

Creditors and stock do need steady scrutiny

Cash flow

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RUNNING a sale or a promotion may seem like an easy way to bring in some extra cash for the business, but it may hide a bigger problem.

Financial management training consultant Birch Consulting Group says businesses sometimes do not pay enough attention to the amounts and the ways money is flowing in and out of the business.

"Businesses simply run out of cash and yet many managers and business owners are often too busy to give this important aspect of their business enough attention," Birch says. "The two primary areas in which most businesses tie up cash are receivables (the money owed to you by your customers) and inventories or stock."

The company says money tied up in these areas can be "dead" money as it is not working for the business.

But managing cash properly can help get through lean times.

Birch says knowing how quickly the business is paid and whether payment periods are met is somewhere to start. "Calculate your receivable days and compare to your payment terms and conditions,"

Birch says. "If your receivable days come to 90 days and your terms say 30 days you will most likely encounter cash flow problems."

Sending invoices promptly will also help smooth cash flow because the client will receive the invoice while the work done is still fresh in their minds and they are more likely to pay more quickly.

Birch says there are always clients who take advantage of slow invoicing which means a proper debt collection policy is vital as is the regular review of credit terms.

"If you do not chase, some clients will take advantage. Good customer relationships can play a big part but for the slow payers you may need to be persistent," it says.

"If your client has cash flow problems they will pay the noisiest first.

"Credit terms are not necessarily set in stone ... but ensure you inform your customers. Many of your key customers will have a specific date by which they need to receive your invoice in order to get it processed for payment in that month."

INS AND OUTS

- Do you have an objective for the management of receivables?
- Do you invoice promptly?
- Do you ensure that disputed items on invoices are cleared promptly?
- When did you last review your credit terms?
- What follow up of outstanding invoices do you undertake?
- Have you recently reviewed your management of inventory?
- How many days stock do you need to hold?
- How quickly you can get stock to fill an order if the stock isn't on hand?
- Are you holding one of everything or do you have a limited number of fast moving lines?
- How big is your warehouse?
- Are you holding any obsolete inventories?