

December - January Volume 2 Issue 1

BUSINESS CONNECTIONS

Connecting Business

In this issue:

FOCUS ON BOLTON

Page 27

EM Rochdale Awards

Page 45



Who cares about IT.....

.....Flexsys Do!

See our feature on page 7

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But as a business owner myself I look at maintenance and planning issues as looking after myself (as no-one else will) – making sure that the business operations are fully in my control.



ISSUE 2 - 1

Forthcoming Events

Manchester Chamber forthcoming events in December – February.....6

Features

FlexCare Lite7
 DIY or expert advertising?24
 Marketing Group put local conference venues firmly on the map.....26

Rochdale News

Has the council been paying employees equally?.....9
 New legal panel for Greater Manchester transport.....9

Bolton News

Business for Breakfast appoints Moorish Idol.....11
 Bolton Nightclub in a league of its own.....11
 Bolton heads overseas.....11
 No decorations for Bolton bosses.....12
 Business booms for local debt management firms.....12

Bury News

Soap stars in Bury.....12
 New account for Wilson-Cooke.....12
 Compensation business claim.....12
 Full house for local business park.....13
 Pennine Telecom.....13
 Fly tippers cause problems.....13

Oldham News

House of Lords recognise Oldham businesses.....13

North England language skills improved.....14
 Hollinwood redevelopment.....14
 Ban on louts supported by businesses.....14

Wigan News

New Wigan shopping centre.....14
 Watchdog warning on unsafe sofas.....15
 Wigan's latest ambassador15

Health and Safety

ROSPA promotes health and safety in the workplace.....17
 RNID keeps the peace.....20

Payroll

Institute of payroll professionals ensure new laws are understood.....23

Leasing

Quality leasing emphasised by the BVRLA25

Focus on Bolton

Bolton Businesses get a spring in their step.....27
 Bolton TIC.....27
 Reebok returns to its roots.....27
 Stafford & Co.....29
 Businesses are risking both fires and fines...29
 Keoghs solicitors.....31

Exhibitions & Awards

Organise your own conference or exhibition.....32
 EM Rochdale Business Awards and Exhibitions.....45



Training	
Sales training in the North.....	37
The Learning Zone	
LSC's new Train to Gain service.....	38
REC.....	40
Gangmasters licensing.....	40
Online	
Spread the word online	42
Legal	
Molesworths Bright Clegg offer financial advice.....	48
Technology	
Wireless Networking.....	50
Energy	
Gas and Electricity contracts.....	51
Small Business	
Small Businesses speak out.....	53
Marketing	
Business Christmas card marketing.....	56
Ignorance of customer service is not bliss....	57
Marketing online.....	58
Travel	
How the real businessmen and women travel.....	61

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Events

MANCHESTER Chamber - Forthcoming Events - Oct 2006 – Nov 2006

DATE	EVENT	VENUE	COST
December			
14/12/2006	Stockport Breakfast	Stockport	£10.64 Member £21.28 Non-member
January 2007			
11/01/2007	Stockport Breakfast Club	Stockport	£10.64 Member £21.28 Non-member
26/01/2007	B2B Networking Lunch	Salford	£17.02 Member £34.04 Non-member
30/01/2007	Members Contact Evening	Stockport	£10 Member
31/01/2007	Carousel Networking Lunch	Wigan	£15 Member £30 Non-member
February 2007			
07/02/2007	Crisis Management PR-Reputations at risk	Salford	£29.79 Member £46.81 Non-member
08/02/2007	Stockport Breakfast Club	Stockport	£10.64 Member £21.28 Non-member



For a full calendar of events throughout the Greater Manchester area, please visit www.gmchamber.co.uk

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Email: info@gmchamber.co.uk Web site: www.gmchamber.co.uk/

Who Cares about IT ?

– Flexsys Do ! and FlexCare Lite proves it

Many people describe themselves as computer literate, but when a computer stops working, slows down or starts to do things it shouldn't, very few of us actually know what to do to make it right.

Smaller businesses, with only a small number of computers, may, in particular, find difficult computers a problem to deal with causing the productivity of their business to slow down significantly.

Flexsys (UK) Ltd, however, think that they might have the answer. The Heywood-based IT support company is launching a new service specifically aimed at start-up businesses and smaller, typically family-run companies.

“As a result of our most recent Telesales campaign it became clear there was a demand for technical assistance from the smaller size local businesses,” MD, Gerry Allen explained. “Therefore we took the decision to put together an affordable solution that will help the smaller companies to tap into the expertise their business requires, and hence FlexCare Lite was born”

FlexCare Lite is ideal for companies with between one and five PCs and provides comprehensive telephone and remote support from as little as £10 per month. Using Flexsys' team of Microsoft Certified engineers, the company believes that most problems can be resolved within one hour, with as many as 40% being resolved in as little as 10 minutes, allowing businesses to get active again almost instantly.

“We realise that many small businesses are struggling with problems ranging from slow, poorly-configured PCs to being inundated with spam emails or spy ware,” Business Development Director Roy Cunningham explained. “We looked around at what our competitors offered in this area and realised that there was a need to provide a better solution to companies with 5 PCs or less, that includes dedicated helpdesk facilities and qualified telephone support personnel.”

The FlexCare Lite service covers all of a company's desktop PCs, laptops, printers and networking equipment. Most queries can be resolved over the telephone, but for the more tricky problems, Flexsys can “dial in” to a customer's PC over the internet using a secure connection to allow the engineer to share control of the PC with the customer and experience the problem first-hand.

Typically for a Flexsys service, FlexCare Lite does not just provide for reactive support.

“When a customer signs up for Flexcare Lite we take a good look at his existing set-up and suggest ways in which the system can be made more reliable,” Roy said.

“This may include installing an anti-virus/anti-spyware solution or implementing a backup procedure to ensure that business-critical data is safe if the computer crashes. We want our Customers' systems to be ultra-reliable; not only does it make our support task easier, it also helps our Customers to run their business more efficiently, and hopefully gives our dedicated Sales Team excellent testimonials with which to further promote Flexsys.”

To discuss the benefits of FlexCare Lite to your business, contact Flexsys on 0845 644 2245 and ask for Laura.



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Geoff Butterworth has gained a reputation over 25 years as a much renowned artist. He was put forward to become a Fellow of the Royal Society of Art in 1987 by two prominent artists who saw his work as progressive in the medium of watercolour. Since then he has been elected a full member of the British Watercolour society, winning top place on three occasions as well as the Mail on Sunday prize for most outstanding work. He has been accepted several times into the Laing Art Competition, where he has won two major prizes and also in the Singer and Freidlander Watercolour competition, both at London's Mall Gallery. He outsells most of his contemporaries and has been consistent in his quality gaining many private and industrial commissions.

Together with Molesworths Bright Clegg acting as negotiators for Geoff, it is proposed that a commissioned painting will be produced, Framed and Mounted to the highest quality for the sum of £1200.00. It is also proposed that out of every commission a donation of £100.00 will be made to the Chamber of Commerce



MOLESWORTHS BRIGHT CLEGG OFFICE
Octagon House Rochdale by Geoff Butterworth FRSA
Image size approx. 16" x 26"

Any interested party who wishes to take up this opportunity should contact John Kay at Molesworths Bright Clegg at Rochdale. All accepted commissions will be done on a first come first served basis and will be completed to the requirements of the investor. This offer will last for one year only and is priced on a similar size of work.

Contact – John Kay Tel 01706 356666 or e-mail jkay@molesworths.co.uk



readers. Amjad Ali my business partner echo's these sentiments."

Adil Ansari, owner of Keystone Estates, winners of the Business Start Up category said: "We are shocked and delighted to have won such a recognised and prestigious award and are pleased to know that Keystone really are making a difference in the estate agency profession. We plan to keep growing and hopefully, with continuing support, become Rochdale's leading Estate Agent and Letting Specialist."

Bolton news

Business for Breakfast appoints Moorish Idol

Bolton-based Moorish Idol Marketing has signed a deal with a leading UK business referral organisation to promote more small and medium sized businesses across Bolton.

The firm has been commissioned to set up new groups across Bolton in addition to managing the two existing groups in the town.

As a private business-networking club, Business For Breakfast allows only one member to join per profession, sector or occupation, with 'referrals of work' being passed between members.

The organisation is a Franchise with over 4000 members, with this region's division bought by Joe Duncan back in 2003.

Mr Duncan says his decision to appoint Moorish Idol signals an exciting development in the growth of forums within Bolton and Bury.

"Moorish Idol has worked tremendously hard in the last few years to establish an impressive client base and a strong network of contacts in the area.

"We are delighted to be working with them on developing at least 3 new groups in the area in addition to the 2 existing groups."

Run by Gary Lovatt, Moorish Idol has now worked with over 150 businesses in an around Bolton, helping them with all aspects of marketing, PR and networking.

He says: "We find the most successful ones are those who establish their networks quickly and work hard on building lasting relationships.

"Particularly at SME level there is no better way of marketing your business than obtaining 'word of mouth' referrals and repeat business from people who know, like and trust you."

For further information or to book a place, contact Gary on 01204 374835.

Ex football pro to put nightclub in a league of its own

One of Britain's biggest entertainment companies, Luminar, has appointed a former professional footballer to boost business at a Bolton town centre night spot.

Derek Loadwick, who previously played for Don Revie's Leeds United as well as playing for Stockport County and Hartlepool United, will take the helm at the Ikon and Jaxx nightclub in Bridge Street, where he is aiming to boost business by 25 per cent.

Mr Loadwick said that he had lots of ideas for club, although progress would take time.

He added that new plans include more celebrity appearances at the club, which the owners hope to make their flagship town centre operation.

Mr Loadwick joined Luminar, one of Britain's entertainment venue managers 20 years ago at the end of his footballing career.

With over 130 sites across the UK, Luminar operates the Oceana, Liquid, Life and Jumpin Jaks brands, and owned the Chicago Rock chain until it sold the brand earlier this year.



Bolton firm wows the USA

A Bolton firm has made a major impression on the USA market following making a debut at an American trade fair showcasing the latest innovations in packaging and its technology.

Virtuweld, manufactured by Mister Blister on the Wardley Industrial Estate in Walkden, attracted 'massive' interest with its stand at the East Pack exhibition in Chicago.

First Choice Packaging, which manufactures Virtuweld under licence in the US, organised and ran the stand which received huge positive feedback on the Virtuweld product range.

Virtuweld - already used by Marks and Spencer in its delicatessen range - looks and feels like a welded pack and also has a unique patented locking system making it highly tamper resistant.

Mister Blister has around 50 employees and a turnover of approximately £3 million a year.

>>>>>>

Bolton bosses ban Christmas decorations

Over 70 per cent of Bolton bosses say workplace Christmas decorations are out this year in a bid to avoid offending other religions.

So say the results of a survey of 480 businesses in the town carried out by Peninsula BusinessWise, a Manchester-based employment law firm.

In the survey, 77 per cent of employers said they were banning decorations because they feared upsetting those of other faiths, while 84 per cent admitted they were not aware of a legal requirement to celebrate all faiths.

A spokesman from Peninsula BusinessWise, said that although he understood employers' concerns, complete are not necessarily the solution.

He added that every employee has the right to celebrate their faith's festival, including Christmas, in the workplace if they want to. And if an employer does not this, they may well be liable to litigation.

UK debt mountain means business for local debt management firm

Debt difficulties throughout Britain have led to a further six months of strong business results for a Middlebrook debt management company.

In its interim results for the six months to the end of September, Debtmatters, reported that its full year results to March, 2007, would now be "ahead of current market expectations".

The company employs 270 people and specialises in Individual Voluntary Arrangements, which allow debtors to write off some of their debts.

The company's revenues rose by 465 per cent year on year to £13.79 million, from £2.44 million, while profits increased from £765,000 to £4.83 million.

Bury News

Bury skincare firm are soap stars!

Bury-based organic skincare products firm Faith in Nature, of East Street, has scooped a Golden Bunny award for the best animal cruelty-free soap.

The competition, held by the BUAV (the British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection), was named after the rabbit - which is most commonly used for testing. Faith in Nature won the award following a poll of over 1,500 consumers.

Faith in Nature, which run by Rona Rose offers a range of over 50 body care products - all produced without the use of animal testing.

The company, which has over 17 staff, belongs to the Humane Cosmetics Standard and was one of the early pioneers of using non-animal tested ingredients.

Rona Rose said that she felt that this policy has helped to establish Faith in Nature as the leading brand it is today.

She added that the company fully support alternative methods of testing to ensure that newer ingredients are safe both for humans and for animals.

New account win for Bury-based Wilson-Cooke

Bury based creative marketing and internet solutions firm Wilson-Cooke (WC) has jointly won an account to rebrand Manchester's United Aluminium (UA).

Wilson Cooke won the account together with Huddersfield-based point2partnership (p2p) after the client decided that both companies had something to offer and that they should each take on a share of the business.

United Aluminium designs and manufactures the award-winning Unibox range of exhibition, interiors and product display systems. The firm's managing director Nick Wraith, said that the company required an agency who they could work with long-term and help them produce the branding that they deserve.

Wilson Cooke moved to the town's Waterfold Business Park two years ago and now has responsibility for all web and email marketing for United Aluminium.



Staking a claim in the compensation business

Finding a niche in a competitive market is a local young entrepreneur who launched his own compensation claim firm after encountering problems claiming compensation himself.

The success enjoyed by 23-year-old Daniel Smith in running The Claim Link from a base in Bolton Road, Bury has led to plans to open further offices either in Salford Quays, Trafford Park or Manchester city centre within the next few weeks.

Daniel explained that the company deal with personal injury claims, from slip and trips to car crashes. He has been involved in the business for around six months, having started with an office on The Rock before expanding to his own shop on the high street.

From virtually no customer base at the beginning, he now has nearly 100 companies including taxi firms and garages which pass claims work through to him. Other clients include two major insurance companies who pass on their claims.

Daniel is now dealing with hundreds of claims a month and growing. He got into the business having attempted to claim compensation when he was younger and experiencing the difficulties faced by claimants.

Full house for local business park

A Bury business park is a sellout say developers Seddons, announcing the full occupancy of their 32-acre mixed-use Waterfold Business Park off Rochdale Road.

The park's popularity lies in its ideal location offering 40,000 sq ft of modern office and 80,000 sq ft of industrial accommodation in an area short of quality freehold space.

Joint site agents Nolan Redshaw claim the park's popularity is due to its closeness to Bury, Rochdale and Manchester town and city centres and the high quality design and specification of the units, which has attracted blue-chip occupiers such as the Village Hotel and PC World Business.

Successful nuclear contract for Pennine Telecom

Bury-based main contractors Pennine Telecom have managed the complete refurbishment of the fire and rescue control room at British Nuclear Group's Sellafield site.

Work carried out by the company means that in addition to radio and telephone communication, staff can control doors, Tannoy, CCTV and even the site fire alarm and perimeter monitoring from a single screen.

