

need to have to succeed,' he said. 'I'm through local farm shops. Firms were working together more, Epstein added. 'Collaboration between businesses working on tenders or joint projects together, for the benefit of both firms is becoming more common.' Key trends likely to emerge and develop in 2010 and over the long term include the growth of home businesses fuelled by rapid development in technology. As well as



**COMPANY** directors who misuse Revenue & Customs' tax deferral scheme to stave off insolvency could

find themselves made personally liable for a firm's debts. Commercial law firm EMTW Picton Howell has warned that directors who apply for the 'time to pay' scheme, under which firms are allowed to defer tax payments, but who do so solely to keep companies afloat, could be found guilty of wrongful trading and face disqualification.

Since the scheme was introduced in 2008 more than 220,000 companies have reached agreements with Revenue & Customs, but there are concerns that 'significant' numbers of businesses are using the scheme to continue trading even though they are no longer viable.

EMTW spokesman Damon Watt says: 'Given the precarious state of the public finances, Revenue & Customs is likely to clamp down hard on directors misusing its time to pay scheme to rack up more debts and delay the inevitable.'

► **SMALL** businesses are missing out on more than £1 billion in possible VAT 'reclaims' because of poor expense practices. According to fuelGenie, a business fuel card run by IT services provider Atos Origin, 60 per cent of small expenses claims by employees of small firms are for petrol, yet one in four fuel expenses claims are submitted without a receipt. This means the employer cannot reclaim VAT on money paid out.

through local farm shops. 'It helps us and it helps the range they have available,' she says. 'I'm hoping to work with companies who send vegetables next.'

And Fiona is looking to expand in 2010. 'I want to expand and grow,' she says. 'The alternative is to stagnate.'

► *For more, go to thisismoney.co.uk/sme.*

Company won the everywoman Ambassador of the Year award.

Diahane Rhiney, founder of the IS Degrees marketing agency in Chigwell, Essex, took the award for the most inspirational businesswoman in the 36 to 49 age bracket.

Diahane, 37, who has

been recognised by my peers and so many strong female entrepreneurs is a huge compliment,' she said.

For more on the awards, which are sponsored by Financial Mail go to thisismoney.co.uk/everywoman.

**HELEN LOVELESS**

# A family firm cracks the secret of survival

By **DAVID WHITE**

WE may be in the middle of a recession but we're going to have fun this Christmas, at least according to family-owned firm Swanlex, which has sold 26.6 million crackers, up 21 per cent on last year.

'People appear determined to have a good time this Christmas because the economic downturn has meant a tough year,' says managing director, David Byk, 42, the third generation of his fam-

ily to run the business, which was founded in 1892.

But the firm also works hard to ensure there is year-round demand for its products, three-quarters of which is not Christmas related.

The business supplies paper napkins and other disposable tableware to retailers including Sainsbury's, John

Lewis, Harrods and Homebase, as well as fast-food outlets and hotels. It makes 3.7 billion napkins a year.

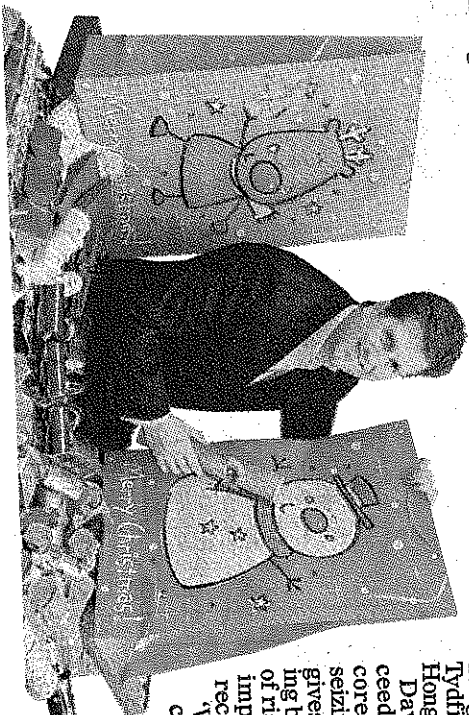
Developing overseas markets to boost sales and growth is part of its strategy for beating the economic downturn.

'We export to about 25 countries, with France and Holland the biggest markets,' says David, who employs 250 at a factory and head office in Swanley, Kent, a plant and design centre near Merthyr Tydfil, Mid Glamorgan, and a Hong Kong showroom.

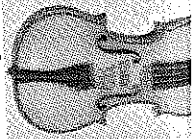
David says the firm succeeds by concentrating on core production skills and seizing opportunities. But he gives a warning against chasing business without thought of risk. 'Debt control is more important than ever in a recession,' he says.

'We carry out detailed credit checks before accepting orders to reduce the risk of non-payment.'

**CORE SKILLS:** David Byk of Swanlex



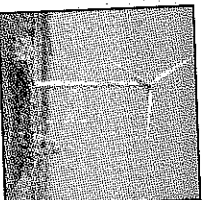
The danger is that we may end up with figures suggesting every kid in Bristol plays the violin and speaks three languages. Other town halls will want to know the secret.'



THE think-tank Reform last week published Core Business, a paper calling for schools better to serve the needs of society and the economy. Gadfly is emulated by Reform to flag up its findings. The second paragraph appears, bizarrely, in the language of Homer (no, not Simpson). All Greek, we fear, to today's kids.

## Receiver is not a mere sabre rattler

TO Bloomsbury in central London and the headquarters of the Insolvency Service. Imagine our delight to discover, in a display cabinet in reception, the ceremonial uniform of the senior official receiver. Cutaway coat, cocked hat and buckled shoes. We hear that current boss Les Cramp has actually donned the outfit. Dressed down Commons speaker John Bercow take note. Did we mention that the uniform includes a sword? Dodgey directors, be afraid.



WHO says the art-tocracy likes environmentalism because it owns so much of the environment? The Duke of Northumberland has 100,000 acres but is unrelaxed about wind farms. In a rare public utterance, His Grace says turbines are 'ugly, noisy and completely out of place in our beautiful, historic landscape.' That's a No, then?