



NEWS DIGEST SEPTEMBER '08

Annie Panton

Signs of the Times.....

At the end of a pretty poor Summer for everyone here in the UK, let's hope that the Autumn brings a little 'sunshine' into our lives!

Autumn will be greatly enhanced by the ARP Conference in an idyllic location at St. Hugh's College, Oxford. The programme will reflect the times we live in – concentrating on The State of the Industry

This said, I think the industry should be relieved that the current downturn in both the housing market (mentioned before in countless articles) and the economy, has not appeared to affect the traditional business of moving people in and out of the UK. My contacts tell me they are busy and that the lettings market has been mostly unaffected – except perhaps in some City centres where new apartments are lying idle – probably overpriced in terms of sensible rents. There is also little doubt that the UK still suffers from skills shortages in various professions, hence the incomers from all parts of the Globe.

Cost reduction though is likely to be the name of the game in the coming months and as I read somewhere recently, the masters of cost reduction will 'come into their own.' It said that suppliers will have to 'look out' as buyers cast an ever more sceptical eye on the prices being charged. However, it is important for all of us to make sure we are paid adequately for the time we spend sorting out some of the issues that face us – many not necessarily known about before we started to do the job!

I've done my usual random glance through a number of publications to draw to your attention and hope that by browsing yourselves (in between jobs) you will gain an insight into what's happening.

I noticed that the Environment Agency has merged its internal environmental management into HR, thereby growing a department whereas, in many organisations, the HR function has been outsourced to some extent. An interesting turn of events, I thought.

BP is changing tack on its flexible working policy – where people could work a 9 day fortnight – which I thought was a return to normality rather than a cut-back, in the current economic situation.

One article I read indicated that larger organisations will handle the economic downturn in better ways than their smaller rivals. This may also lead to mergers and acquisitions – something we are used to handling as it will usually mean more staff mobility, whether short or long term.

Look out for the CBI's forecasts during mid September as it may indicate recession as opposed to a downturn. But we live in hope that this won't happen.

On UK house prices generally, the Times today is quoting a 25-30% fall by the end of next year. The Times also asked the question 'Why would buyers rush into a falling market to save £1,750 (the stamp duty holiday) when, on current trends, they could



hope to save ten times as much if they waited a year?' It went on to suggest that the only sensible policy is to let the market find its own level. My sentiments too.

I also hear from our household goods colleagues that they are exceedingly busy with international moves but that the domestic market is flat on its face.

Another interesting piece I read in the Sunday Times a couple of weeks ago was describing the situation in terms of 'Brics' (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) investments. It claimed that soaring inflation in all 4 countries – and an element of instability - has encouraged another acronym to be preferred 'Mena' (Middle East & Africa) and that these countries – the oil-rich Middle East – and places in Africa like Morocco, Egypt and Nigeria will benefit because of low rates of inflation – hence more investment in these locations.

Another piece I read in The Week suggested that homeowners take better care of properties and neighbourhoods than renters do. They were commenting on 'transnational' citizens who have no loyalty to any city or country. It said globalisation had created legions of highly skilled workers who move from place to place, without ever putting down roots. The journalist cited one example of a guy who had moved from London to Washington to escape from what he called the British Capital's 'rootlessness.' He said that real social solidarity is generally found on a smaller scale.

We should take account of this, perhaps, and encourage the people we are moving into the UK to get involved with local cultural diversity and events to make them feel they are part of a community. We do try but perhaps we should try harder!

By the way, petrol prices are now coming down and I do recommend that you subscribe (free) to www.petrolprices.com who will advise you of the least expensive petrol within a 2 mile radius of your postcode. It can make a difference of at least 5p a litre on unleaded. Every little helps!

Finally, on a random note, The People Bulletin (on-line version) has some interesting comments about NLP – something I think we should consider using more extensively in our dealings with people we move.

So I hope I haven't given you, dear readers, the impression that all is gloom and doom – as I am sure we shall survive through any minor difficulties we may have at the moment and that the coming months/years will be as exciting as they have ever been.

See you at the Conference.

Annie