The contract schedule was extremely tight with completion required within three months and the works being carried out alongside the centre in full round the clock operation.

Shopkeepers up in arms over fly tippers

Shopkeepers are up in arms after fly tippers have been dumping mounds of waste onto a customer car park on Watson Street, Radcliffe for the past six months.

The shopkeepers on Ainsworth Road, Radcliffe say they are worried customers will be put off by the mess and the smell from the car park - with one customer even saying that she had seen a dead rat.

A spokesman for Bury council said that the site had

been examined by council officers to ensure that there is nothing toxic and has now been referred to the area cleansing team to be dealt with.

Oldham news

Oldham business recognised at House of Lords

Oldham based Madeleine Lindley Ltd was recognised at the House of Lords recently, at an event to celebrate employer diversity in UK businesses.

The company, based on the Broadway Business Park, Chadderton, attended the event, sponsored by Bradford and Bingley, which acknowledged 27 businesses who have taken part in QED-UK's Employer Diversity Project.

Madeleine Lindley Ltd has shown its commitment to the project, which aims to improve the employment prospects of ethnic minorities across the UK. The company received its certificate from Lord Ahmed of Rotherham.

QED teamed up with Jobcentre Plus to deliver the initiative to more than 80 businesses, employing almost 35,000 people, across eight designated areas of England and Wales. All the companies who registered on the project received guidance on preparing actions plans to improve the ethnic diversity of their workforce.



Mike Lindley (second left) receives his award from Lord Ahmed of Rotherham, QED chief executive Dr Mohammed Ali OBE and Gerry Sutcliffe MP.

Madeleine Lindley Ltd works with Ethnic Minority Achievement Teams from various education authorities throughout the UK. The company has always had an equal opportunities policy in place but got involved with QED to find out the areas for improvement.

Director Mike Lindley explained: "We have always celebrated diversity within our workforce but saw this as an opportunity to formalise and acknowledge our efforts. Whilst the initiative showed us that our proactive approach to diversity is effective, it also highlighted the opportunity to improve our recruitment processes to reflect the high numbers of people from ethnic minorities within the North West community. We work with schools nationally and internationally and therefore our client base is very diverse - we hope to encourage people from all walks of life to work with us, creating a multicultural community at Madeleine Lindley."

>>>>>>

Oldham resident works wonders for North of England language skills

Oldham resident Jane Smith has once again proved that the town boasts its fair share of brilliant minds.

Jane, who is the web and marketing officer for the Regional Language Network North West (RLN NW), has helped to pioneer and promote the Language Survey 2006 - the first ever language capability survey in the North of England.



Jane Smith

The Language Survey 2006 aims to identify languages spoken and how widely they are used with geographical breakdown, providing potential inward investors and employers with valuable data on language skills that are available.

The RLN NW is a Manchester-based organisation which exists to highlight the importance of foreign languages in business. Jane, who is responsible for promoting the services of the RLN NW, is delighted by the response the survey has received since its launch.

“People have been logging on and completing the Language Survey in impressive numbers, so it just goes to show that the public is really starting to sit up and take language skills seriously.”

Everyone is invited to go online and complete the survey, as the more people who take part, the better the reflection of language skills will be. All North West survey participants are eligible to enter a free prize draw, where prizes up for grabs include a £250 holiday voucher, ipod nanos, MP3 players, and free entry tickets into popular North West tourist destinations.

Jane continues: “The Language Survey is a very important study because data on languages has not been previously available. Businesses and inward investors can use this information to help them match their recruitment needs, which is obviously great news for our region.”

The first of its kind on the North of England, the Language Survey has been developed in collaboration between the Regional Language Network North West (RLN NW) and its counterparts in Yorkshire & Humber and the North East.

Preliminary findings from the survey will be available free-of-charge to businesses looking to create opportunities in the North of England, from 12 December 2006. A full research report will be obtainable before the end of March 2007.

The survey is live until 1 December 2006. To take part, log on to: www.languagesurvey.co.uk

Multi-million pound Hollinwood redevelopment a step closer

The multi-million pound redevelopment of Hollinwood has come a step closer with the drawing up of a new masterplan.

The scheme, which will include a landmark hotel and offices, is for land in Alfred Street next to the motorway and around the Hollinwood Business Centre.

The masterplan includes the site of the Roxy cinema which will be demolished and also involves the removal of the gasholder beside the M60.

The plan, which has attracted great interest from property developers, has been strongly promoted by Oldham Council's regeneration team.

Town centre businesses launch ban on louts

Oldham town centre businesses have launched a pre-Christmas campaign to rid the town's shopping centre of louts and to ban anti-social behaviour likely to put off shoppers.

The new drive is Oldham Town Centre Partnership's Business Improvement District's latest move against business crime.

The police and Oldham Council have joined with 47 businesses to issue exclusion notices to badly behaved individuals who not be allowed to enter any of the shops, pubs and bars participating in the scheme for 12 months. Breaching a notice could lead to the issuing of an anti-social behaviour order.

The campaign is being run along the lines of 147 similar schemes across the country and is geared to send out a clear message from the business community that the small minority of people who misbehave are not welcome in the town.

Wigan News

Jobs boost as retail skills bus tours town

With Wigan's showpiece new shopping centre just three months away from its grand opening, Wigan Council is helping the town's retailers meet the anticipated upsurge in demand for trained staff.

The Grand Arcade is due to open its doors next March and is expected to create 700 new jobs in the town. A further 300 jobs are likely to become available during 2007 as more shops and stores open – which is why the council launched a scheme to match retailers with potential employees.

The council has been working with a number of partner organisations to ensure the right people are available for the right jobs in the town.

A retail skills bus is now visiting locations around the borough to promote jobs in the town. It is staffed by a number of advisors who can help people with their training requirements and find the right job for them.

A council spokesman said: "We want to show that retail can be a great career for many people. A variety of training will be provided for potential employees, tailored to the requirements of the new and existing stores, and this will raise the standard of skills throughout the town centre."

Watchdog Warning On Unsafe Sofas

Consumer watchdogs with Wigan Council are urging the public not to buy furniture that is being flogged from the back of a van in the borough.

Trading Standards officers say they have taken a number of calls from residents who may have fallen victim to doorstep conmen who are selling sub-standard and possible dangerous furniture.

So far the team has taken calls from concerned residents in Beech Hill and Worsley Mesnes, but fear this could spread to other areas.

While Trading Standards is currently investigating the most recent complaints, past problems with mobile furniture salespeople have included claims that sofas were leather when they were fake.

The team says that the salespeople are even claiming that the furniture has come from a show home but it's more likely to originate from Eastern Europe or the Far East.

Chief Trading Standards Officer Alan Blundell says: "A few years ago we had problems with unsafe sofas being sold from a van in Wigan. Tests carried out on these sofas proved that they did not comply with UK safety standards and could in fact be a potentially lethal fire hazard. Tests by the fire brigade showed that once they were on fire such sofas gave off large amounts of toxic smoke."

Wigan's latest ambassador

She comes from the Kent coast, but she's been given the task of promoting Wigan across the channel.

25 year old Suzanne Riches is Wigan's latest ambassador to French twin town Angers.

Hailing from Minster Abbey on the Isle of Sheppey, the French and Italian Studies graduate has extensive knowledge and experience of the country. Suzanne has studied and worked in France on and off for several years, and recently completed a



one-year post-graduate course in Business Communications at the University of Bordeaux.

She knows Wigan through memorable trips to Wigan Pier and the Museum of Memories, and is looking forward to the challenge of strengthening links between the borough and the Angevins.

"The chance to represent an area of England that I love is an amazing opportunity" says Suzanne. "Dealing with different projects that concern so many areas of life, such as politics, education, sport and music can be very rewarding. It's great to see that twinning actually makes international relations possible on a local level.

"I've enjoyed living, studying and working in Paris, Aveyron and Bordeaux, but Angers is a very beautiful town and the surrounding countryside is very picturesque. It seems that there's something for everyone here - it's a young university town with a good night life and it's also steeped in history and culture.

"I'm really pleased to have the opportunity of spending a year here, discovering a new region of France which is very different to that of Bordeaux - an interesting comparison given the strong presence of a 'wine culture' in the two regions."

Suzanne counts reading, cinema, art, horse riding and hiking among her hobbies and interests. She also enjoys aerobics, circuit training classes and yoga, and has joined the local gym in Angers with the Ambassador from Osnabrück.





Health and Safety in the workplace

Is your business as safe as it needs to be?

An accident or damage to someone's health can happen no matter what line of business you are in.

Manual handling of loads, dangerous machinery, toxic substances, electricity and working at height or with display screen equipment are just some of the conditions that expose people to hazards.

Great progress has been made in occupational health and safety in the UK and, as a result, we now have some of the safest working environments in the world.

But despite all the precautions, there are still around 1.6 million workplace injuries each year and around 2.2 million cases of ill health caused or made worse by work. Last year, 212 workers suffered notifiable fatal injuries at work and 384 members of the public were killed in occupational settings.

The cost of such incidents to the UK economy is immense – up to £16 billion per year.

On top of this, of course, is the

suffering and grief caused to employees, their families and workmates.

The effects on a small business of an accident or illness at work can be considerable. The absence of a key member of staff for a prolonged period of time could result in huge losses in terms of worker morale, time, wages, orders and output.

As well as being a way of demonstrating social responsibility, paying attention to health and safety therefore makes good business sense. Actively promoting well-being safeguards the company's key asset – its people.

Health and safety – relieving the headache

Research has shown that small companies face a number of distinct challenges when dealing with occupational health and safety issues and even though the interval periods between accidents in small firms is much longer,

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training & consultancy

Established just over 12 months ago, Gateway Training & Consultancy Ltd are an expert training company, covering all areas of health and safety training. Based in Lancashire and working nationally the company provides expertise in first aid, fire training and many aspects of health and social care. With a 15 strong team of professionals all with a specialist background in the subject they teach, the consultancy is a wealth of knowledge for people who need a first class service.

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email: julie@gateway-training.co.uk
42 Manchester Road, Bury, BL9 0SX



OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE

Occupational Health has a variety of functions, principally these can be summarised into ensuring that the workforce is fit for the job they are employed to do, that the workplace is fit for its purpose and neither has a negative impact on the other.

Occupational Health should always work as an integral part of organisational policy and procedures, there should be strong consultation and association with the HR function and, obviously, Health and Safety.

Health Assessments

- Pre-employment medical assessments
- Health surveillance (statutory and risk)
- Audiometry, Spirometry and Vision screening
- Sickness Absence Management and Referral
- Return to Work assessment
- Lift Truck
- Workstation
- LGV Driver
- Night Time Worker

First Aid Training

- 4-day FAW course
- 2-day Refresher course
- 1-day Appointed Person

Rochdale Occupational Health Service Ltd (Reg. Charity No. 222649)
Nuffield House, College Road, Rochdale OL12 6AE

Tel: **01706 648855** Fax: **01706 648674**
Email: occ.health@rohs.co.uk Website: www.rohs.co.uk



accident rates are shown to be higher in smaller firms.

Many small businesses regard health and safety regulations as a towering monolith, requiring a huge amount of time and resources to overcome.

On the surface, there are copious amounts of regulations and supporting guidance for companies to get to grips with, including Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations, Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations, Electricity at Work Regulations and Noise at Work Regulations.

However, the good news is that the underlying principles are actually quite straightforward and not as insurmountable as may at first appear.

“Essentially, you have to ensure absence of risk to the safety and health of employees and others ‘so far as is reasonably practicable’,” Roger Bibbings, Occupational Safety Adviser at the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA), said.

There are five key principles that form good health and safety management:

- *A system needs to be put in place to manage health and safety and, a company employing more than five people, needs set out a written policy statement. A company needs to specify how to plan, organise, control, monitor and review preventative measures, and competent person must be appointed to help the company understand and respond appropriately to legal duties.*
- *Identify any main hazards and things that could cause harm.*
- *Assess the risks and, if a company employs more than five people, the results of the assessment need to be recorded.*
- *Make sure risk control measures are adequate, used and maintained. Safety measures have to be sensible and balanced. If necessary, back-up measures such as emergency procedures should be put in place and all employees should be adequately informed, trained and supervised.*

Help is available

There are plenty of resources available to those starting out in health and safety.

The HSE produces free leaflets with information on common hazards and it also has a downloadable guide specifically targeted at small businesses called An Introduction to Health and Safety.

RoSPA is also a useful port of call. The Society offers a consultancy service called the Health and Safety Review, which is suitable for organisations of any size and helps employers identify their main health and safety issues.

Regional training courses are also available. In Manchester, RoSPA’s exclusive NEBOSH Modular National General Certificate course, which covers the well-regarded safety syllabus in 12 one-day sessions, starts again in April 2007.

A Manual Handling Trainers and Risk Assessors Course in April and a Display Screen Equipment Assessors Course in May will also take place in Manchester.

Employee leaflets and RoSPA’s Themed Month Poster Service are also popular with small businesses.

Don’t try to go it alone

“Working together to develop a good health and safety culture is crucial,” says Roger Bibbings. “Although ‘the buck stops with you’ if are the person in overall control of your business, you cannot achieve a safe and healthy working environment on your own. It has to be a team effort and ownership and commitment to safety throughout your workforce needs to be built up over time.”

Becoming an occupational member of RoSPA and joining one of the Society’s affiliated health and safety groups, about 80 of which are located around the country, are two very practical ways of keeping up to date with the latest developments and learning from the experiences of other organisations.

A wealth of information is also available on the RoSPA website, on issues such as Managing Occupational Road Risk, a key factor for any business with employees who use the road for work.

“Don’t think accidents and occupational ill health can’t happen in your company – they can,” Roger Bibbings concludes. “Don’t wait for things to go wrong and then go for the ‘quick fix’. Build health and safety in from the start. Companies should also seek to get proper health and safety co-ordination going with other businesses, such as clients, customers, suppliers or contractors.”

Useful resources include;

- HSE publications – www.hse.gov.uk
- RoSPA Health and Safety Review - www.rospace.com/consultancy/review
- RoSPA training courses - www.rospace.com/occupationaltraining
- RoSPA leaflets - www.rospace.com/employeeleaflets
- RoSPA Themed Month Poster Service - www.rospace.com/themedmonthposters
- You can call RoSPA on 0121 248 2000 or email help@rospace.com



Keeping the peace

By Mark Morris, RNID's Head of the
'Noise at Work' campaign

How noisy is your workplace?

Noise is one of the most underestimated workplace risks. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) estimates that 170,000 people in the UK suffer deafness, tinnitus or other ear conditions as a result of exposure to excessive noise at work.

Particularly in the manufacturing, construction and music industries, the noisy atmospheres and higher levels of sound can often create initially unnoticed yet lasting and prolonged damage to hearing. However, whilst its effects are irreversible, noise-induced hearing loss is completely preventable.

