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CASE STUDY: Butler Tanner and Dennis

Date	05 January 2010
Location	Frome, Somerset
Sector	Printing
No. of Employees	100
Key Benefits	From a business point of view if you have a better trained workforce you can speed up the whole operational process.



Introduction

Butler Tanner and Dennis is one of the UK's premier colour book and publications printers.

Think of Delia Smith cookbooks and other large format, British coffee table titles and the chances are they will have been produced by the Frome company.

In summer 2009, Butler Tanner and Dennis proved its worth by printing three separate books about Michael Jackson each for a different publisher and all done concurrently within days of the superstar's death.

This speed of response is the company's unique selling point compared to overseas printers who can take weeks to return a UK order.

Another fast track project has been a book about the new Formula 1 champion and local Frome hero Jenson Button.

However, these printing successes would never have happened if it had not been for poet and entrepreneur Felix Dennis who reopened the 158 year old company in August 2008 after it had been shut months earlier by its previous owner.

Since then, Butler Tanner and Dennis has been busy rebuilding its order book and regaining the official accreditations that a large print firm needs to hold to stay in business. These include the written procedures behind ISO 14001 environmental accreditation and the standards of the Forest Stewardship Council. The company has also introduced new equipment including a Kodak plate maker, a KM600 paper backline and a new jacketing machine.

“ Making the Skills Pledge has broken down quite a few barriers and given us much more flexibility all round”

Katrina Caffyn, Compliance Manager



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Drivers for Commitment

By the end of 2008, the new management team had established a training committee and carried out a skills audit covering every employee.

“We had to start from scratch,” says Compliance Manager Katrina Caffyn. “We asked people about their main machinery and operational skills, the other operations they knew about, the gaps there were in their operational training and the areas where they would benefit from a refresher course.

“We also wanted to know what they would choose to train in if they had the opportunity, what transferable skills they had from outside the industry, and what questions and ideas they had for training.”

From the audit the committee devised a skills matrix showing where training was required. It covers the full range of print-related activities such as health and safety, first aid, ISO auditing, plate making, fork truck training, fire wardens and spill response training.

Impacts and Benefits

The new approach to training, in which more staff are encouraged to attain skills and further qualifications, was demonstrated to the workforce with the making of the Skills Pledge in April 2009.

Since then, Butler Tanner and Dennis has taken on apprentices and enabled existing employees to take a more flexible career path. Everyone has a training file and staff

development is a regular subject for discussion at weekly workforce open forum meetings.

Grant Aven, 19, (pictured (I) with colleague Clinton Walker) from Frome, is on a three year print Apprenticeship following in a family tradition at Butler Tanner and Dennis. His mother, father and grandfather have all had experience at the company.

Grant, who is currently learning his trade on an eight-colour KBA Rapida 162 machine, says: “The training side gives everyone a good feeling of support. I’ve got on-the-job training, a great team to help me become fully skilled and regular check-ups with the team leader on how it is progressing. On top of that I get formal assessments on the apprenticeship and my tutor comes in every fortnight from Yeovil College.”

Clinton Walker, 34, also from Frome, worked on the print floor for 15 years before training as a sales rep. He now works from both Frome and London, with clients recognising that he can talk with real experience about the whole print process.

Clinton says: “You get the most satisfaction when you have clinched the deal, seen the product delivered on time and made the client happy. We convey the thank-you email from customers back to the whole team when a particular job goes well. The new training approach has given me a great opportunity within the print industry that I wouldn’t otherwise have had.”

As well as these individual successes, Katrina believes that offering training to all employees and making them aware of the Skills Pledge has helped with wider business productivity that is in turn filling the order book.

She says: “From a business point of view if you have a better trained workforce you can speed up the whole operational process. That saves on costs in the long term because you have a more flexible workforce who can help to hit peaks of demand.”

The company is now working towards Investors in People and has gained the ‘Positive about Disabled People’ standard.

“Making the Skills Pledge has broken down quite a few barriers and given us much more flexibility all round,” says Katrina. “It is all very well to do a skills audit but you have to do training on the back of it. The Skills Pledge is important because it is recognition that without people on board you don’t have a business even with all the machinery in the world. You have to be serious about training and it is important for everyone in the workforce to feel valued.”