

British Ambassador visits North East stand at Milia

For the third year running, the North East had a stand at one of the world's leading exhibitions in the new media sector, Milia 2001.

Such is the importance of the event that Britain's Ambassador to France, Sir Michael Jay, visited the stand and was guest of honour at a reception organised by the French Business Council.

Another special guest at the reception was Sénateur Pierre Lafitte, who founded Sophia Antipolis 30 years ago (now Europe's largest science and technology park).

Both guests praised the FBC's initiatives in the knowledge and technology based sectors and agreed that today, competition between European regions is being replaced by cooperation and relationships which bring long-term benefits to both sides.

One of the companies present on the stand was no newcomer to Milia. Leighton has been to the

The North East stand at Milia 2001



Left to right: John Dobie (Grierson's), John Campbell (BT UK Markets), Sir Michael Jay, Emmanuelle Deplanche (FBC), Andrew Robinson (FBC), Tracy Codner (Virtual Reality Centre)

exhibition with the FBC for the last three years. James Bunting said "It was useful to spend some time examining the technologies that people are using, and in some instances it was very satisfying to see how far ahead we are of other companies. From a business point of view, we received a vast number of enquiries for 4Projects.com, our online project management tool, and we had a number of very useful meetings surrounding this. Since our return to the UK, it looks as though those meetings have resulted in four very hot leads that we are now in the process of following up. All in all it was such a positive event that we will probably look at returning next year."

A Newcastle company, Grierson's, used Milia to promote its total IT solutions for business. John Dobie was impressed by the huge range of technologies on show at Milia. "Milia is a good opportunity to form relationships with complementary businesses both in Europe and in the rest of the world. There is an absolute need for SMEs in the North East to come to Milia and develop relationships and partnerships with companies here."

The other members of the region's delegation also gave very positive feedback. They included the Virtual Reality Centre, BT UK Markets, the Centre for Electronic Commerce, Digital Media Network, One NorthEast, Newcastle City Council, Twedco and the Universities of Teesside and Northumbria.

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TME's French connection

by Ron Stroud, Managing Director TME Ltd.

Total Maintenance and Engineering Ltd. (TME) is a small engineering company specialising in maintenance of factory machinery. It has a turnover of between £1.0 and £1.2 million per annum. Our workforce has an average age of 53.

We first employed a French mechanic in December 1996, when a young Frenchman called Gérard Vial walked into our reception to ask for a job. He could not speak a word of English, and though he brought an interpreter with him, the interpreter was unable to speak fluently. My reaction to this was "What on earth have we got here?" – but I gave Gérard the job.

It was an excellent decision. Gérard, from the beginning, showed a high level of skill, and he could not talk to anyone, so he just got on with his work.

Our workforce tried to teach him English – a difficult task for Geordies. He was taught to put the word 'like' at the end of every sentence, and he learnt such phrases as "Oi Marra, Hoi that hammar awer 'ere like!" or, "The toon had a canny game last nite like."

Gérard struggled with imperial units, so he had difficulty with American drawings. One of his greatest achievements was converting US gallons to imperial gallons to litres. (TME are going to start using litres soon.) Gérard stayed with us for over 2 years, but when he left to go to Ireland, he was replaced by Alex Débrec. Alex also showed exceptional skill. This was also noticed by our customers, when Gérard was with us our customers often asked for him, when Alex joined, the customers still asked for 'the Frenchman'. Alex stayed for a year before returning to France, he could speak English quite well when he arrived, but left with a good knowledge of Geordie.

After Alex, we employed our current French national Yann Dubos. Again we found our customers asking for Yann and we realised that there must be something in the French apprentice training system. All of our French mechanics, they were all around 21 years of age, had a higher and broader skill base than our own young men.

We have also had other French personnel at our works. We have had two apprentices and a young undergraduate, who did some marketing work for us. We hope we have helped them in their future careers.

As a result, TME are now, backed by the DTI, sponsoring 2 employees to go to France this summer, to find out how apprentices are trained in France. It is worrying that our customers want to use our French personnel ahead of our local people, so we must find out why French training is better than ours. If necessary, to ensure we turn out the best tradesmen, TME will join the French system. We



TME's
Managing
Director
Ron Stroud

cannot afford to fall behind international standards any longer. We are failing our apprentices if we do not bring them up to these standards.

In order to send our employees to France I need to phone people in France. For a non French-speaking Brit this is difficult! I have had some good conversations with French answering machines – I have learnt the word for Star. If you don't understand this, try phoning BT and imagine listening to that in a foreign language.