Hearing problems and the lasting affects

Prolonged exposure to loud noise can cause permanent hearing loss, and other long-term hearing problems:

- Noise-induced hearing loss

This happens when you have been regularly exposed to damaging levels of noise over a long period. The hearing loss will be similar in each ear and will get worse if you continue to be exposed to the noise. Damage to the inner ear may be gradual but relentless, so people only realise their hearing has been damaged years later.

- Tinnitus

This is the word for noises that some people hear in the ear or in the head – buzzing, ringing, whistling, hissing, and other sounds. These sounds do not come from outside the head although they may sound as if they do.

- Hyperacusis

This can develop after sudden exposure to high sound levels. It can cause people to find certain sounds uncomfortable or painfully loud even when they don't bother other people. The area around the ear may also be painful.

The effects of a new hearing loss condition can often cause feelings of isolation and depression as everyday activities such as using a phone or keeping up with a conversation in a group become difficult.

100% avoidable

Employers have a legal duty to protect their employees from the harmful effects of noise at work and new UK Control of Noise at Work regulations came into effect on 6th April 2006. The new Noise at Work regulations will provide improved protection for workers from one of Britain's most serious occupational diseases.

Under the new regulations, the noise levels at which workers will be required to have hearing protection available, has been reduced by 5dB(A) to 80dB(A) and 85dB(A) respectively. The permitted average noise levels in work places have also been lowered to 87 dB (A).

RNID, the charity representing the 9 million deaf and hard of hearing people in the UK, campaigned on the EU Directive when it went through the European Parliament to ensure it provided improved protection for workers. The new regulations will bring at least one million new workers under the legislation due to the lower noise thresholds being introduced.

Employers will be required to reduce noise through a 'hierarchy of control measures' ranging from acoustic and mechanical design down to hearing surveillance and protection. The best solution is to get rid of the noise

at source. When this is not possible the employer has to make suitable ear protection available free of charge.

How employers can help

If you're an employer, there are many ways in which you can lower or eliminate your employees' exposure to noise:

- Replace old machinery with newer, quieter models.
- Ensure noise levels are checked before purchasing new machinery.
- Reduce noise from equipment by changing how it is mounted or installing silencers or enclosures.
- Keep noisy machinery in a separate work area.
- Ensure that employees do not spend longer than necessary in a noisy working environment or create a noise-reduced enclosure for employees.
- Reduce reverberations by changing the acoustics of the room or work area with material that absorbs sound.

If you think you have hearing loss take control and take RNID's telephone hearing check. Call 0845 600 55 55 to check if your hearing may be impaired.

For further information on protecting your hearing contact RNID on Tel: 0808 808 0123 Text phone: 0808 808 9000 or visit www.rnid.org.uk

Are you aware that the Noise Regulations for Work have changed?



The Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005

Are you providing a Hearing Screening Service for your Employees?
Part 6 Section 314

Would your employees benefit from custom made hearing protection?
Part 5 Section 267

For any of the above contact
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Our approach

We get to know your business and tailor our service to meet your precise recruitment needs. This means that we take care of everything from CV sifting, arranging interviews to training any new recruits before they start work. We carefully match candidates to jobs, so you can be confident we'll send you the right people with the right skills every time.

Our candidates

At TNG we specialise in helping and supporting the long-term unemployed and people who are disadvantaged in the job market to return to work. We invest time and resources into every person we help to ensure that they have the personal qualities, skills and motivation employers need. We offer jobseekers a range of support from training, work experience and mentoring through to helping them organise childcare and funding their travel expenses in the first few weeks of starting work.

Our support

We will only put forward people who we feel are up to the job and are committed to returning to work. Therefore you can be confident that we have the best interests of your business in mind at all times.

And we don't just leave you to it once your vacancy has been filled. We continue to stay in touch with you and your new employee to make sure everything's running smoothly.

If you would like to discuss your recruitment requirements or any current vacancies you have, contact us on

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TNG, Mitchell Hey Place, College Road, Rochdale OL12 6AE

A 21st Century Payrolling System



By Karen Thomson Head of Policy and Research at IPP

The IPP

The Institute of Payroll Professionals (IPP) is a 21 year-old membership organisation that aims to achieve chartered status by 2010. Previously entitled the Institute of Payroll and Pensions Management (IPPM) it became the IPP in September 2006 to encompass all payroll professionals and the 5000 members of the organisation.

The IPP provides training and professional qualifications to a MSC level to its members and works closely with key Government departments, such as HMRC, DWP and DTI, to ensure the practical implementation of payroll and pension legislation is addressed. It also offers an end-to-end payroll resource service for employers, an advisory service with up to date online industry news and publishes a monthly Payroll Professional magazine to keep members, associates and students up to date.

E-filing and the new legislation

It all began when Lord Carter released his first report in 2001, recommending that large employers file their End of Year returns (P35 and P14s) electronically for 2004/05 and medium employers file their End of Year returns for 2005/06. Lord Carter also recommended that small employers, those with fewer than 50 employees, file End of Year returns from 2010.

As with any new legislation, initial problems were experienced with 2004/05 returns being processed with some difficulty, however the 2005/06 returns have proved far more successful.

In July 2005, Lord Carter was requested to undertake a second review, this time reviewing HMRC online services as a whole.

In his second report on online services, Lord Carter recommended large and medium sized employers to file in year forms (P45, P46) online from April 2008 and for small employers to do the same from April 2010. Forms P45(1), P45(3), P46 and PENNOT (pension notification) will also be included, however P46 car, P11ds, P9ds and P11D(b) will not. It was also recommended that electronic returns should be required at various intervals for Self-Assessment, VAT and Corporation Tax.

The use of pay-rolling online will predominantly benefit employees as their tax affairs will be much more regularised, allowing the turnaround time for forms to be much quicker and adjustments to tax code issues applied easier.

Employers will also witness potential benefits as employees will be correctly paid and fewer queries and HMRC enquiry forms will be received.

Approximately 24% of large and medium sized employers already submit their P45 and P46 forms online, however, in order to support employers to make the transition to online filing for 100% of businesses, HMRC online recruitment staff are approaching employers to ensure that they understand their responsibilities and to offer help, advice and guidance. The IPP are working closely with HMRC to ensure a smooth implementation of these regulations.

Both employers and software developers will have to review internal procedures to ensure that they are able to cope with all the forthcoming changes. The new system will have a wider impact on some employees than may have previously been anticipated, however together, the IPP and HMRC, are trying to ensure that within the up and coming months all employees are prepared for a new era of payroll.



Is employee-related legislation dragging you down?

With 200 additions to employment and tax legislation in the last three years and potentially crippling compliance costs, we live in a hostile commercial climate. This means that businesses need to get smart.

Consider outsourcing your payroll to DTE.

By outsourcing your payroll functions to The DTE Payroll & Tax Centre Limited, you can obtain expert services for as little as a third of the in-house cost. You will also benefit from accurate financial reporting that gives management greater operational awareness, and therefore a higher level of strategic control.

For more information please contact Lynne Cramb on
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DIY or Use An Expert

The New Year can often be challenging time for employers faced with the task of revving up the workforce out of Christmas Party mood and kick starting 2007. Staff will often make New Years resolutions or just plainly lack the motivation to join the new impetus and choose to resign. Even planned recruitment hits you in the face.

Faced with unexpected or even planned recruitment problems, company directors are often torn between the costs of using an expert consultancy or the time consuming process of doing it yourself. So what's involved in the recruitment process, how do you get the best possible group of candidates and how do you make the right choice for you company?

The natural inclination for most managers and directors is to save money and try to find people themselves. The immediate questions are:

Where do I place an ad?

How much should it cost?

How do I get discounted rates?

Who writes the ad?

How do I manage the response?

Who should I interview?

Will I get a good selection of people?

How will I know which candidate is right for us?

The answer is that without having your own expert recruiter in your organisation, you are doing a job that takes you away from your day to day tasks and gets you doing something you don't do often enough to be good at it. The staffing decision you make could well be rushed because of lack of time and be based on gut feel as much as any true knowledge about the person you are about to employ.

Advertising and sourcing staff through word of mouth can and does work, especially for companies which recruit regularly and have a continuous presence in certain media. Small and medium sized companies who recruit infrequently into specialist positions such as Marketing, Finance, Legal and other professional functions may find that advertising gives a small snapshot of people available at that particular time and who happen to see the advertisement in that paper or magazine.

Initially using a Recruitment Consultancy may

seem like an expensive option, but let's take a look at what you get for your money. Let's also discuss what the consultancy should do for you?

Firstly you should expect the consultant to have a good knowledge of the position you are recruiting for, either through experience of that specific employment market or through having worked in that sector. This can be demonstrated by how a consultant can construct a job/person specification and discuss how that role fits in to the organisation. Another indicator is whether or not the consultant can suggest certain people who may be suitable.

Secondly, you should be guided as to the availability of candidates for this type of position. If there is a plentiful supply, a good recruiter will have a selection of candidates available for you through having consistent advertising in the right media over a period of time. Should there be a shortage, the consultant should be able to suggest media, websites or professional bodies to advertise the position in and be able to offer discounts for advertising through their contact with those media. They will also be able to write the ad copy and place it on you behalf, managing all responses.

Thirdly, an expert recruitment consultancy will be able to carry out all initial interviews, carrying out competency based interviews and providing you with a selection of candidates who know about your company, your vacancy and, best of all, who are interested in working for you.

Lastly, you will have a partner who you can work with throughout the interview process, the offer and acceptance and during the initial stages of the new person's employment. This is an invaluable part of the service, giving you a impartial advisor who can work as an intermediary, taking interview feedback, dealing with rejections and reservations, promoting your company to the right candidates and ensuring a two-way flow of initial impressions one the right person starts with you.

To register a vacancy with us or discuss issues relating to accountancy recruitment, please call us on 01706 712388 or 01706 715388

or email the team at :

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Giving cowboys the boot

The BVRLA ensures the best in quality vehicle leasing

The British Vehicle Rental and Leasing Association (BVRLA) is the trade organisation for vehicle rental and leasing in the UK. The main focus of the association is to ensure that none of the industry 'cowboys' are allowed to trade to the public. The BVRLA check the credibility of membership companies, the level of service they provide and the industry knowledge they have.

The association has three primary objectives to ensure they represent quality members and act for a first-class industry.

- The BVRLA regulates the majority of its members through a mandatory Code of Conduct and by regular inspections of its members, their vehicles and premises.
- The association lobbies the government and many related agencies on behalf of the industry, consistently seeking a fair, reasonable and practical resolution to issues that affect the industry and the wider cause of motoring in general.
- It provides its members with services and information that aids them in developing their businesses to provide an unparalleled service to the public that the BVRLA are proud to represent.

The BVRLA have a list of registered members posted on their website, which is available for the public to check. As an independent body, the association can also act as an arbitrator for any disputes, helping both members and customers.

The BVRLA has almost 800 members and, between them, the members run more than two and a half million vehicles and buy more than 44% of all new vehicles sold in the UK. In doing so, they spend in excess of £15.4 billion each year on transport and a further £4 billion on support services.

In combined fleet sizes, BVRLA members represent more than 65% of the commercial vehicle rental and leasing fleet, more than 85% of the car rental fleet and over 95% of the leasing and contract hire fleet, which emphasises the importance of a regulatory body, such as the BVRLA, who demands the highest standards for its clients.

Anthony K Associates are reputable vehicle management and fleet funding company based in Middleton and are BVRLA accredited. In the 11 years since its establishment, the company has created a wide customer base ranging from large, multi-national PLC's to smaller sole traderships and believes that its membership with BVRLA improves its company reputation.

"Anthony K Associates gains enhanced credibility because of its BVRLA accreditation," Tony Nugent,



MD of the company said. "Although customers may not actively seek out the company because of its membership, the integrity the associations presence can offer is immeasurable. The service we receive through our membership is worth every penny we pay."

Anthony K are continually growing and looking towards expanding the vehicles, services and advice they offer. To increase the company profile they hold monthly seminars to which they invite MD's and financial MD's and explain what Anthony K can offer and the savings that they can provide.

During 2007, the company will be touring the country with seminars in Birmingham, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Preston and Manchester. All the details of the seminar information is on the website www.anthonyk.co.uk or alternatively contact Anthony K Associates on 0161 655 3200.

For more information on the BVRLA, how to join or what the association offers the website www.bvrla.co.uk

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"Cutting the Cost, Keeping the Quality"

Marketing Group Puts Local Conference Venues On The Map

Lancashire, and the M61 motorway corridor in particular, is fast becoming the destination of choice for conference and event organisers from across the UK thanks to the efforts of The M61 Meetings Group, a strategic partnership of 14 local member venues which was established to promote the unique and diverse range of venues located in the area. A national conference for a major high street retailer is just one example of new business attracted to the area following the launch of the group early last year.

The last 12 months have proved enormously successful for the M61 Meetings Group which has launched its own website, www.m61meetings.com, implemented a targeted marketing campaign and appointed a dedicated Conference and Promotions Officer, Claire Thomas. 2006 also saw member venues invest more than £12.5m in facilities and personnel, with particular emphasis on conference and meetings facilities, new technology and bedroom upgrades.

Nick White, spokesperson for the M61 Meetings Group, said: "In order to attract more conference and events business to the North West and the M61 motorway corridor in particular, it is essential that our members continue to invest in both people and facilities to ensure that they offer conference organisers high quality venues that are as good as, if not better, than those found anywhere else in the country.

"As a group representing these venues, we will also

continue to develop our website – the biggest source of enquiries to date for the group – and further implement our targeted marketing strategy to put this area, and the fantastic and diverse range of venues on offer, on the national and international conference and events map."

The M61 Meetings Group comprises a range of top quality venues, all with great meetings and conference facilities, with the capacity to cater for all levels of business from small meetings and events to large conferences and exhibitions. Both residential and non-residential venues are included in the mix, with facilities to cater from between 2 to 6,000 people.

They include an ancient chapel, a beautiful country house, a high tech arena, a hotel built into a football stadium and several leading hotel brands such as the Marriott Worsley Park, Manchester and Holiday Inn, Preston.

Looking forward, the group plans to build on its success and will focus its efforts of further website development, cross promotion between member venues, a targeted public relations campaign focussing on specialist conference and events meetings and participation in regional marketing campaigns with organisations such as Marketing Manchester.

To find out more, visit www.m61meetings.com or call Claire Thomas, Conference and Promotions Officer, on (01204) 334094.

14 top conference venues, 100+ meeting suites, 1000 bedrooms. Only one number to call...



The M61 Meetings Group is a consortium offering a unique collection of 14 high quality venues, all within 30-minutes drive of Manchester and close proximity to the M61 motorway.

