



BENEFIT BY STAYING ABREAST OF THE LAW

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 management and minimise risk by making sure you are up to date with any laws that affect your company.

WHY?

- By complying with existing law fully you'll be quick to adapt to new regulations because you'll be able to see what's coming.
- Being one step ahead means you won't find out about new responsibilities from your customers or staff or at moments of crisis.
- Investing in staff training and having someone keeping up with developments will help make sure you can make changes quickly.

EXTRA BENEFIT TO YOUR COMPANY

- You reduce the risk of time consuming legal challenge or costly fines or penalties.
- You can plan and budget for investments to meet legal requirements – you won't face heavy one-off costs at the last minute.
- A reputation for proper working and sales practices will attract customers and staff.

LIVING PROOF

EASIBIND

Employing more than 100 people in Derbyshire, Easibind is a manufacturer of products for company presentations and packaging. It believes its customers are looking for good environmental practice without compromise on quality, service or price. To ensure it could meet these expectations Easibind's first steps involved simple business checks and audits to ensure that the company not only met current legislation, but could also comply with all known future legislation. This developed, through consultation, into the company meeting the standards of the European Eco-Management and Audit Scheme and a major investment in staff development and training to ensure the company continues to comply with all current and foreseeable legislation.

THE RESULTS

Easibind's investment in staff training underlined its commitment and ensured that staff supported the changes necessary to improve the business. Being up to date with – and often ahead of – the law has resulted in better waste management and more effective use of materials and machinery. This in turn has reduced prices, increased competitiveness, and helped the company to win important new business. Easibind has also been awarded Investors in People status.

WHO ELSE IS MAKING A POINT?

Many successful companies throughout the UK understand the real business benefits that can be gained by keeping up to date with the latest law and preparing for future changes.

- **Offshore Crane Engineering Limited (OCE)** was set up in 1986 and serves major oil and gas companies. The strict regulations that its clients have to adhere to requires the company to meet equally high standards. OCE uses management and technical standards set by the British Standards Institute; these procedures are the basis for compliance in everything the company does. An environmental management system, BS EN ISO 14001, has been used since 1996 to provide a framework for environmental compliance. In 2003, the company implemented an occupational health and safety management system, OHSAS 18001.

The results: Ensuring compliance in health and safety and environmental systems has meant that OCE has increased its client base and has increased its

revenue. The number of staff has increased by 70% since 1995. Maintaining these standards, with support from the British Standards Institute makes it easy for OCE to stay compliant and keep winning business.

- **The Mitre pub** and hotel was taken over by Sarah Kelly in 1996 and she set about refurbishing it throughout. An access audit was drawn up with a local architect and plans to improve access were prepared. Accessible toilets were put in the basement and a lift was put in for wheelchair users. Three out of 15 bedrooms were also made accessible for wheelchair users. Such investment, made with the intention of securing more customers, means that The Mitre now complies with the final part of the Disability Discrimination Act, which was fully enforceable from October 2004.

The results: The Mitre has developed as a destination for people with disabilities – the pub is now popular with groups seeking use of an accessible meeting and conference venue – which means increased sales. Using the opportunity of a refurbishment to address accessibility issues has meant that the pub does not have to spend extra to meet the new regulations.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- 13% of workplaces have had at least one employment tribunal claim made against them over the past decade.
Source: CBI, Managing the Compensation Culture: improving case management in the employment tribunal system, 2000
- 27% of employers in tribunal cases relating to sex/race discrimination said they incurred increased staff stress as a result of the tribunal. 12% said they experienced an adverse reputation as an employer and 15% said it damaged workplace relations.
Source: Routes to resolution: improving dispute resolution in Britain, Department of Trade and Industry, 2001
- 82% of businesses could name no environmental regulations relating to their industry.
Source: Environment Agency SME-environment 2003 survey.

HOW TO GET STARTED IN A SMALL WAY

- Identify good sources of information: from the basics of company law and accounting requirements to operational issues like employment, consumer protection and environment.
- Make sure you get digestible updates.
- Share the load – you could appoint staff to keep up to date with different legal topics.
- Talk to your staff, let them know your plans; they may already be expert in relevant areas.
- Consider a general programme to improve your business such as the Business Excellence Model, the Small Business Benchmarking Index or find out about British Standards that might apply to you. This will help you identify and fix areas of weakness in your legal compliance.

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

The Institute of Directors provides factsheets, legal advice and training with courses including 'Directors and the Law' and an introduction to the director's role. www.iod.com.

The Confederation of British Industry provides publications and guidance on topics relating to legal issues such as health and safety, the environment and employment. www.cbi.org.uk.

The Federation of Small Businesses which lobbies on behalf of small business and supplies information and benefits, provides legal advice for members. www.fsb.org.uk.

The Forum of Private Business runs an information service for members, and puts members in touch with others who can help. www.fpb.co.uk.

Local Help

Check with your local Business Links organisation about how you can get involved with programmes such as the SBS Benchmarking Index. They should also be able to help you get legal advice if you need it. The national website has factsheets about business legal basics. www.businesslink.gov.uk (England) www.bgateway.com (Scotland) www.busesseye.org.uk (Wales) www.investni.com (Northern Ireland).

Online Help

www.learndirect.co.uk is a government-funded online learning service. It offers short courses on complying with all aspects of law affecting business such as equal opportunities, the environment and health and safety.

www.tradingstandards.gov.uk The Trading Standards Institute website is a one-stop shop for consumer protection information for businesses and consumers. It has summaries of legislation, and guidance leaflets on a range of detailed topics.

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:

