

The Link

Ride the recession and boost your business

February/March 2009

Let's cut to the chase

How Matt got a fresh grip on his established business

In 2008 Matt Smith was wondering where his business was going.

His hairdressing operation in Highcliffe, with 13 employees (ten of them full-time) was generating a turnover of around £400,000.

But when his tax bills came in he didn't have the money to meet them. That prompted some urgent re-appraisal of the way he was going about things.

Fortunately he was already talking to Business Link, in the person of adviser Beryl Griffiths.

Said Matt: "I first came across Business Link two years ago. A guy I know who is in financial services said, why don't you get them in to check-over what you are doing?"



Matt Smith: 'Beryl identified that I was spending a lot of time chasing sales and not enough time controlling costs, which was why I had a cash flow problem.'

"It was useful from the start, but it has been in the last six months or so that I have really appreciated the benefits.

"When we did our second review, Beryl pointed out that there was a lot I could be doing to improve net profit, and gave me

Business Link website packs on cash flow and setting key performance indicators.

"She identified that I was spending a lot of time chasing sales and not enough time controlling costs. That was largely why, last year, I had a cash flow

problem. I had tax bills to pay and the money wasn't there.

"Beryl had already lined up more advice she said I needed – through the Dormen mentoring scheme and through Envision, who

Continued overleaf

Salon's profits up despite the economic downturn

Continued from page 1

know all about making better use of energy and resources.

"The Dormen scheme was a revelation. The mentor I had was really on the ball. In just a few hours of talking things through I learned so much – partly about the salon's appearance and the importance of it to the client, but particularly about cutting costs and controlling costs.

"It was exactly what I needed – someone who was completely unbiased, who was asking me why are you doing that and have you thought about doing this?"

"And from Envision I got a real lot of practical advice, on cutting energy bills and water usage as well as other costs.

"All the light bulbs here are being replaced, as they pop, with low-energy ones, which are more expensive to buy, but we will save around £600 a year just on light.

"Water consumption has

been reduced – that includes hot water, so there is another power saving there – and our laundry costs have been reduced from about £90 a week to about £60 just by being more logical and less lazy-minded about it.

"We have amalgamated utilities, which has saved about another £1,000 a year.

"And none of the advice I have had has cost me anything at this point. Envision provide the first two hours' advice free – and the advice I have been acting on I got in that two hours."

Despite the economic downturn, Matt's profits are up, and so is his turnover – running at six per cent more than last year.

Currently, he says, he is building his customer base with a loyalty discount scheme, which rewards customers for re-booking regularly and for recommending friends.

That approach, he says, is currently bringing him 10 to 15 new customers each week.

How much impact is the recession having? Says Matt: "You've got to stay positive and understand the situation.

"Fifty per cent of my clients are over 50, so some of them are depending on the return they get from savings and so on. Everybody's looking for a deal these days, and they want to think, hey, this person's making an effort for me."

"I've got a new focus on a number of different aspects of my business now, and a lot of it is thanks to Business Link."

Beryl says: "I am delighted that Tony Hair continues to grow and improve profitability despite the poor economic climate.

"When reviewing Tony Hair with Matt I was able to identify what support he needed now to improve the performance of the business, and we then worked together to agree what actions would be best suited for him.

"As Matt says, one of the things I can do as a Business Link adviser is to broker in other agencies to help – in this case a mentor from Dormen and Envision, who have helped to reduce costs by minimising the use of electricity.

"Of course, I also made sure that Matthew had all the relevant information packs from the Business Link website that he could use."

Dorset

Dorset-based firm The Box Office, supplier of high quality bespoke gift boxes, has announced a second company acquisition in six months.

In June last year the firm acquired Duston Baldock Productions, manufacturers of specialist boxes for sets of books and CDs.

Now The Box Office has taken over the Cornwall-based firm Westpact Ltd, which makes high quality presentation boxes for customers, including the Duchess of York and Harrods.

