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Fund to aid home workers beats its target

CALL centres are among the industries in the North East to have benefited from a project to create home-based jobs.

To date, it has beaten its target to create 360 jobs since launch in November last year and has another 10 months to run.

Funded by the regional development agency, One North East, the programme offers up to £3,000 per job created. This can support both skills development and training for new employees and the capital investment required to set up remote workers.

The sales and marketing director of Sensee, David Thorley, said clients benefited from big cost reductions and added: "…but what primarily attracted us to the Home Working Fund was the quality of the North East resource pool. Quality is a big focus for us, and the calibre of the staff that we have gained since adding the North East as a hub is impressive."

Home agents, he said, provided the flexibility and agent quality that could not necessarily be realised with traditional call centre models.

The director of SalCallCentre, Susan Lane, recently established a virtual call centre to deliver customer services for large retail outlets.

She said: "A flexible workforce gives us an edge in tendering for new business. Working from home suits a wide range of individuals whose skills and knowledge might otherwise remain untapped."

As part of our social ethos, we aim to get unemployed people into full time employment. The Home Working Fund will enable us to grow the business faster and provide additional job opportunities at a quicker rate than we could otherwise have achieved."

One North East's Director of Business and Industry, Ian Williams, said: "This is great progress and will help us to continue to work towards the necessary higher level skilled operatives that the call and contact centres sector in particular demands."

The Home Working Fund is managed by a not for profit organisation, Entrust, set up in 1982 to assist businesses in the North East with advice, consultancy and financial support.

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Poor voice quality is driving customers away, says survey

FOUR out of five consumers report poor voice quality in call centres, says a survey. About a third said it had happened in more than half of their calls.

Nearly 70pc of those said that they would usually hang up as a result and – if calling about a new product or service – they then call a competing company.

The survey was carried out by the Customer Experience Foundation (CEF) on behalf of an IP supplier, Empirix.

Professor Morris Pentel, chairman of CEF, said: "Consumers are quickly losing patience with companies that suffer from poor voice quality – truth is, it's a consumer's market; they have choices in today's market.

"Consumers are having major issues that they will not tolerate, which has obvious ramifications for businesses.

"Customer and agent churn will increase if they are unable to communicate with each other, not to mention the loss of new business opportunities, such as upsells or new products and offerings

"Organisations with a reputation for poor customer service are simply pushing their customers toward their competitors, which impacts market share and the bottom line."

Empirix, which offers testing and monitoring products, says the problem is often blamed on background noise, poor headsets, loose connections, bad home VoIP, poor transit by carriers and bad mobile phone connections and handsets.

News **Brief**

COFFEE CALLS

Nestle has opened a 40-strong call centre to handle enquiries about its Nespresso coffee makers. Based on the fifth floor of the company's offices in York, it was expecting to hire another 18 staff by Christmas and a total workforce of 73 by 2012.

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