



DUCKETTS
 TRUSTED ADVISORS

March 2005 Newsletter

Beware the Ideas of March? That includes the Budget.



Crossing the geek line

This is the line that separates those who use IT from those who are its prisoner. Once upon a time, computers had their own floor, postmen delivered mail and the length of the cord determined how mobile a phone could be. Then came desktops, laptops, PDAs, blogs and online dating. The Geek Line has definitely blurred. However, as a rule of thumb, if you can explain the difference between Bluetooth and Blackberry you're on the way to crossing the line. If you clip any sort of communication device to your belt, there really is no way back.

Boil the ocean

This is one of those US-originating consulting terms that could easily be meaningless. Allegedly, it refers to the need to use all means and options available to get something done. The Consultant Debunking Unit (KDU) has done some calculations and concluded that every single person on earth would have to consult for 26 million years to actually "boil the ocean". Might be a bit quicker if they burnt the Global Warming Bonds first.

The phrase was popularised by Will Rogers, during the Second World War, as the answer to the U-boat threat. When pressed as to how, exactly, this might be achieved, he is supposed to have answered: "It's your job to work out the details!" True consulting speak.

Rabid Revenue buildings

Sparkle and I were recently involved in some fairly heated discussions with an Inspector. Once the action was over, Sparkle's empathy over-drive clicked in and she started to reminisce, with the Inspector, about particularly unpleasant Tax Offices she had been to. The Inspector (a Scotsman) then told us the story of the TO in Bootle. Construction had begun in the late 60s, but due to a 7 year strike by electricians, it had stood empty for a long time, eventually becoming infested with rats. The Revenue's answer (in the eco-friendly 70s) was to introduce cats to kill the rats. So then they had a plague of feral cats. The cats got fleas, and the fleas survived the removal (at what cost?) of the cats. The fleas found the incoming government servants to be particularly tasty and this was not a popular place to work. Eventually, somebody decided **the building itself was "sick" and it got blown up one weekend. What strange things you do learn in meetings with the Revenue.**

New image

For no apparent reason, we've changed our stationery. All comments to boyscout@chrisduckett.co.uk
I also hope that the New Girl starts on 1st April. To be checked out at the April BD event?

Seth Godin's blog

Blogging is the US-driven craze for putting random comment on the web. There is an element of self-absorption about the whole thing, but it can be entertaining. For example, Seth Godin's (writer and FastCompany contributor) comments on the reasons for having a website are clear and concise:

You only have four paths:

1. get someone to buy something right now
2. get someone to give you their email address so you can build a relationship
3. get someone to tell a friend
4. get someone to go to another page on your site.

That's it. Only four things worth doing. So, what are you trying to accomplish? (Hint: picking one works better than picking two, and picking more than two is silly.)

www.sethgodin.typepad.com

All returns to go electronic

After the online tax return filing debacle at the end of January, I am bemused to note that the government is targeting the filing of nearly everything online by 2007. Companies House has increased the Annual Return fee to £30pa for a paper copy, but left the electronic fee at £15. Of course, you can only file on line if you pay by credit card and security is still an issue.

Thanks to robust lobbying from Ms Sparkle, we've offered to file PAYE year-end returns on line for clients this year in order to obtain the refund, but big companies are obliged to do it this way.

The return will be rejected (and the company fined) if any of the NI numbers are wrong. How can you possibly tell, particularly if somebody has more than one (which is not uncommon)?

"Set up to fail" syndrome

By definition, if you have star performers in your organisation, then you must have some less-outstanding employees too. Such people are quaintly termed PWP's (perceived weaker performers). The average boss tends to let the star performers get on with it and keeps a close eye on the PWP's. This often makes the PWP's worse as they feel over-monitored and under-valued, resulting in a downward spiral of performance. They can't do right for doing wrong. Allegedly, the problem can be resolved by discussing the issue rationally, setting achievable goals etc. Or the PWP finds another job. www.set-up-to-fail.net Not that I speak from experience, you understand, but the Sage of Bishopswood's take on this is considerably more practical (in Managing Peak Performers). I have the text if required pwp@chrisduckett.co.uk

At last, a use for Economists

One of the more interesting features of the Global Warming issue is that it is unlikely to cause significant changes for some time, but we would need to spend money (lots of it) in the near future to be sure of avoiding the problem (if there is one). That's why it's hard to get Governments to do anything. To my surprise, the economists seem to have an answer; issue Global Warming Bonds which are redeemable from taxation in 50 years time. It's a bit like the Japanese idea of leaving your house to the kids complete with a mortgage on it. Can you imagine the fuss there will be in 50 years time when it turns out that the money got spent on something else?