Nikki and Julian Black, owners of The Box Office, which is based at Spetisbury, Blandford, have formed a new company, Atlantic Box UK Ltd. All of the existing Westpact management and staff, based in Redruth, will be continuing in their current roles.



Laura McHarrie, adviser to The Box Office



Business Link adviser Beryl Griffiths

A world of business insight, a wealth of

firm on buying spree



Julian Black: 'We are always looking for the next step in improving our business. Business Link helps us to review and hone what we are doing.'

Nikki Black said: "We are really pleased to be able to keep all the existing staff, as most work opportunities in the Redruth area are seasonal and unemployment is very high, particularly during the off-season."

The main reason for the acquisition is to develop the range of luxury presentation and gift packaging that The Box Office supplies throughout the UK and beyond. Additionally, the company is looking at offering customers a unique contract packing and fulfilment service.

Julian Black added "We have known and worked with Westpact Ltd for a long time.

"Having relaunched this company as Atlantic Box UK Ltd we are now able to be more competitive

and provide an even better service to our customers."

Julian first started working with Business Link in 2006 through its peer group learning programmes and has benefited over the last couple of years not only from connecting with others with different expertise, but from access to specialist classes on subjects that have made a significant impact on his strategic and tactical plans.

Julian said: "Whilst they have all been useful, the sessions on Fast Track Growth with mergers and acquisitions and Finance for Business Growth really helped to clarify my course of action and consider contingencies.

"My Business Link adviser, Laura McHarrie, has a significant business background herself, so she understands, from a

practical perspective, the pros and cons of business development.

"She is able to access expert speakers on the subjects and facilitate group discussions around particular aspects where we are able to explore the practical implications for our businesses.

"As one of the UK's most well-known and respected suppliers of presentation boxes, we are always looking for the next step in improving our business. This Business Link service helps us to continually review and hone what we are doing.

"We would not rule out further acquisitions in the future to put us in an even stronger position to build on the firm foundations and the rapidly expanding customer base that we have developed over the last few years."

BUSINESS UPDATE

Matthew Butcher,
Economic
Development
Manager for
Business
Link in
Dorset



As 2009 began we all knew that it was going to be a challenging year for business.

Recent events, including the news that we are now officially in a recession, have only served to confirm that.

But whatever the economic climate, the future of a business rests largely on the decisions made by its owner. Some businesses will not only ride out the recession but go on to prosper, partly because the current business climate will prompt them to re-focus their thinking about exactly what they are doing.

The decisions you take this year are likely to impact on your business for a long time to come.

It is vital that you make sure you have the best possible perspective on your business, that you are doing everything you can to get all the fundamentals right and that you are ready to take advantage of the opportunities that will present themselves.

We at Business Link can help. Our experienced business advisers are out and about every day in Dorset talking to people about getting the best from their companies – and because we are funded by government there is no charge for the time they spend with you.

We are your first port of call for all publicly-funded support, and we will also identify other sources of specific advice.

Make sure you are making the most of what we have to offer.

To arrange a one-to-one chat with one of our advisers or to book a place at one of our business clinics, seminars or other events, call us on **0845 600 9966**.

local knowledge... that's the link

Talk to us about how to boost your business

Business Link clinics in February and March

Bournemouth

February 25
March 3, 17

Poole

February 18
March 11, 12, 18, 19, 25, 26

Boscombe

February 25, 26
March 24, 25

Dorchester

February 26
March 17, 18, 19, 26

Weymouth

March 3, 4, 5

Ferndown

March 11, 12

Christchurch

March 3

Sturminster Newton

March 24

To book a place at any of these clinics, call 01202 607532. An enhanced programme of business clinics from April will include new venues at Sherborne, Bridport and Lyme Regis. Details available on the same number.

Business Link seminars and other Dorset events

How to grow your business whatever the market conditions

Bournemouth University, Talbot Campus
25th February 2009 16.30 - 19.30

History has shown that some businesses are always ready to take advantage of market conditions. As a result they achieve amazing growth. Will you be one of them?

