



## The National E-Commerce Awards & TMB Trusted Advisers.

Last month saw the 6th Annual National E-Commerce Awards staged by TMB's parent organisation, ITFF – The IT Forum Foundation with the backing of the DTI and a number of other sponsors led by The Royal Bank of Scotland.

### A Channel Winner in Broadband

A promising young IT services company, ihotdesk, scooped a top award, winning the National Best Use of Broadband Award on top of having also won the London regional awards for both broadband and teleworking. Once again another young channel company has made its mark on these prestigious awards.

What the judges look for is great commercial application of e-technologies. Every year there are solid case studies of end-users who have transformed their businesses. Sometimes this is with the significant help of a channel player as their solution supplier, though interestingly, more than 50% of the shortlisted entries are from companies who built their systems internally!

Channel companies themselves often enter their own case studies for judgement, and it is good to be able to focus on IT companies who 'eat their own cooking', such as ihotdesk. The judges' comments at the London heats were that ihotdesk had shown a great example of how broadband and teleworking technologies can be used to underpin the growth of a successful company, giving great levels of customer service with a distributed workforce.

In particular, they were impressed by the way that ihotdesk offers SMEs the skills and knowledge that are characteristic of a large internal IT Department for a fraction of the cost. I'm sure many people would say that ihotdesk is a 'reseller', because that's the way the supply chain often likes to categorise people and firms who do what they do. They think of themselves differently, as I'm sure many of the readers of this magazine do too.

### So are you a 'reseller'?

Being a simple ICT reseller is a business life with lots of pressure, being squeezed in the vice of vendor channel policies, falling prices, shrinking margins and rising user expectation. If all that you do is resell someone else's products – it is a tough existence indeed.

Moreover, if you're chasing the next sale with discounts, competing with others who are selling the same product, not adding anything of your own intellectual property and more concerned with your product targets than you are with your unique business propositions, you're likely to fall prey to more enlightened competition, sooner or later.

That said, an intelligent approach to healthy relationships with the distributors that supply the components that you need to build your business solutions and thinking of yourself as an 'End User Service Provider' starts to put things into a better perspective.

### Or are you a 'Trusted Adviser'?

If you are a 'Trusted Adviser' to your customers, it may well add some facets to your strategy that will balance your whole business model. If you are listening to the needs of the client, interpreting them intelligently, then proposing sensible and economic ways to deal with the solution, you are off to a good start. Following that if you're managing the supply chains for the components that you need, implementing the system in an orderly and competent way with some of your own IPR and then managing a life-cycle relationship with your customer, you are a good service

provider. And if your staff are truly up to the job, you're probably at least modestly profitable too.

User Needs and TMB

Users need ICT suppliers who will help them to manage their businesses. I confess – not all of them behave according to that ethos. Too many of them think that buying the kit cheaper is the 'be all and end all' of ICT acquisition. When it comes to a systems purchase, rather than a spot deal for the next PC, network adapter or printer, the price of the kit should come somewhere down the list of priorities. Top of the list comes good and balanced advice, followed quickly by certainty that what is bought will, when fully assembled and configured, work properly. This is where TMB comes in and it is also where simple 'reselling' starts to run out of steam.

### ihotdesk – On Stage at the Broadband Summit

When interviewed at the recent National Broadband Summit by Bill Turnbull of BBC Breakfast about the needs of the user when looking at technology solutions, David Horwood the MD of ihotdesk said of TMB; 'Users need to know where to go for good and balanced advice. IT consultants often confuse potential clients by speaking to them in technical terms. Owner/Managers need to be engaged in plain language and shown how the ICT solution will benefit their business. TMB Advisers realise this. We ourselves are looking at the TMB qualification with great interest and in our own development we were assisted with a number of vital matters by a TMB Adviser from Business Link for London'

### The E-Commerce Awards and the Future

Phil Flaxton, Chief Executive of ITFF and TMB, said "Since the inception of these Awards in 1999, we have seen entrants' steadily increasing maturity and their innovative use of technology, endorsing clearly how well applied technology is all about integration, transformation and enhanced business processes. In 2004, the Awards entrants demonstrated how the clever and considered application of technology represents a complete reassessment and shift in the way that business is done, and at its most successful, forms a core part of a fully integrated competitive strategy for business growth. With TMB we aim to positively contribute to getting more SME companies to become entrants for this recognition. In 2005, you'll see some new and innovative ways that we will identify and reward the best in business systems implementation throughout the UK'.

### So – what are you?

If all that you sell is a bunch of product that any other reseller could do, then you are a distance from having the resilient business model that will single you out from the crowd. If on the other hand you have a service-based ethos, with some of your own IPR in the mix and some reliable supply partners who give you good product and service back up, you have stopped being just a reseller. You are well on the way to being truly value added, probably a Trusted Adviser, and a likely long-term winner.

At TMB, we want to identify and work with the long-term winners in the Trusted Adviser community. Getting the users that need you to your front door is a key long-term priority for us.

If you are not yet in TMB or if you want to enter your customers or yourselves for the National E-Commerce Awards e-mail me at [mjb@itff.net](mailto:mjb@itff.net).