

THE BIZ

A guide to what's making the news within the business community

Survive the crunch

BUSINESSES are being offered a chance to learn how to survive and thrive, despite the current economic climate.

Experienced consultants from Helensburgh-based Aspire Management Services and Red Marketing are to hold a series of master class seminars on everything needed to grow a business during the economic downturn.

The 12-month programme, providing bite-sized chunks of knowledge, is aimed at leaders who have already weathered the first two turbulent years of trading and are ready to consolidate and expand their businesses.

'Survive and Thrive' courses will be running throughout Helensburgh and Lomond starting this month.

The course of six individual face-to-face consultancy meetings, six group sessions and weekly telephone updates is intended to maximise learning with the minimum of interruption to an executive's normal working pattern.

Spreading the programme over a year will allow participants to progress at their own pace and equip organisations with the key knowledge needed to drive companies forward — such as planning and direction, finance, operations and systems, developing the team and marketing.

Gordon Mowat, CA, managing director of Aspire Management Services, said: "When people start out in business it's often because they have a burning passion for what they do or that they have identified a gap in the market.

"However, as many find out, keeping things on track requires a level of organisation few are prepared for. Many talented people have started a business with the best of intentions but have found that a lack of business savvy has sunk them entirely.

"We can teach all that's needed about the mechanics of running and growing a business through to realising the dream that inspired a business in the first place."

Although the number of participants on each course is limited to eight, to ensure maximum benefit, there will be regular opportunities to enrol throughout the year and many businesses may be eligible for grants towards the training costs.

Unlike other programmes, 'Survive and Thrive' is tailored



SUPPORT PROJECT: John Park MSP, Shadow Minister for the Economy and Rural Skills, with Dr Dalton and the apprentices at the launch of the project at the park HQ in Balloch.

Park's new apprentices

YOUNG people living in the national park are getting a helping hand to find work thanks to a new initiative.

The business/apprentice support project, launched last Thursday by the park's community partnership, addresses the lack of training opportunities for young people in the park and creates placements with local businesses.

Thirteen small businesses, based throughout the park, have signed up to the project so far, with each taking on an apprentice and offering 'taster training' sessions before moving on to the full modern apprenticeship.

They include five electricians, one stonemason, two joiners, three builders, a plumber and a roofer/plasterer.

Dr Ron Dalton, Apprentice Support Project Director of the partnership, said: "I am delighted that we have been able to launch

this project at a time when small rural businesses need extra support in providing a training place for an apprentice. Equally, rural based apprentices need help in getting to and from college, with accommodation and other issues."

Carron Tobin, the park's Executive Director, said: "This project will directly tackle the evident lack of skilled tradespeople in and around the park and also the lack of opportunities for young people to undertake a trade apprenticeship in the place where they have been brought up."

The partnership has secured financial help for four years from private and public sponsors including Argyll and Bute Council and Arnold Clark Automobiles.

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to individual business needs and takes the learning from the workshops into the workplace, so participants can apply the knowledge gained practically.

"So many programmes just deliver on the day and then leave people to get on with it," said Evelyn Laurie, of Red Marketing. "Life's not always

that simple. Not everything can be understood or practised straight away so we wanted to come up with a way to help people apply the training in the workplace. It helps that the support and guidance continues over 12 months so people don't feel as though they are on their own."

Between them, Aspire Management Services and Red Marketing have a diverse wealth of experience, making them uniquely placed to deliver the hands-on training.

"At just £199 a month, this programme could make a major difference to any company's performance," said Mr Mowat.

Hints of a 'marriage'

A LONG-term "engagement" may yet end in the marriage of Helensburgh's Retailers Association and Helensburgh and Lomond Chamber of Commerce.

At a recent meeting, members of the Retailers Association agreed their board should take the next step towards the union of the two organisations by approaching the Chamber of Commerce for a commitment.

And it is expected that the union will be discussed at the meeting of the chamber board next week. Compton McGill, chairman of the

retailers said: "This has been a gradual process but we have now decided to take it a step further.

"It would be a lot easier if everyone came under the same umbrella with just one annual subscription and one set of meetings but obviously the retailers would want to retain their particular focus on marketing the town and increasing footfall in the shops.

"We will discuss this at the chamber board meeting next week and see if we can set a way forward for the union to go ahead."

GARDENING

As the season draws to a close, our regular gardening column will be consigned to the potting shed until next spring. However, watch out for occasional gardening features over the winter months. In addition, George Irvine will be replying to readers who wrote to him with gardening questions.