

# Business Doctor

A panel of experts from the Chamber answers your business dilemmas

**+** I own and manage a small manufacturing business in Manchester that employs just over 30 people. Trading has been steady over the past eight months, but as the downturn lifts I'm looking to invest in new tools and machinery to expand the business. What are my options in securing extra funding?

**GARY CONNOR** Corporate Manager at Svenska Handelsbanken: A 'survival of the fittest' culture rang true throughout the recession, but it also demonstrated the resilience of many independent SMEs and enterprising business owners. The new economic environment has provided small businesses with the opportunity to expand through the acquisition of assets on preferential terms in distressed sales.

However, although the right funding is available to those who need it, the business will have to endure a careful and diligent assessment of its growth and survival prospects in the next financial year before it will receive any funding.

Machinery is always a major expense, but can lead to real improvements in economies of scale and production quality. In spite of this, major purchases are only recommended if the business can keep up with future payments and that the investment will lead to genuine payback. If not, the investment will burden your business with unnecessary costs and restrict cashflow.

A good approach, if you do decide to go ahead with the investment, is to plan the finance term in line with the life of the asset, and in doing so, spread the cost through loans or asset finance schemes. Your bank should be able to advise you properly on the right sort of loan to suit your business, be it short or long term.

However, an overdraft facility is often not recommended for this type of investment as it can leave the business vulnerable, with no safety net for short-term working capital requirements.

**+** Our employees back up important business data to disks but I am concerned that this relies on them remembering to do this and there are also security issues if the disks are taken off site. The cost of disks is also

mounting up. Is there a more secure and cost-effective way to back up our data?

**TRACY BARLOW** Marketing Director at 24/7 Uptime Ltd: You have invested a great deal of time, money and effort in developing your business data and you can't afford to lose it.

Unfortunately, back up methodologies such as tape, CD, memory sticks and external hard drives are unreliable because they do rely on human intervention, and also because:

- Fixed capacity means data may need to be split to fit onto backup media
- Difficulties in detecting backup problems BEFORE trying to restore data
- All have a shelf life so WILL fail eventually
- Slow read/write speed.

A greener, more reliable, more secure and cost-effective option to consider is offsite data backup. But do check the following before you commit to expensive backup contracts:

- Is your data backed up to UK-based data centres?
- Is your data encrypted for security and compressed for speed of transfer?
- Is the offsite backup system protected with indemnity insurance in case of data loss?
- Does your preferred solution offer low cost, affordable monthly payments without upfront capital costs?

**+** How does headhunting work and what can I personally do to help my own career advancement?

**CHRIS HUNTER** of CareerMove Hunter: No doubt you, like I, read the press release from Marks & Spencer shortly before Christmas regarding the appointment of Marc Bolland as its next CEO. It is known that one of the London-based search consultancies was involved in this appointment.

It is also very likely that Morrisons' Board will authorise another "headhunt" (more commonly known as "search") to replace Marc. The Times informed us that the London-based executive recruiter Egon Zehnder had been involved in Bolland's appointment to Morrisons in 2006.

## EXPERT PANEL



**Gary Connor**  
Svenska Handelsbanken  
0161 214 6100  
www.handelsbanken.co.uk/manchester



**Tracy Barlow**  
24/7 Uptime Ltd  
0161 304 9991  
www.247uptime.co.uk



**Chris Hunter**  
CareerMove Hunter  
0161 727 9033



**Simon Linton**  
McCarthy O'Sullivan  
0161 214 7909  
www.mccarthysullivan.com

Of course, there is a huge amount of work involved in these headhunting procedures, ensuring this very logical outcome which prized Marc from one company by outlining a career opportunity to him – and initially to several other strong shortlisted candidates.

This highly confidential activity is at the top of the executive appointments tree, although there is no doubt that there are principles and good practice from which we can all benefit at slightly lower salary levels.

It is these procedures which Rachel Smith and I will describe in a series of articles about the world of career progression and recruitment/selection.

How do you get yourself noticed? How should you respond to that all important first telephone call from the recruiter's researcher, which normally comes at your place of work?

How do these search procedures actually work and is it possible to strip out some of the mystique that always seems to surround them?

And what about lower management levels. How should I respond to that advert that appears, at first sight, to be just me? How do I prepare fully for the interview? How do I write those awkward to get 'just right' cover letters? What do I include/exclude in my CV? Can I write direct to a company that would appear to be ideal for my career development? How do I write such letters which get through and not just filed "waste?"