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Newslink extra

Editorial Manager: David Polkey
Business Link East Midlands
Innovation House, Riverside Park,
Raynesway, Derby DE21 7BF

Direct line: 01332 826 359
Fax: 01332 826 393
email: editorial@businesslinkem.co.uk

contact
us...

Welcome to...

...the latest edition of **Newslink extra**, highlighting business issues throughout the East Midlands.

In this tough economic climate, the Business Link team is working hard to provide real help to the region's enterprises by helping them access timely information, support and advice to protect themselves against any potential adverse business conditions.

Our aim is to give businesses the tools they need to take positive steps to survive and thrive, helping them to evaluate the organisation and identify areas that could improve both their business performance and competitiveness during any possible downturn they might experience.

Sometimes, taking a step back and reviewing the business can even identify new opportunities for growth or diversification.

Companies can access information and guidance on any aspect of their business from Business Link's Advisers. The team of experts is available to help review performance and identify any training needs or improvements that can help to achieve business goals and manage cashflow. They can also provide information and signposting to specialist business support services available to meet particular needs.

Let us help your business... call **0845 058 6644** email info@businesslinkem.co.uk or visit our award-winning website at www.businesslink.gov.uk/eastmidlands where you can use the online tools, register for news updates and gain access to a comprehensive range of information about business issues.



Stephen Smith, on behalf of Business Link East Midlands.

A great start to a winning business

Accessing the right information can save you time and money and give you the best chance of success, particularly in a tough economic climate.

Steve Faulkner from East Midlands-based Portland Trophies is definitely an example of how good advice at the start can help clear a path to success.

The business is the UK's leading supplier of inline and ice hockey trophies. Steve explains how the business started, "I didn't have a business background, had never been self-employed and didn't have colleagues to ask. I got Business Link involved straight away when I set up Portland Trophies as I needed reliable advice about VAT registration, tax, National Insurance and getting an accountant - all the basics."

At first, all the engraving was done by hand, any mistake meant starting again from scratch. Steve's Adviser helped him to apply for funding towards new equipment which revolutionised the business.

"I could turn around orders much faster which led to more flexible hours which suited my lifestyle and gave me time to seek out new customers. Turnover and profit increased by 50% as a direct result of this investment."

Steve says that around 80% of the trophies he sells are unique in design. "I've managed to secure a five-year design patent with the manufacturer to prevent the trophies being copied which is helping me maintain a strong position in the UK market."

Steve taps into Business Link regularly as he explains, "Whatever I've needed, they've always had an answer, and my Adviser is a great sounding board for forthcoming plans and any additional support that might be available."



Winning Team... Steve Faulkner (left) of Portland Trophies with James Cross, captain of the BISHA North Regional Team

News In Brief...

Sign-Up for latest news...

Our regular bulletins will keep you up-to-date with legislation, events and business news – invaluable information to help you remain competitive. Subscribe now, it's simple to do and FREE of charge.

Once you have subscribed your business newsletters will be delivered directly to your inbox ready for you to read at the appropriate time.

- To subscribe, call 0845 058 6644.

Don't get squeezed in 'the crunch'...

With many businesses worried about the potential impact of the economic downturn, Business Link's team of Advisers is keen to help companies access information and advice to protect themselves against any potential adverse business conditions.

Some businesses may want to look at ways to maximise the potential of overseas market, others may benefit from focusing on fewer but more key income streams.

Business Link has compiled a comprehensive online guide, which contains a wealth of information to help businesses stay one step ahead.

• Call 0845 058 6644 or visit www.businesslink.gov.uk/eastmidlands/businesshelp for top tips to maximise potential.

Funding to transform your business...

The Business Transformation Grant (BTG) is designed to support the development and sustainable success of those businesses in the East Midlands area who can demonstrate they have the potential to transform. The BTG is available in two parts, revenue and capital.

Revenue: funds the cost of using service providers from the private sector. Businesses are offered a choice of solution providers that are on the Service Provider Register.

Capital: usually supports some other form of assistance, such as mentoring or a consultancy grant. Capital grants can occasionally be used to purchase technology that is considered as being new to the business.

• To find out more, or discuss eligibility criteria, call 0845 058 6644 or visit our award winning website www.businesslink.gov.uk/eastmidlands/btg

Business Link Latest...

Mum's the word to drive a business forward

Business growth depends on flexibility and the ability to identify and realise opportunities.

That's exactly what happened following requests from female and elderly customers wanting to see more women taxi drivers – the resulting launch of a female driver service branded as Mum's Taxis by East Midlands businesswoman Jeegisha Dinnall.

Jeegisha says that after talking to existing customers, she soon realised there was a gap in the market.

Jeegisha contacted Business Link to access help and advice on how to set up her new enterprise and the subsequent successful launch of the business.

"I wanted to make sure all the correct procedures were followed," explains Jeegisha. "Our Adviser discussed the importance of setting up the correct legal structure from the outset. This meant it was clear on what needed to be done and that adequate funding was in place." The resulting initiative not only increases the service to customers, it provides a chance for women with children to return to employment, in a flexible working environment, where drivers can choose their hours to fit around their families.

