

Britvic drinks to ongoing growth

ROBINSONS squash firm Britvic yesterday said its full-year performance would beat expectations, but warned of continued troubles in its Irish business.

Britvic reported group year-on-year sales growth of 5.9% in the third quarter from 6.3% in the first half of the year, with the drag coming from its recession-hit division in Ireland.

But the Chelmsford-based company said it had seen "particularly strong trading" in the period, helped by its British and international arms.

Chief executive Paul Moody said: "While Ireland continues to be a very challenging environment, with no signs of improvement in the macro-economic conditions affecting the soft drinks market, our GB/International business in contrast continues to perform very strongly.

"As a result, the board now anticipate the full-year outcome is likely to be ahead of the peak of current market expectations."

Britvic said it had brought forward its trading report in light of its strong performance in the quarter to June 30.

British and international sales in the quarter grew 11.6%, with revenues from UK still drinks increasing 8.3%, and carbonates up 14.4%.

BA workers oppose plan

MORE British Airways workers have rejected the airline's plans to axe thousands of jobs and freeze pay, it was revealed yesterday ahead of BA's AGM.

The GMB union, which represents thousands of BA staff including baggage handlers and check-in workers, said its members had opposed plans to make huge cost savings.

The workers were instead backing union proposals, which will be put forward when talks resume later this week.

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Holiday isle seen as haven to combat credit crunch

Alarms couple target ex-pats for expansion

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A BID to beat the recession has extended one small firm's reach from Merseyside to the Mediterranean.

Crosby Intruder Alarms has established an operation on the holiday isle of Cyprus, which is home to thousands of ex-pats and British holiday home owners.

Husband and wife team Roy and Ann Williams hope to achieve turnover of £200,000 in their first year of trading on the island, compared with revenues of £500,000 in Liverpool.

Mr Williams said: "We have established ourselves in Peyia, in the Paphos region. There are some 10,000 ex-pats in this area alone."

And work in neighbouring Ayia Napa and Larnaca has seen staffing grow from one to three.

Mr Williams said: "Our British competition mostly consisted of ex-police officers who had retired to the sun and were fitting alarms for something to do."

The firm provides intruder alarms and CCTV systems that can be accessed and remotely controlled from the UK by phone or the internet.

Such home automation systems, offering control of anything from lights to central heating, are also proving popular in high-value UK



Venturing into the overseas market - Roy and Ann Williams, of Crosby Intruder Alarms

developments, he revealed. The firm has established links with a London property developer which specialises in £1m-plus properties.

Mr Williams said: "These do not seem to be affected by the credit crunch.

"We have just completed a house in Wentworth, Surrey, that's on the market for £11m and we have a second development on the go, with more in the pipeline."

The average price of a home

automation system in high value properties is around £10,000.

In addition, the firm has just completed a fire alarm system for a hotel at Loch Lomond, Scotland, and will shortly install a CCTV system there.

Mr Williams said the contracts are the fruits of hard work: "We have found that you can't afford to stand still.

"You have to go looking for the work and you certainly can't afford to be complacent - if you

are, you will go under. So many places are laying people off at present, through not being proactive.

"You need to keep in touch with existing customers. Too many companies give incentives to generate new customers. I agree with this, but what about your existing clients?"

"You need to look after them as well. If you look after them, they will come back time and time again."

You can't afford to stand still

Availability and security key as Aimes wins three-year contract

AIMES Grid Services has won a three-year contract to provide IT disaster recovery services to Liverpool-based training and consultancy provider, Sysco Group.

Technology firm Aimes provides secure server hosting, data back-up and disaster recovery services from its base at Liverpool Innovation Park.

The deal with Sysco will see Aimes deliver a real-time replication and "failover" service - which means if Sysco's on-site servers fail, virtual servers within Aimes's data centre automatically take over, ensuring there is no interruption in service for Sysco's clients and staff.

Sysco is a provider of Government-funded training schemes such as Train to Gain, and is required to maintain and store large amounts of personal data on individuals.

Ian Smith, managing director at Sysco Group, said this means systems availability and data security are key priorities.

"Like most firms, the amount of data we store digitally is growing both in terms of volume and importance," he said. "Information has become as critical to our business as cash is and so protecting it is no longer just a technical issue, but a business one.

"The disaster recovery service that we receive from

Aimes mitigates the risk of any downtime or data loss, and ensures that we are complying with legal requirements."

Richard Spragg, technical director at Aimes, said: "Real-time data replication and failover is widely regarded as the Rolls-Royce of disaster recovery solutions, which is why it's the choice of so many blue-chip companies.

"Traditionally, it's come with a premium price tag, though, which has kept it out of reach of many smaller businesses. Aimes's investment in local digital infrastructure is changing the business model for this type of service and is making it accessible to SMEs."

House prices still falling in region

HOUSE prices in the North West are continuing to fall, despite a nationwide improvement in the annual rate of decline, official figures have shown.

Prices in the region have dropped by 11.7% during the past year, while most of the UK has witnessed a slight improvement in the rate of price falls, according to the Department of Communities and Local Government.

It was one of three areas of the UK - London and Northern

Ireland being the others - that did not see an improvement in the rate of falls.

Meanwhile, the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) said a low level of properties on the market, combined with increasing buyer inquiries, was providing a platform for a number of "modest price increases".

But it warned that there was unlikely to be a sustained recovery in the housing market until mortgage lending increased.