

## ANGLIAN WATER

## Is your business 'thaw-ward' thinking?

Advice from Jonathan Clarke of Anglian Water Business

The temperature has noticeably dropped over past weeks and we all know that the deep winter chill is just around the corner.

You may have already given some thought to protecting the water pipes in your home over winter, but has your business done the same?

Interruptions caused by frozen, burst and leaking pipes can be hugely damaging to businesses, leading to costly repairs, higher bills and even loss of revenue.

Last December was the coldest for 100 years with prolonged periods of sub-zero temperatures causing widespread disruption to services and businesses in the East of England.

This year, long range forecasts are predicting yet another extremely cold winter just around the corner. This is why Anglian Water is urging all of its customers to be 'thaw-ard' thinking and take steps to prepare their businesses.

Much of the advice offered to businesses is the same as would be given to household customers.

While many of the water pipes serving commercial properties will be buried deep enough to avoid most of the cold weather, Anglian Water is advising you pay close attention to any exposed sections of pipe above ground, particularly where they are attached to external walls.

Here are some practical steps to make sure your business is ready for the cold weather, whenever it strikes:

**Insulate your pipes**, especially those in any ceiling spaces. Pipes can be protected using wool matting which is wrapped around pipes like a bandage, or ready-moulded lengths of insulation foam which can then be taped together to close any gaps.

**Stop draughts.** When buildings take a battering from cold air it can lead to frozen pipes on the inside. Wind can also increase the risk of freezing pipes as it penetrates air bricks, roof spaces and outbuildings.

**Don't forget the outbuildings.** Check the insulation and, if possible, isolate water supplies to outbuildings if they are not frequently used.

Make sure you know how to turn off the water supply to your buildings. This way if the worst happens, you can stop water damage and flooding from making a bad situation worse.



love every drop  
anglianwater

## The Ant Group

# It's time to crack on

John Hensley is managing director of hi-tech packaging specialists The Ant Group, at Claydon, Ipswich, which was named Business of the Year at the Anglian Business Awards 2011. He believes the future of the UK economy lies in engaging young people in manufacturing, as he tells SHELINE CLARKE

## New recruits

The Ant Group took on two young professionals as part of the Government's Apprenticeship Scheme and now John and his team are looking for more new recruits.

"We want two people who want to get into business and who want to make things happen," said John.

"There are lots of opportunities for 'can-do' people in these exciting times.

"I am passionate about giving young people opportunities because I remember what it was like. Back then the Prince's Trust gave me a chance and I felt that I was invested in and given access to advice and mentoring and I think as a business community we should invest in the next generation and give them a chance."

**ENTREPRENEUR:** Managing director of The Ant Group, John Hensley

JOHN Hensley is undoubtedly an extraordinary businessman and entrepreneur. He has grown the business he founded more than 20 years ago into a £7million enterprise which now has world-wide reach and four trading divisions, each involved in different aspects of supporting blue chip clients in the electronics, automotive and medical arenas. His customers now include industry giants from Marconi to Dell, Hewlett Packard and BMW.

Along the way he has seen lucrative markets disappear overnight but has been quick to seize other emerging opportunities; he's had a timely "leg-up" from the Princes Youth Business Trust and has embraced the development of the internet and other technologies as tools to grow internationally. His business in supplying emerging technologies with innovative packaging and other support, including clean room supplies, means his expertise is in the manufacturing environment, one which he believes should now become a prime focus of the UK's economic recovery. Now he is on a mission to support manufacturing in Europe and to encourage young

people to see the career opportunities in "making things".

His opinions are strong but delivered with good humour and the experience of someone who has got on with things, quietly and successfully.

"Education is the most fabulous thing you can get and it empowers us to learn about the world and how to play nicely, but, there has been too much focus on degrees which have become a carpet under which to sweep people and with no jobs at the end of it," he said.

"Horizons are expanded but at the end of the process there is no mechanism to fulfil it. I am one of Maggie's children; I have got on my bike and made things happen, we are fleet footed and respond to our customers' needs and the opportunities in the market. We need to wake up to the fact as a country we have relied too heavily on finance and banking and that there needs to be a return to manufacture in the UK and that is key.

"Degrees are fine but we need people to do the plumbing and work in agriculture and to make things. The most powerful economies in the world make things. So we need investment in factories, involved in the production of electricals and cars and then if we buy British that creates thousands of jobs; that's the way to develop the UK economy and invest in UK youth.

"But, we need to crack on otherwise others will take it away from us, so we need to do it now and do it ethically."

John's original company, Antistat, was formed in 1985 to service the needs of the defence and aerospace market. The end of the Cold War, however, came as something of a shock to the young entrepreneur who feared his business would not survive such a dramatic shift in not only the market but worldwide attitude to defence.

It was at this point that a chance meeting with a Prince's Trust adviser at an exhibition in Cardiff gave him the opportunity to

Education is the most fabulous thing you can get and it empowers us to learn about the world and how to play nicely



The Ant Group  
Anglian Business  
Awards Business of  
the Year 2011



**TOP TEAM:** The Ant Group directors, from left, Ron Tosh, John Hensley and Michele King. Right, Picking up the Business of the Year Award 2011, from left, Judge Tim Passmore, John Hensley, Stephanie Hensley, Ron Tosh and host John Humphrys, above, Harmless packaging

change direction and pursue blue chip electronics manufacturers.

"I was lucky that the Prince's Trust gave me a leg up," he says, reflecting on the low interest loan and gift funding he received.

"The Cold War had ended and we really didn't know if we could survive. But with that support we were able to switch to the electronics supply chain and that really was the key to our survival.

"Back then as a young entrepreneur I had no access to finance or credit history, the infrastructure wasn't there.

