

Towards 2010: LiZLaKe

EEDA helps a firm of chartered landscape architects plan for future expansion

Summary

The EEDA-funded Towards 2010 initiative helped an Essex-based firm of chartered landscape architects pay for a training course to update vital employee software skills. A second course also helped the company decide to delay investing in an expensive new software programme until the time was right for the business.

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| County: | Essex |
| Theme: | Business Support |
| Date: | October 2008 |

Main messages

- EEDA's funding helped LiZLaKe train employees in vital new software
- Training helped the firm understand developments in mapping technology
- Helping it decide not to invest in this technology yet – saving a lot of money.

Case study

Liz Lake owns and manages an Essex-based chartered landscape architects and urban design practice called LiZLaKe. It's an established company, formed 21 years ago, but operates in an area in which technology moves fast, and businesses have to keep right up to date to maintain a competitive edge, so training is vital. "We have a long history of training. I want highly trained staff because I want a reputation for being good at what we do," said Liz.

Liz heard how EEDA-funded Towards 2010 offered employers a contribution towards training, to help them grow their businesses. After successfully applying for funding, she used it to send employees on a training course to update their knowledge of CoreIDRAW, an important software package used within the business. "Because we're in a niche market,

Microsoft Word and Excel courses are no use to us. We need specialist courses in the particular programmes we use every day,” she said.

“We had found a course in Guildford, but it covered the previous version of CorelDRAW, and I wasn’t prepared to send staff on a course that was out of date. With Towards 2010 funding, however, we were able to ask Writtle College, part of Essex University, if they could set up a training course especially for us. Now, they have a specialist CorelDRAW course that their students can use, too.”

Liz sent four employees on the CorelDRAW course, and it really made a difference. “Having several people trained in CorelDRAW has provided greater flexibility and has helped us complete things faster,” she said.

Anne Williamson of Screen East – the regional screen agency dedicated to developing, supporting and promoting a thriving and successful film, TV and digital media industry for the East of England –helped Liz apply for funding. “Towards 2010 has been an important initiative for creative industries,” said Anne, “because most companies in the sector are very small – many are sole traders or freelancers. Towards 2010 was designed to help companies succeed, and there is evidence that companies that undertake training are less likely to fail than those that don’t.”

When to invest in new technology and when not to invest

Towards 2010 funding also helped the company learn more about complicated and expensive Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping software. “GIS programmes are the software of the future, but for a company like us they’re a big investment,” said Liz. “We have to keep pace with the developments in GIS and decide when it would be a good time to invest.” She sent employee Mike Harman on a week-long lecture course at Cranfield University to find out more.

“GIS is becoming more and more widely used, by local authorities and larger firms on various projects,” Mike explained. “It ties in a lot of information visually, in one package, in a way that’s easy to understand. For example, local authorities make maps of a region that correlate lots of different information – about houses, landscape features, sewers, amenities and more.” When working on large-scale projects, landscape architects can use GIS mapping to develop a landscape strategy. “It helps us decide where certain kinds of development should be,” he continued, “what resources are available and what constraints there are, for example in terms of environmental impact.”

With Mike trained in the basics of GIS, Liz felt she could take the right decision for the practice. “I made an informed choice that we weren’t going to jump on board yet. As a relatively small business, it was too early for us to embrace this technology. We could have gone out and wasted a lot of money by investing at the wrong time – so the Towards 2010 initiative was invaluable for us.”

Towards 2010 – helping organisations train their employees

EEDA funded the Towards 2010 initiative jointly with the European Social Fund, offering employers a significant contribution towards the cost of training and improving business performance. The scheme began in November 2005 and typically involved one of EEDA’s Towards 2010 advisors working with an organisation to agree the most appropriate training programme and provider, and then supporting the organisation as it goes through the programme. Training programmes range from those that improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the production line, to those that build computer skills, extend leadership and management skills and improve marketing.

Over three years, Towards 2010 assisted nearly 2,400 businesses to train over 8,800 of their staff in areas that would make a tangible difference to business performance. Towards 2010 has now been followed by a new round of EEDA funding called Beyond 2010. Combined with funding from the European Social Fund, the £6.2 million investment in Beyond 2010 offers businesses up to half the cost of training. For further details of Beyond 2010 and other publicly-funded business support, visit the Business Map at www.bizmapeast.co.uk

Conclusion

EEDA’s funding through Towards 2010, and now through Beyond 2010, is helping employers in the East of England develop the skills and knowledge of their employees. It enabled LiZLaKe to train its employees to use software that is vital for the growth of its business. Further training also gave the firm a greater insight into its immediate needs, and helped it to decide not to invest in mapping technology until the time is right for the business.

Financial facts and figures

- EEDA gave LiZLaKe £787.50 to help send four people on a CorelDRAW course
- EEDA gave £906.50 to help send one person on a GIS training course
- EEDA gave £175 to help fund podcast training for one person (see below)
- These funds amounted to 70 per cent of the cost of the courses
- Beyond 2010, the follow-up to Towards 2010, is a £6.2 million investment by EEDA and the European Social Fund.

Extra quotes

Liz Lake

“My staff are pleased that they’ve completed their training and seen an obvious improvement in their skills. It’s been great for staff morale. They have gained transferable skills, and from my point of view – as an employer – it helps me with staff retention. It’s very hard to get staff, so anything that encourages them to stay is vital.”

Anne Williamson

“Many people don’t realise how diverse the creative industries are, but Towards 2010 has helped with all different kinds of training.”

Extra information

Liz also used the funding to pay for a podcasting course, to find out more about this useful marketing tool that allows companies to present audio information to their customers through their websites.

Contact details

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