Country house hotels, smart town centre addresses and even a hotel attached to a premier league football club, whether your event needs are for 6 or 6000, there is sure to be something to suit. By working together, we are able to offer you a greater choice of individual venues or mix and match facilities, so you can rest assured your exact event requirements will be met.

Call us on
01204 334094 or visit
www.m61meetings.com

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Business in Bolton is taking on a whole new shape and Bolton Business is the new name for the City's transformation.

Bolton Business offers everything a new, established, struggling or successful business needs covering everything from start-up and relocation support to specialist services in designated regeneration areas and for ethnic minority businesses.

Bolton is a distinctive and diverse great place for business, ideally positioned just over 13 miles away from the City of Manchester and with brilliant access to the Northwest's motorway network link.

Bolton contains excellent business accommodation and a great work force, combined with an infamous down-to-earth, no-nonsense Bolton attitude that makes sure business in Bolton are some of the best in the country.

Bolton TIC - the UK's first 'junior incubator'

Bolton Technical Innovation Centre (TIC) is the UK's first 'Junior Incubator', a brand new concept developed in the North West of England. It links education and industry in a new and natural way, and it lies somewhere between a school, a university research laboratory, a training centre and a factory.

Bolton TIC is established to nurture innovation and enterprise in young people, and to inspire a new generation of science, engineering and technology enthusiasts. The centre is open to young people from 9 to 19 years of age, and from every school in the town. It is open during and beyond the school day, at weekends and during holidays.

The purpose-designed building has been funded by the Northwest Regional Development Agency, and supported by Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council. The National Endowment is supporting some programmes within the centre for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA).

Reebok returns to its roots

Reebok are notorious as a home bird sports brand and it seems they don't like to stray away from their roots. Around 100 years ago local athlete and Reebok founder, Joe Foster, developed what is believed to be the first ever spiked running shoes and the City has been unable to get rid of the brand since.

Already having huge amounts of investment in Bolton with the impressive Reebok Stadium, the leading sports brand has decided its hometown is the perfect place for the company's new Headquarters. The brand will invest further in the City and move into new offices in the Reebok Stadium, one of the

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most distinctive buildings in the North West.

The new offices have been fitted using European grant money and the new location has more than just Bolton sentimentality as an advantage.

"Bolton's location is excellent whether your business be local or international," David Singleton, Reebok's Senior Vice President Europe, Middle East and Africa, explains. "It's proximity to the motorway network makes the conurbations of Manchester and Liverpool, their airports and sea terminal, easily accessible, yet the town also has a rural feel with over half the borough lying in the countryside."

"Product innovation is the lifeblood of any global brand, and Bolton retains an extensive skills base in textile research, development and manufacture," David Singleton continues. "It is ready to do business in the 21st Century and we are looking forward to driving Reebok's ambitious and innovative plans forward from our brilliant new headquarters here."

Stafford & Co – a service that's more than just numbers!

Stafford & Co. Chartered Accountants are a leading accountant agency in Bolton and offer a full range of accountancy services from start up businesses through to groups of companies with turnover in excess of £8m.

The company have recently been working alongside the directors of Alson Controls Ltd to help establish future growth plans for the company and have seized an opportunity to develop their existing market of fire alarms, CCTV and access control into automated barriers and gates.

After identifying the opportunities for growth within this area, including a number of potential acquisition businesses, Stafford & Co. sought to provide a detailed strategic plan to identify how Alson Controls could combine their existing business most efficiently and diversify into this new market.

The strategic plan focused on the existing competition by looking at the market size, trends and by providing a detailed competitive analysis.

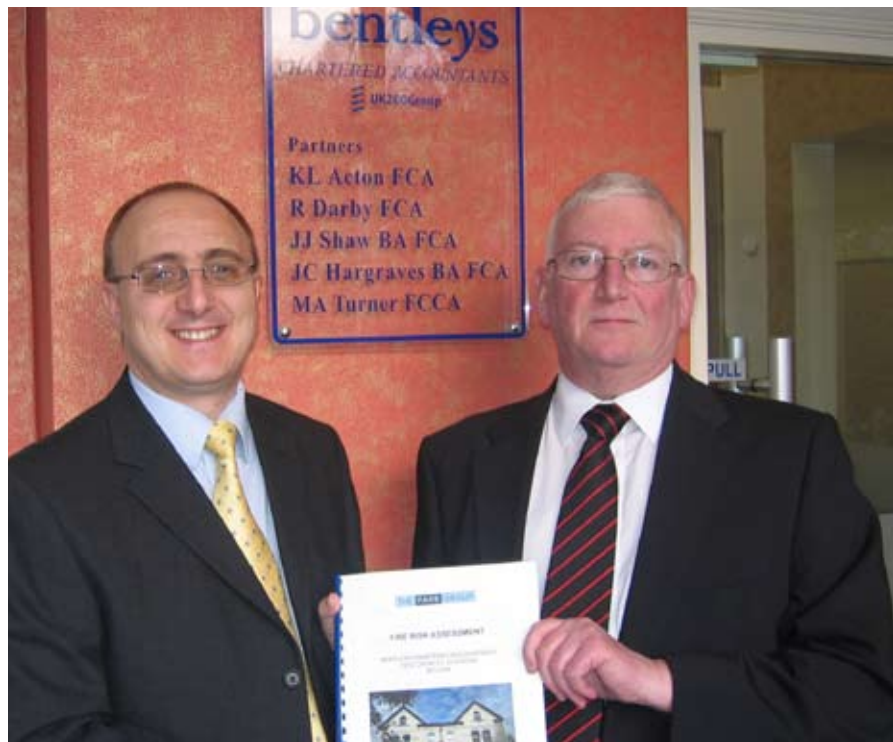
The plan also identified the finance that would be required to diversify into automated barriers and gates and enabled the company to raise the necessary finance.

Alson Control have been delighted with the plan put together by Stafford & Co. 'It has really helped to highlight to us where the potential growth opportunities are within our existing market,' Stan Wright and Frank Aldersley, directors of Alson Controls have commented. "The plan has been extremely useful to present to banks to provide a tool to raise finance for the business.'

With the existence of Alson Barriers and the advice from Stafford & Co., Frank and Stan now believe that their business is able to offer a full turnkey package in terms of design, supply, installation, commissioning and after sales maintenance on a full range of fire alarms, emergency lighting, CCTV, access control and automated barriers and gates.

For more information on Stafford & Co. and Alson Controls Ltd visit their websites at:

www.staffordandcompany.co.uk and
www.alsoncontrols.co.uk.



Is your business still at risk from fire and fines?

Bentleys chartered accountants, based in Bolton, are among one of the first businesses in the area to receive a Fire Risk Assessment Certificate from health & safety specialists The Parr Group, in compliance with new legislation, which came into force on 1st October 2006.

Under the new legislation, existing fire certificates are no longer valid and it is now the responsibility of the premises' owner to ensure the safety of everyone who works at, and visits their premises.

Despite the new legislation, many businesses have yet to carry out a Fire Risk Assessment and are failing to realise the consequences of non-compliance.

"Fire certificates have now been abolished and anyone found not to have a proper Fire Risk Assessment could be fined up to £10,000 by the Government," Brian Lawton, Business Development Manager at The Parr Group explains. "The emphasis has changed, the new law is about preventing fires and reducing risk and it is critical that businesses realise that the responsibility lies with them to employ qualified experts to carry out an assessment."

Mike Turner, partner at Bentleys, is pleased that his firm have been one of the first to receive a new certificate and urges other companies to go down the same route.

"We would recommend other companies to have a fire assessment completed as a matter of urgency," he explains. "Not only are companies at risk from heavy fines but, even more critical is that they could, unknowingly, be putting peoples lives at risk. Just getting the basics right such as appropriate signage, removing hazardous obstructions and operating a visitor book could be a matter of life and death if an emergency situation did occur."

For more information and free advice on Fire Risk Assessments contact Brian Lawton at The Parr Group on 01204 389573.

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All change in Bolton!

Kevin McKenna, Head of Employment at Bolton -based Keoghs, talks about one of Bolton's premier solicitors



Keoghs has changed to a limited liability partnership and from 1st December became Keoghs LLP. The change presented an ideal opportunity to refresh Keoghs image and reflect the developments we have achieved

in ensuring that excellent service continues to be delivered to our clients. As the field of employment law continues to develop rapidly change can be seen for numerous other businesses in Bolton during this festive season.

Six sets of employment related regulations came into effect in October 2006 and on 1st December new pension provisions were introduced which form part of the age discrimination act. Keoghs has been helping its clients to take a more proactive approach to legislation of this kind by involving them in the government consultation on new laws. The belief is that by doing this we can ensure local businesses are able to influence developments in the law and make known their views on the practical impact any proposed change is likely to have.

Whilst continually being approached for assistance by the many businesses in Bolton who have yet to take on board the notification of retirement rules under the age discrimination legislation and make the necessary changes to their contracts

and handbooks to deter claims, we have already begun talks with our clients about the proposals to increase minimum holiday entitlements and the banning of smoking in the workplace, legislation for which, fortunately, businesses in Bolton seem better prepared.

As absence continues to be a major issue for many of our clients, we also recently delivered a round-up seminar, which dealt with all of the circumstances in which employees take time out from work. There are increasing incidences of employees requesting time off out of desire rather than necessity and in circumstances such as these employers are not just having to deal with the usual problems in securing cover to ensure the work gets done but also in deciding whether employees should use their holiday entitlement to cover the period of absence or be allowed sick leave to recover. In relation to sickness, we are also monitoring the case of Commissioners for the Inland Revenue v Ainsworth, which has been referred to the ECJ on the issue of whether employees on long term sick leave should still accrue holiday pay.

Keoghs are finding that more businesses (and even more small businesses) are taking up annual retainer services with us which will give them access to legal advice as well as insurance cover against the legal costs and compensation payments that they are at risk of paying out given the growing complexities involved in employing people.

The employment team at Keoghs works for a client base throughout the North West including a number of established Bolton businesses. With an emphasis on the motto "prevention is better than cure" the department offers a range of services and prides itself on working with its clients to understand their business, enabling the team to spot issues from a legal perspective which might not always be readily apparent to the client themselves.

For further information on employment matters contact Kevin at kmckenna@keoghs.co.uk or on 01204 677083



Create a centre of attraction for new business prospects

Organising a conference or exhibition offers an ideal way to get your market to come to you!

Conferences and exhibitions can be a massively powerful marketing tool, providing a great way to promote business face-to-face and getting your market to come to you.

Holding such an event is well worth looking into - especially when you consider the benefits, so why not give the matter some serious thought?

Exhibitions - creating the perfect environment for commercial opportunity

A good exhibition creates something akin to a retail environment, which for many companies working in the business-to-business arena, and especially for service sector firms, is unique.

The beauty of an exhibition is that it is a neutral environment in which to do business. The visitor feels, and to some extent is, in control and therefore is more at ease and less pressured. Which is a good attitude for them to have when exhibitors open up a business dialogue with them.

Exhibitions give exhibitors a substantial opportunity to meet new prospects and sometimes even close a few sales. In most instances of course, this will only be at stage one of the buying process - which is all about a company getting to know their prospects and publicising their products. It's about finding out what customers need, what kind of problems they have and need to solve, getting an idea of whether they have money to spend and who else they are talking to - and

not necessarily the time to go in for the kill.

Event based marketing gives companies an opportunity to make a high impact impression on clients and prospects because they provide potential customers with the opportunity to make direct contacts with a company's products, through demonstrations and trials.

As an added bonus, through exhibitions companies can do some hands on research, see and talk to: competitors, potential suppliers, sector lead bodies and of course talk informally to potential customers themselves. For many businesses with new ideas in the pipeline, exhibitions can be a great opportunity to find out what their market is 'thinking' at a moment in time.

One of the most important aspects in planning an exhibition is choosing a suitable venue.

This should be arranged as early in the planning process as possible, since the more time you give yourself to choose a site, the better your options will be.

Your site should be located as centrally as possible with regard to your target audience. It is pointless having a textiles exhibition in the central business district, just as it is pointless having a technology fair in the countryside.

Choosing the appropriate venue also has an influence on the overall theme and furnishings which you might use in your exhibition, so an early decision will make consequent planning more streamlined.

Setting an appropriate theme for the show

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Garden Restaurant

Our acclaimed restaurant combines the finest cuisine with a full winelist, surrounded by the elegant beauty of our colourful gardens.

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is very important, as it will eventually determine what image the public have of the exhibition. Choose one that is in line with the material you are exhibiting.

Next in the planning process is finding potential exhibitors to take part in your show.

Sending out personal invitations is probably the most effective way to go. You can also advertise your intention to hold an exhibition in the early planning months, but this needs to be done amongst the social or industry circles relevant to your kind of exhibition.

As an exhibition is primarily about marketing, finding willing participants should not be too much of a problem if the proper methods are used.

Ultimately you want to draw as many people to your exhibition as possible, and a sure-fire way of increasing the amount of interest in your show is to offer a diverse range of activities.

Offering seminars or interactive workshops is a great marketing technique to involve people who would normally be put off by the prospect of just going to an exhibition to look at stands. Be sure to source speakers who will be able to deliver dynamic presentations on the relevant topics.

Publicity is of utmost importance in the planning of an exhibition. Use as many channels as are accessible to you.

The internet is a very powerful marketing tool, and should be exploited to its maximum. Make sure you have an up to date website which is instantly identifiable with your theme and purpose.

Furthermore, make use of show invites and advertisements, promotional gifts, flyers, brochures, visitor and press packs, staff badges, stand backdrops and signage, and internal documents and communications.

Ensure that your supporting web pages and email address are listed on every single communication item used for the show. If possible, advertise the exhibition in local magazines and newspapers, as well as radio.

Once you have done all your preparation of advertising, budgeting and sourcing participants, it is time to plan the actual show and execute it.

Planning of the show plays an important role, and should be coordinated carefully, because once a schedule is formed, great confusion can result if it is not adhered to.

You might plan certain talks or workshops to coincide with specific days of the exhibition, and if these are unclear or mixed up, they might completely lose their desired effect, and end up just being a waste of time and money.

During the exhibition it is important to make good use of signs; this ensures that visitors and exhibitors never become disorientated with their surroundings. During the exhibition, the coordinator's time is in great demand. Delegation plays a key role in the smooth running of an exhibition, but is worth nothing without a well trained and informed group of staff members.

Conferences - the perfect way to attract your target market

When planning a conference, firstly select the theme for your event. Use your potential audience to seek their views on what THEY want to see, after all the event is for the audience, not you! The more topical the theme and the more entertaining the speaker, the more likely your event will be a success.

Your choice of speakers is again vital to the success of any event. Don't automatically go for the person that is

most qualified on the subject matter -they may not feel totally comfortable on their feet in front of a large audience.

Don't pressure anyone to speak, they must have a real desire to present otherwise you could face disaster! If there is no-one in your organisation that wishes to take to the lectern then consider hiring-in a professional speaker. They can be highly entertaining and get your message across without the associated nerves.

