

Experts needed for 'Technical Action Line'

The ERTC is making a call for individuals with specialist technical or diagnostic expertise to come forward as part of a major new help line for growing firms in the Region.

The Technical Action Line (TAL) will operate across the six counties of the Eastern Region following the successful bid by the ERTC to run what is being described as the most important DTI initiative for a decade.

The man heading up the new service is Mike Anstey, the ERTC's Senior Technology Manager in Bedfordshire.

"Firms across the Region with technical problems will be able to ring the action line and be put in touch with someone who can provide a diagnosis and, if necessary, an expert to assist in implementing the solution", he said.

The ERTC is currently compiling a register of appropriately qualified individuals prepared to act as consultant Diagnosticians or Experts. The positions carry a remuneration and will have a high profile in the development of TAL in the Eastern Region. Further details and a registration form are available from Mike Anstey at ERTC, Applied Research and Consultancy Centre, Putteridge Bury, Hitchin Road, Luton LU2 8LE. Tel: 0582 482555 Fax: 0582 482689. Email: MANSTEY@UK.AC.LUTON.VAX2



Mike Anstey

Export Initiative

Good quality marketing research overseas is the key to export growth, according to the British Chambers of Commerce, who have launched a new kind of intensive training initiative for exporters. An innovative series of three-day courses is being provided to help companies fill "a vital gap in their marketing skills".

Details from the Association of British Chambers of Commerce, tel: (0223) 694484.

Mobile Information Unit in UK



A new travelling information centre bringing facts and information to people across the United Kingdom about the direct effects of the Single European Market has returned to the UK to continue its tour after a visit to the continent.

The Mobile Information Unit (MIU) is sponsored by Ernst & Young, founder members of the ERTC, who have also provided technical support for the MIU's construction. The MIU is the first of its kind in the European Community.

Competition Promotes Better Use of Technology

A national technology competition for Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Higher Education has attracted over fifty entries from 45 institutions throughout the United Kingdom.

The competition, known as ESCOM, called for proposals from academics in higher education to develop commercially viable 'expert systems' applications and encourage collaboration between higher education and industrial, business or other end-user partners in the development process.

Tom Addis, Professor of Computing Science at Reading University, Vice Chairman of the Expert System Group of the British Computer Society and ESCOM adjudication panel member commented:

"The number of universities and colleges applying and the level of collaboration between departments and with industrial partners is very encouraging. ESCOM looks as if it will be an important catalyst for academics to turn their ideas and knowledge into commercially worthwhile products."

Expert systems are a computer based means of comparing actual data and information against a known knowledge base, and making deductions and reaching decisions based on this process. The operations can be in batch mode, for example, as in equipment or materials selection, or in real time for control of manufacturing or processing operations.

Conceived and organised by the Thames Valley Technology Centre (TVTC), based near Slough, ESCOM is jointly sponsored by ICL UK Limited, Inference Expertech Limited and the DTI.

ESCOM is the first of a series of technology competitions being planned by TVTC to foster collaboration and technology transfer between higher education and industry and commerce. Technology competitions will encourage the development and exploitation of new products and systems based on the knowledge, skills and resources within higher education.

Luton College, a founder member of the ERTC, submitted one of the winning proposals.

This proposal aims to construct an expert system offering advice on the better matching of flowers and plants to particular garden environmental conditions and to advise on plant aftercare. It is expected that the user will be able to ask advice on which plants are suitable for a particular situation and what alternatives are available for a particular plant, given stated characteristics and environmental conditions.

The team at Luton College wish to use this competition in order to apply their theoretical and practical expertise to a commercial proposition.

Aimed primarily at garden centres it is believed that with minimal training current staff could be competent operators. It would also be of potential interest to commercial and public sector organisations, which lay out and maintain parks and gardens.

At present one or two garden centres utilize sample database packages for plant care instructions and these are well thought of. Therefore the team feel this augers well for a full expert system.

Coming Up....

