

Builders' merchant turnover goes up

A BUILDERS' merchant achieved a hike in turnover during what has been called the worst summer since 2004 for the home improvement and DIY markets.

Figures released by market research company GfK have shown a sharp decline in money spent on DIY and home improvement products with just £752m spent in July compared to £795m spent during the same month last year.

The wet weather combined with a slowing housing market and lack of consumer confidence have been blamed for the dip in sales for some larger DIY retail stores.

But Howard Building Services, based in Tonypanyd, has enjoyed substantial growth during an uncertain economic period. The company, a subsidiary of Howard Building and Electrical Contractors, specialises in supplying high-quality building materials to trade and DIY customers.

Managing director Michael Howard said:

Office management firm's new office

SCHOOL and office technology business Peninsula is planning to open new offices in Cardiff in response to growing local demand for smart workplace technology systems.

The investment in new premises follows research into current levels of satisfaction regarding office technology, with the company finding that many customers were unhappy with their existing equipment and systems due to poor service back-up, financing costs and dissatisfaction over contract terms.

Paul Dare, an executive with Peninsula who lives in Cardiff and will run the new offices, said: "With the rising costs of raw materials and utilities there's strong demand from customers who want to upgrade their office management systems in order to cut overheads and work smarter."

Peninsula works with schools and businesses through identifying departmental weaknesses and overspend in current systems, and recommending bespoke equipment that cuts out the duplication of many office tasks, allowing customers to release money from

E-cycle wins 3-year contract with IT service giant

A VALLEYS-BASED recycling venture has secured a lucrative multi-million pound contract.

Porth-based Remploy e-cycle will provide a service – alongside sister sites in other parts of the UK – to technology services giants Electronic Data Systems (EDS).

The three-year IT processing and recycling commercial partnership will see e-cycle manage many of the thousands of pieces of end-of-life computer equipment – from laptop and desktop computers to peripherals and servers – handled by EDS in the UK, Europe, the Middle East and Africa every year.

This includes collection of the redundant



IT equipment from EDS sites, grading and assessment, refurbishment and repair, re-imaging, recycling and disposal.

e-cycle is part of Remploy, one of the UK's leading providers of employment services for disabled people. As part of the new contract it will also provide a full and secure data cleansing service.

The contract will provide a substantial boost

Big fall in number of adults without skills

THE proportion of working age adults in Wales without qualifications has fallen by nearly a third since 2001.

Figures released by the Welsh Assembly Government show that just 14.9% of people reported having no educational qualifications whatever in 2007, down from 21.5% six years previously.

It's a far more dramatic improvement than in any other home nation and well above the trend for the UK as a whole, which has seen just a three percentage point change in the same period.

But Wales still comes second only to Northern Ireland in the proportion of its population who have no qualifications,

and the figures also reveal significant disparities between different local authority areas within Wales.

In Monmouthshire just 8.2% of working age adults remain without qualifications, while in Merthyr Tydfil the figure is as high as 21.4%, or more than one in five.

Looking at the English regions, only the West Midlands has a higher proportion of its adults without qualifications, at 16.6%.

The differences within Wales are most stark at the highest skills level. Nearly two in five people in Monmouthshire – 39.2% – hold a degree or equivalent qualification, compared to just 16.7% in Blaenau Gwent.



JOHN CULLEN

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The worst recession in 60 years?

A worrying comment came from the Chancellor as I was writing this column. He said that he thinks the current downturn is "going to be more profound and long-lasting than people thought."

I started working in the corporate recovery and insolvency business at the beginning of the last recession and so far, I am pleased to say, there is little comparison.

Plummeting house prices and comparatively high inflation added to spiralling unemployment spelled financial disaster for some, the cost of which some unlucky individuals are still paying for. Banks were very quick to pull the plug on businesses that were suffering and 'hostile' administrative receiverships, where the owner or directors did not instigate the proceedings, were all the rage.

Today's slowdown is not the same. The banks do not generally overreact initially, although given that they are pressed on liquidity issues themselves due to the credit crunch this can vary depending on the business you are in. I have seen, in fact, that banks are not quick enough sometimes to bring about the inevitable. They do have much better managed specialist situation departments now and usually have their finger on the pulse.

Inflation is nowhere near the levels it was nearly 20 years ago. Job losses are on the increase, but again they are yet to reach the levels of the early 90s and do not show the signs yet of doing so.

However, increased costs through fuel bills and therefore transport costs may be here to stay. Everyone is feeling the pinch.

The Chancellor has access to much more information than most of us do. Conceivably, he could be aware of the storm that is going to hit us and is preparing us all for it. However, he may simply be reacting to public opinion, ensuring that everyone is aware that he takes the matter very seriously.

I hope the latter is true, as I am sure we all do. ■

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