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Businesses plan growth for 2015

Small businesses are planning growth in 2015 but many are unaware of the finance options available to them, research by the British Business Bank has revealed.

The research into more than 1,000 firms found that 46% are planning to expand their business over the next 12 months.

The main reasons for obtaining finance were:

- buying fixed assets (43%)
- increasing working capital (33%)
- expansion (11%).

There was a lack of awareness among businesses about sources of finance, despite 68% of firms saying they were confident about their ability to obtain funding. Although 85% knew about lease or hire purchase arrangements, the research found:

- 36% were aware of angel investors
- 55% knew about venture capital but only a fifth knew of a specific supplier
- 35% knew about peer-to-peer lending
- 32% were aware of crowdfunding opportunities.

Keith Morgan, chief executive of the British Business Bank, said:

"It is clear from our research that there is increasing confidence among UK small businesses and an appetite for growth. The challenge now is to connect the emerging demand for finance with the new forms of funding that are becoming available.

"That is why the British Business Bank is working to encourage innovation, promote diversity and share information, to develop a more broadly based and accessible lending market for smaller businesses."

Talk to us about plans to grow your business.

Government proposals to tackle late payment

Large companies could be forced to publish information about their payment practices, under government proposals designed to combat late payment.

The measures would oblige large businesses and companies listed on stock markets to:

- issue quarterly reports on payment performance
- make additional information about payment practices public
- put payment information on their website.

Companies would face fines if they do not comply with the requirements.

Philip King, chief executive of the Institute of Credit Management, said:

"Small businesses need to make better informed decisions before entering into commercial relationships and this measure will be invaluable in helping them enter into such relationships with their eyes wide open."

A separate survey by the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) found that 17% of FSB members have suffered from poor payment practices over the last 2 years.

The most disliked payment practices according to the FSB survey were:

- ⦿ 'pay to stay' fees where businesses have to pay to remain on supplier lists
- ⦿ long payment terms
- ⦿ late payments
- ⦿ prompt payment discounts

- ⦿ retrospective discounting where businesses change terms after a contract has been signed.

John Allan, national chairman of the FSB, said:

"...small businesses are fast approaching the breaking point. They are no longer prepared to put up with these sharp practices. Brands that think they can continue to squeeze their suppliers with impunity may get a nasty shock when what they are doing comes to the attention of their consumers."

 *Are late payments causing you cashflow problems? Call us to discuss your situation.*

Employees take advantage of flexible working

There is a high demand among employees for flexible working arrangements, research by the Centre for Economic and Business Research and Citrix has found.

The research, which surveyed almost 1,300 employees, showed that flexible working arrangements such as flexi-time or working remotely are popular with most employees:

- ⦿ 96% of respondents who have the option to work flexibly choose to do so
- ⦿ 83% of people who do not currently have the option would choose it if given the opportunity.

The findings also suggested that flexible working could encourage people to work more:

- ⦿ 68% of unemployed or economically inactive people believe flexible working would be an incentive to start working
- ⦿ 60% of part-time workers said they would be more likely to work more hours if they could work remotely.


Jacqueline de Rojas, of Citrix, said that offering flexible working would allow employers to, "reap the benefits of an even more productive, contented workforce".

The Confederation of British Industry (CBI) has urged the government to work with employers to promote the benefits of flexible working:

- ⦿ employers should promote flexible working opportunities on job adverts
- ⦿ businesses should commit to workplace diversity targets.

Katja Hall, deputy director general of the CBI, said:

"A lot of companies offer flexible working but the onus should be on businesses to presume in favour, challenge outdated assumptions and give their employees more confidence to ask about the options."

 *Talk to us about flexible working arrangements.*

YOUR MONEY

Savers unaware of pension guidance service

More than half of over-40s do not know whether they will be eligible for the government's free pension guidance service, research by Partnership has found.

Pension savers will have access to free and impartial guidance on how to benefit from the pension reforms that will be introduced in April 2015.

However, Partnership's survey of more than 2,000 people over 40 found:

- ⦿ 53% are not sure if they will be able to access the service
- ⦿ 18% said they know they are not eligible
- ⦿ 29% know they are eligible.

Andrew Megson, managing director of retirement at Partnership, said:

"There is a huge need for education around the new pension regime.

"Much of the discussion has focused on the new freedoms but ultimately these are not going to be properly taken up if people don't fully understand their rights and responsibilities under the new system."

 *Talk to us to discuss your retirement planning.*