

■ When The Herald was invited to attend one of Germany’s biggest trade shows, Business Editor **WILLIAM TELFORD** learned the country, and host city Leipzig, were keen to attract Plymouth companies in 2017..

German trade show keen to invite Plymouth firms



ENTERPRISE VALUE: Left, Dr Ilona Buergel is working with with Holcuren and, right, Patrick Jager with Oliver Scholz and Anne Tesch from Solean



THE organisers of one of Germany’s biggest business conferences are looking to attract Plymouth firms in 2017.

The Herald was invited to the huge day-long MUT (Mittelständischer Unternehmertag) trade show in the East German city of Leipzig.

The event is aimed at SMEs and attracted about 4,000 business leaders from across Germany, plus 120 exhibitors, to the massive Leipzig Congress Centre.

The show is now in its 12th year and is already among the top 10 such events in Germany – out of 250 staged annually.

But ambitious organisers aren’t content to stop there – they want to be number one in Germany and reach out internationally too.

The 2016 MUT attracted firms from across Germany, and even welcomed a delegation of 33 large companies from China.

And MUT bosses told Herald Business it wants to welcome firms and delegates from the UK and Plymouth.

Businesses from Leipzig visited the Devon Business Show, at Plymouth Pavilions, in 2015 and 2016, and the two nations and cities now have the opportunity to strengthen bonds before the UK makes its Brexit from the European Union.

Frank Leibmann, who runs Leipzig public relations business Leibmann PR, promoted the MUT and said: “When we started the first MUT 12 years ago it was regional, now it’s international.

“We have a plan for the next 10 years, which is to grow. But it’s growing faster than we have planned. We want to be the biggest congress for SMEs in Germany. We have firms here today from Dresden and Berlin, but want to spread even wider.

“When we get better connections with Plymouth and the UK it’s another step for us being international.”

Alexander Lohse, managing director of BVMW, the firm running the MUT business show, said the event continues to grow every year, mirroring the expanding economies of Germany and Leipzig.

But he said: “The UK has not sent people, I don’t know why. We visited the business show in Plymouth. But let’s do a launch for UK companies, like we did this year for the Chinese delegation.”

Martin Buhl-Wagner, chief executive of Leipziger Messe, which staged the MUT, said the show attracts companies to Saxony and Leipzig.

“It creates a platform to communicate,” he said. “This congress is special for the region and one of the biggest in Germany. It shows Leipzig is an open city, a welcoming city.”

Dr Ilona Buergel, a psychologist working with confectioners Holcuren on how chocolate can energise staff and prevent sickness, said: “This event is for (SMEs), and if you are a mid-sized company and have a lot of people off you can substitute, but for smaller firms its important everyone can perform.”

Patrick Jager, an IT expert with Leipzig’s process improvement firm Solean, said: “MUT puts us in touch with others, every important company has a stand here.”



CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE: The huge day-long MUT trade show attracted about 4,000 business leaders from across Germany, plus 120 exhibitors

‘The UK was brave but stupid to vote to leave the European Union’

THE UK was “brave” but “stupid” to vote to leave the European Union, according to German business leaders.

When The Herald attended the huge MUT (Mittelständischer Unternehmertag) trade conference in Leipzig it found businesses were stunned by the June 23 referendum decision.

Some bosses still hope the UK will “come to its senses” and remain in the EU.

Some called the Brexit decision “stupid” saying the UK profited from being an EU member.

But there was also an admiration for voters who had the “balls” to tick the leave box and exit a union which has its “dark side”.

Michael Korner, managing director of Invest Region Leipzig, the organisation tasked with bringing business into the East German city, said: “It was a big surprise, and a big disappointment, but a lot of people think the British had ‘balls’ to vote this way, because the EU has a dark side.

“But Germany leads the European process and Germany, France and the UK are the winners of the EU. It doesn’t matter if they provided the most income, they

profited the most from the construct.

“But I’m convinced the UK economy will be strong enough to survive without the EU.”

Matthias Feige, international business manager at Industrie und Handelskammer zu Leipzig (IHK), the Leipzig chamber of commerce, also said the vote was a shock and said: “I was in London days before the referendum and convinced Brexit would not happen.”

He said German businesses felt the same and added: “No companies contacted us for information or asked what it meant for them.”

But he stressed this could be because the effects of a British exit from the EU are still unknown and said German firms still hope the UK will remain part of the EU, or at least in the single market.

“Mainly they want the UK to stay in the EU,” he said. “Business wants the easiest way to make business and any change would lead to more difficulties. They want a much agreement as possible that things will not change, that it would be like being in the single market, and not to establish new barriers.”

Frank Leibmann, who runs

Leipzig public relations business Leibmann PR, believes UK-German trade will continue after Brexit and said: “The heads of companies will speak together before and after Brexit. The pound may be high or low but we have interesting products and a market for them so let’s make trade.

“But I was surprised by the vote. Until the last minute I thought the UK would not be stupid and think about what is better.

“So we were surprised, sure, but two weeks later most of the Britons were surprised too and wondered what they had done.

“I hope that after this situation German people think 100 times about such a step, such as going outside the EU, the eurozone or NATO.”

Patrick Jager, an IT expert with Leipzig’s process improvement firm Solean, said German firms have “frozen” their investment in the UK, and now growing businesses may bypass the country entirely.

“They are waiting to see what will happen,” he said. “Normally we see the next step is the UK, but maybe now it’s another way, another country.”



OPINIONS: Top, Frank Leibmann, and, bottom, Michael Korner

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Landlords are making a costly technical error

INVESTMENT in property has seen an explosion in popularity over the past decade as a result of a sustained period of historically low interest rates. Last year private rentals funded by buy-to-let mortgages accounted for a fifth of the value of UK residential properties overall.

However, in the light of changes to tax reliefs for residential landlords, more and more landlords are looking to cash in their investments.

Landlords need to recover possession of rented residential properties for a variety reasons. Many see the process of bringing the tenancy to an end as relatively straightforward, simply giving the tenant two months’ ‘Notice to Quit’.

While it is possible to gain possession of a property quite easily, landlords must follow the correct rules and procedures.

Under Section 21 of the Housing Act 1988 tenants can be given two months’ notice to leave the property. Landlords do not need to give any reason for wanting to end the tenancy and nor do they need to show that any breach of tenancy has occurred.

As a result, if the documentation is correct this can be one of the easiest ways to bring a tenancy to an end.

However, since new obligations were introduced on October 1, 2015, we have seen a rise in the number of landlords or agents who have made a simple, but potentially very costly, technical error – either in the process of serving the notice or in setting up the tenancy in the first place.

In either case this could render their notice invalid, presenting them with a real problem when they want to regain possession of the property.

One of the most commonly encountered issues relates to deposits. Where a deposit is taken, a landlord must protect it in a Government-approved deposit scheme and must also give the tenant information about how their deposit is protected within 30 days of the deposit being taken.

If either of these requirements has not been met or is done outside the specified timeframe, the tenant cannot be given a valid ‘Notice to Quit’. In that situation, the landlord must return the deposit to the tenant before the notice can be served.

This not only causes delay in securing possession of the property but also leaves the landlord in a vulnerable position and exposed to a fine of up to three times the original deposit amount.

For tenancies starting after October 1, 2015, a specific form of ‘Notice to Quit’ now needs to be used, which cannot be served unless the tenant has been given an Energy Performance Certificate, a copy of the Gas Safety Certificate and info about their rights and obligations as a tenant.

For further advice on complying with your landlord obligations or assistance with seeking possession of your property, please contact Nicola Mitchell-Rodd of Wolferstans on 01752 292278 or nmitchell-rodd@wolferstans.com who will be happy to assist with all landlord and tenant-related matters.