

# Your Weekly Business Bulletin from Thanet & East Kent Chamber

## Thanet & East Kent Insider

19<sup>th</sup> March 2009

### 1. Chamber IT Forum

The Chamber IT Forum held its first session of the year on Friday of last week and was treated to a masterly summary of Open Source Software (OSS) by Ian Stuart, Director of Cariss. We learned that OSS is low cost, reliable and can reduce energy costs by as much as 50%. Thanks to a worldwide user base, OSS is competing successfully with expensive packages such as Microsoft Office as it is “free from vendor lock-in”. In other words, the OSS software can cost you next to nothing and you are not obliged to purchase upgrades and new versions to support your office records. One delegate to the forum confessed that his company operated 300 desktop computers and that the annual license fees paid to Microsoft amounted to £272,000 per year. By adopting OSS, he could reduce that payment to virtually zero. Ian advised that start-up companies should use OSS from the beginning and would have few problems in transferring their Microsoft Office skills to the OSS Open Office package. Companies with a large investment in a proprietary software package from a major company might like to consider a gradual transition. Delegates discussed the application of OSS to Internet telephony, OTRS, XEN applications and other troublesome sets of initials which apparently have nothing to do with Buddhism at all. With all SMEs in East Kent keen to reduce their operating costs, Ian Stuart is expecting a busy year. For details of OSS and Linux, email the Chamber to [admin@tekc.co.uk](mailto:admin@tekc.co.uk) or contact Cariss direct, tel: 0870 224 5421.

### 2. SEEDA & Grants

In the last financial year, the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) awarded grants to companies in the South East looking to expand their businesses. The grants were awarded in four main areas: Micro Grants £152,819; Development Grants £1,459,462; Research Grants £610,838 and some Exceptional Grants £1,000,000. Readers with exceptional mathematical skills or who have recently acquired the free OSS spreadsheet package will know that the total of taxpayers’ money returned direct to South East companies in grant payments was £3,223,119. Whatever your views on quangos and the merits of government-sponsored business support agencies, you might be interested to see if your company could qualify for a grant. You can attempt to research all the regulations and official guidance yourself, likened by one Chamber member to “trying to walk through treacle three foot deep”, or you could attend the Chamber Finance & Grants Workshop scheduled for 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2009, open to all Kent-based organisations, and hear an expert supported by SEEDA, Kent County Council, Thanet District Council and BusinessLink. He will explain that if you qualify for a grant, he will do almost all the administration for you free of charge. The workshop will also cover the availability of private finance, in case a grant is not available to you. For details, email [admin@tekc.co.uk](mailto:admin@tekc.co.uk) with the subject line “Chamber Finance & Grants Workshop”.

### 3. How are we doing?

At a presentation organized by our partners at the Channel Chamber of Commerce last year, Dennis Turner, Chief Economist at HSBC, concluded that the trends in any country’s economy could be judged by the interest rate, the exchange rate and unemployment. Make your own judgment over the UK’s performance in the last year. The UK interest rate is now 0.5% (April 2008: 5.25%). One pound sterling now buys you the less than princely sum of 1.45 US Dollars (April 2008: 2.0), 137 Japanese Yen (April 2008: 200) or 1.27 Euros (April 2008: 1.06). We are grateful to the ever excellent KCC Information & Analysis Team for sending the latest unemployment figures for February 2009 which we can compare with the same period last year.

	February 2009		Change since February 2008	
	Unemployed	% of workforce	Number	%
Ashford	1,839	2.7%	1,000	119.2%
Canterbury	2,299	2.5%	1,070	87.1%
Dover	2,270	3.7%	992	77.6%
Maidstone	2,191	2.5%	1,207	122.7%
Shepway	2,380	4.1%	954	66.9%
Thanet	3,797	5.2%	1,618	74.3%
Tunbridge Wells	1,305	2.1%	741	131.4%
Kent	32,694	3.3%	15,494	90.1%
South East	398,304	3.3%	162,493	68.9%
Great Britain	1,416,213	3.8%	591,195	71.8%

These figures show that Thanet remains the district with the highest number of unemployment benefit claimants among males, aged 16 – 64, and females, aged 16 – 59. But, even at an annual increase of 74.3%, Thanet has one of the lowest unemployment growth rates in Kent, alongside Shepway and Dover, and well below the county average of 90.1%. The sharpest increases in unemployment in Kent over the last year are registered in Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells.

#### **4. What is the Chatham House Rule?**

Sometimes quoted incorrectly as “Chatham House Rules”, there is in fact just one Chatham House Rule. It is a most useful device used by companies and public bodies throughout the English-speaking world to promote the frank and free exchange of information during meetings. It was first devised in 1927 and has since acquired such popularity that its originators have quietly dropped the trading name of the Royal Institution for International Affairs and now like to be known simply as Chatham House. The rule has a morally binding force that protects the identity of speakers and encourages the sharing of commercially sensitive information. In brief, if the Chatham House Rule is invoked, all those attending the meeting may quote what is said but must not reveal the identity of the speaker. The rule was last revised in 2002 and its full text is as follows: “When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed”. So now you know and whatever you do, do not say “Chatham House Rules”. OK?

#### **5. Business Breakfast Dates**

Readers of the Thanet & East Kent Insider may like to make a note of the dates of the Chamber business networking breakfasts which are scheduled for 21<sup>st</sup> April, 19<sup>th</sup> May, 23 June, 21<sup>st</sup> July, 22<sup>nd</sup> September, 20<sup>th</sup> October, 17<sup>th</sup> November, 8<sup>th</sup> December. Details of the venue and speakers will be available nearer the date concerned. Acute observers of the celestial cycle will note that the networking breakfasts all take place on a Tuesday.

