



Bogus invoices are being sent to online businesses

Bogus invoices are still being sent out to website domain name holders to claim false "Notice of Expiration" charges. This was a scam first seen as long ago as 2004 and appears to be returning

.uk domain name holders have been receiving the invoices from an organisation (actual identities vary) which claims that it is the Registry for those domain names. The notice states that the holder stands to lose their domain name unless the invoice is settled, and the sums being demanded are many times the amount charges by Nominet UK, the .uk Internet registry.

These false invoices have been issued to owners of .com and .org domain names in the past, ICFBA partners advise all .uk domain name holders to be careful when checking correspondence regarding expiry of domain names.

This is typical of approaches made for invoices, often associated with 'artwork for an advertisement'; which are received by small businesses.

Potential scammers recognise that formal processes may not yet be established and an unsolicited invoice – usually for a small amount – might just be paid without question. ICFBA partners do recommend

that all unexpected bills are challenged –or ignored.

Graduates Slide into Entrepreneurs – Recruitment Freeze

Less than one in five of Britain's small firms plan to take on new staff this year – and students about to graduate could face problems in attaining their first employment as a result.

A new study from software provider Sage, drawing on responses from 1,000 entrepreneurs, found that just 18% of small to medium-sized businesses are planning to expand their workforce during the rest of 2011.

Furthermore, it appears that many graduates with excellent academic qualifications will experience frustration in the job market this summer.

Just 45% of the entrepreneurs surveyed agreed that formal education offers the skills needed for working life; in fact, one in 10 said that formal education provides either poor, or very poor, preparation for the workplace.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, it seems many graduates are turning away from more traditional routes into employment and considering entrepreneurship as a viable option.

The growth in the number of digital and e-commerce start-ups, with web-savvy graduates

and young people at the helm, gives great cause for optimism and it's exciting to see such a thriving entrepreneurial generation coming through.

ICFBA partners do encourage graduates and young people to look at entrepreneurship as a viable option to being employed.

With the pressures on recruitment, the route to success via entrepreneurship could be the logical choice for generations to come.

Growth Review

The second phase of the government's Growth Review must support small businesses and help them grow into medium-sized companies, according to a leading business group.

Building on the radical programme of reforms set out in the first Plan for Growth, published at the budget, the next stage of the review will focus on infrastructure, education and skills, logistics and open data.

In addition, the programme will also look towards the mid-sized business sector to determine how those businesses achieved growth in order to develop plans to help small businesses do the same.



Social Enterprise Benefits

Social entrepreneurs across Europe could receive investment totalling £50,000 through a new scheme which launched in Jun 2011.

Village Capital London, an incubator situated in Westminster's brand-new Hub Venture Labs, is now open to applications from social entrepreneurs across the UK and Europe.

Any business which aims to make a profit, while providing a wider benefit to the community, can apply for the 12-week programme.

Once all applications have been received and evaluated, 16 entrepreneurs will be invited to Westminster – where they will receive specialist advice on fundraising, marketing and designing for impact, while benefiting from peer-to-peer support and networking.

At the end of the three-month course, the two best entrepreneurs will be nominated by their peers – and will each receive a £50,000 prize.

Stephen Rockman, founder of Merism Capital, the company which created the Hub Venture Labs in tandem with Hub Westminster, said: "We're really excited about launching Village Capital London, which will help European entrepreneurs with the skills

needed to build successful social businesses."

The Village Capital incubator model has already been rolled out in New Orleans, Boulder, Mumbai and San Francisco, and Rockman believes this track record is a real source of strength.

"Being able to leverage Village Capital's network, and experience, will provide a fantastic boost to the whole of the impact investment sector – so we encourage start-ups from across Europe to apply for Village Capital London."

To apply for Village Capital London, go to

<http://hubwestminster.net/hubventurelabs>.

Designing your logo

To a certain extent, logo design depends on personal taste, the nature of your company and what it sells. However, there are some basic principles to creating an effective logo.

Most designers suggest a great logo is timeless, memorable, versatile and appropriate. First off, consider the longevity of your business. You want a logo that will fit for years to come and this means rising above current design trends or en vogue fonts.

To make your logo memorable, it not only needs to be visually appealing, but also needs to make an impact.

Think about issues such as visual contrast and use of colour. However, simplicity is probably the most effective way to make a logo distinctive and memorable. The more complicated and fussy a logo becomes, the less recognisable it is. Logos such as the McDonalds M or the Nike tick are simple and instantly recognisable.

Your logo also needs to be versatile. Consider all the places it will be used. Colour may not always be an option, especially if printed in a newspaper. Although colour is a strong element in your logo's message, the concept should be strong enough for your logo to stand alone in black and white.

When designing your logo, remember it may need to be scaled up or down. The concept should remain clear whatever the size or dimension.

Overall, a good logo is simple, distinct, striking and memorable. But factors such as longevity, versatility and flexibility must not be overlooked, as they are very important in the long run.

To ensure your logo stands out from the crowd and creates a lasting impression, it must convey your brand identity while being simultaneously visually effective and distinct.



New HMRC software to scour web for tax cheats

Taxman to target eBay traders, tutors, tradespeople and VAT avoidance

New 'web robot' software is set to automatically target income tax and VAT cheats, in new plans released by HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) this month.

The software, which will be launched later this year, will trawl the web finding information about specific people and companies, identifying those who have failed to pay the proper amount of tax by cross-referencing the information found on the web with HMRC's own data and honing in on discrepancies.

The campaign will be focused on small businesses and personal ventures, such as private tutors, eBay traders and tradespeople.

This will mark the first time HMRC's spotlight has fallen on these sectors. A spokesperson explained that the aim is to tackle 'moonlighting' ventures – businesses run as a means of providing extra income for people, who believe they have found a tax-free way of making money.

Earlier this year, HMRC also announced a campaign targeting those businesses with a turnover above the VAT



threshold of £73,000 who have not registered for VAT.

The government appealed to those within the target groups who believe they may be affected by a search; to voluntarily disclose their status and pay any outstanding tax before the campaigns begin later this year.

HMRC hopes to maximise dialogue between themselves and the organisations concerned, with feedback to play a larger part in future targeted campaigns.

The HMRC director of risk and intelligence, Mike Wells, explained: "By being open about our areas of interest for the coming year we hope to maximise that exchange of information and help customers pay what they owe.

We will use the information we gather to pursue people who choose not to use the opportunities we provide for them to put their affairs in order. It will be more expensive if we come and find people, so I urge them to come forward and disclose voluntarily."

FSB: Help small businesses access recycling services

Nine out of ten businesses would recycle more if they had access to better facilities, recent research from the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) suggests.

The lobbying group is calling on the Government to ensure



that it has the needs of small businesses at the heart of its Waste Review due in June 2011.

Most small businesses know that minimising waste makes business sense as well as benefiting the environment, says the FSB.

However, the FSB adds that lower turnover companies find it extremely difficult to access suitable waste and recycling services as many local authorities do not offer these services to businesses. And due to the small volumes of waste they produce, small businesses cannot attract the services of waste management companies.

The FSB also calls on DEFRA to use the planning system to ensure there is adequate storage space in new and refurbished commercial premises for storing waste. Environment committee chairman for the FSB; David Caro says, "Small businesses are keen to do their bit for the environment but need to have access to the right facilities available locally. Many small firms produce a similar amount of waste to that of a household, yet they cannot use the same facilities and often find that they are at the mercy of an uncompetitive waste and recycling market.

Giving small businesses access to household waste and recycling centres would be a quick win that would make the lives of so many small businesses easier when it comes to managing their waste responsibly."



Entrepreneurs short of organisation skills

UK entrepreneurs score highly on ideas but are lacking in organisation, according to a new study among business people.

Research of 111 entrepreneurs by Andrum Consulting finds that more than 80% of the UK's entrepreneurial businesses have at least two completely new ideas which they have yet to commercialise and 26% have four or more ideas waiting to be launched.

However, poor day-to-day cash flow is an issue for almost a fifth, some 30% of entrepreneurs don't know how to manage their time and over half don't have a long-term plan. A lack of finance for investment is also hindering 39% of respondents.

It is almost incredible that the entrepreneurial businesses studied were brimming with ideas, but if they lacked the skills to know which idea is the strongest and can't raise the finance to turn the chosen idea into a commercial reality, such innovation will not translate into sales.

According to the study 'What Makes Entrepreneurs Tick'; many entrepreneurs are not helping themselves as just 57% have a five year plan, less than 50% have a social media strategy and barely 12% have a written down exit strategy.



Whilst there can be no doubt that banks are not coming up with a lot of investment, but if entrepreneurs are to persuade financial partners to back their innovation, they need more than just ideas.

Entrepreneurs must demonstrate rigour in planning, demonstrate achievable numbers and show they have an experienced team in place to take their business to the next level.

Many of the entrepreneurs studied said they don't even have enough time in the working day nor enough good people in their business to succeed as they would like.

This will ring alarm bells with potential investors. Who's going to back an entrepreneur who can't manage their own diary?

UK and Sweden neck-and-neck (Technically Speaking)

Britain and Sweden are leading the race to create the next YouTube, Twitter or Facebook, according to a new survey.

The study, carried out by US-based business platform Red Herring, lists the 100 most vibrant and innovative tech companies in Europe.

Encouragingly, 14 of the 100 companies are based in the UK, a number matched only by



Sweden – suggesting Britain's tech sector is in rude health. Red Herring, which bases its top 100 on a range of criteria including financial performance, technology innovation and market potential, has previously publicised some of the world's foremost tech companies before they became famous.

Multi-national giants such as Facebook, Twitter, Google, Yahoo and YouTube were all spotted and recognised by Red Herring while still in their infancy.

Despite the heartening nature of the findings, many in Britain's innovation community remain cautious, even apprehensive about the future. John Mitchell, chairman of the SME Innovation Alliance, says: "The UK, as usual, is nowhere to be seen in truly supporting Britain's innovators develop their businesses into the next Facebook, Twitter or Google etc. but instead assumes that any SME patent has a maximum value of £500K."

Mitchell added that small firms, "seriously working at the coal face of innovation, often struggle to obtain funding.

Banks tend not to fund projects where, by definition of 'innovation', the returns are not certain to any degree - so businesses look to other sources who often financially screw the incentive out of the enthusiastic ideas guys."



Business accelerators shooting up across Europe

But success rate for applicants can be as low as 1%

The number of business accelerators across Europe has increased rapidly – but less than 10% of those who apply to them are successful.

These are the principal conclusions of a new study from the National Endowment of Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA), aiming to map out the global network of business accelerators – which provide funding, mentoring and Dragons' Den-style pitching exposure for promising new businesses.

The NESTA team, led by seasoned internet entrepreneur Paul Miller, found that, just four years after the establishment of Europe's first business accelerator, there are now more than 10 such bodies serving the continent's start-ups. Furthermore, the report claims that more than 150 fledgling companies have received financial and strategic support from Europe's accelerator programmes.

Yet the authors also note that "demand for accelerator programmes outstrips supply considerably". Indeed Seedcamp, the original European accelerator, receives more than 2,000 a year. Seedcamp takes on just 1% of its applicants, and the competition is just as fierce elsewhere; at present no accelerator in Britain or



Ireland takes on more than 9% of its applicants.

The report also highlights the fact that the accelerator judges generally overlook applications from one-man companies, and they often favour companies which are simply after a quick, lucrative exit over businesses which have genuine global ambitions.

The report highlights a number of prevailing trends within the accelerator space – including increasing volumes of private investment, and the changing role of accelerators, "from helping companies survive their formative years (decreasing downside risk) to adding value to companies (increasing upside advantage)".

However, the authors steer clear of making a definitive forecast about the next generation of accelerators, concluding:

"We make no prediction about the future success of individual programmes because we believe that the business model for running an accelerator programme is yet to be proven. There is certainly no one correct way of running a programme, and there will continue to be a great deal of innovation in this area over the coming decade."

Brain Drain – or Skills Deluge

Some 7.6 million British workers are willing to move overseas to improve their job prospects, research finds. The GfK International Employee Engagement Study reveals that more than a quarter of



British workers are willing to move country to find a better job (27%), driven by a desire to escape the UK's soaring cost of living and static wages.

The young and highly qualified are most likely to feel this workplace wanderlust, with more than two thirds (36%) of workers aged 18-29 saying they are willing to move countries to find a better job.

The figure is almost one in three for degree holders (31%) and nearly two in five for people with postgraduate qualifications (38%). This is compared to just one fifth of employees educated to secondary school level (23%). Almost 6.5 million (23%) are looking to change employer in the next year.

The research suggests that Britain has a risk of 'brain drain' in the coming year, posing significant problems for companies looking to recover from the downturn. Even if only a fraction of those who are considering a move abroad do it, UK businesses will face a significant loss of talent, just at the time they most need it.

Internationally, more than a quarter of the workforce in countries questioned (27%) is willing to move to another country to find better employment.

Central and Southern America look set to be the hardest hit of the markets covered, with nearly six in ten Mexican employees (57%), half of Colombia's workforce (52%) and two fifths of staff in Brazil and Peru (41 and 38% respectively) ready to look across borders for better careers.



The '**International Confederation for Business Advancement' (ICFBA)**, is a confederation of business professionals who have been working together for over 10 years as top-level advisers for all types and sizes of businesses throughout the world.

ICFBA Partners have been acting as business mentors and advisers to the management teams within client organisations, focussing on restructuring business as required and helping to develop the businesses in every possible way. The experience gained when assisting clients in marketing their products and services to

wider international markets (through the contacts ICFBA have developed over the years in every industry and major country worldwide) results in new sales opportunities and enhanced relationships for the client.

ICFBA are advised of projects, being put out to tender worldwide on a daily basis. ICFBA Partners can identify those projects that may be suitable for the client business.

ICFBA Partners can arrange for clients to gain experience in pursuing a number of major international contracts and also include them within the 'valued resource pool' that will

be useful in the pursuit of contracts on an ongoing basis. With guidance and advice, clients can become self-sufficient in the identification of new business opportunities, ideally suited to their particular strategic capabilities, and successfully generate new business.

ICFBA Partners are always willing to co-ordinate projects from organizations worldwide, making effective use of Accredited Partners - often through regional ICFBA administrative offices - to ensure that the best-qualified specialist in the appropriate industry is selected to lead and manage each project

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