IT corner

I've been reading various IT briefs telling me how memory on mobile phones is going to expand dramatically in 2005, leading to all sorts of hard-to-use applications. I still can't see how picking up e.mail on a mobile phone is going to help. I am, however, looking forward to "rich" phones, although I may have misunderstood the concept?

Microsoft is gradually moving towards world domination and has launched an accounting package within the Office Suite, much to Sage's annoyance. If only MS had bought TAS, all would be well in the IT world. Furthermore, MS has started to roll-out its subscription based version of Outlook. I assume this is the thin end of the wedge and, in due course, all MS software will be subscription based. Then you get to buy Excel & Word every year?

Employees are only supposed to use their PCs for business purposes, but it's a hard concept to enforce. However, new control systems allow everything done on a given PC to be replayed "like a video". Combined with retinal passwords, how will anybody get away with anything other than working appropriately? And will I have to place my order with Tesco myself?

The Da Vinci code

In a bid to stay in touch with popular culture, I've been reading (well, listening to) the Da Vinci Code by Dan Brown (www.danbrown.com). I was struck by the parallels with the accountancy profession. After all, we use a secret code that nobody understands (accounts) for no apparent benefit to anybody. Other features of the secret society:

- Clandestine links to Government (the Revenue)
- Bizarre language and symbols (can you tell a debit from a credit?)
- Chronic shortage of female members
- Uninspired uniform (blue suits)
- Handshake?

Any other suggestions to thebrotherhood@chrisduckett.co.uk

The Sunday Times – Best Companies to work for

The poll results came out last week and WL Gore won again. More interestingly, the small company section (still > 50 employees) was won by Pareto Law, a recruitment & training agency. Perhaps we can get the Boy Scout and Miss Sparkle playing "strip cold-calling"? It works for Pareto. Incidentally, the answer is the Marie Antoinette standby => "Let them eat cake". Employees speak particularly highly of firms that buy cakes on their birthdays. It makes people feel good about themselves and therefore about their workplace too. [Isn't this all a bit obvious?] The factors included in the survey were:

- Leadership – how good is the top dog?
- Wellbeing – what about stress, pressure and the work/life balance?
- Management – how good is your immediate boss?
- Team – is there one?
- Fair deal – pay and benefits
- Giving something back – support for charities etc
- Company values – does it have any and do you like them?
- Personal growth – is the job stretching and challenging?

It was also no great surprise to learn that small(er) companies are more fun to work for – largely because they are smaller and more immediate/intimate.

www.dti.gov.uk/bestpractice/assets/bcbp.pdf

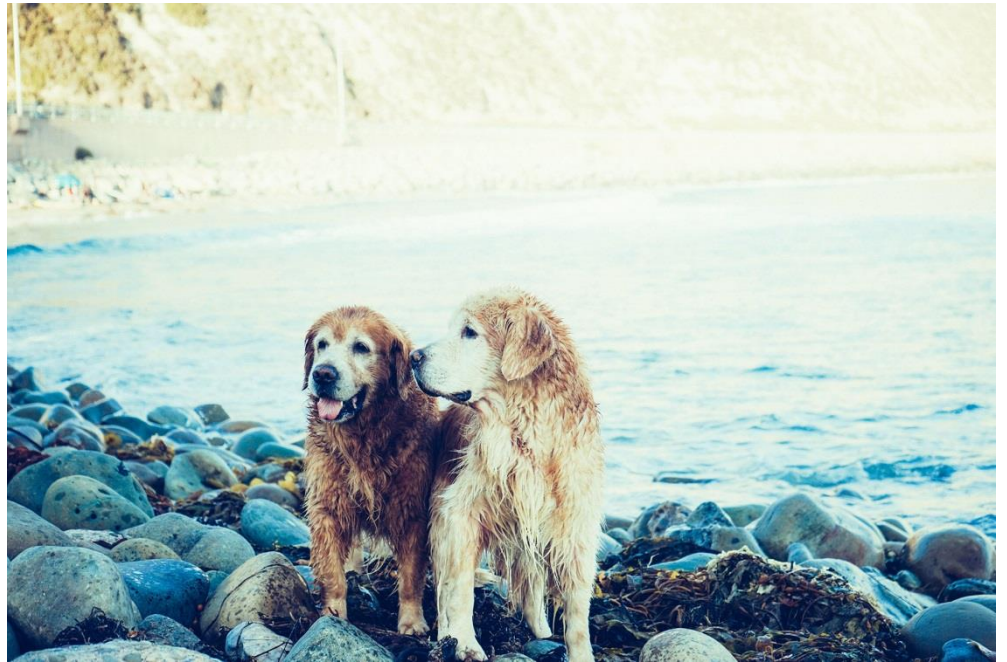
Disclaimer

If, at first, an idea doesn't sound absurd, there's no hope for it? Sounds like marketing?



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