Arguably the most important decision when organising a conference or training seminar is the venue. Get it right and you have made the first step towards ensuring a successful event.

Whether you decide upon a hotel, dedicated conference location, or other suitable venue, you should look for the right physical layout and support services to guarantee a positive experience for all concerned.

It is important to visit the venue before making a decision. The location with the flashiest website or most attractive rate card might always not live up to its promises. An advance trip to scout out the facilities and services available is always a good idea. Hotel managers or facility administrators will be only too happy to show you around and answer any questions.

The location of your conference or training venue should also be central to your decision. Check the ease of access from airports, train stations and by road. Depending on your needs, a city centre, suburban or completely rural location may suit best. Parking is a vital consideration, especially for city centre sites.

The number and size of rooms is of paramount importance. Different room sizes and shapes offer varying opportunities (e.g. theatre style seating, extra privacy, relaxed settings).

Fit the size of the room to the number of people; too much space is just as big a problem as too little. For a day-long training event, consider a venue with a large meeting or conference room which can be partitioned into smaller rooms for workshops or role-play sessions.

The general atmosphere of the venue should also be considered as you will want to hold your event within a dedicated professional environment.

Getting the venue, the theme and the speakers organised is just the beginning! Write down everything that needs to be done, by who and by when. Don't leave everything to the last minute and ensure you give yourself plenty of time.

Begin planning a conference as a minimum four months before the event. Phone round various suppliers of services eg audio visual, video production, designers, printers etc to ensure you get the best deal. Some companies offer a total conference service package which may take away some of the headache of sourcing the various component parts of your event.

On the day of your conference, make sure the venue is well signed including a clear registration area and there are plenty of staff on-hand to help your delegates find where they need to be. Ensure you are aware if any guests have disabilities and check with the venue well in advance what arrangements are needed.

Ensure the audio-visual experience matches the event. If you have 20 people coming together for a small seminar, there is no need for a huge PA system, giant screen and theatre style lighting.

Equally, if your event is for 70 delegates or more, an event with a fold up screen and overhead projector on a wobbly stand will look pretty amateurish. It is worth paying a professional production company to assist you with this side of your event as it will speak



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volumes about the professionalism of your organisation both from an internal and external point of view.

Ensure your audience is on the move as much as possible. They will lose concentration if held in the main auditorium for too long. Regular breaks, networking opportunities and breakout sessions keep the traffic moving. The more entertaining and varied the event, the more memorable it will be!

Finally, measure the feedback. All the money you have spent putting on a successful event needs to be recouped in higher sales, better motivation, and more customers. Take the time to speak to the attendees and gauge their honest opinions. By listening now, it may make next year's event even better.

Events on a timescale

Planning large scale events is hard enough at the best of times, not least when you're faced with a limited timescale in which to organise everything.

From budget allocations and boardrooms, to conference speakers and catering requirements, the range of activities can seem overwhelming.

According to business tourism manager for the Dundee & Angus Convention Bureau, Karen Tocher, it's best to remain realistic as to achievable outcomes when setting up an event on a tight timescale, and focus on getting those right rather than aiming for the skies and ultimately falling at the first hurdle.

Karen highlights what she considers to be key traits that will help even the least experienced event organiser stay afloat when the stress kicks in during the final few weeks.

Be decisive

Having the courage to make decisions without necessarily having all the information is key when the clock is ticking. Booking something that can later be cancelled is always better than not booking and later regretting it, and most venues or speakers have a certain period of flexibility with regard to cancellations.

Be flexible

Plans often change at the last minute, a fact that is even more applicable when planning within a tight timescale, so be prepared for change and develop strategies to adapt accordingly. Generally such strategies should take the form of a 'Plan B', such that you have something to fall back on, be it an event venue, conference speaker or delegate hotel, just in case things don't happen to go as originally planned.

Prioritise – make lists

The importance of identifying what needs to be done first is paramount when planning any event, but never more so than when you're pushed for time. Set deadlines against the various activities and work backwards from them to establish how much time you have for each. This minimises the chance of missing deadlines and losing out on opportunities as a result. Lists are an invaluable means of keeping track of pending tasks and also provide a great morale-booster in terms of the satisfaction gained from scoring items off!

If you have a team or committee assisting with the organising of the event, the value of allocating tasks according to individual strengths and delegating workloads cannot be over-estimated. Make sure that each team member is fully briefed on deadlines and encourage them to communicate continuously, as this will help with spotting errors and identifying pending activity at as early a stage as possible.

Stay focused

Easier said than done, but keeping sight of the bigger picture amidst what can often seem like ensuing chaos is vital to remaining on track with regard to your timescale. Take time to regularly remind yourself of your overriding objectives and summarise the ways in which you plan to achieve them – this will do much for your ability to see the wood for the trees.

Set aside worry time

There's no denying that constantly having to meet deadlines and working within tight timescales can be stressful and start to take its toll on our personal lives.

Being unable to sleep at night from thinking about the mountain of organising to do is a common complaint of many an event organiser, so setting aside a portion of the day specifically for 'worrying' is a good idea, as it should help to take the weight off your mind late at night. Good times for this are at the end of a working day, in preparation for the next day, or first thing in the morning so that you can make a start on them all with a fresh mind and body.

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Sales Training In The North

Reebok Stadium works for more than just football

Mike Le Put of MLP Training is now running regular sales training courses at the Reebok Stadium in Bolton. Those who have already used the Reebok will know it to be a great venue, easily accessible via the Motorway network with ample free parking. For train users it is within walking distance of the station.

As an author, publisher, trainer and motivation speaker, Mike Le Put has inspired sales professionals in the UK, USA, and the Far East.

The courses are designed to be very interactive and run less like a seminar and more like a Master Class. The numbers can sometimes be limited to a maximum of ten people as in the case of the Powerful Presentations skills course. This enables delegates to get the individual attention that brings results.

Other courses running in 2007 are as follows;

A one-day 'Getting Appointments Over the Phone' programme

Many sales people are good face to face; the problem is getting that all-important first meeting.

During this programme delegates will learn how to target a call, develop powerful scripts that don't sound as if they are simply reading from a sheet, clarify

important questions, and close for the appointment.

A two-day 'Successful Selling Skill' programme

This workshop takes delegates step by step through the selling cycle.

"Selling is not about making people have things they don't need, can't use, or can't afford" Mike Le Put stresses. "It's about identifying customers and prospects that can genuinely benefit from our products and services. This customer-focused approach removes the old adversarial buyer verses seller and leads to win win sales, happy customers, repeat business, good referrals and increased profit."

A one-day Sales Managers Master Class

How do you recruit, train and motivate a sales team of high achievers?

During this one-day programme you will get an opportunity to work with Sales Managers and Directors from other industries to establish best practice. The mix of tuition discussion and syndicate work enables delegates to discover what's going on in the real world of Sales Management.

A free information pack is available from MLP Training 01204 888826 or visit www.mlptraining.co.uk



Train to Gain



The Learning Zone

The Learning Zone is a new regular feature, which will cover issues affecting owner managed businesses or traditional SME's in the North West area. It will try to give advice on any new legislation, training and skills available and provide information in specific relation to businesses in our area.

Learning and Skills Council Businesses get skills boost from LSC's new Train to Gain Service

Skills shortages are one of the key challenges for businesses today. Train to Gain, a new service led by the LSC is helping businesses to identify the skills to succeed now and in the future.

Developed with employers and training providers, the Train to Gain service is offered at a time and place to suit individual businesses. The flexible service will address the significant skill shortages in each company that continue to have a negative impact on UK productivity and competitiveness.

Train to Gain targets smaller businesses, who face the biggest challenges on time and cost when training employees to achieve a vocational qualification. The LSC's research shows that more than 3 million employers, who have not invested in vocational, Apprenticeship, or NVQ training over the last 12 months, could benefit from the specialist skills advice the Learning Skills Council offers.

The Train to Gain service gives employers access to a Skills Broker who will analyse the levels of skills within the business, identify the skills needed to succeed and develop a training plan that is right for the business and its staff. This free, independent and impartial advice will also show employers how to buy the right training.

The advice from Skills Brokers is free to employers and some parts of the training, such as Skills for Life qualifications, first full Level 2 qualifications, and Apprenticeships will attract subsidised funding from Government. Some training, however, will need to be paid for by the employer.

The Learning and Skills Council North West is confident the Train to Gain scheme will offer employers an opportunity to get value for money from the investments they put in, in areas of training.

"Skills gaps cost a business with 50 employees about £165,000 in lost revenue annually," John Korzeniewski, Regional Director for LSC North West said. "Train to Gain

will help to address this problem by making sure training is focused on tackling skills gaps. We know this is right because of the successful Employer Training Pilots approach, which, in the last four years, has helped more than 30,000 employers and 264,000 employees to get the right training."

"Every employer should have access to a service that helps them to succeed and Train to Gain is a service they can use with confidence" he continued. "A Skills Broker will walk them through all the stages of how to develop the skills of their workforce to improve their business."

One of the businesses who benefited from the successful Employer Training Pilot was the well known Cathay Dim Sum Bar Restaurant based in the Trafford Centre, with seven members of staff having successfully achieved a national qualification in Team Leadership through the LSC funded programme.

They received their certificates, from Ted Noone, Regional Head of Marketing and Communications for the Learning and Skills Council who was impressed with their enthusiasm and commitment, which highlighted just how successful the scheme, has proved to be.

"It has been great to meet such positive individuals who have clearly benefited enormously from their training" Ted Noone said. "Busy employers like the Cathay Dim Sum often find themselves in a vicious circle of wanting to develop their staff but being unable to release them for training. This programme has been specially designed to fit in with employers so their staff can receive training which is fitted around their work."

Laurence Lee, then Managing Director of Cathay Dim Sum was delighted with the success of his staff and the new skills they brought to the company.

"The training has been of great benefit to the restaurant," Laurence Lee said. "It has been wonderful to see our team leaders grow in self-confidence and



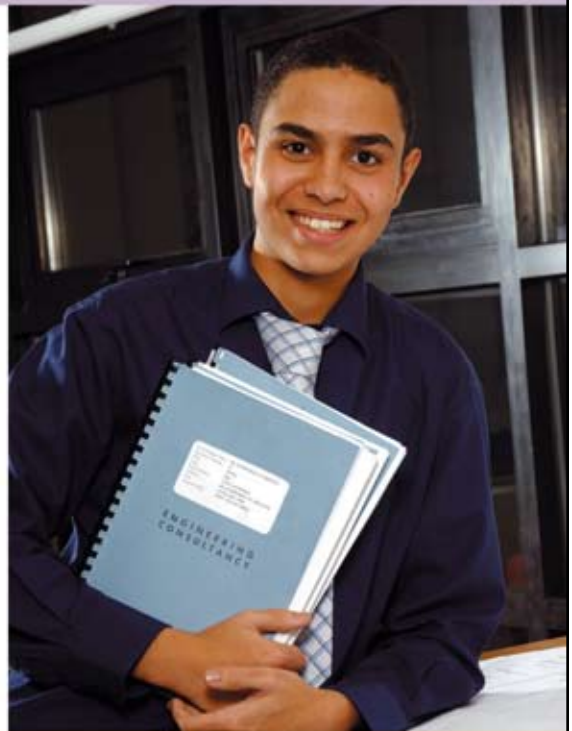
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develop the skills to lead their teams, which in turn means we are able to provide a more professional service to our customers. I would recommend other small businesses to think seriously about training and developing their staff in this way.”

All seven staff members found the training a very positive experience and having achieved their level 2 National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) are now keen to continue to develop their skills.

To find out more about Train to Gain, businesses should contact 0845 602 0062 or visit www.traintogain.gov.uk.

Recruitment and Employment Confederation

The REC is the association for the £24.5 billion private recruitment and staffing industry in the UK, with over 8,000 recruitment agencies and over 5,500 recruitment consultants in membership.

The REC has knowledge on all aspects of the labour market, from employment legislation and workplace issues, to skills shortages, implications for the economy of changes in employment levels and the benefits of temporary work.

Gangmasters licensing – what does it mean to you?

Since October 2006 it has been an offence to provide labour into the agricultural and food industries without holding a Gangmasters licence. But how aware are recruitment agencies and businesses in our region of the law?



Following a number of high profile incidents, including the Morecambe Bay tragedy and the increase in Eastern European workers, a new Gangmasters licensing law has taken the limelight. It is now an offence for employment agencies to provide labour to the agricultural and food industries without holding a licence.

Both recruitment agencies and organisations employing such labour in our region should be well aware of the consequences if they were to operate without a Gangmasters Licence. However, there is still a significant amount of work to do in terms of the level of awareness. The REC feel there is still a job to be done on educating both labour providers and users on what this Licensing Act truly entails.

The REC has taken the lead in representing the views of the recruitment industry on the

formation of this licensing scheme.

The main setback that has appeared is due to the actual term ‘Gangmaster’. The misunderstanding of the word has meant it has been harder to promote awareness of the law to employment businesses and agencies that supply any workers to the sectors covered by the Act.

Labour users will also need to be aware that from 1st December 2006 it will be an offence if they take labour from an unlicensed labour provider.

The Gangmasters Licensing Act 2004 specifies that agencies supplying workers for agricultural work, gathering shellfish, fish or products derived from shellfish or fish, or to other agricultural areas such as dairy farming and horticulture will need to hold a licence

In the North West region agriculture is still a significant area of employment and the region attracts a number of seasonal workers and a significant number of local businesses rely on temporary staff. These businesses should now ensure that any employment agency they use for ‘gangmaster’ tasks has a suitable licence.

The term gangmaster is misleading in this context because there are many areas of known gangmaster activity, which do not fall within the scope of this legislation, particularly namely the supply of labour in the construction and hospitality sectors.

Equally the term gangmaster within this legislation applies to organisations such as employment businesses and agencies that are already regulated by the Employment Agencies Act Regulations and not traditionally associated with gangmaster activity.

In April 2005, The Gangmasters Licensing Authority (GLA) was launched to implement, administer, and enforce the Gangmasters Licensing law and the GLA has produced Gangmaster licensing conditions rules. Employment agencies will need to comply with the rules in order to be successful in gaining a Gangmasters Licence.

Agencies will be required to pay wages, Tax and NI and provide suitable accommodation for the workers when required.

It is not yet clear what the effect will be of the Act on the region’s employment market; some diversified labour providers are likely to decide to cease supplying the sector covered by the Act, which may cause problems for some farmers and food businesses, particularly those operating in the more rural areas.

Whether the Act will do anything to curb unscrupulous gangmasters in our region, many of who are not currently showing up on the authorities’ radar screens, remains unclear.

The government has indicated that it will review the legislation after a year and it is possible that the regulatory regime will be significantly amended as a result of that review.

The REC supports a return to licensing, however believes that the Gangmasters Licensing Act needs to be more widely promoted so both agencies and businesses understand the benefits and improvements it will bring to the region’s seasonal and temporary employment scene.

