

Supplier Adoption and Economic Development (Strand 5)

Case Study: Slough Borough Council

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One of the challenges facing local authorities is how to persuade their suppliers to come on board. In order to convince suppliers of the benefits of signing up to their marketplace Slough combined marketing techniques and change management tools. This case study shares Slough's learning, and signposts the reader to other sources of help.

Background

Slough were the first authority to sign up for the IDeA marketplace, choosing this solution as a way to take forward the Council's response to the e-government strategy. Slough's own strategy consists of three strands: being an e-council, the e-community, and e-commerce. Slough have taken a two phased approach: Phase I has focused on getting their suppliers on to the marketplace, and getting their own buyers to use it; Phase II is about consolidating suppliers, and establishing regional contracts.

Supplier workshops

It was decided to run a workshop for suppliers, in order to tell them about Slough's plans, and to gain their buy-in to their plans. The first workshop was run, learning derived from it, the approach was refined, and a second very successful workshop then took place.

Contact strategy – who to invite

For Slough's first event Slough used their Oracle database to pull off details of all their suppliers – all 57,000 of them! Slough realised that the quality of data was not good, although 150 registered, and 88 attended on the day – not a bad turnout. Of those 35% actually signed up to the marketplace, although their paperwork did not capture this information very well.

For the second event a much more targeted approach was taken: each department was asked to select their top 20 suppliers, and to provide accurate details for the invitation process. Where these suppliers were not already on the marketplace they were invited to an e-procurement event, called Marketplace Open Day. This approach was an improvement on using the Oracle database, which even included anyone who had received a rebate. 68% of the attendees signed up on the day.

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The advice from Slough:

"The big issue for most departments is knowing where to start with recruiting suppliers. Do not underestimate how long it will take. It is worth it to get it right"

How the event was positioned to suppliers

The day was described as being for suppliers, to learn about e-procurement, to understand how technology can improve procurement processes and day-to-day transactions between suppliers and their customers. Slough would explain how they planned to buy their goods and services in the future – electronically. This was put in the context of the government agenda and target for local government to be e-enabled by 2005.

The overall positioning was linked to Slough's new logo and strapline launched in June 2003: www.slough.gov.uk – Slough Borough Council – local government in the 21st century



For the second event a professional events team was used to organise the event, and to manage the invitation process. This was made possible by UK Online for Business, on the understanding that learning would be shared with other local authorities.

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"Organising the event itself was the most time-consuming activity. It is definitely worth having a professional events team to manage the process. We were able to do this thanks to UK Online for Business."

Publicity

Slough's own communications team were used to promote the event, placing advertisements in the local press, and of course publicising on the website. A press release was issued and faxed out to the local press. Key newspapers such as the Sough Observer were contacted, and the initiative discussed with the editor. The press themselves were invited to the event, and Slough made their own in-house photographer available, so that the press only had to send along a reporter.

Structure of the event

The day consisted of a mix of presentations, demonstrations and one-to-one discussions about the approach to e-procurement and the opportunities available to all types of suppliers.

The event also covered the support available to suppliers to realise the benefits of e-commerce, for example from UK Online for Business, and from Slough's partnership with Business Link for Berkshire.

Presentations were given by:

- Colin Lee of Business Link Berkshire and Wiltshire
- Paul Keegan of UK Online for Business
- Peter Howarth on the IDeA marketplace

The slides of all three presenters are available on Slough's website:
<http://www.slough.gov.uk/BusinessAndWork/e-procureevents.asp>.

An interactive question and answer session was programmed in.

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Simultaneous with the main event, two separate workshops were taking place. One-to-one meetings were provided for those who had attended the first event but who had not signed up.

Demonstrations of the marketplace system were given, and the software developers, EGS, were in attendance to tell suppliers what options they had, for example, to put their catalogue on the marketplace. Two suppliers who were already on the marketplace (Community Meals and an IT company) were there to talk to the other suppliers. A CD was made for the event, funded by Business Link Berkshire and Wiltshire, and this has since been used by them to encourage other suppliers. The intention is that the CD will eventually go on to the Business Link and Slough websites. Suppliers were provided with packs containing the forms they needed to fill out at the events, and they were encouraged to register before they left. This way Slough had their details and signature and agreement to put them on the marketplace.

