



On-line Accounts Save Time and Money and Make a Small Business More Competitive

Chartered accountants, Jonathan Ford & Co - finalists in the *Accountancy Age* "Small Firm of the Year" Awards in 2004 - are showing how small local firms, not just the large multinationals, can benefit hugely from Internet technology. Owner-manager Jonathan Ford works from his office at Rainhill, Merseyside, but broadband enables him to reach out all over the globe to communicate with his clients and to keep their accounts and tax affairs in order.

"As a small company," he observes, "we need to work as efficiently as possible to stay ahead of the game." So the firm has started a pilot scheme with 30 clients to securely store their accounts and tax returns on-line. "This gives our customers access to their files with an instant click of the button, whenever and wherever they need them," he continues.

Greater efficiency and less paper

"Before we started this system, requests to send out tax returns or copies of accounts could be a time-consuming business. All accounts were archived and stored securely on paper. Searching out the documents and posting them to the client could take a long time. Having them on the web means that we no longer need to spend time printing, binding and



Jonathan Ford outside his Rainhill office

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Key Facts

- **Having accounts and tax information on-line provides instant access for both accountants and clients**
- **Broadband is increasing the competitiveness and market reach of a small company**
- **Archiving material on-line rather than in paper form has saved £6000 a year.**



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packing. It has also cut down the number of requests to resend documents, which saves even more time.”

Before they put accounts on-line, Jonathan Ford & Co had to store and archive 30-40 boxes of papers each year. Dispensing with this has created annual savings of an estimated £6000 in staff time, storage and retrieval costs. And it has improved client confidentiality and peace of mind. Documents now require password access - which is only available to key people. And multiple, and frequently updated back ups, mean that, even if computers crash, or offices burn down, they can be retrieved.

New market opportunities from the Internet

Putting client data on-line is also positioning Jonathan Ford & Co for an era when many government authorities, and private companies, are working on-line. Jonathan Ford says, “having electronic records in one place means we can quickly and easily fill out, and return, tax forms for clients. For example, we’re now completing VAT returns this way. This saves them a great deal of time and effort, and keeps our fees competitive. By anticipating future developments in Internet business, we can stay at the forefront of our industry.”

Small businesses can reach global markets

The ability to transfer and receive information from clients and partners anywhere in the world has also allowed the firm to outsource some routine work to

people who work from home. Further benefits are expected when more client information is stored on-line, such as copies of passports, and automatic e-mail notification of new developments or uploaded documents is introduced.

Clients certainly appreciate the changes. Laura Harvey from M. H. Communications says: “the on-line document management system has helped our company to become more efficient in the way we receive and share key information. We anticipate this will make us significant time and money savings in the future.”

Further Information

The Northwest Regional Development Agency wants the region’s people and businesses to benefit from the new opportunities created by the digital revolution. It has worked with partners to establish Digital Development Agencies in Cheshire and Warrington, Cumbria, Greater Manchester, Greater Merseyside and Lancashire to achieve this at local level. The agencies help identify ICT priorities for their areas, work with local organisations to identify projects to address them, and secure the resources to make these projects happen.