

this you would first need to set up a pilot operation as a dry run (and to show the feasibility to potential franchisees).

Also it may be cheaper (in terms of capital) but you will be sharing your potential profit with the franchisee as well as all your trade secrets (which you will have conveniently laid out for them to see in the franchise operations manual). And you will not have the day to day control that you have over direct employees. So it isn't easy, but it may well be worthwhile.

**+** **Over the years, I've developed business operations using a series of spreadsheets, which show a lot of duplication of tasks. I'm also worried that if there's a problem in one of these linked spreadsheets we may not know about it. In the current economic climate, we want to be as efficient as possible. What can we do?**

**TIM THOMAS-PETER** Managing Director of Triangle Software:

Efficiency is a great way to get your business healthy. Rather than looking for cost cutting, which may leave you restricted after the inevitable upturn in the economy, make sure that you are doing things the right way and that you're getting the most from your people.

If you improve your operations you can decide what you do with the increase in your capability. You could reduce your staff costs but still be in a position to do all the work you do now, or you could take on more work without having to increase your overheads.

Many businesses immediately cut their IT spending when times get tough, but the cost of software designed for your business is almost always much less than the payroll costs associated with staff carrying out repetitive manual processes or struggling with multiple spreadsheets that can be simply and efficiently replaced.

What's more, you only pay for the software once, while your staff costs go on year after year. You could also consider financing arrangements to give you the opportunity to spread the cost of your software over up to three years. This gives you the benefit of improved efficiency without the upfront expenditure – the payments usually attract tax relief as well.

A good bespoke software development company will take the time to learn how your company works, so you can be sure you get all the features you need in your daily workflow.

If you take the time and effort to do things well now, you'll be in a great position to thrive a year from now when

less focused companies are no longer around.

**+** **What do this year's changes in employment law mean?**

**DEBORAH HELY** Beachcroft LLP: At last it's time to wave goodbye to statutory dismissal and grievance procedures. Introduced in 2004, they were widely regarded as overly complex and unsuccessful so a radical overhaul was called for last year.

The result is that these procedures have been replaced with a new ACAS Code of Practice which took effect on 6 April 2009. It sets out procedural requirements and the basic standards of fairness on disciplinaries and grievances. As many of the key requirements are the same as the statutory procedures, employers may have to do little to adjust their procedures to comply with the Code.

The main difference is that the sanction of up to a 50% uplift in compensation for non-compliance has been removed. However, tribunals may still increase compensation by up to 25% if they unreasonably fail to follow the Code. Further, the procedures don't apply to redundancy dismissals, but it will remain essential that employers follow a fair procedure when handling redundancies.

Employers should consider providing appropriate training to line managers, as the Code makes it clear that employers are expected to ensure that managers understand what the rules and procedures are, where they can be found and how they can be used.

The Code promotes informal resolution, and managers should be encouraged to approach issues proactively and informally before escalating the issue to a formal level. To support this, ACAS will provide an enhanced helpline and mediation service aimed at resolving workplace disputes before litigation is commenced.

**DAVID WALTON** Gorvins: This represents the most significant of recent changes, however there are a number of other issues to note.

First of all, the Government extended the right of employees with parental responsibility to request flexible working. Prior to 6 April 2009, only parents with children up to the age of 6 could apply for flexible working, but this cut-off age has now been significantly increased to 17.

The Government estimates that this extended right will apply to an additional

**EXPERT PANEL**



**Helen Marsh**  
**Kippax Beaumont Lewis Solicitors**

01204 527777  
www.kbl.co.uk



**Sherree Schaefer**  
**Two Sixty Ltd**

07886 397205  
www.twosixty.co.uk



**Tracy Barlow**  
**24/7 Uptime Ltd**

0161 304 9991  
www.247uptime.co.uk



**Andy McNish**  
**Davis Blank Furniss**

0161 832 3304  
www.dbf-law.co.uk



**Tim Thomas-Peter**  
**Triangle Software**

01477 571940  
www.trianglesoftware.co.uk



**Deborah Hely**  
**Beachcroft LLP**

0161 934 3000  
www.beachcroft.co.uk



**David Walton**  
**Gorvins**

0161 930 5151  
www.gorvins.com

4.5 million employees and reflects a policy drive to try to enable working parents to balance their work arrangements with childcare commitments. The extended right is still limited to a right to request, as opposed to a right to require flexible working, however employers should note the extended right and ensure that they follow due procedure for dealing with any such requests that they receive.

Other changes include the final stepped increase of statutory paid holiday entitlement to 5.6 weeks per year, equivalent to the old 20 days plus 8 days public holidays for a full time worker, and there were also increases to the rates of statutory maternity pay and statutory sick pay.

Otherwise, something to look out for – the Government has also issued its Equality Bill, intended to combine all existing discrimination legislation. How this major piece of legislation will take effect will be known later this year. ■