



**Review
of
Business
Reviews**

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Survey of ten businesses who had Business Reviews carried out in early 1999

A sample of ten businesses was contacted to give their views on the early or pilot Business Reviews that were offered on a free of charge basis. A semi-structured interview was carried out with the main contact of each business, and the results are given in case study form below. The questionnaire is attached, and the summary recommendations based on the survey are as follows:

- The Business Review is regarded as a very useful diagnostic tool, scoring seven or eight out of ten for all respondents
- There is no requirement for major or radical change
- All respondents considered that that it had helped them to focus on the key business and management issues
- From users point of view, it is clearly a useful tool both to start a relationship off and for relatively early use in an existing contractual relationship
- The report and charts come out very well with respondents very much in favour
- Providing a sample report to a client before he or she commits is an important feature
- Individual comments are contained within the individual case studies following in this report
- The Business Reviews were valuable in their own right, but particularly so when free of charge

- Where an ASA is not entered into immediately after the Business Review, a six month follow up could provide another business opportunity.

F J Blissett **Gary Blissett**

Blissett's said that the Business Review helped them to focus minds on the key business and management issues. Following the Business Review they also began to think of other areas in a more formal way. A formal action plan had been drawn up.

Not all the action plans had been implemented at this stage, but the marketing plan had been developed, and they were still working through the actions on training and development. They particularly liked the charts ("not so many words"). They would have preferred to see a sample report early, so that they could understand the charts more quickly.

Carfax Ltd **Tim Jones**

Yes, the Business Review did identify the key issues facing the business. These were generally more commercial than managerial, such as profit and loss, costing and pricing. It meant a lot of work, but it was a tool to focus on the issues. They did not have a separate action plan drawn up, but a lot of action took place subsequent to the business review in line with the issues. There has been senior level reorganisation (retirement of Production Director) and restructuring, revised pricing and good relationships developed with a key supplier. The staff questionnaire had produced valuable results. Communications had now improved and "now there was a shared vision". The charts were useful for comparisons, and also highlighted quickly where we were good.

Dangerous Goods International
Brian Boucher

The key issues facing the business had been identified, and the business review was instrumental in helping the newly appointed General Manager to change the direction of the business. An action plan had been drawn up, and completely implemented. There was major restructuring in terms of personnel; a change in the external accountants; regular financial information was now being produced which was accurate and the business was working to properly established budgets; a major customer was dropped; and training and development plans had been introduced for all staff. The staff questionnaire had shown a need for better communications, and now there were monthly staff meetings as well as a lot more social events. The charts were very helpful.

GLS Exhibitions Ltd
Debbie Church

The Business Review did really identify the key issues, and reinforced aspects that we needed to introduce. We drew up a recommended action plan and we are still working our way through that. We cannot therefore say that we have implemented all the actions at this stage, but it is still on-going. There are now regular management meetings and there has been considerable improvement. We lost one manager, changed location, we produce more information and have better control. Whilst it reinforced what we were thinking, it was important to get an authoritative external view. The report and the charts were easy to read and understand. Overall very valuable to the business.

Philip Vilars

The Business Review and a couple of further sessions really "flushed out the key issues". The main issues related to company objectives and resources and marketing. An action plan was drawn up, and was followed through but it has not been completely implemented yet. Following the business review, there has been on-going management review. The business is actively working to improve its marketing, and is currently planning to undertake a major customer survey. The staff questionnaire highlighted the importance of communications for the benefit of the business - and we have improved in this respect. As far as the report and the charts were concerned these were well presented. The meaning of the charts was thoroughly explained, and we found the whole process straightforward, simple, and understandable.

Kerr Recruitment Ltd
Marian Creighton

Yes, the key issues were identified. We did not draw up a formal separate action plan in a formal sense, but the whole process sparked significant discussion within the company. Key areas of weakness were identified as Business Planning, Leadership, and Shared Direction. We have taken major steps to address these problems with an executive level reorganisation (involving Marian's former business Partner) and redefinition of roles and responsibilities. At a later stage we put together a staff survey which was very helpful. The report itself was invaluable.

GMA Planning

Mailflight Courier Services Ltd**Michael Odell**

Michael Odell and the other three members of the senior management team (Sales, Operations and Finance) completed the Business Review. The key issues were identified - marketing strategy and plan, marketing communications, human resource issues (particularly contracts of employment), and training and development. Considerable progress has been made on the marketing issues and on human resources, but due to various factors including limited resources not as much progress has taken place on training and development. This will be a priority for the coming year. The report and the charts were very good and easy to understand.

Munday Long**Ray Long**

A reserved yes to the question as to whether the Business Review identified the key issues. It really confirmed what they already knew, but it also went into some areas that they might not otherwise have addressed. An action plan was drawn up and 80% of the plan has been implemented. The staff questionnaire results were immensely valuable, and have been implemented, with a commitment to liP standard. The report and the charts were good and the comments area useful. Some of the comments in the report on the financials rather stated the obvious and overlooked the underlying reasons for the ratios. Overall very good.

Stanley Smith Ltd**John Driver**

The Business Review did identify what the key business and management issues were. The management team had a cohesive view of the business; the business is a soundly based manufacturing organisation; continuous improvement teams have

contributed to improvements in morale and attitudes; and finally leadership skills are rated highly. However the business environment is very tough, the site constrains modernisation and expansion of the plant, and there is only a single production line for most of the product range. Training requirements were drawn up for the top team and a commitment for liP standard was made. There has been a lot of change since the report, and the strong pound has very seriously damaged their situation. The report was considered to be quite innovative and different. It showed what needed to be shown. They suspected they could have got more out of it themselves, but to an extent were thrown off balance by very adverse trading conditions.

The Training Company Ltd**Graham Nightingale**

In many respects, as far as key issue identification is concerned, it confirmed what we already knew. There was in the review an action plan drawn up, but we kept it as part of the on-going management process for review. A great many things have taken place following the review - we have downsized from 34 to 18 employees mainly by natural wastage; our market has changed to "smaller" customers and "smaller" invoices and we have changed our marketing and sales accordingly; our financial controls have improved immensely - a part time bookkeeper has been taken on, there are better accounts, and Diane (Hegel) is running the invoicing. The results of the staff questionnaires were interesting in that they showed the staff had high opinions of the management team and the business generally. The report and charts made it very easy to pick up the information and was better visually.