

Your Weekly Business Bulletin from Thanet & East Kent Chamber

Thanet & East Kent Insider

23rd January 2010

1. Reduce Your Costs

We are again grateful to Martyn Young of Atlantic Business Resources, tel: 08456 185088, for drawing our attention to regulations that came into effect on 18th January 2010 from Ofgem, which regulates the gas and electricity markets in Great Britain. The measures are designed to eliminate unjustified price differences and improve contract conditions while at the same time promoting greater transparency for price comparisons. Micro businesses stand to benefit the most from the new arrangements. As Martyn puts it, "From this date an automatic rollover for a micro business can only be for a maximum of a 12 month period, and they will be able to serve notice anytime after the contract renewal date up to the contracted notice period. The new rules are not retrospective for contracts signed before 18th January 2010. A micro business is defined as fewer than 10 employees and a turnover or balance sheet total of less than 2 Million Euros or annual electricity consumption of not more than 55,000 kWh or annual gas consumption of not more than 200,000 kWh. It is possible to be a micro business for one utility and not the other." Readers of the Thanet and East Kent Insider with an interest in this issue can see the official fact sheet at <http://www.ofgem.gov.uk/Media/FactSheets/Documents/1/probef.pdf> or better still, give Martyn a call. He is the Thanet & East Kent Chamber's expert on utilities cost reduction. The charge to you should be no more than the cost of your telephone call, but you could reduce your energy costs by a substantial amount.

2. One For Me, One For You

Shop-lifting is in public and repeat offenders will almost always get caught. Corporate fraud is different and requires more than a discreet camera and a fleet-footed store detective. Are you sure that there is no-one connected to your company who is handling your products or money and whispering, "One for me, one for you"? Richard Heasman, forensic partner at accountancy firm Reeves & Neylan, has joined former police officer and Chamber member, Darren Jones, to run a series of clinics aimed at assisting companies interested in dealing with fraudulent activity. Fraud Consultants UK Ltd and Reeves & Neylan offer two sessions in Canterbury on 4th & 23rd February. These are free to readers of the Thanet & East Kent Insider. For details, email admin@tekc.co.uk with the subject line "Fraud Clinic" or give Darren a call, tel: 01843 600960. Regular readers of the Thanet & East Kent Insider may recall the words of Chris Argent, Partnership Director at Chamber sponsor Girlings Solicitors. At a Chamber presentation just over a year ago entitled "Predict, Prevent and Prosper", he advocated using outside professionals whenever required. As we emerge from recession, his justification rings as true today as it was then when we were entering the downturn; "their costs are less than your mistakes". If you need a fraud expert, Darren is your man. For professional consultants in other business sectors, email admin@tekc.co.uk and expect a prompt reply.

3. CRM, What Is That?

CRM stands for Customer Relationship Management and is usually used to describe a company's internal systems for managing customer records, sales and marketing activities. At its best, it works like a dream; increasing your profits, managing your administration and ensuring that all your customers receive the information they need to buy your products and services. At its worst, it becomes a complicated, time-consuming and expensive luxury which distracts you from managing your business and bombards your customers with information they do not need, do not want and do not like. Many of us at some time will have been approached by a company or on-seller offering a wonder system, typically for a license fee of around £200 or more and promising to revolutionize your company. The Thanet & East Kent Chamber is able to offer members the opportunity to use a fully-featured CRM system that has no license fee and has been designed specifically for small and medium companies, allowing you to access your company information from any computer terminal in your office, at home or from overseas. Details follow in next week's Thanet & East Kent Insider.

4. Disability In Focus

Jo Moore of Moore Communication is planning a one day, hands on, practical training session to help event organisers to ensure that their procedures and practices are as inclusive as possible so that disabled people can attend and participate fully. Moore Communications has acquired an excellent reputation for the quality of their work. Jo Moore was the Disability Advisor for the Diocese of Canterbury and has in-depth experience of a wide variety of disabilities. Brian Moore has particular expertise with deaf blind adults and has worked in care settings looking after adults with profound and multiple needs (PMLD). The training is scheduled to take place at Marlowe Innovation Centre on Friday 5th March from 10am to 4pm. For more information, contact Jo direct, tel: 01843 598608 or 07896 844 151.

5. Chamber Update

The Thanet & East Kent Chamber continues to attract new members and we will feature them in future editions of the Thanet & East Kent Insider. As well as the excellent healthcare offers at The Spencer Wing, a 22 bed independent hospital owned and operated by East Kent Medical Services Ltd, and free legal advice, the Chamber also operates a 24 hour emergency hotline for all members. Close cooperation with the Dover District Chamber of Commerce, established in 1850,

ensures that Thanet & East Kent Chamber members can benefit from belonging to the largest business support network in the East Kent coastal business community. There is only one Thanet & East Kent Chamber. Beware of imitations.

