

Always try to encourage a strong sense of networking

How should firms handle relationships between clients and service providers? Michael Whitefoot reports

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SMART STORAGE



IN CHARGE: Michael Whitefoot, managing director of county business storage specialists Whitefoot-Forward.

THE current recession is making it more difficult than ever for businesses of all sizes to manage the age-old problem of cash flow. Whether your own business fortunes are suffering or not, getting caught in a cash-starved supply or payment chain can bring your operation to a grinding halt.

In such trying times every possible avenue to ease cash flow needs to be explored and one of these should be to talk things over with each of your service

providers. Not only do both of you need to know where you stand; you may find that there are flexibilities that will help you do better business together.

At my own company we have, in the past 18 months, provided help to a number of clients. This has been in the form of extended payment terms, discounted costs

for long-term clients who previously paid on time, spreading the cost of large projects over several months and offering discounts in exchange for extended contracts.

Where clients have been able to make payments in advance, or on invoicing, they have also secured discounts.

That's not to say we are in a position to buffer other businesses from the financial squeeze but where we can offer favourable terms we will - especially to secure continued revenue that will help our own cash flow.

These measures were also made available because our clients, who have been instrumental in the growth of our business, are in constant communication with us. This has enabled Whitefoot-

Forward to offer and put in place a bespoke package wherever it's of practical help to customers.

If every business was prepared to consider options such as these there might be fewer breaks in many a supply chain caused by companies going under. There would also be an extremely strong sense of networking and mutual support across the business community - and that's likely to pay long-term dividends, as customers who survive continue to build on your relationship when the recession ends.

Whitefoot-Forward provides off-site document storage, palletised goods storage and logistics for more than 200 businesses across the region. For more information telephone 01299 250566 or visit whitefoot-forward.com.



BUSINESS TALKING

LOUISE HEWETT

RESearch from the Recruitment & Employment Confederation (REC) shows that more than 50 per cent of businesses using temporary workers are unsure of the EU Agency Workers Directive (AWD) and its potential implications when it comes into force in October 2011.

It is important that hirers and agency staffing suppliers work together and begin as early as possible to develop plans to minimise costs and any potential disruption.

One of the main principles underpinning the AWD is to give agency workers equal treatment to permanent employees and direct recruits after 12 weeks of service on the basis of pay and working conditions.

Although there has been a degree of recent clarification - the Government is finalising guidance as to what exactly equal treatment will mean in practice and the REC will subsequently be compiling model documents for its members.

One thing is for sure: equal treatment does not mean agency workers will have the same status as employees - they will not be able to claim for unfair dismissal, redundancy pay or maternity leave and as such will remain a flexible form of labour for organisations as the economy emerges from the recession.

Agency workers have the flexibility to leave their assignments at any time and as such are not entitled to the same benefits that would be given to a direct employee. After 12 weeks temping in the same role a temp will be entitled to the same basic hourly rate as a permanent employee.

It seems likely that many larger organisations with fixed pay scales will use an identifiable new starter rate as the comparator for pay, however, in other smaller workplaces this may be more difficult or not relevant if the assignment is a new project with no comparison.

Some temps in areas such as IT may be getting paid more than their permanent counterparts. There is no implication that their pay will have to be lowered, however they may need to show the steps put in place to decide on the temps pay rate.

The key to ensure minimal disruption is simply to plan well in advance and work closely with your agency - which ideally should be a well-informed member of the REC - leading you through the process and further guidance from the Government as it unfolds.

For more details and guidance notes you can e-mail me at louise@hewett-recruitment.co.uk.

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HEWETT RECRUITMENT

Ben takes on IT role

HEWETT Recruitment has taken on specialist recruiter Ben Mannion to head up its new IT recruitment division.

Born in Worcester, the Cambridge graduate said: "IT has become an intrinsic part of every business, ranging from one member of staff to a big team."

Louise Hewett, managing director of Hewett Recruitment, which has offices in Worcester and Kidderminster, said: "Ben's dynamic approach and proven expertise makes it an exciting move for us."

UP, UP AND AWAY: Staff and guests at the hotelshop UK 10th birthday party release balloons to raise money for the Prince's Trust.



Flying high to raise money

DROITWICH-based hotelshopUK launched its 10/10 charity fund-raising appeal by releasing more than 100 balloons into the night sky over the town.

The event was part of the company's 10th anniversary birthday celebrations. The 10/10 challenge pledges to raise £10,000 for the Prince's Trust over the coming year with different events and initiatives.

Managing director Vivienne Hudson is a member of the regional council for the trust in

the West Midlands.

She said: "hotelshopUK is still here and growing apace, ready for the next 10 years and more."

"We know firsthand the importance of support in times of need and during the days, weeks and months after the 2007 floods which devastated our business, we were helped by several local companies to get operational again."

"We are proud and thrilled that we did it and are here to celebrate our 10th anniversary. "Support from the community

made us more determined than ever to help others, resulting in our commitment with our 10/10 challenge to raise £10,000 during our 10th anniversary year for our chosen charity the Prince's Trust, whose admirable work supports young people getting their lives back on track."

Each of the hotelshopUK balloons launched at the celebration party has a name and number attached to track whose balloon travels the furthest.

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