

THE HULL BUSINESS

PLAYBOOK

This guide is for you: the trades, retailers, start-ups, small businesses and sole traders who keep Hull moving.

Inside, you'll find where the real opportunities lie, the gaps waiting to be filled, and how to step in, stand out, and win locally.

→ Your shortcut to spotting growth, making smarter moves, and staying ahead of the competition.

BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE 15-MINUTE MARKETER

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Hello, Hull!

Your Guide to Get Ahead Locally

Hull has always been a city that works hard. For centuries, trade and industry have defined its character, from medieval wool exports to modern-day turbine blades spinning on the Humber skyline. This isn't just history - it's the DNA of the place. When other cities stumbled in the pandemic, Hull's industrial backbone kept it standing.

But this is not just about grit and survival. Hull today is younger, hungrier, and full of untapped potential. It's a city where the cost of living is lower, the housing market is affordable, the student population is thriving, and technology infrastructure is world-class. For local SMEs and trades, that means opportunity on every corner - if you know where to look.

Why This Guide Matters

Hull has always been a city of doers and makers, not just talkers. But in today's world, the businesses that get found, get remembered, and get chosen are the ones that know how to play the local game.

That's what this guide is about: helping you spot the hidden opportunities, understand the real needs of local people and landlords, and use Hull's unique landscape to grow your business. Think of it as a mix of hard facts, fresh ideas, and straight-talking insights you can actually use.

What's Inside

We'll start with the good news, tackle the challenges head-on, and finish with a look at the incredible opportunities right here on your doorstep. You'll see where Hull businesses are thriving, where the gaps are, and how local SMEs and trades can step in and win.

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Part 1: People, Homes and Cars: Hull's Everyday Economy

People Power

Hull is home to more than 271,000 residents, and unlike many UK cities, its population is younger than the national average. Younger people mean new households, first homes, first cars, and bigger consumer spend in areas like leisure, fitness, and tech. The University of Hull adds around 20,000 students, creating a rolling demand for housing, services, and nightlife.

* We are getting younger!

Hull has a younger population compared to the national average. With an average age of 38

HThe Landlord Effect

Hull has one of the highest proportions of privately rented homes in the region. That makes landlords a critical customer base. Many manage multiple properties - especially student lets and HMOs - and they need regular, reliable trades to keep things ticking. From boilers to wiring, from redecorations to refits, this is a repeat business market if you position yourself as a trusted supplier

Housing = A Tradesperson's Dream

The average house price here is £132,000—barely half the UK average. But affordability doesn't mean modernity. Much of Hull's housing stock is pre-1950s, packed with Victorian terraces and interwar semis. That translates to constant demand: rewiring, plumbing, extensions, loft conversions, insulation, kitchens, bathrooms, and energy-efficiency retrofits. Every street has work waiting.

Car City

Unlike London or Manchester, Hull is built around the car. Around 75% of households own at least one vehicle. That fuels opportunities not just for mechanics and garages but also for mobile services: tyre fitting, valeting, detailing, EV charger installs, and local delivery businesses. Suburban growth only adds to the demand for trades and services that "come to you."

Part 2: Hull's Business Landscape – Who's Here and What They Do

Hull and East Yorkshire together host around 25,700 businesses. Hull's economy may be known for its industrial heart, but the business mix is more diverse than many realise.

* Major Investment

Siemens Gamesa alone have invested a whopping £310 million and that's just the start.

- Wholesale & Retail – Still the biggest sector, reflecting Hull's trading roots. From high street independents to logistics chains, retail fuels jobs and consumer spend.
- Construction – A powerhouse employer, driven by housing, infrastructure, and large-scale investment projects.
- Manufacturing – Food production and advanced engineering remain strong, alongside chemicals, plastics, and offshore renewables.
- Professional & Scientific Services – Hull actually has a higher proportion of knowledge-economy businesses than the UK average. Legal, consultancy, design, and IT firms are growing quietly but steadily.
- Health, Education & Social Care – Anchored by the NHS, University of Hull, and training providers, this sector underpins the city's stability.

What this means: Hull isn't a one-trick pony. Whether you're in trades, retail, digital, or services, there's a foothold to be found.

Did You Know? Hull In 5 Surprising Stats



Hull is part of the Humber Freeport, giving tax breaks that attract global manufacturers - which means supply chain work for local SMEs.



The city is still a major UK port, handling millions of tonnes of cargo each year. Logistics, packaging, and transport firms here are never short of opportunities.



Hull's City of Culture 2017 badge still pays dividends, boosting the food, leisure, and creative scene and making it easier to attract visitors and talent.



The University of Hull is more than students: it runs innovation hubs and start-up support, helping local businesses access talent and funding.



Hull has a fast-growing Eastern European community, reshaping retail, services, and food markets with new demand and cultural flavour.

Part 3: Skills, Shortages and Future Potential

The Skills Gap

Hull faces a well-documented shortage of formal qualifications. Too many people leave school without the training employers need. That creates headaches for big employers but opportunity for small ones.

