

Focus – David Jinks/Editor Blog

This might sound like a naive question, but where have all the jobs gone? I know we're in the teeth of a recession, but we're still making some stuff and, if my experience last Sunday at Milton Keynes is anything to go by (it took me nearly an hour to find a parking space!) we're still buying with gusto if it's cheap.

Yet take a look in journals, on web sites or even on your notice board at work, and I bet you'll see a marked decline in advertised jobs.

It's a question I posed yesterday to the Directors of BiS Henderson. Who? I hear you cry. Top recruitment specialists George Henderson and BiS have joined forces, which if you are involved in logistics HR and recruitment is the equivalent of First and Stagecoach or DHL and Wincanton merging!

The answer it seems is consolidation. When, for example, DHL merged with Exel there were duplications in staffing and DCs.

Ironically, BiS Henderson director Larry Woelk, who is a keen supporter of environmental initiatives, points out that the drive to sustainable transport has also impacted on jobs. By eliminating wasteful empty running and increasing cooperation in sharing loads and even DCs, a lot of the fat in logistics has been trimmed. Good for the economy, good for profits; but knocking a few more jobs out of the market.

Consolidation is the name of the game at the moment. BA has just announced it wants to get into bed with Quantas. It is already looking at getting into bed with American Airlines and Iberia. No wonder it's the world's favourite airline, it's dead easy to get into bed.

Behind the scenes there's a close financial link between two of the UK's key rail operators; while Stobart, for example, has been very acquisitive lately - even buying airports.

Is all this consolidation a good thing? Will it reduce further the number of jobs? Are customers happy with the DHLisation of logistics? Larry thinks new opportunities may open up for smaller dedicated logistics providers to fill the niche gaps. In fact, some very big shippers are using very small providers. They claim the extra cost they may pay is more than made up with a more efficient supply chain.

Of course some mergers are long planned and give obvious synergies (Larry points out that discussions between George Henderson and BiS started very early this year, long before the credit crunch hit!). Cullina and Wincanton's chilled business spring to mind. But when Daimler (Mercedes Benz) merged with Chrysler it opened a can of financial worms that have left now de-merged Chrysler with a fair few problems (think asteroid heading for earth and no Bruce Willis).

When you do see a rare tempting opportunity do you go for it in this climate? DSG International (Currys and PCWorld to us) are reporting some gloomy trading news. Would you rush into taking a logistics job with them? BiS Henderson has just filled a key post for them. They say there's a big difference between such a well financed group and, say, Woolworths. It's all about knowing the business.

Stagecoach has just announced good profits, but in the same breath has also said it has to shed jobs, primarily in its rail operations.

I guess it's not good enough to be just logisticians and passenger transport professionals any more. To get the best jobs we also have to have a fair amount of business nous. Attend a national, regional or forum event, or your local CILT Group meet, and it's fascinating the industry gossip you'll glean if you are in the job market!