



The Fibreoptic Industry Association

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IT'S TIME TO TAKE ADVANTAGE

by

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for Networking+ (March 2009)**

One thing that is guaranteed in a recession - there will be winners and losers. During recessions some organisations adapt and survive, others die and yet others are created from the embers of those that die. Unfortunately, skills are often lost. In organisations that do survive, the initial adaptation involves reducing headcount to re-define the "core business". Although this process is sometimes an opportunity to get rid of "dead wood", it can also remove the most skilled and experienced personnel in favour of lower cost, young and dynamic types. Similarly, newly created businesses tend to follow their Pied Pipers who again tend to be those with ideas and visions rather than those with their feet firmly fixed in the comparatively dull concepts of such as quality assurance.

It is probable that many new enterprises fail early in their development because ideas and vision take over from skills and experience. So it is with recession, which accelerates the production of new start-ups but also watches them burn and die. If the recession is short-lived, no one notices the second phase but if the recession is extended the fundamental problem of reducing levels of skills and experience is compounded.

The skills being referred to are not just technical but also cross over into the field of basic business administration. If your business model does not allow for the cost of employing skills and experience, how can it be obtained? One obvious source is the various industry bodies ranging from the Institute of Directors through to trade associations such as the Fibreoptic Industry Association and its co-hosted cousin, the Telecommunication Infrastructure Advisory Board.

One question often asked is if the services offered by such organisations are fully used or even recognised by their members?

What we do know is that the hits on the FIA web-site at www.fia-online.co.uk have increased by 21% since the start of the year. We also know that the majority of those hits come from non-members, seeking advice from the many free sources of information such as White Papers and Newsletters. Of course, a large number are looking at our membership lists in order to find suppliers in their local area or in their sphere of activity. On the members-only side of the web-site, the activity and the activity areas are more restricted - this indicates that, for many, simply being a member of an organisation (and getting "the badge") is an important market differentiator in itself with any additional benefits of membership being ignored.

The "badge of merit" concept associated with having paid ones annual membership fees is perhaps only natural. The additional differentiators of membership such as being an "approved" supplier of services as opposed to being a general member certainly attract some members but once again this is treated as one more badge. Such philosophies do not change during a recession. Indeed FIA membership is continuing at a steady state since as some companies unfortunately cease trading, others come along behind them to fill the gap.

However, members who simply see membership as badge and do not use the services offered by organisations like the FIA are really failing to benefit in two significant ways. Firstly they do not benefit from the body of knowledge that already exists and secondly they do not identify where those services could be improved to meet their specific needs. This is clearly a double-whammy.

It is job of the FIA to effectively market the services they offer – but as the saying goes "...you can take a horse to water.....".

If you would like to have your say on this topic and would like to join the FIA in order to do so, e-mail jane@fiasec.demon.co.uk or, alternatively, you can contact the FIA Secretariat in 01763 273039.