#### **6. Get The Money In**

As often mentioned in these pages, the most common reason for business failure in small and medium companies in the UK is poor cash flow; you do the work but you don't get paid for it. Some businesses that are perfectly sound in every other aspect have gone to the wall recently because of a lack of attention to cash flow and few, if any, credit control procedures. This Chamber has worked with specialists such as Engee Accountancy and Credit Management to produce a simple guide to help you get paid for your work. For a free copy, Chamber members are invited to email [admin@tekcc.co.uk](mailto:admin@tekcc.co.uk) with the subject line “Credit Control Guide”. If you looking to improve your cash flow, Chamber member ILM of St Peters, Broadstairs has spent 4 years developing a credit management system that removes much of the laboriousness of chasing debtors. This innovative software package, SYGNOS CM, can be demonstrated free of charge at a time that is convenient to you. Give Ian Mattinson of ILM a call to arrange a meeting, tel: 01843 861616.

#### **7. Vitamins, Fish, Glasgow and Mars Bars**

Health Food shops throughout East Kent are worried that a new European directive currently under consideration might restrict the sale of vitamins and food supplements to very small quantities so as to reflect the demand in Europe rather than the needs and interest of UK consumers. Sue Croft of Consumers for Health Choice is quoted by Kent News as saying that the eating habits on the continent are different to those of the UK. As she put it, “Think of the diet in Italy, of the beautiful warm climate and fresh olive oil, and compare that with Glasgow and deep-friend Mars bars”. We assume that Ms Sue Croft will not be taking her Easter break in West Scotland this year. If she does, she might find that she will need some large doses of health supplements after encounters with restaurant owners. The Glaswegian Restaurateurs Association is adamant that “Glasgow is viewed as a trend-setter in European Culture and a centre of dining excellence to such an extent that it is now widely acknowledged that Glasgow has the best dining scene in the UK outside of London”. There is no doubt that an indigenous food culture can have a magical effect on the local economy. Padstow is a prime example. Celebrity chef, Rick Stein, reigns supreme there and local traders enjoy the warm reflection from incoming food tourists. Whitstable has its oysters and Britain's busiest passenger port can claim naming rights over Dover Sole. Ramsgate has a respectable flotilla of fishing boats which land daily catches of prime fish. Ms Sue Croft does not need to travel to Italy to eat well, she would be made very welcome at any of the following venues: Royal Harbour Hotel tel: 01843 591514, Kent International Hotel tel: 01843 588276, Court Stairs Country Club tel: 01843 591850 and the Atlantis Seafood Restaurant 01843 581582. After extensive research, this Chamber is delighted to confirm that all these establishments serve excellent food using fresh, local produce. None of the menus feature deep-friend Mars bars.

#### **8. Who Was Sarah Thorne?**

If you lay awake at night in state of high anxiety because you have heard of Sarah Thorne and cannot remember if she is a first round casualty of Strictly Come Dancing or an Edwardian suffragette, and before you ask, it is impossible to be both, your sufferings are at an end. Sarah Thorne (b. 1836) was the long-serving Manager of the Theatre Royal in Margate. Along with most of her seven brothers and three sisters she began her career on stage in Margate. After periods away in Dublin, Edinburgh and Worcester, she returned to Margate in 1876 and remained closely associated with the Theatre until her death in 1899.

Described by the Thanet Times as having a "somewhat imperious manner", she cannot have been easy company for some of her troop. Sarah Thorne is very much with us today for two good reasons. Her ghost is reputed to haunt the Theatre Royal and her name lives on in the Sarah Thorne Theatre Club (STTC) in Broadstairs, founded by Chamber member Michael Wheatley-Ward. If you want to get involved with Thanet's liveliest theatre group or are interested in finding out more about the year's programme at STCC that ranges from puppet theatre to classical music, speak to Michael direct by telephoning 01843 580389 or email [wheatleyward@btinternet.com](mailto:wheatleyward@btinternet.com)

## 9. George Best and Style

Further to last week's article about management styles and the drinking habits of famous footballers, many members have contacted the Chamber with stories about the wasted lives of celebrated sports folk. However true some of them may be, sadly the majority are not suitable for publication. Personally, I find it difficult to believe the one about an Arsenal centre forward and doughnuts. I'm sure that no commercial baker would allow it. The eminently respectable Audrey Songhurst, CEBD Director at Canterbury Christ Church University, related one story about Ireland's most gifted player. Audrey wrote, "Your reference to George Best reminds me of when he was being interviewed by Michael Parkinson. Best had apparently spent some time in Canada and Parky asked him why he had gone there. Quick as a flash, Best said: "I was in London one day and a bus went by with 'Drink Canada Dry' on it. Seemed like a good idea to me!" Thank you, Audrey, many readers will have enjoyed that. They might also recall that in his later years at Manchester United, George Best frustrated the Old Trafford management by arriving late for training, or as he put it, "I used to go missing quite a lot ... Miss Canada, Miss United Kingdom, Miss World." On this theme, the one story about Best most quoted by Michael Parkinson referred to the elderly hotel porter who late one evening delivered champagne to the great man's room and found him lounging on the bed next to a scantily-clad Miss World. Thousands of pounds in used notes, the winnings from a local casino, were scattered around the room. The porter nodded his head in regret saying, "So George, where did it all go wrong?" George Best, the fifth Beatle, certainly had style; no deep-fried Mars bars for our George.



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***It's happening now, it's happening in Thanet & East Kent.***  
**For details of membership, email [admin@tekcc.co.uk](mailto:admin@tekcc.co.uk) and be happy.**