If you have in-demand skills - electrician, welder, coder, marketer - you're already more valuable than the average. If you can train apprentices, you don't just fill your own skills gap, you become part of the solution. Skills bootcamps and apprenticeship grants are available and underused.

Future Potential

Hull's economy is actively reshaping around three priorities (from its Economic Strategy 2021–2026):

- 1 People** Raising skills and creating good-quality jobs.
- 2 Place** Making Hull a greener, cleaner, more attractive city.
- 3 Productivity** Supporting innovation and growth across sectors.

The city aims for carbon neutrality by 2030, which will trigger demand for retrofits, insulation, energy-efficient systems, EV infrastructure, and green building projects. Local SMEs in the supply chain stand to benefit massively.

Part 4: The Digital Paradox

Hull is a world leader in digital infrastructure: the first UK city with 100% full-fibre broadband, delivered by KCOM, with competitors like MS3 and CityFibre adding to the mix. Businesses here can access lightning-fast speeds few other regions can match.

Yet here's the paradox: many SMEs and trades in Hull still have no website, no Google Business profile, and no social media presence. Nationally, around 40% of small businesses lack a website. Locally, anecdotal evidence suggests Hull lags even further behind. That's a wide-open opportunity

If you are online - visible on Google, present on Facebook, listed in local directories - you're already ahead of the majority. Being findable locally is no longer optional. It's the difference between being picked and being invisible.

Is this your business?

40%

Nationally, that's the percentage of small businesses who don't have a website. With at least 80% of potential customers searching online these businesses are missing out

Part 5: Where the Action Is



Trades & Construction: Hull is buzzing with housing refurbishments, infrastructure projects, and green retrofits.



Landlord & Student Services: Landlords need fast-turnaround, repeatable work: painting, plumbing, cleaning, maintenance. Reliable suppliers will get recurring income.



Auto & Mobility: Cars dominate. Mobile services, EV-related businesses and car-care providers are on the up.



Digital & Cyber: Fibre creates opportunity for e-commerce, marketing, and cybersecurity solutions.



Lifestyle & Leisure: Hull's affordability leaves households with discretionary spend for gyms, salons, cafés, and entertainment.

Part 6: Key Moves for SMEs and Trades

Specialise, Don't Generalise

Be known for one thing and own it.

Tap Into Housing and Cars

Hull's housing stock and car dependency are two of the biggest demand drivers.

Be Online, Be Found

The local online gap is wide. Fill it.

Ride Hull's Goals

Link your offer to the city's carbon-neutral, greener, fairer vision.

Use Local Support

Grants of up to £10,000, training hubs, and mentorship are available if you know where to look. **

** For Information about grants etc click here →

Proud of Hull



Hull's own aviation pioneer Amy Johnson once said:

“ Had I been a man I might have explored the poles or climbed Mount Everest, but as it was my spirit found outlet in the air

Today, that spirit is pure Hull business advice: find your own route, take bold chances, and don't wait for permission.

Big Boots to Fill

Hull has always been a city where small, practical ventures grow into national and even global names. From family shops to factory floors, it's proof that big things often start in little workshops, back rooms, and corner stores.

Here are just some of the businesses with Hull roots that went on to shape industries far beyond the Humber:



Smith & Nephew

Started in 1856 as a small Hull apothecary. Cotton wool and plasters made in a back room grew into one of the world's leading med-tech companies.

Arco (Safety Specialists)

Born in Hull in 1884 selling oilskins and clothing, now the UK's leading supplier of PPE and workwear. Still family-owned, still headquartered in Hull, still kitting out trades and industry across the nation.



J.R. Rix & Sons

From a 19th-century shipping and fuel trading firm to today's regional giant in fuel supply, fleet services, heating oil, and car dealerships. A story of local trade evolving to meet new needs.

More Big Boots to Fill.....



William Jackson (Aunt Bessie's)

Founded in 1851 as a grocer and miller, now best known for Aunt Bessie's Yorkshire puddings and frozen foods. Proof that a local trade can one day stock freezers in homes across Britain.

Reckitt's (Now Reckitt Benckiser)

What began in Hull in 1840 as a starch and laundry business is now a global health and hygiene powerhouse, producing brands like Dettol, Nurofen, and Vanish.



Rank Hovis

A milling company that grew to dominate flour production nationally, with Hull as part of its historic backbone.

Humber Galvanizing (Wedge Group)

A trusted local provider for steel protection since the 1970s, showing how trade and construction-linked industries are just as vital to Hull's economy as the global giants.



The takeaway? These weren't overnight successes or "big idea" start-ups. They were trades, family businesses, and practical solutions to everyday needs. Hull's history shows that if you serve your community well and adapt to change, the sky's the limit.