Speaking to French secretaries is also interesting. Most do not speak English, but will try. When asked if I am American, I answer yes – it is much easier. I have also been asked if I am German or even English. I have never tried to explain I was born in Ireland. However, the French secretary is generally very helpful eventually saying, "un moment à bientôt" – I have no idea what this means – but following this statement someone arrives who speaks a little English.

The internet does not make things any easier, to get an E-mail address from a Frenchman over the phone is difficult, even English-speaking Frenchmen have difficulty with underscore, backslash, forwardslash, ampersand etc.

There has been plenty of personal satisfaction in working with these young people from France. They all keep in touch with TME and we were pleased to receive an E-mail from Phom, our undergraduate, who informed us she is to be wed in April.

I have learnt a few French words during the past four years, the main phrase being "C'est possible". When talking to France this phrase comes up time and time again. Very often everything becomes possible, all I have to do is try.

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case study

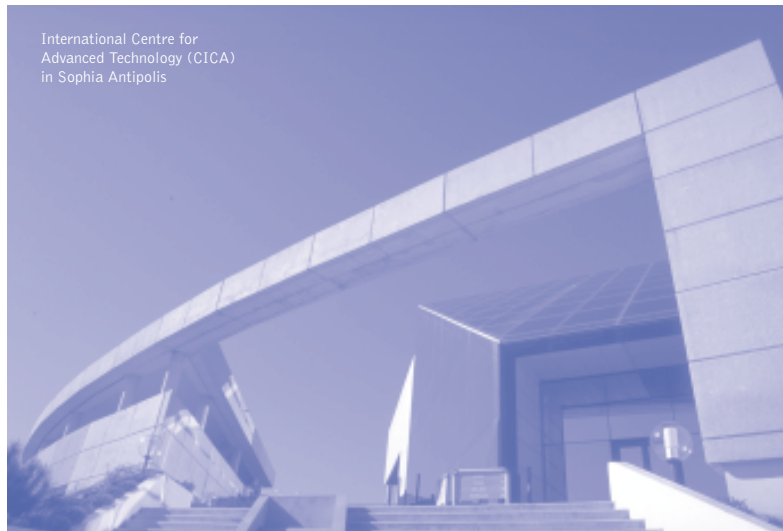


There are 8.7 million cats and 8.1 million dogs in France. The average annual spending on a dog is 2500F and 700F on a cat.

Four out of five French people have lunch at home every day of the week. 84% of French families have dinner together.

Hamburgers only represent 1% of food consumed by young French people aged between 15 and 24.

Club Sophia UK: a step ahead



International Centre for
Advanced Technology (CICA)
in Sophia Antipolis

Club Sophia UK, the new international knowledge network piloted by the French Business Council, took advantage of the North East delegation's presence at Milia 2001 to organise a visit to Sophia Antipolis. Estelle Chatard, Club Sophia UK Project Manager, reports on the success of the trip.

The visit to Milia 2001 in Cannes created an opportunity for the delegation to discover Sophia Antipolis and to meet the business community of Europe's largest science and technology park.

The first part of the visit consisted of a presentation and a guided tour of the park which allowed Club Sophia UK's members to appreciate the tremendous resources and potential available in Sophia. Tracey Pitt, from the Centre for Electronic Commerce (Sunderland University) agrees: "With Sophia Antipolis and Club Sophia UK, there is a big opportunity to open new areas to companies in the region, having seen what is available in the global market."

One of Club Sophia UK's main partners in the park, Club Sophia Start-Up (Fondation Sophia Antipolis), organises monthly meetings, gathering business managers, investors and business support organisations. In February, the theme of the meeting – "Anglo-French collaboration" – was specially selected for our visit.

The companies in the delegation had the chance to present their products and services before a room of two hundred people. John Dobie, managing director of Grierson's Ltd – a software development house currently specialising in the legal market – said: "I am very optimistic that the contacts I have made in Sophia will be beneficial to my business".

The University of Northumbria and CERAM (one of France's leading business schools located in Sophia Antipolis) also presented their proposal for a joint MSc in International Project Management and announced their agreement to launch this new course in September 2002. According to Dr Oisín MacNamara (Head of Regional and European Office) "it will be a major strategic development for Northumbria and marks an early success for Club Sophia UK acting as transnational network".

The meeting was held in the International Centre for Advanced Communications (CICA), a business centre hosting more than eighty IT and Life Sciences SMEs. Club Sophia UK is proud to announce that it will shortly welcome the CICA as a new member.

Christian Cabrol (Commercial Manager of SAEM – management of the park) concluded, "it is the proven dynamism of the business and universities representatives of the North East that are really attractive to us in the partnership".

It is in this climate of success that Club Sophia UK's members are now working to organise the next events.

E.C.

Le Bourget Airshow - June 2001

If you would like to join the visit to Le Bourget Airshow in June, please contact Emmanuelle Deplanche on 0191 284 2213 or emmanuelle@frenchbusinesscouncil.co.uk


clubsophiauk



For more information on what Club Sophia UK can do for your organisation contact:

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The most common French surname is Martin (followed by Bernard, Thomas, Richard and Robert).

The French visit the doctor 7.2 times a year, the British 6 times and the German 12 times.

The average doctor's consultation time is 14 minutes in France, 9 minutes in Germany and 8 minutes in Britain.

Crossing the Channel the easy way

Companies looking to access the French market were given a helping hand recently when they attended a seminar at RTC North.

"Crossing the Channel – the easy way" provided a comprehensive introduction to working with French companies and attracted many representatives from local industry. The half-day event was organised by the Innovation Relay Centre North, with support from the French Business Council and the joint ventures initiative, Venteuro.

Presentations from both industry and business support covered a wide range of topics. Ron Stroud, managing director of Ryton based TME, described his experiences of placing French apprentices in his company (see the case study overleaf). RTC North's Barbara Allen focused on the services of the Innovation

Relay Centre and some of the Anglo-French initiatives that are under way, while Carole Wright of the North East Chamber of Commerce covered the Languages for Export campaign as well as travel and translation grants available to North East companies.

The French Business Council was well represented. Estelle Chatard dealt with Club Sophia UK and Andrew Robinson and Aurélie Liraud gave an overview of the services offered by the FBC.

The legal challenges that could be encountered when working with a French company were addressed by Mary Anne Macharg of Robert Muckle

Solicitors. Also represented at the event were the Euro Info Centre and Interprise 2001.

Feedback from the participants was extremely positive, with delegates describing the seminar as: "very useful" and "an excellent seminar which highlighted useful marketing and networking opportunities".

Barbara Allen, Anglo-French co-ordinator at RTC North, who organised the event, said: "It is encouraging that so many local companies are showing an interest in accessing the French market and this seminar means that they are now in a better position to take advantage of the wide range of support services on offer in the North East."

For further information on forthcoming RTC events with a focus on France, please call Barbara Allen on 0191 516 4400 or e-mail: barbara.allen@rtcnorth.co.uk



Multi-sector trade mission to Lyon

Five North East SMEs have signed up for a mission to Lyon organised by the French Business Council from 2 to 6 April 2001. The generalist mission aims to help regional SMEs to develop contacts and trade with the Lyon area, the second largest industrial centre in France after Paris.

The British Consulate in Lyon and the local development agency ADERLY are the FBC's local partners who will help make the visit a success. Business meetings are being pre-arranged with suitable companies for all participating organisations, which include: The Regional Centre for Innovation in Engineering Design, Diffusion Textiles, Loblite, Oberlin Filter and Ford Component.

For further information about the mission or the Lyon region, contact Emmanuelle Deplanche on 0191 284 2213 or emmanuelle@frenchbusinesscouncil.co.uk

Last word...

*Dear Colleagues and Friends,
Today is my last day at the French Business Council, as I am leaving the North East to go back to France.*

I would like to thank you all for the wonderful moments I have spent in the North East of England for more than a year. I will keep excellent memories of this region where I found people extremely friendly and the quality of life very good.

More than anything, my professional experience at the FBC has been very rewarding. It has been a pleasure to work at the service of North East SMEs and with all business support services in the region and in London. I hope that my contribution was helpful and enabled companies to grow their business. I am confident that the dynamism of the North East will continue to grow and that further business opportunities will develop between this region and France.

I will return to the North East in few years time. In the meantime I will keep in my mind and my heart good memories of the Geordies, the Angel of the North and the Millennium Bridge.

*Best of luck for the future to you all.
Aurélie Liraud, FBC Manager, 28.2.2001*



... new beginnings

We thank Aurélie for a contribution which was indeed more than helpful, and wish her all the best in her new life and career in Paris. Emmanuelle Deplanche is the FBC's newly promoted Project Manager. Her responsibilities include the day-to-day running of the FBC, the organisation of missions and events, and general assistance to SMEs who wish to trade with France.