If you have specific questions relating to gangmasters licensing you may find it helpful to contact the Gangmasters Licensing Authority helpline on 0845 602 5020.

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Moving into 21st Century advertising

Maximise your business potential and start spreading the word online

It seems amazing that there are still many companies, some of a significant size, that do not have a website or are not successfully marketing the website they have got. If a business has created a website, too often the it is left to degenerate and become out of date, no one is aware of who is responsible for the maintenance of the site and the maximum potential of a website as an advertising resource is not always recognised.

try to catch up sometime in the future.

Making a website work for your business and ensuring it generates measurable results is not as daunting as it may at first appear. It simply requires the same thought process as any other advertising media. Does it impact and is it memorable? Does it include all the information a customer will need? Is it current and completely up to date?

Here are some simple tips to get a website working for your business:

- Make sure that your website has plenty of good descriptive content about what your business does. People like content and like the ability to understand what they have logged on to and search engines are much more likely to bring up your business if you have a significant amount of content in it.
- Keep it updated and add new information regularly. If people return to your website a second time and read the same information, you can be sure they won't return for a third. Search engines are also likely to lower the ranking of your company if the information does not change on a regular basis.
- Ensure that the site is easy to navigate. When people log onto your site they want the information they require easily and immediately. Create easy to see links, which will lead to straightforward and simple information.
- Record who visits your website and how they get there, which will tell you how valuable an advertising tool your website is. The majority of websites, when produced by a professional, can incorporate these features.
- Make sure everyone in the organisation knows who is responsible for the maintenance of the website and that any problems are reported promptly. Websites that don't work will not endear potential customers to using it again and will not create business for your company.
- Search through Google to see how easy it is to find your website. How easy is your website found and how far up is it in the rankings? If your competitors are ahead of you it is easy to assume whom the customers will try first. What more information can you put on your website to make sure you are at the top?
- Finally, the legality of your website needs to be addressed. It is your legal obligation to ensure your website is reasonably accessible to people with various forms of disability.

So now ... what are you waiting for? Get advertising, get promoting, get online!



The main question a business needs to address is "can my business make effective use of the Web?" The answer is almost certainly "Yes" as the Internet and its capabilities continue to grow and its users continue to multiply. However, as with anything worthwhile, there are some negative aspects that need to be noted.

As with most forms of advertising, how effectual the website is can be increasingly difficult to determine, even if you are scrupulous about asking new customers how they came across your business, many may not admit to accessing your website. It is also important to recognise that a large proportion of business websites may not show up on search engine results as they don't get enough traffic or they don't change their content often or they don't have enough links ...

However! There are more glaringly obvious advantages than there are disadvantages. Over a million new broadband contracts are being signed every 3 months, over 50% of UK homes have internet access and over 65% of all adults in the UK have used the Internet in the past year.

The Internet is an ever-growing, always-changing institute of knowledge, information and accessibility so it is better to get 'web-serious' now than

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A glittering array of business finery

EM Rochdale Awards have another successful year

After two years of great success, The Rochdale Ethnic Minority Business Exhibition and Awards Evening descended once more on Rochdale Town Hall to celebrate the achievements of the many ethnic businesses in the area.

The EM Business to Business Exhibition was held on the 16th November and the Awards Ceremony took place on the 17th November as people gathered together to view spectacular stands and receive prestigious awards.

The Exhibition was packed with exhibitors from both the business support community and local businesses from in the area. The exhibition had been well publicised and as a consequence attendance was high and the atmosphere was electric.

Business support exhibitors included Lloyds/TSB, Molesworth Bright Clegg Solicitors, TBV Business Services and NatWest and all exhibitors reported a keen interest and were able to gain good contacts.

"We are proud to be part of the EM Rochdale exhibition," commented Malcolm Hall of Lloyds/TSB. "It has given us a unique chance to meet with other exhibitors, to increase

the profile of Lloyds/TSB Bank as part of the Rochdale community and to promote the services we provide. The day was a success regarding all three aspects and we are already looking forward to the event next year."

The Kingsway development used this opportunity to promote its latest phase at Junction 21 and the business and employment opportunities that this mixed-use development will bring during construction and when finally completed. Bramall Construction, the company responsible for the main part of the construction, also took the opportunity to highlight their policy of recruiting and training local people and their aim to achieve a highly community representative workforce.

There were several local companies exhibiting at the event and each declared it a brilliant opportunity to showcase what their business has to offer. "We have taken several orders today, including one for a large party" Samar Mushtaq of Sahara Grill said. "We have also given out several hundred menus and have succeeded in raising the profile of our new enterprise to a fantastic level."

After the success of the exhibition day, the Business

Awards Gala Evening began in high spirits and, hosted by Zulf Ali, CEO of Celltek, the evening included speeches from the MP for Rochdale, Councillor Paul Rowen; the Conservative MEP for the North West, Den Dover; the CEO of Bramall Construction, Trevor Jee and the CEO of East End Foods, Tony Deep.

The evening was a huge success as food was distributed freely; beautiful musical entertainment was provided by Seela with the Whirling Dervishes and excitement began to build as the award winners were announced.

The Awards

This year, there were 8 business award categories, all of which were highly sought after and the competition was fierce.

• Business of the Year Award

This was sponsored by Lloyds/TSB and went to Asian Leader, a highly successful newspaper targeted specifically towards the Asian community. The publication began in Rochdale in 2001 and has grown significantly, now circulating to over 30 000 people across Greater Manchester, Lancashire and Yorkshire.

• New Business Start Up Award

Sponsored by TBV Business Services, this award was picked up by Keystone Estate Agents and Lettings Specialists. The company provides residential property lettings and estate agency services in the Rochdale area and has an emphasis on straightforward, easy and competent services to all its clients.

• Business Woman of the Year Award

Sponsored by Kingsway, Seeros Designer wear was awarded this for its exceptional range of beautiful fashion. A designer fashion outlet, it specialises in exclusive ranges and unique designer pieces, which caters for young, modern, working women.

• ICT/Innovation Award

Reach BCS picked up this award, which was sponsored by Hopwood Hall College. Combined of a pioneering group of designers, marketers, web developers and programmers, Reach BCS operate at the forefront of graphic design and web-based technologies and offers an inclusive range of services to its clients.

• Workforce Development Award

This award was sponsored by Bramall Construction and was presented to Drive UK. Drive UK focuses on widening the driving instructing market and, to date, have trained 35 instructors who are now operating in the Greater Manchester area. The company also provide training for learner drivers, has developed a programme for training driving instructors and actively encourages women to train with them.

• Service Excellence Award

Revitalising Inner Rochdale sponsored this award, which was won by Sahara Grill. This contemporary catering company provide a spectacular dine in and buffet service for both families and businesses in Rochdale and the surrounding areas.



• Retail Award

Also sponsored by Revitalising Inner Rochdale, this award was won by Home2Home, which retails quality branded furniture and prides itself on training its staff to the highest standard possible to ensure every client that walks through its doors receives excellent customer service.

• Health, Safety and Environmental Award

Sponsored by Groundwork Oldham and Rochdale, this award was won by TJ Refrigeration for its significant and detailed health and safety standards. TJ Refrigeration specialises in the design, installation and maintenance of commercial refrigeration and air conditioning. Established in 1979, TJ Refrigeration has contracts with a number of major blue chip companies, which has encouraged the company to step up their health, safety and environmental policies, which they have done to a fantastic standard.

• Special Recognition Award

Selected by an independent judging panel comprising of Lloyds/TSB, Molesworth Bright Clegg Solicitors, TBV Business Services and Celltek, two businesses were selected for their unparalleled efforts and business success in the community.

RAM Clearances scooped the first of the two special recognition awards. Robert Myatt set up a house clearance business with assistance from the Business in Mind scheme following an accident that left him with a brain clot and short-term memory problems. After overcoming this temporary setback, Robert has built an extremely successful business, which has since expanded into a shop, Sugar Ray's, selling new and second-hand furniture.

Nahda Technologies received the second recognition award for their exceptional IT support services. Established in 2005, Nahda has become one of the key providers of IT support in the area. The company gives clients the best operational advantage through the structured use of IT.

• Community Award

The final award, sponsored by NatWest, was awarded to Tracie Powers of Urban Gallery in recognition of her outstanding contribution to community involvement.

Zulf Ali summed up the excellent event perfectly. "A fantastic night of glitz and glamour with a true cross section of our community delighting in the success of rising stars from the Rochdale EM business community" He said. "I am very proud to have presented an awards ceremony with such fantastic finalists and exceptional winners of these prestigious awards. This event simply gets better and better every year."



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NUTS AND BOLTS ON DEATH

Following a death most people are at a loss to know what they need to do to put the deceased's financial affairs in order. They will often make an appointment to see a solicitor but are anxious and apprehensive about the procedure. There may be moneys held in banks or in property and they are unsure how repayment will be made or how the property will be sold. This is a brief guide to the likely steps that will need to be taken once the funeral has taken place.

If a Will has been made and the deceased had assets in their own name, then a Grant of Probate will be obtained. The assets of the deceased will then pass under the terms of the deceased's will. If the deceased did not leave a Will then there is a set list of who will benefit from the estate. In these circumstances the grant is called a Grant of Letters of Administration and this is taken out by one or more of the persons entitled.

In either case, it is necessary for the solicitor to obtain a value of all the assets that the deceased held, together with details of any liabilities, such as the funeral account and outstanding bills. The will (if there is one), details of assets and debts and at least one death certificate should be taken to the solicitor.

The solicitor will then write to the banks, building societies and insurance companies etc to obtain values of the assets as at the date of death. Once all the figures have been obtained an Inland Revenue form will be prepared listing all the assets. If Inheritance tax is payable a loan may need to be obtained as this will usually have to be paid before the Grant is issued. The solicitor will also prepare forms for the Probate Registry.

If there is a Will, then an Oath for Executors will be prepared and will have to be sworn by the Executors in the presence of an independent solicitor. If there is no Will, then an Oath for Administrators is prepared and the person(s) entitled to the estate will swear the Oath. In both cases, the forms will be submitted to the Probate Registry.

The Probate Registry is a division of the High Court. The Principal Probate Registry is in London but there are District Probate Registries in various parts of the country. Usually the solicitor will use their local Registry. The Probate Registry will look at the application and make sure that everything appears to be in order.

In the case of an application for a Grant of Probate, the Probate Registry will keep the original Will and send back to the solicitor the Grant of Probate with a copy of the Will attached to it. If there is no will the Probate Registry will issue Letters of Administration.

Once the documents have been received from the Probate Registry the solicitor will proceed to lodge

copies with the various banks etc and obtain repayment of monies due to the estate. The sale of any property or transfer into a beneficiary's name can be completed once the Grant has been obtained. Any debts can be paid. If Inheritance tax has been paid final clearance will have to be obtained from the Capital Taxes office. Income tax returns may need to be completed up to the date of death and for the period of administration. Once all this has been done the balance of the estate can be distributed in accordance with the Will or the set order if there is no will. The time it takes to complete the administration will depend on the complexity of the estate and the assets involved.

Louise Salisbury, Partner
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Wireless Networks



– Safe Surfing

Wireless networking has really taken off in 2006. The ability to surf the internet, unfettered from the office desk, coupled with the ever-decreasing price of wireless laptop computers, is enticing more and more people to embrace this technology.

However, the security implications of using a wireless connection should not be ignored.

When you connect to a wireless network, there is the danger that anything you type could be picked up by an eavesdropper: your Hotmail password, that email to your customer or even your credit card details. Your computer is acting as a radio transmitter, sending all of your data – private or otherwise – to anybody close enough to listen in.

Equally, if you have a wireless network at home or at the office, be aware that anyone parking within range of that network could potentially gain access to your computers.

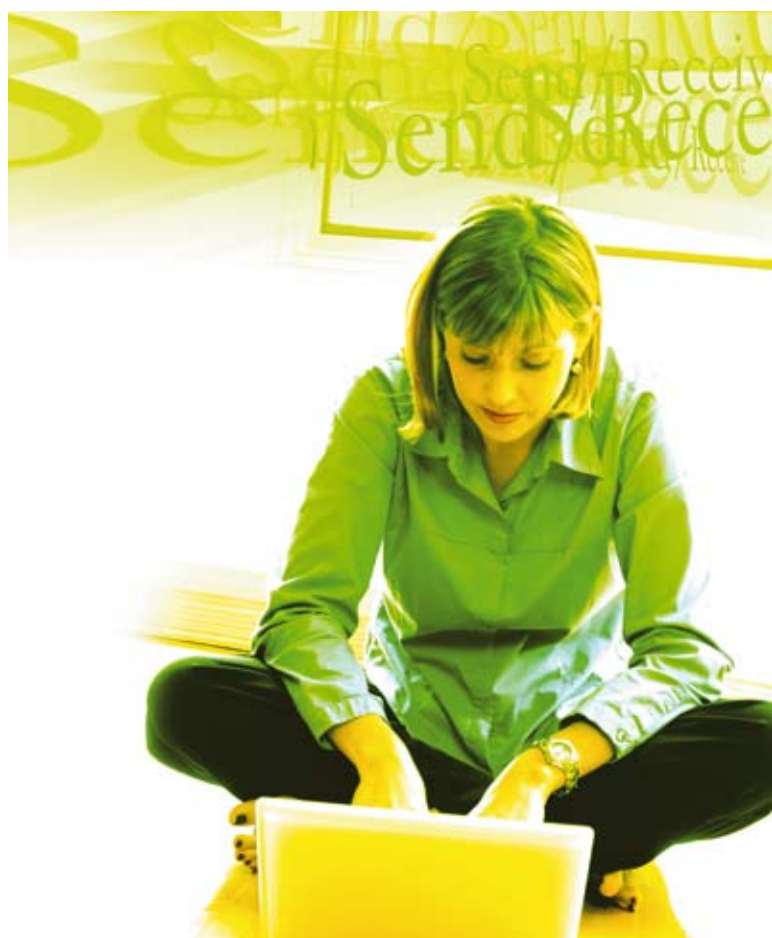
However, by taking a few sensible precautions, it is possible to take full advantage of the freedom that wireless gives you. The following tips are intended for anyone who has set up (or is thinking of setting up) a wireless network at their office:

Use encryption wherever possible: Always ensure that the connection between your laptop and the wireless access point / router is encrypted. There are a number of different levels of encryption available, although older equipment may not support all of them. You should choose the highest level that is supported by both your laptop and you access point / router. The best level (currently) is WPA2, which should be used wherever possible. WPA is the next best, while WEP is better than nothing – although a competent hacker can gain access to a WEP-encrypted network in less than 10 minutes.

Don't broadcast to the world! Do you want unauthorised people to be able to access your network from the car park? Or from the pub next door? If not, consider ways to ensure that the signal doesn't reach that far. Many access points have the ability to run at half power or lower; if yours don't, consider relocating them so the signal stays mainly inside the building.

