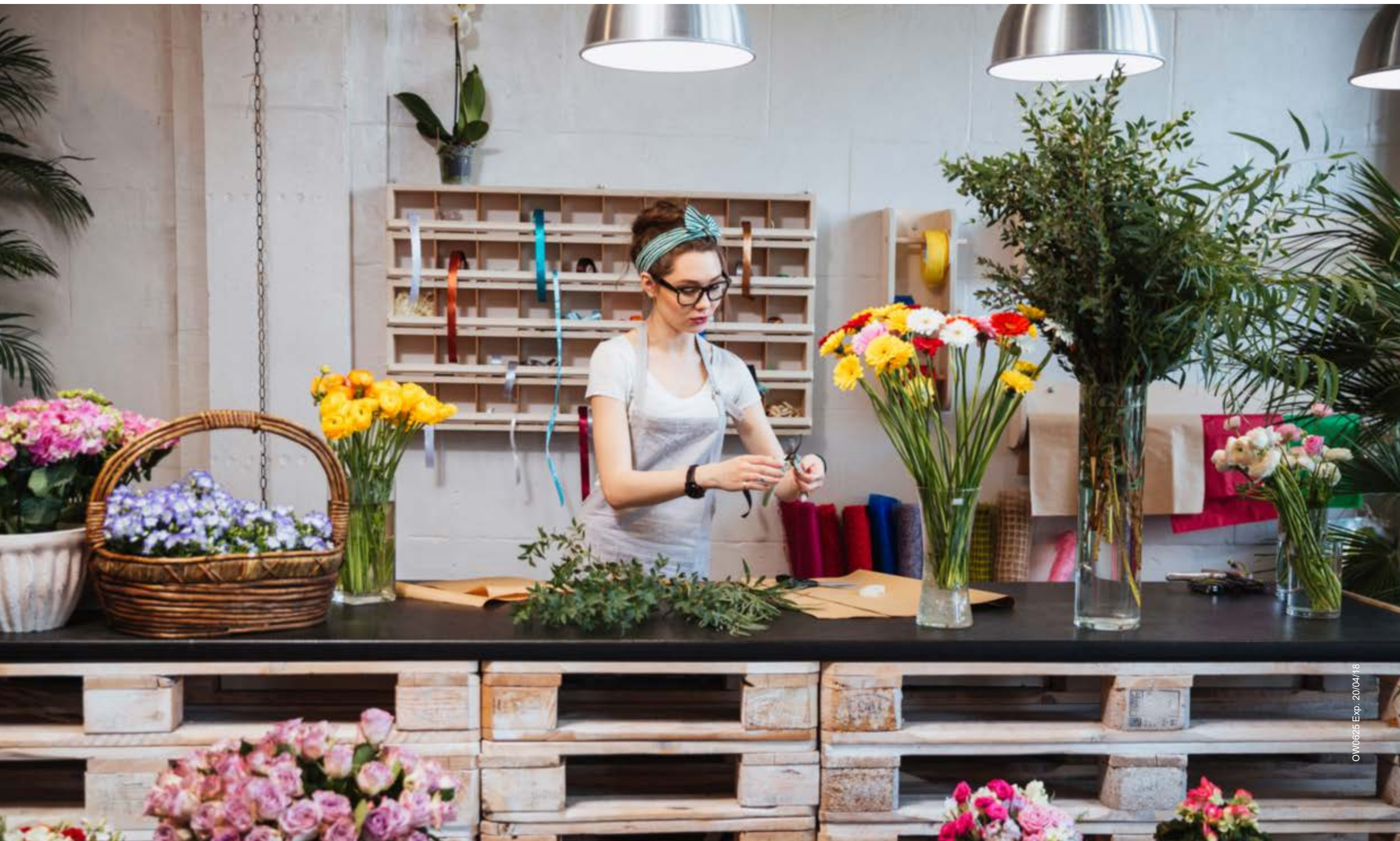
As a business owner, you should know there are three main types of business protection: Key Person Insurance, Shareholder Protection Insurance and Business Loan Protection.

- *Key Person Insurance* – provides a lump sum to the business on the death of an important member of the business.
- *Shareholder Protection Insurance* – provides a lump sum that will allow remaining shareholders to buy the shares of a deceased shareholder.
- *Business Loan Protection* – provides a lump sum to help a business pay any outstanding business loans.

Deciding on the right type of cover depends on the circumstances involved and the events the business wants to insure the key person against.

People are the biggest asset to any business and Business Protection Insurance is designed to keep your business trading should the worst happen.

For further information or advice on setting up a business protection policy please get in touch.



OW0625 Exp. 20/04/18

Time for an upgrade?

Have you upgraded your mobile phone in the past two years?
If the answer's yes, your choice may have been driven by a change in your needs or wants. Perhaps you opted for a better deal, a different contract, or a handset with new features that weren't available with your previous model?

We can review your needs and make sure you have the right cover in place. To arrange your review, please get in touch.

When it comes to updating your phone TV or even your car we all want to feel like we're getting a good deal.

The question is: why don't more of us do this with items like the financial products we pay for every month?

Are your current arrangements still right for you?

Take critical illness insurance as an example. If you have a critical illness policy:

- When did you last update it?
- Does it still provide the cover you need?
- Does it continue to provide the benefits and features you need?

When your needs change, it makes sense to update things

Life may have changed since you last bought or reviewed your critical illness insurance cover. You may have had children, moved house, or your income may have changed.

This means that even though you have a critical illness plan in place, it might not offer you the level of cover you'd need if the unexpected happened.

However, it might also provide cover for certain conditions which may not be available on a new plan.

Insurance innovation

It's not just mobile phone companies that compete to offer the most innovative products – insurance companies are constantly updating their products to reflect customers' changing needs too.

Given that more of us are living longer and surviving serious illnesses like cancer it is perhaps unsurprising that products like critical illness insurance have changed in recent years. For instance, many insurers have introduced greater flexibility and extended their cover to cater for a wider range of illnesses. Some have even introduced completely new products offering partial pay-outs, or for an additional cost, allow you to claim for non-critical illnesses and injuries.

Protect your loved ones

Critical illness insurance can help you cover mortgage or rent payments, treatment, or any home alterations you may need to make as a result of an unexpected critical illness – so it's important your cover remains up-to-date.

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