



Small East End London business goes online



Challenge

East London-based Cartridge World, which supplies and recycles printer and photocopier ink cartridges, realised they needed a strong web presence and e-commerce capabilities in order to be able to successfully trade online with Newham Borough Council and potentially other local councils in the capital. But it was exceedingly difficult for the six- strong company to know where to start.

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says Imtiaz Patel

Solution

After attending an organized supplier forum event, the director of Cartridge World decided that the business should join @London plc, an e-trading service for SMEs.

More than two million businesses are already using the services provided by @London plc. It aims to provide a quick and easy route to trading online and offers a package that takes customers from the internet, through to a company’s web site where they can make payments online for products and services. The e-trading service is deliberately targeted at SMEs and it is inexpensive. Prices start at only £48+ VAT.

One of the chief advantages of @London plc is that it is linking up SMEs with councils in London. The local authorities can use specific passwords in order to access the web sites of their suppliers so they can buy products and services over the internet.

“It’s a good way of dealing with councils,” says Imtiaz Patel, director of Cartridge World, who have just joined @London plc. “It’s efficient as orders come in through email and it’s a very good way of getting your payments quickly.”

Benefits

“If more and more councils order online it saves us being on the phone and faxing orders through. All they have to do is view it on the net and make their orders,” explains Patel.

Cartridge World believes it will be relatively straightforward to alter working practices so that emails are checked regularly during the course of the day. And Patel appreciates the fact that online ordering means that orders are documented by the buyers. “At the moment we check our emails at least three to four times a day. We will have someone checking them every hour.”

As an SME on @London plc’s service, Cartridge World will be able to take payments with Access,

Visa, Mastercard or Switch cards 24 hours a day. The company will also be listed in the database of several portals in order to help drive traffic to its site. It can also access individual sales statistics for the company's last 20 sales, and orders can be checked online.

"SMEs in London are being offered high value software at a low cost. This is a quick and affordable way for them to e-enable themselves so they are in a strong position to enjoy the commercial benefits of new technologies," explains Lyn Duncan, @London Plc's marketing director.

Cartridge World also plans to organise its own publicity to promote its new online presence and will be encouraging existing customers including schools in Newham to visit its e-commerce site.

Patel is optimistic about the potential that e-trading offers SMEs in London. "The reason I'm excited is that we are still growing. Being online might produce more orders for us from new schools and I hope more councils will start using our services."

The Government has set a target of 2005 by which time all public sector organizations must be trading electronically with their suppliers. However there are still plenty of small and medium-sized businesses in London who have not woken up to the practical realities of the e-commerce revolution.

Technology is revolutionising the way companies and councils do business. For those who exploit the potential of information and communication technologies, the rewards are lower costs, faster response times and closer relationships with customers.

E-trading means there will be a reduction in order errors. It is simpler and cheaper to update an electronic catalogue rather than a paper-based one, and there will be fresh opportunities to expand and reach new customers online.

Martin Scarfe, chair of the Government's national e-procurement project, adds that Cartridge World is setting an example to other London SMEs who have so far failed to e-enable themselves. "It is a fact that all corporate and public sector organizations (local authorities, hospitals and schools) are moving rapidly to electronic trading and this will have a direct impact on the fortunes of businesses in London.

"It is essential that SMEs take a long hard look at the impact that these e-trading changes will have on their business processes, staff skills, training needs and IT. Our national project aims to encourage SMEs to adopt new online ways of trading with councils. But time is running out fast, as the deadline of 2005 is quickly approaching."

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