



IMPROVE YOUR BUSINESS PERFORMANCE BY EMBRACING DIVERSITY

This is one of a series of +points on The Journey – a route map designed to help you build a business that people value. Check out other +points on www.smallbusinessjourney.com

WHAT'S THE POINT?

You CAN improve efficiency, productivity and overall business success by engaging with the widest possible range of potential customers, suppliers and employees. This means including people and businesses from all communities, regardless of gender, race, disability, age, sexual orientation or belief.

WHY?

- Greater diversity of employees can bring innovative business and marketing ideas.
- A diverse company will reflect the diverse needs and requirements of its customers.
- By developing a culturally and racially diverse supplier base you may be able to service a wider range of potential customers and explore new business opportunities.

EXTRA BENEFIT TO YOUR COMPANY

- You can gain reputation and loyalty with employees, potential groups of employees, and with customers.
- You can build the distinctive character of your company by being clear that you value all customers and employees.
- You may more easily maintain practices that comply with the law.

LIVING PROOF

TRAVELSPHERE

Travelsphere is a direct selling tour operator employing around 200 staff in Market Harborough. As one of the top three, direct sell, UK tour operators, Travelsphere recently became the first mainstream travel company to offer a specialised service for blind and partially-sighted people. The company adapted popular tours so that blind and partially-sighted people could get as much enjoyment as other clients. For deaf clients, the company also provides information using talk-type systems and assists deaf guests to access non-audible alerting devices.

THE RESULTS

Travelsphere's fresh approach to customer diversity has helped to generate more than £100,000 in sales from a completely new market. It has also helped the company to differentiate its service – beating competitors into a new market – and to secure repeat business by providing a specialised service.

WHO ELSE IS MAKING A POINT?

Many companies throughout the UK understand that real business benefits can be gained by supporting diversity in all aspects of their business operations. Here are just two:

- **TJW Exhibitions Ltd** is a small business based in Taunton, Somerset with 40 employees. TJW organise events throughout the UK in the careers & recruitment and business to business markets. When launching their new careers & recruitment event in Bristol (Job Scene) TJW aimed the event at diversity in the work place. The exhibitors were those looking to recruit from all communities and often with a diversity policy and targets in place. Extra work was then undertaken in the promotional campaign to attract the widest cross section of visitors possible.

The results

The first event in 2003 was a sell out and attracted a high number of ethnic minority visitors. TJW gained £100,000 of extra sales revenue. Exhibitors are now booking for other shows in the Job Scene series and the 2004 event is expected to be even more successful than 2003.

- **McPhie's craft bakers** in Shettleston is one of several small Glasgow businesses to employ refugees. Jim McPhie describes them as a breath of fresh air. After 30 years of baking, a major recent challenge has been staffing. Soft skills like turning up for work on time were practically non-existent and staff didn't want to work or develop their skills. High staff turnover limited any plans for growth and even threatened the sustainability of the business. Two Iraqi refugees joined the business. They had previous business experience but, at the time, lacked English language skills.

The results

After six months of working with Jim, he describes the refugee workers as “nectar from heaven for my business. In the past we have had to turn down orders because we couldn't rely on the staff but their hard work and dedication has turned the business around. They are now so skilled they can do virtually everything in the bakery that I can do.”

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- 41% of European SMEs have an environmental policy but only 13% have a diversity policy.
Source: CSR Europe
- By 2010 only 20% of the workforce will be white, able-bodied men under 45.
Source: BITC website
- There are 8.6 million disabled people in the UK, with an annual spending power of £50 billion.
Source: Disability Rights Commission
- Employers with a disabled worker on staff report improved teamwork and are better able to anticipate and respond to the demands of disabled customers.
Source: Survey commissioned by Jobability.com

HOW TO GET STARTED IN A SMALL WAY

- Establish and communicate your company approach to diversity.
- Consider what recruitment, placement schemes or working practices will encourage greater diversity.
- Think about where you advertise vacancies and how you could reach a wider pool of recruits.
- Talk to staff and find out what sorts of opportunities they see for promoting more diversity.
- Set relevant targets for adding to the range of people among your employees, suppliers or customers.
- Address any physical or practical barriers by considering what modifications might make it easier to accommodate e.g. disabled employees or working parents. The Access to Work programme may help.
- If barriers arise from attitudes and policies, then consider who can help you to create a more positive framework and contribute to meeting your targets.

WHO CAN HELP YOU TO GO FURTHER?

Strengthening the performance of your business in this way is really just a matter of common sense. But if you are committed to achieving major business benefits, then it often helps to get help.

National Help / Online Help

Government Commissions on equality and human rights can give advice: **Equality and Human Rights Commission** advises on sex discrimination. www.eoc.org.uk.

www.equalitydirect.org.uk Equality Direct is designed for business managers and gives advice on a range of equality issues. Helpline is 08456 00 34 44.

www.acas.org.uk The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) advises on avoiding disputes through good practice. The helplines are 0845 747 4747 and textline on 0845 606 1600.

www.employers-forum.co.uk Employers Forum on Disability, funded and managed by employers, provides briefings on disability in the workplace.

www.agepositive.gov.uk Age Positive promotes age diversity in employment. It provides guidance, facts and figures and case studies on employing the over 50s.

www.fpb.co.uk The Forum of Private Business has developed an employment guide with the TUC which includes diversity issues. Contact them at mis@fpb.co.uk.

www.stonewall.org.uk Stonewall offers employers practical advice on managing diversity and an employers' guide on the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations.

Local help

Check with your local Chamber of Commerce or Business Link organisation for business networks in your area. These will give you an opportunity to talk to companies who are tackling diversity issues. www.chamberonline.co.uk (click "find your chamber") or www.businesslink.gov.uk (England) www.bgateway.com (Scotland) www.busesseye.co.uk (Wales) www.investni.com (Northern Ireland).

IT'S COMMON SENSE

This briefing paper is one in a series of +points that make up The Journey – a route map designed to help you build a business that people value. You need only do one if you like. It's your journey. It doesn't have to be time consuming or complicated. It's basically common sense.

SMALL BUSINESS CONSORTIUM MEMBERS:

The Small Business Consortium is a group of organisations who share a common goal:

