

Telehaus Wetter: Tele-Service in Rural Areas: SME Case 20

Overview

The restructuring of commerce, industry, administration and the craft trade over the last few years has led to workforce bottlenecks, particularly during peak-times. Companies are therefore forced to outsource certain tasks to external service providers. Telehaus Wetter takes advantage of this situation and offers office services to companies and offers relief in the area of customer care. The wide range of services also available from Telehaus Wetter includes marketing, software development and consultancy as well as training courses. Customer growth enabled the launch of two satellite offices in Marburg-Cappel and Marburg-Stadtwald.

Practice

One aim of the project, which was supported by the Hessian State Government during the first two years, was and still is to create secure workplaces for women in rural areas close to their homes which allow them to combine work and family. All 16 women employees of Telehaus Wetter are employed full-time, part-time work is possible if requested.

The service range offered by Telehaus is aimed mainly at small and middle-sized companies. Services include a phone answering service for entrepreneurs who are unable to afford a secretary's office, are travelling a lot and pay attention to a representative impression. The Telehaus employee answers the phone using the company name and is able to forward the call by ISDN irrespective of the location of the customer.

The two branches in Marburg offer a special office service used by engineers' and architects' offices as well as import/export merchants located nearby. The branches of Telehaus handle all conventional secretarial tasks such as the making of appointments, the writing of tenders and the recording of data; they even attend personally to customers.

Further services offered by Telehaus cover areas of marketing, graphic design and of layout service. This includes mailing campaigns and telephone customer services, creation and administration of mailing lists, as well as the design of letterheads, logos, presentation overheads, brochures and posters. One further core area of the service office is consultancy for the acquisition of hard and software components, the design of computer networks and the networking of spatially distanced PCs (ISDN consultancy and installation). Another field of activity is the creation of interactive demo versions of programs. The service range of Telehaus Wetter is rounded off by training courses for women and girls as well as companies and associations (computer courses, accounting, CV writing and interview training).

Experience

Telehaus Wetter offers the opportunity to strengthen the rural economic structure by creating qualified jobs incorporating new technologies for women at close proximity to their homes. At the same time a range of attractive office services for small and middle-sized companies is provided.

After initial difficulties with the introduction of hard and software there were no further obstacles for the employees of Telehaus Wetter in carrying out telework. The women very much appreciate the short commuting distance from home to work as this allows them more time with their families and for looking after their children. So far approx. 40 women have participated in the project on a contract basis. More than 80% were able to find long term employment afterwards, many of them in management positions.

The marketing sector in particular has developed well in recent times. While companies in conurbations discovered this service relatively early for themselves, customers from Wetter approached the company some time later.

Customers taking advantage of the services offered by Telehaus gain a whole range of advantages. It is possible to use the service by demand, for example during peak-times. Customers who outsource tasks are able to concentrate on their core tasks. At the same time they can save on personnel expenses, material and acquisitions costs (for example for fax, photocopier, PC and so forth).