In today's challenging climate it can be difficult to stay positive. However, we invite all Dorset businesses to a seminar which will help you BOOM! If you are a business owner who is serious about growing your business, this seminar will allow you take a big step back from the day-to-day, think differently and get to grips with what really matters.

Business Link open advice and support day

The Olive Bowl, Gillingham
26th February 2009 10.00 - 15.30

Free advice and support day. Drop in to attend any of the seminars or arrange a meeting with one of our experienced advisers who are available on the day to discuss, one-to-one, how you might take your business ideas forward.

Seminars include: Confident Networking, Marketing on a Small Budget and Making Google Love Your Website. Network with other delegates over a free buffet lunch.

How to grow your business whatever the market conditions

Weymouth and Portland National Sailing Academy
3rd March 2009 16.30 - 19.30

Details as those for the seminar held at Bournemouth University, 25th February.

Business Link open advice and support day

Portland Spa, Portland
5th March 2009 10.00 - 15.30

Free advice and support day. Details as for open day at The Olive Bowl, Gillingham, 26th February. Poundbury Systems will also be bringing the Cisco Systems van, showing you

how to save money on your phone and computer systems.

Sound Bite Sessions **Hotel & Catering Show, Bournemouth International Centre** **10th March 2009 12.00 - 16.00**

Business Link is hosting free sound bite seminars at the Hotel & Catering Show. Each session lasts 40 minutes and will cover: How to save money when marketing - for businesses working with little or no marketing budget; How to make your website work harder - how to keep your website at the top of the search rankings and drive targeted traffic to you and not your competitors; Profiting in competitive times - helping you to make the impossible dramatically possible to explore business opportunities in challenging times.

To book please call 01425 485040.

Sound Bite Sessions **Hotel & Catering Show, Bournemouth International Centre** **11th March 2009 11.00 - 15.00**

More free sound bite seminars at the Hotel & Catering Show.

The 40-minute sessions will cover: How to make friends and influence people - learn how to interpret verbal and non-verbal communication to build long-lasting, quality business relationships; How to close the deal - to help you understand the negotiating process to maximise your chances of success.

To book please call 01425 485040.

Business Finance Options: Surviving the Downturn **Durley Dean Hotel, Bournemouth** **10th March 2009 10.15 - 14.00**

A must if you are involved with the financial side of a small or medium-sized business and want to grow your business but don't know how you are to finance it.

This seminar will enable you to make better informed decisions; you will have a greater knowledge of what lenders are looking

for when agreeing finance and overdrafts, plus an understanding of the many other options available, including working capital, loan finance, equity/angel funding, invoice finance and bank loans.

How to grow your business whatever the market conditions

Captain's Club Hotel, Christchurch
24th March 2009 16.30 - 19.30

Details as those for the seminar held at Bournemouth University, 25th February.

Leading For Success **Kingston Maurward College, nr Dorchester** **26th March 2009 16.00 - 19.30**

Learn what diversification can do for your turnover, profits and security, and if you qualify for funding through the Leadership and Management Development Grant. In times of economic downturn many businesses' strategy is to spend less and sell more. However, some turn to new markets, or new products and services to help them survive and even grow. This seminar will give you advice on how to plan for business growth through diversification, avoiding the risks to continue to improve your business success.

Guerrilla e-marketing **Carrington House Hotel, Bournemouth** **21st April 2009 08.30 - 12.00**

There are over 300 social networking sites on the internet, some of which are focused on building business-to-business relationships. We will show you the most popular sites, explore the opportunities available and look at how your business can gain commercial benefit from social networking.

This workshop also explores email marketing, looking at how to build your subscriber list, creating attractive and informative emails and how to avoid being classed as a spammer. Designed for business owners with a basic understanding of the internet.

To book these events and for all other Business Link information and inquiries call 0845 0707 747