

ADVERTISEMENT FEATURE

Raise your sights if you want to raise finance



Jonathan Gold

DIFFICULT economic times offer opportunities for businesses that want to grow. That doesn't mean it's easy to raise finance but for a good business with a clear plan, raising cash from equity investors is still possible.

Jonathan Gold, chief executive of Finance Tree, said: "We meet a lot of businesses through the courses we run and the biggest barrier to raising investment is often a lack of understanding of the processes and needs of the investors."

One way to test whether you are prepared for a first meeting with a potential investor is to use BIRT.

"We developed BIRT not to tell you whether your business was ready or right for investment, but to help you understand what investors need, before you meet them," added Jonathan.

But software can't replace one-to-one interaction and that's why seeking advice and attending interactive sessions remains important.

"Our courses and workshops – such as the Growth Programme – are designed to help you learn from others as well as our presenters," said Jonathan.

Finance Tree now also provides a tailored service to work with you to write your business plan.

Understanding what investors want from you is crucial but raising finance always starts by examining your business and what you want and need to start or grow.

Jonathan said: "Finance Tree's work may centre on raising finance but we have to help companies see where they are and how they can move forward; finance is only the means to



PRACTICAL HELP Jonathan Gold, chief executive of Finance Tree.

an end, the business has to decide where it's going.

"I am always surprised how many businesses write a business plan or proposal for investment and still don't really know where they want to take the business. Finance Tree doesn't pretend to answer all the questions but does act as a sounding board. It's done this for well over 1,000 businesses by providing a starting point on the road to growth and investment.

"This is an open invitation for others to make use of the resource and put aside the doom merchants for a while."

Perhaps you should take Jonathan up on that invitation?

Jonathan Gold is chief executive of Finance Tree

● For more information and course details visit www.financeandbusiness.biz or contact (0191) 230 6370

SUPPORT FOR THE REGION'S BUSINESSES

ONE North East is committed to supporting the region's small and medium-sized businesses and sees Finance Tree's Finance and Business programme as a practical way of delivering key training and advice.

Since its launch in 2007, the programme has received over £2.4m of investment from the Agency, and has provided over 1,100 SMEs with free classes covering a range of topics including 'Managing Money' and 'Funding Your Business Needs'.

Through this programme we aim

to reach out to as many small businesses as possible by providing two and three-tier levels of support – exploring key terms and concepts that are fundamental in helping businesses to grow and create new jobs.



By having a clear and sound knowledge of these platforms, business leaders will be better equipped to make the right choices, use cash efficiently and secure new investment."

Malcolm Page, Deputy chief executive of One North East

GETTING READY FOR INVESTMENT? ASK BIRT

THE Business Investment Readiness Tool (BIRT), developed by Finance Tree and funded by One North East, is an on-line application that helps entrepreneurs prepare and apply for external finance.

BIRT is ideal for businesses sourcing investment for the first time and guides you through a series of questionnaires and assessments to give you an insight into what investors will ask.

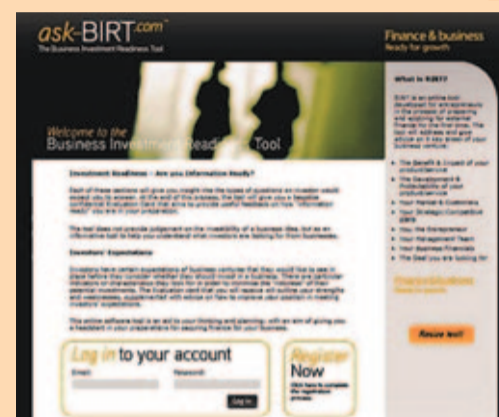
BIRT's developer Jennifer Kwok said: "The process ends with a detailed 30-page report that highlights the relative strengths and weaknesses in your business proposal. More

importantly, BIRT provides explanations and suggestions as to how you can improve your prospects for attracting investment.

"Finance can still be found despite the economic gloom, the key is ensuring your business is an attractive proposition to potential investors.

"If you can put the right proposition to the right people, you will get the money you need to grow."

Ask-BIRT now to give your business proposal the best possible chance of securing investment finance. Preparation is everything. www.ask-BIRT.com



ask-BIRT.com
The Business Investment Readiness Tool

Sowing the seeds for growth

AFTER more than 15 years as a member of Reg Vardy's finance team, Fiona Laughlin decided to go it alone in 2007 to set up FEL Accounts.

As a chartered accountant, Fiona knew her venture would offer accountancy services but admits she had no long-term vision for the business or how it would grow.

After attending Finance Tree's Managing Money course, Fiona was eager to learn more and booked on to the Growth Programme – extended sessions that take place over five two-day modules.

Workshops include planning for growth, building a management team, making money work harder and improving sales. The programme ends with a presentation of your adapted business plan to a panel of advisors.

The impact on Fiona has been dramatic.

"I knew I wanted to grow my business but I didn't know where I wanted to be or the steps to get there. From the first session, I realised the Growth Programme would help me answer those questions," said Fiona.

"My business manager noticed a huge transformation in me and my attitude to the business. The Growth Programme helped me realise I could achieve a lot more than I thought I could."

FEL Accounts now boasts more than 40 clients from one-man bands up to medium-sized corporate companies.

Fiona added: "Practically, the Growth Programme gave me the confidence to put up my prices because I realised I am much more than an accountant who files accounts and tax returns. Far too many



GOING IT ALONE Fiona Laughlin set up FEL Accounts in 2007.

accountants talk in gobbledey-gook but I like our clients to be educated and enlightened and understand everything involved in financial planning.

"The Growth Programme has helped identify a vision for my business and how I will get there."

Since completing the programme, FEL Accounts has shown impressive results while Fiona continues to meet up with her fellow graduates.

She said: "The participants were all from very different businesses with

different backgrounds, experiences and knowledge. It was very thought-provoking and extremely useful to have them there all asking questions, challenging each other and giving different perspectives.

"We have become mentors for each other, advising on where we might be able to help through our own networks.

"It is a brilliant sounding board for ideas but you have to be prepared to learn and take every opportunity that is given."