

Valuation Office Agency

27 October 2009

EMPLOYING A BUSINESS RATES ADVISOR?

EAST OF ENGLAND BUSINESSES URGED TO MAKE THE RIGHT CHOICE

The Valuation Office Agency (VOA) has today issued a fact sheet to help ensure businesses are not caught out by 'professionals', who offer help to reduce business rates bills but end up charging more in fees than they've saved. Some less scrupulous rating agents even claim to be working on behalf of the VOA to confuse business owners and drum up trade under false pretences.

The VOA is sending out new business rates valuations this month, which businesses should check to ensure that all the details are correct, as this will form the basis for next year's rates bills. This is straightforward and can be done with or without professional help. A website is available, www.voa.gov.uk/2010, offering help for time-pressed business owners.

The VOA has teamed up with the professional bodies that represent rating agents and surveyors, including the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), to produce the fact sheet. It explains why new valuations have been sent, what services are available and how to avoid being caught out. The idea is to ensure that ratepayers can make an informed choice when employing a rating agent.

The VOA's customer services manager, Andy Booth, says:

"Businesses have a choice to employ an expert to check the details of the valuation we send them, and see where savings might be made. There are many agents who offer a very useful, value for money service. Some others, however, don't and we're often made aware of ratepayers paying for a service that offers them absolutely no benefit."

Blake Penfold, Chairman of the RICS' Business Rates and Local Taxation Policy Panel, said:

"Unfortunately, there are some companies that are opportunists, taking advantage of business owners who may not have a solid understanding of how their property is valued for business rates or how their bill is calculated. Our members can offer this sort of advice and we're keen to ensure that ratepayers have the information they need to make an informed choice, not a mistake."

Ratepayers are advised to:

- Beware of the 'hard sell' of telesales or doorstep sales people and ask searching questions before signing anything
- Understand the terms of any contract offered before signing it and be aware that there may be terms which commit them to a period of service
- Find out if the agent is able and willing to put them in touch with satisfied clients

- Be suspicious of any agent who claims to be able to get a big reduction in their business rates valuation without inspecting their property or asking to see their accounts
- Check the credentials and identification of any agent who claims to be a member of the VOA or one of the professional rating bodies.

For more information please contact:

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Notes to editors:

- The VOA is responsible for valuing all business and non-domestic property in England and Wales for the purpose of business rates. Local councils use the VOA's valuations to calculate business rate bills.
- The fact sheet is available from www.voa.gov.uk/2010 and from the websites of the professional bodies
- The main bodies representing rating professionals in the UK are:
 - Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) - www.rics.org - 020 7222 7000
 - Institute of Revenues Rating and Valuation (IRRV) - www.irrv.org.uk - 020 7831 3505
 - The Rating Surveyors' Association (RSA) - www.ratingsurveyorsassociation.org
- The RICS helpline offers 30 minutes free advice with a qualified practitioner - 0870 333 1600.
- **video footage of small businesses in Cambridge and Norwich talking about business rates is available from COI News & PR or clicking on <http://www.newspr.coionline.tv/VOA/regional/eastvox.mov>**

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