

Sources of information, help and advice in the UK

The British Library Business and IP Centre (www.bl.uk/bipc)

The most comprehensive single source of information in the UK is the British Library Business and IP (Intellectual Property) Centre in London. The free Reader Pass gives you access to the Library's collection of over 150 million items – books, manuscripts, maps, newspapers, magazines, patents, prints and drawings, photographs and more. You can find images and sounds to aid in the creative process, technical literature to aid in scientific discovery and market information to help develop your competitive strategy. There is information on market size, trends, competition and target customers including hundreds of market research reports from companies such as Mintel, Datamonitor and Frost and Sullivan covering a huge variety of industries. They offer free online access to databases giving company, financial and industrial information such as Fame, Amadeus, OnSource, Lexis-Nexis and Dialog. The British Library also houses the most comprehensive collection of patent specifications in the world – currently over 50 million specifications from 40 countries – and provides access to the most up-to-date literature on patents, trademarks, designs and copyright, together with access to extensive online search tools. It even has an inspirational entrepreneurial role model events programme.

Business Link (www.businesslink.gov.uk)

Local advice and consultancy to start-ups and existing SMEs in the UK is offered through the Business Link network. Business Link is designed as a first-stop shop offering general advice on business as well as specialist advice on topics such as marketing, exports, innovation and product design. It also provides information on grants and subsidies available in local areas. Business Link has an excellent, practical website providing information, help, advice and links to other relevant sites.

Shell Livewire (www.shell-livewire.org)

Shell Livewire is the UK's largest on-line community of young entrepreneurs starting a business. As well as help and advice, it offers business awards, training courses and a social network

Chambers of Commerce (www.britishchambers.org.uk)

Once you have set up your business you might decide to join your local Chamber of Commerce, membership of which gives you access to certain support and services financed by membership fees. These are largely self-selecting, self-regulating groups although the British Chambers of Commerce have developed their own accreditation and quality assurance system for their members. The services provided by local Chambers vary enormously but generally they can provide you with information and advice cheaply and quickly. They generally attract a high proportion of local owner-managers and are therefore good places for local networking.

Trade associations

Many business sectors have trade associations, membership of which gives you access to certain support and services, As with Chambers, the services these associations provides vary enormously but generally they can provide you with information and advice cheaply and quickly. You can obtain lists of trade associations from www.britishservices.co.uk/associations.htm or www.is4profit.com/trade_associations.htm. Information on the services can be obtained from the website of the relevant trade association.

Banks

Many of the banks also provide free information and advice. For example, Barclays provides free Business Information Fact-sheets which give information on size of market, types of customers, competition, advertising, start-up costs, qualifications and legal matters relevant to particular fields of business. They also provide more general start-up information in the form of free booklets. Information on these services can be obtained from the website of the relevant bank.

Elsewhere on this website you can find websites offering practical, up-to-date help and advice, with hyperlinks.