

IMPROVE YOUR BUSINESS BY LEARNING AND SHARING WITH OTHERS



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 achieve good practice in your business and improve performance by learning from the experiences of other similar organisations.

WHY?

- Other companies have been on the journey you are on and are willing to share their experience and success.
- There are many good practice models and the odds are that following some of their principles could help you achieve your business objectives.
- You can help other companies on their own journeys when you share your experience with them.

EXTRA BENEFIT TO YOUR COMPANY

- Other companies' good practice standards are a short cut to developing your own.
- Some of the organisations creating standards or endorsing good practice have business networks where you can meet and learn from others.
- Promoting your own good practice can improve your reputation and help to secure customers.

The Small Business Consortium is a group of organisations who share a common goal. They include AccountAbility, Arts & Business, British Chambers of Commerce, Business in the Community, CSR Europe, Federation of Small Businesses, The Forum of Private Business, Institute of Directors, Lloyds TSB and Scottish Business in the Community. Their work is supported by the DTI, www.societyandbusiness.gov.uk. These materials are created by Corporate Culture, www.cc-plc.com.

LIVING PROOF

EDINBURGH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE CENTRE

Edinburgh International Conference Centre aims to create economic benefit for Scotland and Edinburgh by staging successful events and by maintaining a high level of commitment to customers. Since 1995 it has been operating as a commercial concern, with a current staff of 58, it is committed to the EFQM Business Excellence Model and has been a finalist two years running. The company works to six different standards to maintain excellence, some generic and others specific to the industry. These include Investors in People and two ISO standards and the company has twice won the Hospitality Assured Meetings Ultimate Award, attaining the highest ever accreditation mark. EICC believes that working to this range of standards offers a realistic and continuous measure of its progress.

THE RESULTS

The Business Excellence Model and other standards have ensured that all EICC staff are completely customer-centric. Staff satisfaction is high, and turnover and absenteeism are low. Customers are very satisfied; the EICC sees 45% repeat business and surveys show that the EICC has "delighted" 94% of its clients to date.

WHO ELSE IS MAKING A POINT?

Many successful companies throughout the UK understand the business benefits that can be gained by learning from others and sharing their experience. Here are just two.

- **Bovince** is one of Europe's largest users of screen process technology and, in an effort to differentiate itself, is committed to reducing environmental impact. To this end, Bovince has achieved two ISO quality assurance standards and established a performance-reporting regime accredited by the European Eco-Management and Audit Standard. It has also been given a British Printing Industries Federation Bronze Award for demonstrable standards of environmental awareness and control, and, in 2000, won the top Environmental Reporting Award for small and medium-sized companies from the Association of Chartered and Certified Accountants.

The results: Bovince's commitment to recognised standards has underpinned its reputation as a responsible company. This in turn has brought the company significant new business from organisations that select suppliers on green performance as much as cost and quality.

- **Flag Communications** is a design and communication agency with around 20 employees specialising in internal communication, graduate recruitment communication, corporate design and corporate social responsibility communication. Based in Cambridge, Flag has gained Investor in People status and was a finalist in the regional Employer of the Year Awards in 2001. It is also ISO 9001 accredited and received an Impact on Society Award for Excellence from Business in the Community in 2003.

The results: By working towards best practice standards and winning awards, Flag has enhanced its reputation as a good employer which in turn has enabled it to recruit by referral and on the recommendation of associates and colleagues, saving time and money. The design sector is notorious for short-term, moving contracts, but Flag's focus on quality helps in retaining clients and contracts.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- 51% of the British public say they have chosen a product or service because of a reputation for responsibility. Source: The Ethical Consumer, MORI/The Co-operative Bank 2002

HOW TO GET STARTED IN A SMALL WAY

- You could measure yourself against good practice models like the Business Excellence Model or the GoodCorporation principles of good practice. Contact the British Quality Foundation or GoodCorporation for more information.
- You could follow standards that have been set up for processes like environmental management or for processes that are specific to your industry: you could start by contacting the International Standards Organisation or British Standards online.
- You could apply for an award like a Queen's Award or a Business in the Community Award for Excellence or Community Mark or simply review the case studies of award winners for ideas on how to get started.

WHO CAN HELP YOU TO GO FURTHER?

Strengthening the performance of your business by learning from others is really just a matter of common sense. But if you are committed to achieving higher standards in your business then you might want to get help.

National Help

EFQM helps European businesses make better products and deliver improved services through the effective use of management practices such as the EFQM Business Excellence Model. National partners include the British Quality Foundation, which helps to promote business excellence throughout the UK, www.efqm.org or www.quality-foundation.org, and Quality Scotland at www.qualityscotland.co.uk.

GoodCorporation is a corporate responsibility standard that organisations of any size or type can use to measure performance of their working practices against an independent global standard. The annual verification report can be used for internal development or external reporting. www.goodcorporation.com.

AA1000 framework is a standard designed to improve an organisation's accountability and performance. www.accountability.org.uk.

Inside UK Enterprise is a service by Business Link that sets up visits to companies from which you can learn particular profitable ways of working. www.iuke.co.uk.

In Scotland, Scottish Business in The Community coordinates groups to share experiences, contact them on info@sbcscot.com.

Online Help

The Small Business Resource Centre, run by British Standards, contains information on standards, publications for key small business industries, and case studies on how small businesses have used standards to improve their performance. www.mysmallbiz.co.uk.

Investors in People can provide you with the framework you need for investing in people to achieve results. www.investorsinpeople.co.uk, Their new service Your People Manager specifically supports managers of small business with advice and news. www.yourpeoplemanager.com.

European Eco-Management and Audit Standard helps companies establish, evaluate and report on appropriate environmental management systems and to comply with all relevant environmental legislation. www.europa.eu.int/comm/environment/emas/.

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.

CONSORTIUM MEMBERS



AccountAbility



Arts & Business



British Chambers of Commerce



Business in the Community



CSR Europe



The Federation of Small Businesses



The Forum of Private Business



The Institute of Directors



Lloyds TSB



Scottish Business in the Community

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