Working with Partners

Slough particularly benefited from the support of three partner organisations, all of whom provided speakers on the day.

Business Link Berkshire and Wiltshire

Colin Lee
Tel: 0845 600 4141
Email: colin.lee@blbw.co.uk

UK Online for Business

Paul Keegan
Email: paul.keegan@dti.gov.uk

IDeA

Peter Howarth
Email: peter.howarth@idea.gov.uk

Business Link provided information for suppliers on how to become e-enabled, and how to improve their commercial prospects by adopting e-procurement. Business Link are able to provide consultancy and training courses for suppliers, as well as having available many books and leaflets on subjects such as: how to set up a website, examples of good websites, suppliers of IT equipment, and where to get advice.

UK Online for Business also have material, and a wealth of practical information and advice on their own website. On hearing about the first workshop from Business Link, Paul Keegan of UK Online for Business, a DIT-led partnership between industry and government, agreed to provide funding for a professional events agency, on the condition that the learning could be disseminated to others.

You can find out more about these contacts on **Slough's** website. There are also links to **Thames Valley University, Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce, Office of Government Commerce (OGC)** and the **Society of Procurement Officers (SOPO)**.

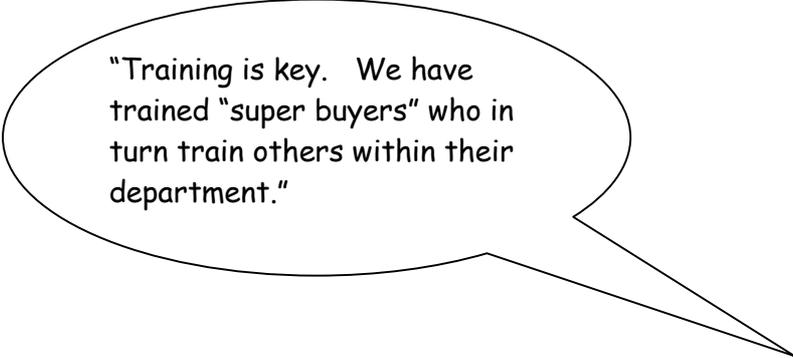
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Employing Change Management Techniques within Slough Borough Council

Now that suppliers are advertising their products on the marketplace, are Slough's own buyers buying from them? Currently £1.7m of orders is being put through the system, and this is growing. Slough now have in place a process for departments to get their suppliers registered on the marketplace, and as it is being realised that it is easy to do, it is expected that the rate will grow.

The e-procurement initiative is being driven by Liz Terry, Assistant Chief Executive as the project champion, and with the Chief Executive team as the key stakeholders. This has provided impetus and focus to the individual departments.

Training



"Training is key. We have trained "super buyers" who in turn train others within their department."

Slough are rolling out a planned and comprehensive training programme to all the departments. 'Super users' have been identified for each department, and these decide on the appropriate degree of training for users, giving consideration, for example, to those with visual and auditory impairment.

Slough's advice is not to underestimate the amount of preparation involved. For example, screen shots for 'super user' training, a 'dummies' guide, a guide for buyers to take them through their very first order, and even a guide for suppliers. All of these are on the website, the intranet, and shared folders.

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Embedding Change

Slough are optimistic. Having concentrated on a few key suppliers in each department, they are now adding suppliers rapidly, and have speeded up the sign-up process by putting it online.

Suppliers are being told that at some point, if they are not on the marketplace, they will no longer be able to do business with Slough.

E-procurement is being built into PSA targets. Quality checks are being put in place for audit purposes. Slough are now monitoring how many orders are being processed by paper, and how many electronically.

Conclusion

The real test of whether e-procurement has been fully adopted is not only how many suppliers have signed up and registered. The volume of orders is what counts, and that entails buyers being convinced, confident and competent to operate an e-procurement model. This requires planning, preparation, and implementation.