12 June

Control of Substances Hazardous to Health

Trinity Centre, Science Park, Milton Road, Cambridge ((0223) 420518)

17-19 June

A Workshop in Chemical Spectroscopy

University of East Anglia
(Contact: Jane Thorp (0603) 592802)

24-29 June

Turbomachinery Aerodynamics

Churchill College, Cambridge
(Contact: Pam Whitfield (0223) 332712)

4 July

Expanding and Funding Your Business Into Europe

A practical guide to European legislation and how it affects business.

University of East Anglia
(Contact: Jane Thorp (0603) 592802)

15-17 July

Advanced Ceramic & Metallic Composites

Department of Engineering, Trumpington Street, Cambridge
(Contact: Pam Whitfield (0223) 332712)

15-19 July

Aero and Hydro-Acoustics

Ecole Centrale de Lyon, Lyon, France
(Contact: Pam Whitfield (0223) 332712)

29-31 July

Remote Sensing

St. John's College, Cambridge
(Contact: Pam Whitfield (0223) 332712)

31 July-2 August

Maximum Entropy Techniques

St. John's College, Cambridge
(Contact: Pam Whitfield (0223) 332712)

9-13 September

Chemical Engineering for the Food Industry

Pembroke College, Cambridge
(Contact: Pam Whitfield (0223) 332712)

23-24 September

Analytical Techniques and Problem Solving

University of East Anglia
(Contact: Jane Thorp (0603) 592802)

MAKE A DATE - FREE!

To make sure your Open Meetings are listed in 'T & B' send details to the Editorial Office, P.O. Box 198, Cambridge CB4 5AX

CULIL - Industry Links

The purpose of CULIL (Cambridge University Local Industry Links) is to stimulate mutually beneficial interactions between the University of Cambridge and local industry: activities that are not necessarily utilitarian or directly functional, but which bring together people and organisations to address subjects of common interest and concern.

CULIL aims to explore more systematic ways of developing and enriching this web of mutually beneficial links. The relationships based on science and technology have achieved the most public exposure, but there is scope for interaction in the social sciences, international studies, law and other disciplines.

Anyone interested in the initiative should contact Dr Chris Padfield, Cambridge University Programme for Industry on Cambridge 332684.



Chris Padfield

Inventor's Checklist

Supplied by Imagineering, ERTC member.

1. Identify a Need

It may be a new idea, but does anyone want it? Is there a demand for a humane slug trap, or a wrist watch which gives the wind direction? On the other hand, maybe the invention can create a new demand, as did the first practical aircraft or the pocket calculator.

2. Check for Originality

Don't spend time and money trying to develop an invention if you can already buy it in the shops. Check for similar inventions in the nearest patent library - no originality, no patent.

3. Don't Upset an Established Applecart

The car companies have spent untold millions on developing the internal combustion engine. They are not likely to want a steam engine replacement, however good. Especially if it was Not Invented Here.

4. Build a Working Model

A successful working model is rarely produced at the first attempt. Making it refines the idea, shows that the concept is practical and that you understand the problems involved in developing the idea.

5. Protect the Invention

Keep it secret. Don't write about the invention, don't publicise it, don't talk about it. Then apply for registered design or patent protection as late as possible.

6. Learn the Patent System

Work out how much protection you need and how much you can afford. Decide if you need a patent agent, and how many patents you need. Remember that the patent is your protection against having your idea stolen by a manufacturer, and the manufacturer's protection if he decides to buy the idea off you.

7. Be Realistic about Demand and Costs

How much money is needed to make a first production run? And do you eventually hope to sell 500 or 500,000? Costs will change enormously with your answer. Potential backers will expect you to know this.

8. Sell Yourself with the Invention

The potential backer is just as keen on his money as you are on your idea. Present yourself and the invention as clearly and sensibly as possible, so that the backer has confidence in both of you.

9. Find a Product Champion

The champion could be a manufacturer, he could be yourself. The product needs someone who believes in it, with the energy and resources to test it and make it sell.

10. Persevere!

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Blooming in Picardy

Tending District Council, which has twinning arrangements with the Picardie region in northern France, encouraged businesses to take part in a business exhibition being held in Amiens, the main town of Picardie.

The exhibition, which is held annually, had over 150 stands taken by a range of companies from different areas of industry.

Any company requiring further details about trade opportunities in Picardie, should contact the Economic Development Unit on (0255) 256155.