Change your Access Point/Router Password: Hackers know the default passwords used to access most wireless equipment. By changing those passwords to something not so obvious, you are making harder for hackers to get into your network.

Use a random SSID: If your network advertises itself as "xxxFinSvc", hackers will guess that you are a financial services company – and that you will deal with customer bank accounts, credit cards, stock portfolios, etc. The same company with a network SSID of "f6Hjr8" is less likely to attract attention!



And for anyone travelling with a wireless laptop:

Use unencrypted networks sensibly: Most public wireless networks (e.g. at hotels, trade shows, conference centres, etc.) are not encrypted; this is to make it easy for visitors to use them. Such networks can be used for general surfing, emails, etc – but don't type any sensitive data into your computer! That includes ALL passwords, bank details, company confidential information, credit/debit card numbers, etc.

For advice and guidance on securing your wireless network, or if you would like assistance installing a wireless network, contact Flexsys on 0845 644 2245. Flexsys has experience of wireless networking at all levels from small offices to large colleges, hotels, conference centres – and even castles!

You can find out more about Flexsys' range of products and services at: <http://www.flexsys-group.co.uk>



Long-term business gas and electricity contracts:

Don't let your business be lured by fear of further price increases

As gas and electricity wholesale prices continue to tumble, it's highly questionable why many of the major suppliers are still actively encouraging small and medium sized businesses to sign up to longer term fixed price contracts, invariably set at a premium above their normal annual contract rates.

These normal annual contract rates can themselves be up to 140% more than those the customer was paying for the previous contract since all the long and short-term reasons for wholesale fluctuations have been factored into the new retail rates simultaneously.

Most of the reasons given for this year's unprecedented rises in wholesale rates were caused by short-term supply problems which have now been corrected. The supply of gas is now far more secure and shortages are not expected for the coming winter period. This has resulted in a large drop from the peak wholesale rates of around 30%.

Given this background, it has to be irresponsible for a supplier to advise a business to contract at a fixed rate for three or five years when retail rates are expected to drop. After all, wasn't the large rise in wholesale prices the sole reason given to customers to justify the extra large retail price increases when they received their renewal letters?

Graham Paul, Sales and Marketing Director of Electricity 4 Business Ltd, one of the U.K.'s cheapest business electricity suppliers reflects on previous experience claiming "A rising market has traditionally been the driver of the fixed price longer term contract. When prices begin

to fall, as happened in 2001, the accepted best practice is to wait until they have fallen to a level where you are confident they can't drop much further and only then is it advisable to fix a contract for as long a period as possible."

If your contract is coming up for renewal soon, Paul would advise that you shop around for the best one year deal and look to extend this when wholesale prices begin to stabilise.

Those businesses who have inadvertently missed the cancellation date on their rollover contracts should resist the temptation to switch to a slightly cheaper rate three year deal from the same supplier. Where an annual contract rate has been doubled, many businesses will grab any deal which promises to alleviate the full impact of this increase for the time being.

However, by committing to this deal for three years, a business will forego any opportunity of benefiting from future retail reductions and of searching for a far cheaper supplier which could reduce the future annual bill by up to 50%.

Joe Malinowski of non-business price comparison site TheEnergyShop.com said that fixing a longer term rate in February 2006 would have made good sense, however, since then the full impact of wholesale price rises has been added to retail rates making it unwise to fix rates at today's prices.

There is no reason why a similar logic should not apply to business contracts.





Small business speaks out.....

Latest news from the Federation of Small Business (FSB)

Call for common sense policy on business rates

The FSB has once again stressed the importance of uniform business rates, following calls from the Local Government Association to return rate-setting powers to local authorities.

The FSB pointed out that when business rates were controlled by local authorities, small businesses in some areas were seen as a soft target and faced massive rises.

The federation called on Sir Michael Lyons, who is conducting an inquiry into local government funding, to keep business rates the preserve of central government so that small businesses are not taxed disproportionately.

John Walker, FSB Policy Chairman, said: "Small businesses are the life-blood of communities, providing employment and essential services for local people. Nationally they generate over half of UK GDP and employ more than 12 million people.

"It is vitally important that they continue to get the certainty of stable, centrally-set business rates so that competition between them is free and fair.

"Returning the setting of business rates to local authority control could cause an almighty mess and it is small businesses that are most likely to be at the sharp end."

Don't go soft on shoplifters

Responding to a consultation from the Sentencing Guidelines Council, the FSB called on policy makers not to go soft on shoplifting.

The FSB is particularly concerned at proposals to drop custodial sentences, even for persistent offenders. Small firms are being victimised by repeat offenders and research has shown that almost all offenders sentenced for theft from a shop had a previous conviction.

FSB members cannot understand why the Government attaches more importance to protecting the individual in their home but not in their place of work.

The consultation period closed on November 16 2006.

David Croucher, FSB Crime Policy Chairman, said: "We literally cannot afford to go soft on crime against businesses. They are vital parts of the





community, providing jobs, services and funding for local projects. They need to be supported if communities, particularly in deprived areas, are to survive.”

“The proposal to remove the custodial sentence for repeat shoplifters sends out the wrong message to both businesses and criminals and we believe that it must be dropped.”

“Our members believe that persistent offenders in particular have to be dealt with firmly to act as a deterrent to prevent future theft. The threat of a custodial sentence must remain for persistent shoplifters.”

FSB facts on crime:

- 57% of small businesses have been a victim of crime over the past year.
- 40% of business owners are not reporting crime to the police because they think that “it would not achieve anything” or that “the police would not be interested”.
- A quarter of FSB members operate in the retail sector. That represents 50,000 businesses.
- FSB research has shown that the retail sector experiences higher levels of threatening behaviour (33%) and shoplifting (17%) than other business sectors.
- The consultation document from the Sentencing Guidelines Council notes that only 3% of thefts from a shop come to police attention and only 1% results in a conviction.

- Half of Penalty Notices for Disorder go unpaid and are never chased up according to Home Office figures.

- 10% of store theft involves physical violence to staff.

- Only 14% of FSB members believe that ASBOs are effective.

New survey shows small firms made of strong stuff

The federation recently published research that details the impacts and issues surrounding ill-health within small firms.

The key finding from the survey is that the average number of days small businesses lost to absence per employee was 1.8 days. This is compared to the 8.4 days average in businesses of all sizes as reported by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. In the public sector, the average is 11.3 days.

Many small businesses paint a positive picture, with 43% of firms having no sickness absence in the past year. Business owners take an average of 3 days sick leave per year and many are under pressure to continue to work through sickness to ensure the continuity of the business.

However, unexpected absences hit small businesses the hardest. Without any warning a small firm can find itself without a large proportion of its workforce, even though it can be just one member of staff. Covering for absence is also extremely difficult in the small business environment because of the costs and administration involved for the

owner in finding cover. The owner also has to take the strain of the additional workload until cover can be found.

Mary Boughton, FSB National Health and Safety Chairman, said:

“This report sheds welcome light on the issue of health at work for small firms. With small businesses employing around half of the private sector workforce, 12 million jobs rely on ensuring small firms keep going when staff are ill.

“The report demonstrates the team spirit that runs through small firms with staff and owners more likely to be at work to keep the business running. However, it also identifies ways in which small businesses can be better supported to safeguard their employees’ health.

“The report’s recommendations should be acted upon by the Government and healthcare professionals so that the well-being of small firms and their employees can be maintained and improved. The health of the UK economy depends on it.”

The report recommends:

- Incentives for providing access to occupational health care and health promotion initiatives should be made available to enable small businesses to give the maximum help to their employees. An important part of this is reduced Employers’ Liability Compulsory Insurance in return for good workplace health and safety practices.
- Clearer and more consistent information from government and other sources must be made available about managing sickness absence, particularly with respect to employers’ and employees rights and responsibilities.
- The administration of Statutory Sick Pay should be explained more clearly and the process streamlined to relieve the headache it creates for small businesses.
- Timely access to NHS health care is really important for employers and employees alike to maximise the productivity of businesses. Advice given by GPs and other health professionals needs to take the workplace context into account.
- Businesses need affordable sickness absence insurance, specifically for sole traders and small businesses, improved income protection insurance schemes and clearer information about private medical insurance schemes.

Business fears a mess over new EU entrants

The FSB has slammed proposals by the Home Secretary John Reid to place restrictions on people from Romania and Bulgaria who wish to come to the UK to work.

The federation has accepted that the Government agreed to allow the two countries to become EU members. However, small firms are concerned that the pressure that will now be put on businesses to monitor who is a legal worker from the two nations will be too much to bear.

All Bulgarian and Romanian nationals will be allowed to come to the UK but, under the Government’s proposals, only a small number will be given the right to work. This will mean that businesses will be forced to check on who is and who is not a legal worker from these countries.

John Walker, FSB National Policy Chairman, said:

“The Government agreed to the entry of Romania and Bulgaria into the EU. It now wants to now want to put up barriers to that entry makes no sense.

“Under this proposal anyone from the two new member states will be able to come to Britain but not all will be given the right to work. It will create a mess and employers will be caught in the middle of it.

“Businesses will not accept being asked to become pseudo-immigration officers by the Government. After treating the previous new entrants in one way, which was clear for all to deal with, the differing treatment for Bulgarian and Romanian workers is unfair to them and to small businesses.”

Business calls on education and skills sector to shape up

The FSB has called on the Government and its skills agencies to get their act together and stop passing the buck when it comes to training employees of small firms.

The Prime Minister, speaking at the Labour Party Conference, hit out at small firms for not training their staff.

The FSB believes it is unfair to say that small businesses are failing to invest in employee training. The average FSB member has 4 employees. Structured off-site training would lead to 25% of the workforce being absent. This would be unsustainable for any business regardless of size. There is little understanding of why training is so difficult to undertake for micro and small businesses.

Businesses want to train their workers so that their processes become more efficient, profits can be increased and the workforce is satisfied to aid retention of staff.

The FSB’s 2006 member survey found that:

- *With financial assistance offered, 52% of members would pursue even more training for their staff;*
- *Wage compensation for employees on training would encourage 37% of respondents to commit to more training; and*
- *If the quality of training were improved, 40% of employers would seek further training for their employees*

Colin Willman, FSB National Skills Chairman, said:

“Recently we have had everyone from the Prime Minister to the Sector Skills Development Agency claiming that small firms do not carry out enough training for their staff.

“To us this seems like a case of passing the buck. The Prime Minister was elected on the back of a promise to reform education but our members often have to pick up the pieces of the failing school system. New, school-leaver employees often cannot even read, write or add up to a decent standard.

“Further problems then arise because the organisations charged with assisting firms to provide skills training for their staff, such as the SSDA, do not appreciate the situation in which small businesses find themselves. They need training, tailored to their needs, in the workplace. This is not widely on offer at the moment and until it is, the blame for lower levels of skills and training in small firms cannot be laid at the door of the employers. The Government and their publicly-funded skills agencies have to get their acts together first.”

The FSB is Britain’s biggest business organisation with 190,000 members. It exists to protect and promote the interests of the self-employed, and all those who run their own business. More information is available at www.fsb.org.uk.



Christmas! It's that time of year when a businessman's fancy turns to the customers and prospects he's seen over the last few years.

He waits in eager anticipation for the sound of the postman's laboured breathing. That postal struggle signals another sack chock full of cheery festive business greetings from every business he's ever dealt with.

And in return the businessman sends out his own sackful of business greeting cards with the jolly Santa joke, the serious Christmas message or the politically correct card "for use in any celebrational situation."

Like you, I've had them all. Have you had cards with messages like these?

- it was good to do business with you. Lets do more in the New Year
- Let's make the New Year our best ever
- Just to wish you a Happy Christmas
- From our winning team to yours
- and even those without a message or signature.

Maybe the cards were signed by the MD, the "whole team", the MD's secretary or the office junior. Or perhaps the signature was pre-printed with the message on the card.

Why send cards that are meaningless?

Why do we send cards that mean nothing? It's not going to get us any more business.

The perception is that cards are just a chore almost every business does around this time every year.

And yet when you communicate at Christmas time, it's that period of peace and goodwill to all men. People are looking forward to Christmas and often people are more relaxed and better disposed to others. So are we right to send all those cards out?

The road to business hell is paved with good intentions

All cards are sent with a good business intention. Which is making sure you are in the customer or prospect's mind, at least once during the year.

Making your customer think of you to get TOMA, or "top of the mind awareness" is a good goal. Right?

Yes and no...

Business is all about building a relationship so that people trust you enough to buy from you and continue doing so. Just sending them a card at Christmas isn't maintaining much of a relationship is it?

You can find plenty of advice about choosing exactly the right Christmas card, the 'personalised message', the envelope even how to address the envelope. And this timely advice often seems to come from printers

who always have a stock of Christmas cards that match such advice making it easy for you to simply order the cards and send them – job done!

Much of the advice is about tactical suggestions. The more astute business considers the aim of all customer contact and the Christmas card as one element of it.

The Christmas card should be part of ongoing communications with your customers or prospects. It shouldn't be order, invoice and then 9 months later a Christmas card.

What should a christmas card contain?

Once you've got your overall customer communication strategy, you need to decide exactly how you want to use a Christmas, or other holiday, message to fit in with it.

Your Christmas card may be all the good things that printers, and others, advise. Or you could send your Christmas message in a different way that still meets your strategic goals.

What's the difference an astute business uses?

It's a Christmas letter summarising what's been happening over the last 12 months.

The letter should be written as a standard letter each year but from the heart of the business owner. And one or two sections added for each customer to give you the opportunity to make specific points and invite them to special offers.

For example...

"Dear Colin,"

Then a standard and interesting introductory passage like:

"...Well here we are it's Christmas time again and we're all looking forward to it at Acorn Service. We're feeling particularly festive since our web designer, Donny, has just inserted bits of holly all over our web site.

We hope your Christmas party goes with a bang and you get plenty of mince pies to eat..."

The first customer-specific section could be:

"... Do you remember when we managed to implement that new marketing campaign last May and we got that staggering amount of new business? The last calculation we did was that it moved an extra £82,000 in sales. And thanks again for that bottle of Champagne you bought the team - it was appreciated.

More news ... of interest...

Further customer-specific sections might include:

"... As a Christmas present to you, we'd like to offer you a free review of your highest priced current advertising piece with the view to helping bring your cost of lead generation down. So a happy Christmas from all of us at Acorn Service ..."

A real letter is a much more intimate and meaningful communication with your customers and prospects.

Certainly more likely to be kept after Christmas compared to one of the many cards that end up being thrown away when the business stops work for Christmas.

