

4 February 2008

Keep investing

Graham Baker of Ixion Holdings Ltd urges businesses to keep investing in training and skills during a potentially tough year ahead.

Concerns about a major economic downturn have charged to the top of a list of worries facing leading businesses in 2008 and much of the debate has focused on what businesses will be doing to ensure they survive.

Businesses of all sizes and across all sectors may face increasing pressure as they look to secure and maintain a competitive advantage. If the economy does slow down, businesses will look to rein in their costs, batten down the hatches and as a result, spending on training could be one of the first casualties.

However, there can be long term consequences which occur through lack of investment in training for employees. A decrease in training can have a negative impact on all industries. It will make organisations less competitive to overseas competition as highlighted in the Government commissioned review 2006 by Lord Leitch, Government targets for a skilled workforce will be missed, and organisations will not be able to retain valuable staff.

So how do you balance operational efficiencies with the need to invest in training?

Organisations that have a fully skilled workforce are more likely to adapt to market change and have a competitive edge when pitching for new business – something of vital importance both during and after an economic downturn. Therefore, a general increase in training and qualifications within an industry will result in an increase in the quality of services and products.

The business case for training is clear cut. Training leads to an improvement in service, productivity, job satisfaction and staff retention. It is important, even at an uncertain time, to invest in training to ensure long-term stability within the work force and the business.

Where do you start? How can a business fund training when it is possibly struggling with its finances?

What a lot of businesses do not know is that there is a wealth of funding available from the Government for training. Business to business service providers all over the country work with all major Government funding bodies and policy makers to ensure that public funds meet the needs of businesses and individuals.

Ixion understands business requirements and acts as a vital conduit between business and government, offering a 'one-stop' shop for business and skills support.

Government funding has allowed B2B service providers to supply businesses with innovative schemes such as Train to Gain.

Train to Gain is typical of the type of funding which is administered on behalf of the Government. This scheme supplies a business with a professional broker who will visit a business' premises and carry out a free organisational skills analysis. The business' training needs are then highlighted and it is provided with suitable training courses, at NVQ Level 2 or Apprenticeship level, and advised of the funding available.

There is a need to communicate this type of Government funded training programmes to ensure that those in industries that could potential benefit have access to the correct training to protect their industry's reputation as a whole.

There are a number of B2B service providers across the country which can help businesses access funding and training schemes. The schemes which they run can often be access through an initial call via a local contact centre, such as Ixion's contact centre (Telephone 0845 8800 977) which any businesses can call to find out more details of the schemes and funding available to them locally

Final word

At the beginning of the year, Gordon Brown predicted that 2008 will be a tough year for business. However, he also emphasised the need for businesses to stay strong and invest, even if that means waiting to reap the benefits.

At Ixion, we could not agree more and want to embrace the challenges in the coming year. This means being bold and ensuring your business is benefiting from the funding and skills initiatives already in place. Publicly funded, free, or partly funded training can appear complicated as funding can come from a variety of sources and, for the uninitiated, qualification criteria can be difficult to understand. However, organisations like ourselves, are there to support and ensure that you get the money and training that your business is entitled to.

Graham Baker, Chief Executive, Ixion Holdings Ltd