

Businesses turn to Business Link as recession bites

13 May 2009

More than 145,000 South East businesses and entrepreneurs turned to Business Link for advice and support over the past year, reveal figures from the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA).

Enquiries in January 2009 were nearly 70% higher than January 2008, as businesses sought advice on how to respond to recession. SEEDA, which funds Business Link in the South East, has committed £24 million to ensure the service can continue to meet demand in the coming financial year.

The quality of Business Link's advice and support is highlighted in a 92% customer satisfaction rating. Despite increasingly challenging conditions, a separate survey also showed that Business Link customers are twice as likely to expect growth over the next 12 months, compared with non-customers.

As well as helping existing businesses, Business Link also helped 3,100 entrepreneurs from across the South East to launch a business.

James Brathwaite CBE, SEEDA Chairman, said: "These figures show both the amount of work Business Link is doing to help businesses tackle this recession, and the amount that this help is clearly needed. Business Link has evolved and adapted to provide services that suit the current economic climate, and South East businesses are responding – for example 8,500 businesses have now taken advantage of the free 'Health Checks' service launched in October."

Jonathan Shaw MP, Minister for the South East, said: "Business Link is a crucial front line defence in the fight back against recession, a place to go to find what the Government's Real Help Now initiative means for real businesses. I often hear directly from business owners about how much they value the information and support they receive from Business Link's advisers, which is a tribute to their hard work and professional manner."

Business owner Antony Reynolds, of Crawley-based Outdoor Solutions, endorsed the value of Business Link help: "There's times when you get into uncharted territory... so it's really good to have that support. Without Business Link, I wouldn't have had the level of forward planning, and I don't know if I'd actually [still] be in business."

...ENDS...

Notes to Editors

- **SEEDA, the South East England Development Agency**, is the Government-funded agency responsible for the sustainable economic development of the South East of England – the driving force of the UK's economy. Through supporting businesses, encouraging innovation, developing skills and engaging with public and private partners, we aim to create a successful, sustainable future for the region.
- **SEEDA's support helped deliver the following** over the period 2005-2008,:
 - 17,500 jobs created or safeguarded
 - 32,500 people helped to get work
 - 10,000 businesses created or attracted to region
 - 137,500 businesses assisted
 - £638m investment, 45% levered from private sector
 - 200ha Brownfield land remediated
 - 148,500 people assisted in skills development
- **Business Link** is a national business information, advice and support service, delivered in the South East by the six Business Link Providers and funded by SEEDA. Business Link is dedicated to helping businesses and budding entrepreneurs develop and progress by ensuring they can quickly and easily locate and benefit from the broadest range of public, private and voluntary business support services.
- The **South East's six providers** of Business Link services cover Berkshire; Hampshire and the Isle of Wight; Kent; Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire; Surrey; and Sussex respectively.
- **For media enquiries**, please contact:
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Case Study – Events Planner

Woking Events company picks up new business after taking Business Link advice

A business review 'Health Check' led to new business for Surrey based entertainment company Events Planner. The company, which laid off a member of staff at the end of 2008, has won two new corporate entertainment contracts thanks to a low-cost mail shot recommended by Business Link Adviser Ian Alexander.

The business's owner, Paul Widdowson, met with Ian in January 2009. Together they completed a Business Action Plan which Paul has followed up on. Actions included: cost cutting measures; how to win new customers by updating the website and arranging better search engine optimisation; improving marketing; and opening up new customer driven product lines.

Paul explains, "Thanks to my Business Link Adviser, Ian Alexander, I have a clear business plan to help me take action to mitigate the effects of the downturn. At my business review 'Health Check' in January, we discussed ways to eliminate any wasted expenditure and improve current marketing activity such as the website.

"Already a low-cost mailing, suggested by Ian, has resulted in five summer entertainment bookings with two new corporate customers. I am confident that the company is in the best position possible to survive, and when things pick up, to grow."

For further case studies please contact the SEEDA press office – pressoffice@seeda.co.uk