What to put in for your customers or prospects

Talk sincerely in your letter. And you can choose so many things to say to your customer, for example:

- 1) You can offer apologies for those times when things didn't run according to plan.
- 2) Explain why you did things a certain way that worked well for the customer but that were hard for them to accept at the time
- 3) Celebrate your customers wins - not your wins
- 4) Remind them why they're doing business with you
- 5) Show your prospects how other customers are using you
- 6) Give them some industry specific tips they can use in the New Year.

Remember everyone is always tuned to radio WIFM (What's In It For Me) so reading you talk about their business makes them interested in what you're saying.

When you send your letter make sure it's on standard good quality stationery. Bear in mind it's a personal letter - showing your logo all over the place removes the personal touch.

Also remember to use a Christmas stamp rather than a normal stamp or worse a franked envelope.

Finally please make sure it's signed from the person who has the most contact with the customer. And don't do what I caught one client doing - getting her PA to sign all her cards for her!

So, throw your cards to the wind, take a step towards a better customer relationship and write them a letter today.

Ignorance of customer service is not bliss

An obsession with sales figures and an ignorance of the real value of customer service is costing call centres dear, says Ian Munro, managing director of Contactcentres.com Group.

In a recent survey, 84% of UK companies with call or contact centres claimed to care about customers. Whilst many of them may believe that they do, in my experience, when call centre managers report their figures back to the board, all too often the only thing they are asked about are the sales. And if the sales are fine, then nothing else matters.

This obsession with sales is wrong. And boards who take this approach are making the wrong commercial decisions. Of course sales are important but they're far from the only factor impacting on a call centre's long term performance. Customer service is often a much more important indicator and yet it's usually neglected.

And this neglect isn't necessarily down to the centre managers; it's mainly down to the directors who

are not following the right ethos. They're failing to understand the value of customer service and failing to ask the right questions. As a result, they're not getting best value for their shareholders because they're not making best use of the centre.

Customer service is perceived to cost money without offering any value in return. Most call centres are set up on a cost, rather than a profit, basis, which means that anything that is likely to increase costs is frowned upon.

Companies simply approach call centres in the wrong way.



As an example; a board might request the sales figures for the last six months. Turnover is up, margins are consistent and the directors are satisfied.

But it's not enough, or at least it shouldn't be. Directors need to be getting below the surface and digging deeper. They need to be asking questions about lost calls, how long customers are holding on for, how many times customers are having to call before getting the answers they need. In one instance, for example, a customer had to call 48 times before getting through. Whilst this shows extraordinary levels of perseverance, it would also indicate a huge customer service problem – if the directors knew about it.

It simply isn't enough to be satisfied with an increase in sales. By failing to take account of everything else that makes a customer's experience satisfying, they are not

only missing out on potentially vastly improved revenues, but actively costing the company as disgruntled customers take their business elsewhere. I've worked for a call centre operation where, on the surface sales were good, but a detailed analysis of the customer service calls revealed that on average, 800 customers had to make repeat calls every day, which could have translated into lost repeat sales of some £250M per year as each of these customer had already bought an expensive product.

But even when boards do take the trouble to investigate figures properly, they can still get things wrong. It may be that alongside higher sales revenue customer complaints are down. On the face of it, a highly satisfactory result. Scratch the surface, however and the numbers may not be as glowing as they first appear. Directors need to ask the question why complaints are down. If it is because a company's level of service is superb, then that's fine. If, however, it's because the complaints system is so cumbersome that customers can't be bothered and take their money elsewhere rather than complain, then there's a problem.

Getting the approach right is particularly relevant when it comes to a tight, competitive market place. If you have several companies in the same sector all offering approximately the same product at the same price, then a firm has to find other ways to differentiate itself from the competition. One key factor should be by driving up the levels of customer service. All too often, however, firms look at their rivals and are satisfied when their call centre figures are roughly equal.

In the long term, increased levels of customer service will have a hugely beneficial effect on the bottom line. Better service equals more satisfied customers equals more repeat business, or even the ability to upsell. In either case it's the easiest and most cost-effective type of business there is. In an ideal world repeat business should account for 70% of all turnover.

There are two fundamentals here. Firstly, directors need to take the right approach to call centres. Sales are obviously key but they mustn't be seen as the only figures on which success or failure is based. And secondly, boards need to ask the right questions. They need to get behind the frontline numbers. Only by doing this can they hope to establish the real performance of their cost centres and take action as appropriate – or even better, turn them into profit centres.

A failure to undertake this sort of comprehensive analysis is a potential risk to the business. Knowing all the facts enables directors to make the right commercial decisions and get the very best out of their operation.

Go online young man!

For PR that gives you a real competitive advantage

Online PR is crucial claims Simon Wharton of online marketing specialists PushON and Rob Baker of PR agency Artisan. The following article explores why this much-underestimated resource needs to be mastered for real competitive advantage for all businesses.

The worlds of the Internet and PR are inexorably converging; any comprehensive PR campaign must take this fact to heart. All too often PR practitioners give the right sound bite, yet very few actively pursue

online PR with no more than a glib reference or a chance to add another revenue stream without actually delivering on their commitment.

It is not entirely the PR professional's fault. It is undoubtedly a field that does not embrace technology as well as it might. Yet, businesses in the main have failed to recognise or understand the potential opportunities available. Without pressure from clients, there is no impetus for the PR world to no more than dawdle towards offering online and offline PR in combination.

But why is online PR so important?

The answer is technology and reader behaviour.

If key audiences are receiving their information from an online source, they are not going to know about a business' new service or product innovation if the PR output is restricted to hard copy.

That is not to say newspaper and magazines are not important: they are and always will be. After all, computers are essential business tools, but the paperless office did not materialise as predicted some 30 years ago just because computers began to arrive on the scene.

I am sure many readers accept this as fact. But even if they have any doubts, a few statistics will force the point beyond any reticence or opposition there might be:

Let's start with UK Internet users: there are 37,800,000; Internet penetration is 62% of the population; user growth is 145% up on 2005 (www.internetworldstats.com)

Blogs – a key element of online PR – are going up at a worldwide rate of 80,000 a day according to leading authority Technorati.

And if the product or service is geared towards consumers, such businesses will be pleased to hear that the latest report (June 2006) states that 72.6% of Internet households enjoy broadband, up from 54.4% in June 2005 and 32.7% in June 2004: that's 14 million households. What is more, many business people work from home or surf the net after work – an audience approaching TV proportions.

How online and offline PR differ, but remain close allies

The demarcation between online and offline activities in terms of channels that can be utilised is quite straightforward.

Offline PR is mainly associated with print (newspapers and magazines), radio and television.

Online PR focuses on influencing the readership that gains its information through the Internet: blogs, forums, discussion threads and Internet (including RSS feeds). A newsletter, sent via e-mail, is another potent weapon in any online PR armoury.

There is a strong correlation between online and offline PR. Both require newsworthy material expressed well in the written word.

Yet, online PR has many special characteristics that must be recognised: the speed of delivery, the worldwide reach and the interaction. Online PR is about links; it is about building communities and sharing information. The very nature of the online world means that traditional media outlets are often taken out of the PR equation. Users can receive information and comment without interpretation, direct from the source.

Respected commentator James L Horton sums it up perfectly: "Online is an individual medium."

If you have read Evelyn Waugh's *Scoop* or remember The Sun's triumphant and vainglorious take on a 1992 election: "It's the Sun wot won it." You might think the media is all-powerful. But traditional media can no longer dominate the online world; they cannot dictate a view because they constitute the few sources of news available. Even though the traditional media is still highly influential, a great deal of information bypasses them.

The implication, much more so than offline PR, is that reputation is key. A business can be discussed at length in blogs, discussion threads and forums. Consequently an online PR agency has the much more pressing responsibility to constantly monitor key protagonists; it can be likened to grassroots PR rather than centralised PR.

US marketing guru Seth Godin gives an illustrative example: the Sripraphai restaurant in Queens New York. This tiny unassuming Thai restaurant is packed every night and achieved an amazing review in the *New York Times*. How? The restaurant does not advertise nor engages in promotion. The answer lies in a blog called *Chowhound*. *Chowhound* has over 350,000 visitors monthly that review restaurants and leave comments. Readers analyse comments from a trusted source – one that is not manipulated. That is an awfully powerful medium.

The worlds of PR and the Internet converge

New, innovative PR campaigns are going to work closely with Internet suppliers: their work compliments each other, almost perfectly. (The real power of marketing is using complimentary disciplines together).

Indeed, a gifted and passionate online professional working hand in hand with a talented PR man in the online world can enable clients to punch well above their weight.

But it can have dire consequences if not taken seriously enough:

Take this lesson from Dell's experience to illustrate the power of the up and coming online media and its importance for all PR and online search marketing professionals and all companies that take their marketing seriously.

Dell, the computer manufacturers, had earned a fantastic reputation for their products and customer service. Last year, however, all those years of carefully building a brand image experienced a major setback. It was not a rival. It was not a loose word in the Ratner style. It was a blogger: just one individual named Jeff Jarvis.

Jarvis had bought a Dell laptop, which had technical problems. Dell's customer support did not rectify the issue to the satisfaction of Jarvis. Through his blog – *Buzzmachine* – he detailed his complaints. Those entries were met with hundreds of responses and comments. The result, as analysed by three market research companies found the whole affair had a detrimental effect on Dell: "it had sustained long-term damage to its brand image."

This clearly illustrates the power of online PR. It also highlights the need for online PR. Of course, it is easy to see why monitoring reputation online is crucial (as mentioned above) and how Internet specialists and PR professionals need to work in collaboration.

But it also shows something else. If the online world can damage a brand like Dell through one individual on one PC, think what it can do positively.

Consider what one PR and one Internet professional can do to gain positive coverage amongst customers who rarely read a paper or watch television.



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For most of us it's just a dream (and at up to £14,600 a night, probably a nightmare for most people's bank managers!). But just imagine what an unlimited business expense account could buy.....

With your chauffeur driven Rolls Royce, discreet in-suite check in, private reception desk on every floor and a brigade of highly trained butlers who provide around-the-clock attention, the Burj Al Arab (Tower of the Arabs) hotel in Dubai offers luxury beyond most people's wildest dreams.

Designed to resemble a billowing sail, the hotel soars to a height of 321 metres, dominating the Dubai coastline and standing on an artificial island 280 m (919 feet) out from Jumeirah beach, and connected to the mainland by a private curving bridge. A remarkable element of the building's architecture is the outer beachward wall of the atrium, which is made of a woven, Teflon-coated fibreglass cloth.

At night, the hotel offers an unforgettable sight, surrounded by choreographed colour sculptures of water and fire. The building's external lighting scheme can vary from white to multicoloured, changing every 30 minutes. Occasionally there is a light show, where colours interchange rapidly.

The Burj al-Arab does not have ordinary rooms; rather it is divided into 202 duplex suites. The smallest suite occupies an area of 169 square metres (1,819 square feet), and the largest one covers 780 square metres (8,396 square feet). It is one of the most expensive hotels in the world to stay in.

The cost of staying in a suite begins at just over £520 per night and increases to over £7,800 per night; with the Royal Suite being the most expensive, at round £14,600 per night.

In addition to a dining and living area, each suite has an office area complete with laptop, Internet access, private fax, printer and copier; a hidden network of advanced technology - lighting, curtains and air-conditioning at the touch of a button; a 42-inch plasma screen, video on demand, DVD and 93 cable channels; a dining table for in-suite dining; a pillow menu with a

range of 13 pillows and quilts to choose from and a walk-in shower and jacuzzi / spa bath, complimented by a bath menu with music and aromatherapy bath oils, (prepared by your butler, of course!)

In addition, the hotel offers a Rolls-Royce chauffeur driven shopping service and a helicopter scenic tour over Dubai from the hotel's own helipad.

The Burj al-Arab features the tallest atrium lobby in the world (180 metres, or 590 feet). The atrium can accommodate the Dubai World Trade Centre building, which, at 38 stories, was the tallest building in Dubai from the late 1970s to the mid 1990s.

Near the top of the hotel is a helipad, and extending from the other side of the hotel, over the ocean, is a restaurant called Al Muntaha (meaning 'highest' or 'ultimate') supported by cantilever.

Another restaurant, the Al Mahara ("The Oyster"), which is accessed via a simulated submarine voyage, features a large seawater aquarium, holding roughly 35,000 cubic feet (over one million litres) of water. The tank, made of plexiglass in order to reduce the magnification effect, is about 18 cm (7.5 inches) thick. The restaurant was also voted among the top ten best restaurants of the world by Condé Nast Traveller.

There was a considerable controversy regarding the claim that the hotel structure looks like a huge Christian cross when viewed by anyone sailing into the city. Some locals claim that this was an intentional move on the part of the British architects. This issue is more ironic when one considers that the Tower of the Arabs is widely considered to be Dubai's most important landmark.

In March 2004, the hotel received publicity when professional golfer Tiger Woods hit several golf balls from the hotel's helipad into the Persian Gulf.

In February 2005, professional tennis players Roger Federer and Andre Agassi played an unranked game on the helipad, which was temporarily converted into a grass tennis court, at a height of 211 metres. The helipad has no borders or fences on the edges and if a player hit a winner the tennis balls would plunge down to the ground.

Construction of the hotel began in 1994, and its doors were opened to guests on December 1, 1999.

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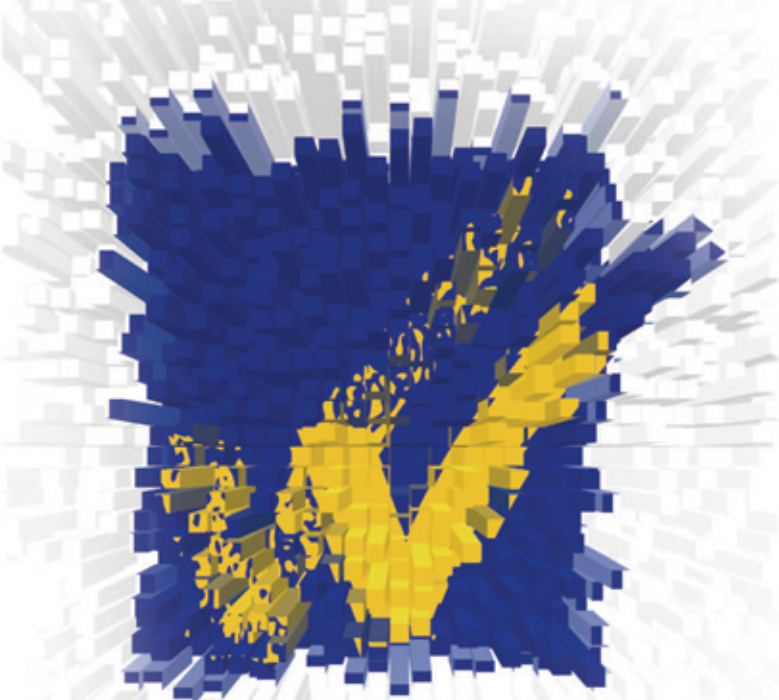
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