6. Thinking Along Different Lines

The performance of Eurostar's cross-channel service before Christmas has drawn much criticism from people in East Kent who were trapped in the tunnel without food, water or access to adequate information about the delay. Passengers interviewed by the BBC reported, "They treated us like animals." One distressed passenger even declared, "That tunnel is dangerous, a death trap and I implore people not to use it", see <http://vodpod.com/watch/2723412-bbc-news-passengers-trapped-on-eurostar-trains-relive-ordeal>. Such extreme reactions have prompted calls for a review of the operating license. Roger Gale MP has put this bluntly as, "Eurostar's effective monopoly is not in the public interest and I do not believe that the travelling public is at present receiving the best or even a satisfactory level of service. The fresh air of competition might remind Eurostar's Chief Executive, and his team who they are working for". Eurostar has attracted criticism in the past from a wide range of senior figures in East Kent. As long ago as 2006, the cutting of Eurostar services to Ashford in favour of Ebbsfleet brought united opposition from Dr Stephen Ladyman MP for South Thanet, Paul Carter, Leader of Kent County Council, Sandy Ezekiel, Leader of Thanet District Council and a host of luminaries in East Kent including Bishop Stephen Venner. Dover Harbour Board is reporting record numbers of cruise passengers and Euroferries is promising to launch its much delayed new Ramsgate – Boulogne Service later in the year, £49.00 return for a car and up to five passengers. It seems as if Eurostar is going to have to change quickly if it is to improve its reputation.

7. Sorry Seems To Be the Hardest Word

In last week's Thanet & East Kent Insider, we reported on Lord Digby Jones's responses to the questions from Thanet & East Kent Chamber members. We could have added that Digby Jones advised that the three most important words in customer relations are "Please, thank you and sorry". The Chief Executive of Eurostar is obviously aware of the power of apology. In an open letter to passengers, he writes, "I am acutely aware that we have to win back the trust of our customers following the disruption to our services before Christmas. We failed to deliver the standard of service you expect and I apologise unreservedly for the problems that occurred." Fair enough. He had little choice, but at least he made the effort. But could the misery of one operator spur another into action? Euroferries, come on, we are waiting. No more delays please, let's get that Ramsgate to Boulogne ferry service launched.

8. Do You Know What I Mean?

Everyone has a different perspective on life and that is certainly true of one member of the Thanet & East Kent Chamber who was anxious to recover his fitness after a particularly sociable Christmas period. Worried at his bulging waistline and concerned that his staff may get the impression that his increased girth might be matched by a similar increase in wage demands, he determined to get fit. The company was surviving the recession but his physical appearance was in direct contrast to the lack of fat on the bones of his commercial operations. A lean production schedule requires a lean manager to run it and he thought he must set an example. Also, he was forever thinking of delivery timetables and meeting deadlines. He knew it would do him good to have a change of scene. His first thoughts were to sign on as a member of a sports and fitness club, but enquiries revealed that he could not manage the three times a week sessions that the marketing literature stipulated. Having read of the health benefits of yoga in one of his wife's magazines, he decided to visit his local centre to ask about yoga classes for beginners. That evening after work, he called in and was introduced to the instructor. After looking him up and down and noticing the accumulation of spare tyres around the waistline, the instructor wondered whether our Chamber member could manage to touch his toes and he asked simply, "How flexible are you?" Our Chamber member thought for a moment and then said, "I can't manage Mondays and Fridays but Wednesday afternoons should be alright." As Mandy Rice-Davies once said, "Well, he would, wouldn't he?"

9. Our Sponsors

The Thanet & East Kent Insider is grateful for the support and sponsorship provided by Gurlings, Express By Holiday Inn and Adecco. Gurlings Solicitors has been managing the legal affairs of commercial and private clients for over a century. Twenty-six partners and one hundred and twenty members of staff ensure a comprehensive range of services from the local offices in Ashford, Canterbury, Folkestone, Herne Bay and Margate. Offices in France and Spain complement specialist departments for charities, individuals and companies. For details, telephone 01843 220274. Express By Holiday took on the daunting task of restoring the former Prospect Inn at Minster. The result is a spectacular hotel that combines the best of Oliver Hill's 1930s design with ultra modern facilities and technological support. Conveniently located for business guests and holiday makers in East Kent, the meeting rooms and 105 bedrooms are available at competitive prices throughout the year. For details, telephone 01843 820250. Adecco is the world's largest HR solutions company offering a comprehensive service of temporary and contract staffing, permanent recruitment, outsourcing, outplacement, career services, training and consulting. Officially designated as a 2009 British Superbrand, Adecco is represented in Thanet and Dover by its Broadstairs office, tel: 01843 609292.



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It's happening now, it's happening in Thanet & East Kent.
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