Your Quick Superpower Summary

TL;DR (Too Long; Didn't Read)

Also known as “the quick version.” If you’re flat-out busy but still want the essentials, this is for you. Think of it as your shortcut: the big picture without all the background detail. Perfect if you’re skimming, on the go, or just want the highlights.

💡 Pro tip: Ask Alexa or Siri to read this out loud while you get on with something else — your business briefing, hands-free.

- This playbook is for SMEs & trades—Hull’s backbone businesses. Younger + student-rich = demand for rentals, setups, refurb. High proportion of landlords = repeat work for trusted trades. Old homes = steady flow of renovations, upgrades, and retrofits.
- Cars dominate = auto services, mobile trades, and EV installs thrive.
- Digital paradox = fibre everywhere, but SMEs are offline. Being online makes you stand out.
- Hull aims for carbon neutrality by 2030 = big opportunities in green retrofits and energy efficiency.

Hull is a city of resilience and ambition. The opportunities are there. It’s your move.

Questions Local Businesses Are Asking

If Hull has world-class broadband, why are so many small businesses still invisible online?

Because infrastructure doesn't equal adoption. Hull has lightning-fast fibre, but many local SMEs and trades still rely on flyers, word of mouth, and Facebook groups. Nationally, around 40% of small businesses don't have a website and Hull seems to lag further.

👉 The opportunity: Even a simple Google Business Profile or one-page website makes you stand out. Visibility = trust = bookings.

Where are the biggest skills gaps right now?

Hull struggles to fill higher-value roles. There's a shortage of electricians, welders, engineers, and digital professionals like marketers or cybersecurity specialists. Employers also say too many applicants lack formal qualifications.

👉 The opportunity: If you already have in-demand skills, you're more valuable. If you can train apprentices or staff, you not only solve your own shortage but get ahead of competitors.

What types of businesses are thriving locally?

Construction, manufacturing, and wholesale/retail are the backbone. But professional services are growing faster than the UK average in Hull - legal, consultancy, IT, and design firms are on the up.

Healthcare, education, and landlord services are also stable markets.

👉 The opportunity: Look for crossover niches like trades working with landlords, or digital firms helping manufacturers modernise.

Is there really money to be made when wages in Hull are lower?

Yes—because living costs are lower too. Housing is half the national average, which frees up disposable income for consumer spend (gyms, salons, food, leisure). It also means SMEs can hire competitively without London-level wages.

☛ The opportunity: Affordable housing = new households setting up, landlords investing, and young people with spare money for experiences and convenience.

What about the high closure rate for new businesses? Should I be worried?

Hull does have the UK's highest closure rate: nearly 45% of new businesses since 2020 have folded. But most failures come down to poor planning, underfunding, or being “too general.”

☛ The opportunity: If you specialise, know your market, and use the grants/support available, you'll already beat the odds. Hull rewards focus and resilience.

What's coming next for Hull that small businesses can plug into?

The city's Economic Strategy aims for carbon neutrality by 2030 and growth built around “people, place, productivity.” Expect more demand for: ● Energy retrofits and green building projects ● EV infrastructure and mobility services ● Skills development, apprenticeships, and training

☛ The opportunity: Align your business with Hull's goals. If you're in trades, go green. If you're in services, show how you support inclusivity and skills growth.

Resources to Seize the Chance (Before Your Competitors Do)

Support Type	What You Can Access
Local Help	Invest Hull Enterprise Team: grants, advice for digital, growth and brownfield redevelopment.
Workshops & Advice	Hull & East Yorkshire Growth Hub: one-to-one support, “Help to Grow,” innovation grants, skills bootcamps.
Green & Energy Support	Hull Business Energy Efficiency Scheme (up to £10k), EV charger grants, training subsidies via Upskilling Support.
Innovation Grants	Humber Innovation Support Programme: 50% funding up to £30k, graduate intern support, academic guidance.
Workspaces & Networks	Hull Chamber, Humber Bondholders, Entrepreneurs’ Circle, Sirius, Business & IP Centre supplies mentoring, loans, export advice.

And one more.....

Support Type	What You Can Access
Start-up Funding	Up to £5k start-up grants via Council & Growth Hub; knowledge transfer, export, innovation grants through regional funds

Bottom Line: Seize the Chance – Before Your Competitors Do

Hull is rolling out opportunity all the time. All you need to do is register to receive updates and be the first to know, the first in line for any new business opportunities.

The tools, goals, and markets are all here but so are your competitors. Get focused, get visible, get supported, and you'll find the gap you were made for.

✶ About the Author: Susi, The 15-Minute Marketer

Susi has spent over 30 years working at a high level in marketing - from leaflets and events to websites, social media, and AI-driven campaigns (with everything in between). She's helped global brands and local SMEs alike, always with the same goal: making marketing work in the real world.

Through The 15 Minute Marketer, Susi now shares that experience in bite-sized, practical resources designed especially for small businesses and trades.

Susi also provides a seamless Get Visible Online service — starting with websites and Google Business Profiles. So if you're ready to stand out locally, you'll know where to begin.



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