The company's Business Adviser also discussed marketing activities, helping how to identify and best target those considered most likely to use the service.

"Mums Taxis is proud that all their drivers are not only fully trained, but reliable and professional. Some people just prefer a woman driver and we are confident that Mum's Taxis provides this kind of additional reassurance."

By providing a unique service that meets and often exceeds her clients needs, Jeegisha has already begun to see the long term business benefits and both repeat and regular bookings are coming in as word continues to spread.



Mum's the word... starting out - Jeegisha Dinnall

Constructive growth in tough market

A good reputation and a drive for continuous improvement will add strength to a business in a tough economic market.

The sky's the limit for Mace Industries which makes machines to carry roofing materials on construction sites and warehouse conveyor systems.

Since the first machine was developed in a garden shed in 1986, Mace Industries has developed a national and international reputation and set up separate companies to sell to customers in Australia, the United States and Poland.

Mace Industries was started by brothers Tony and Richard Mace, who were in the roofing trade. Having yearned for an easier way to carry tiles to the roof, they developed their own machine - the Bumpa. From here The Hoddi, the Boxa, Uni-loada, Shifta, Supa-screen all now market leaders in their own right, were born.

Business Link and the Manufacturing Advisory Service have shown how changing administration and production systems can improve efficiency and productivity. And export markets have been opened up with the help of UK Trade & Investment. The company now trades through distributors in Iceland,

Holland, Sweden and South Africa, as well as through its companies in the US, Australia and Poland.

MD Tony Mace says, "Working with Business Link we have streamlined the business and introduced automated systems.

We have also changed production methods, giving employees better job satisfaction because they now take responsibility for producing the whole machine, not just a part of it."

Tony said: "Business Link services have improved since I first became aware of them and the service now relates more closely to the needs of industry. We wish we'd asked for their help earlier. We would advise any company thinking of changing its operations to get in touch with Business Link right at the beginning."



Sky's the limit... Mace Industries

Business Link Latest...

Raising a glass to teamwork

Joining forces can add strength to gain market share in a competitive sector.

For one East Midlands brewery that got help to get its bottling operation off the ground, the party is just beginning. Diane Sharkey, one of the owners of the Spire Brewery, teamed up with brewer David McLaren in 2007 to drive up sales.

Diane contacted Business Link for help with the bottling project. An Adviser listened to their plans and identified a source of finance Spire could tap into to fund the cost of a labelling machine.

“Most people buy bottled beers based on the appeal of the label and the name - that means good, professional design. Without the grant, we would not have been in a position to invest in the machine, especially as we needed to acquire the neighbouring unit to make it feasible.”

In just three weeks during October, David and his team produced 102 cases of bottled beer for off licences and markets and demand is growing daily.

The plan is to approach more independent off licences and then look at getting onto the shelves of some of the larger chains.

In addition, the grant helped provide training for Spire’s staff including brewing courses, computer



**Malt and Hops in perfect harmony...
Spire Brewery toasts success**

skills training through Train to Gain, tax and VAT workshops.

Spire is planning for a period of fast growth over the next two years, capitalising on the bottled beer market. Overall turnover has tripled to £160,000 in the last three years with cask sales increasing from 40 in the first six months of trading to an impressive 186 within 24 months.

Extreme makeover manufactures success

Using technology to streamline systems can increase efficiency and performance to boost the bottom line.

After increasing the production capacity of his hydraulic and pneumatic component company by 50%, Julian Davies has also introduced new systems to Flotec Industrial Ltd that aim to increase business efficiency improve and growth.

“We’re expecting a 30% increase in turnover in the current year now we have larger capacity, but we couldn’t have supported this without funding to streamline the operational side of the business,” says Julian.

Julian contacted Business Link for advice on potential sources of funding to transform the technology they were using. “We were looking to increase efficiency with the way we managed our customers and processed orders and to reduce paperwork and storage requirements as well as freeing up valuable staff time to support the growth of the business.

“A Business Link Adviser listened to our needs and recommended a grant that would provide us with 50% of the funding for new IT equipment. It took just five weeks from calling Business Link to get approval for the grant which was great as we were really eager to get the project moving.”

The new technology integrates sales and accounting records and has improved management information reporting and order processing times.

Julian adds, “The company’s expansion opened doors for us to start looking at expanding our product range and looking to markets further afield than the East Midlands. So I will definitely be contacting Business Link again to see how they can help us.”



Flotec Industrial Ltd using technology to transform the business...

News In Brief...

Survival of the fittest...

Reducing energy consumption and increasing resource efficiency can boost your bottom line.

Business Link is working with key organisations to offer practical advice on how to save money and increase profits in a tough economic climate through energy saving measures, reducing packaging and cutting waste.

• To find out more about the benefits of resource efficiency, contact Business Link on **0845 058 6644** email info@businesslinkem.co.uk or visit www.survival-of-the-fittest.co.uk

Lead by example...

In an economic downturn, businesses should resist the temptation to cut spending on staff training and development.

Initiatives such as Train to Gain and Leaders First – both funded by the Learning and Skills Council – can help to boost the skills of your workforce.