"The adviser who helped me never knew how much he did for me. He was way up the food chain and talking to me, just a kid, and he enabled me to engage and get that contract which was the difference between us being here or not."

Since then the business has diversified even further and now includes four divisions. Each has been developed or acquired to further meet the needs of existing customers or to fulfil a gap in the market. The group believes being fleet-footed has helped it remain ahead of the pack.

Back in 1995, for example, the world watched as the Kobe earthquake caused devastation in Japan causing substantial damage to the world's computer memory manufacturing centre and wiping out much of the memory stocks. John formed a company, Cygna, to respond to the needs of the marketplace, becoming an established supplier to Computercenter and quickly helping fill the void in their memory supply chain. Since then Cygna has provided fourth party maintenance to the computer maintenance market and has a huge network of suppliers and contacts worldwide.

As supply chain experts the Ant Group has also filled other niches. The Acupaq division,

for example, acquired in 2009 gave the customer base access to component handling and production consumables.

The Ant Group's fourth division, Cyberpac, and award-winner in its own right, is involved in innovative packaging solutions and has developed the environmentally-friendly Harmless packaging range, which includes biodegradable 'plastic' bags.

As an ambitious entrepreneur John has used emerging tools, such as the internet, in growing his businesses.

"When I started out, it was difficult to find out what was happening in the market, there was no internet and a flight to Germany to see a potential customer would cost you £700.

## I was lucky that the Prince's Trust gave me a leg up

"I would have needed a bank loan just to do that. The internet has revolutionised our business and has become an intrinsic part of our everyday lives. That and the advancement in other areas. These days you can get a parcel sent from here to Budapest to arrive tomorrow morning; 15 years ago that was like flying to the moon."

The Ant Group deals mainly with manufacturers in central Europe and has partners in Romania, Poland, Malta and Morocco, rather than China. While John travels a great deal, he also uses video conferencing and his trusty smart phone to keep him up to speed with all areas of the business. While he is away he knows the

■ **Antistat:** Experts in global purchasing and supply chain management. Experts in high-end technology led packaging solutions. Distribution centres in North America, Singapore, Malaysia and the Czech Republic, giving a global supply network, but headquartered in Ipswich.

■ **Cygna:** This company was formed after the 1995 Kobe earthquake to help breach a worldwide shortage of computer memory. Today it supplies computer parts, sub-assemblies and complete units to major IT service providers throughout Europe.

■ **Cyberpac:** Since its inception in 1998, Cyberpac has offered the design industry with exciting ideas for promotional and packaging projects. It diversified into sustainable packaging in 2009 with the launch of its Harmless packaging range, which includes biodegradable bags.

■ **Acupaq:** The Ant Group was acquired Acupaq in 2009 and gives clients access to full service component handling services. It also became an outlet for the patented 'peel pack' system for the component market.



business is in the safe hands of operations director Ron Tosh and Michele King, the group's finance director and the team who all share the company vision.

Moving manufacture to Europe has helped the company achieve a "massive" growth curve. The move has meant stock is not 'at sea' for months. For the immediate future John is opening a new office in Chicago to support emerging business with South America, which he describes as a "very exciting economy" and also has an eye on developments in Africa, where he believes manufacture is coming on line. As well as expanding geographically, the business is also looking for new sectors, and is keenly involved in developing new products for the life science technology. It really is all go.

After his incredible journey, John feels quite comfortable in offering advice to other entrepreneurs. As a young man, he says, he didn't always keep his eye on 'the numbers' which he now sees as key, particularly now that his business and many other deal in multiple currencies.

"Employ someone; get an accountant," he says. "Invest in technology and invest in people. There are some very clever people about and the combination is a key driver to success.

"Also, make sure that you offer good service and value for money. Be reliable. Do what you say you are going to do and do it well. People will pay for that and they will stay with you and that way you build relationships. Alongside all of that, be sure to invest in young people."

## OTLEY COLLEGE

# Be brave

By JOHN NICE of  
Otley College



The recent fly on the wall documentary called Educating Essex was an interesting watch.

For those who didn't see it, cameras were given complete access to a secondary school in Harlow.

Some of the results weren't pretty as truancy, fall outs, family troubles (and lots more besides), were laid bare for all to see.

Throughout all the hardship, the school stoically tackled the issues to help keep the ship afloat. And as a consequence came out of the programme with a great deal of credit.

Everyone who works in business can relate to having to constantly deal with the unexpected as demonstrated in Educating Essex.

That of course is part of the charm of working – not always knowing what is going to happen next.

(It can also be part of the frustration). But it unites us all as we have all experienced it, one way or another.

The school in Essex was certainly brave to allow such access – but you sometimes have to be brave in education and business.

We are finding that more and more people are taking a brave leap of faith by starting completely new career paths via the college.

This is partly because of enforced changes, but also because people are seeking a different choice of employment in an area in which they have a passion.

At our recent UCS Otley graduation ceremony, the honorary graduate, Simon Clegg, made that very point - emphasising the importance of working in an environment (and in a role) that excites and stimulates.

Many of our higher education graduates - who attended the November ceremony - had chosen to take a UCS Otley degree for that very reason.

But it is not just our graduates who take courses with us to change their career path.

I recently met a former student who left a healthy career working with a national charity to train with us for two years on a further education course. His countryside management company has been set up since he finished his course in this subject.

His business is now positively booming. Over the years I've met hundreds of people who started out at Otley before going on to be successful in business.

There is nothing more satisfying than discovering how their lives have been positively transformed through education.

If you are interested in a change of career, or adding a new string to your bow, visit our website [www.otleycollege.ac.uk](http://www.otleycollege.ac.uk) or give us a call 01473 785543.