Train to Gain is a free service that helps employers support the development of their people. It is complemented by the Leaders First programme which offers support and funding to key decision makers within organisations.

• Contact **0845 057 1817** to access more information on the latest range of initiatives available to increase and develop the skills of your workforce through these difficult times - creating a skilled, motivated and committed team that is firmly positioned to help your business remain competitive and strong – ready to take it forward as and when the economy picks up.

Commit to skills...

Businesses can reinforce their commitment to encouraging and supporting employee development by signing up to ‘The Skills Pledge’.

The Skills Pledge is a voluntary commitment that a business will support all of its employees to develop their skills and work towards relevant, valuable qualifications to at least Level 2 (equivalent to 5 good GCSEs).

It will be the companies with a strong, efficient and dedicated team that will be in the best position to capitalise on the eventual upturn in the economy.

• Call **0845 058 6644** or visit www.businesslink.gov.uk/eastmidlands/skills to discover how you can make this public commitment to developing your staff, funding initiatives available towards meeting training needs and how skills development in general can benefit your business.

News In Brief...

Starting out...

Evidence indicates that new businesses that seek professional, external advice actually increase their chances of growth and survival. This is particularly important in the current economic climate.

- To access the *Regional Business Link Start-up Service* designed for people just starting out, or those businesses still in the early development stages of growth, call **0845 058 6644** or visit www.businesslink.gov.uk/eastmidlands/startup

Networking & skills development...

Through Business Link you can access a wealth of support, advice and information to help you start your own enterprise. There is also a comprehensive programme of workshops, events and seminars covering a range of topics of interest to those starting, growing and developing their business.

- Call **0845 058 6644** or visit our award winning website to find out about events and seminars taking place near you at www.businesslink.gov.uk/eastmidlands/events

Suppliers get themselves known...

Suppliers can boost their business by signing up to East Midlands Development Agency's (emda) comprehensive database of local organisations. Emda's Regional Brokerage Platform is the key tool used by Business Link in the East Midlands when giving customers access to business solutions.

By registering on the Regional Brokerage Platform, suppliers of skills and services increase their channels to market and raise awareness of the services they offer.

- To register, call **0845 058 6644** or visit our website www.businesslink.gov.uk/eastmidlands/supplier

Explore overseas...

Now is the time to ensure your business is smart and efficient to identify new opportunities for growth or diversification.

It may be that you want to explore markets abroad and if so, there are lots of things to consider before you branch out and begin to trade internationally.

- To make the most of the range of information and advice provided by UK Trade & Investment (UKTI), and discover the benefits of global trading, call **0845 058 6644** or visit www.businesslink.gov.uk/eastmidlands/internationaltrade

Business Link Latest...

Tasty business

Help and support needn't be remote for a rural business.

Steve and Meryl Ward are the fourth generation to farm at Grayingham Grange, better known as Uncle Henry's. Since taking on the farm in 1991 the couple have transformed the enterprise with the help of Business Link.

Meryl's passion for animals is apparent and she is a keen member of the Farm Animal Welfare Council and the British Pig Executive. It's this passion that has helped Uncle Henry's become much more than a farm with a shop.

At the start, their Business Link Adviser put them in touch with a host of organisations and contacts who could offer them advice on everything from grants through to legal and staffing issues.

"Without Business Link we would have never been put in touch with emda who were able to offer us a grant to convert the barns into a café, shop and meeting rooms," says Meryl.

"We made sure a long time ago we got the right people in key positions and do all we can to keep them. We were pleased to be awarded Investors in People as it is recognition for us of our belief that a



Award winning business in the heart of the countryside...

successful business is all down to a happy team."

As well as a shop, café and organising a host of events from Christmas markets to beer and wine festivals, the farm also offers educational workshops to schools.

"We're thrilled with the way the business has expanded. Without the advice we gained from Business Link we would have never obtained the funding or the invaluable advice that has got us where we are today."

A roasting success

Re-evaluation and improvements can provide opportunities.

East Midlands-based Lee & Fletcher was founded 17 years ago during the last recession so is well placed to survive the current economic climate.

The company supplies a range of coffees, teas, beverages and equipment to the catering industry and its main activity is the roasting and supply of speciality coffee to independent coffee shops.

Owner Jim Lee says the business has developed to reflect the changing market. "Our business growth has mirrored the growth in the popularity of coffee drinking and the opening of more bistros and coffee shops.

"When times are tough you can still grow the business but it is vital to know your customers' needs and manage your growth," adds Jim.

When Jim and the team wanted to improve the efficiency of the production processes they contacted Business Link. A Business Adviser carried out a full business diagnostic for the company including assessing resource efficiencies which identified that investing in new machinery would make the coffee roasting and packaging process more efficient. "Our Adviser also identified that being in the Food & Drink sector meant we could apply for a match funded grant from the East Midlands NTI Initiative," explains Jim.

The new equipment is helping with the company's continued growth. "It was good to talk to someone who could give us an impartial overview of our

organisation," adds Jim. "Our Adviser brokered a solution to our needs and helped us obtain funding. We'll definitely go back to Business Link."



Aroma of success... specialist supplier, Jim Lee of Lee & Fletcher