



Dagens Næringsliv (Life Style Section) Friday 19 November 2004

Purchase of services from person assistants is growing in London. Megler Scott Troxel considers that lifestyle services replace the old fashioned servant.

Long working days and increased focus on quality time have sent thousands of Englishmen right into the lap of firms which take over the organising of tasks within private life. The America trend of private services is spreading around Europe, and if one believes in the consultants it is no longer outrageous to have either cleaning help or other outsiders who carry out private errands.

When I worked in the City myself, my biggest problem was not to get into the hottest clubs. I needed someone who would pop to the post office for me and renew my parking permit, says Claire Brynteson.

She started the company Buy:time two years ago, and she has specialised in helping people with irritating small jobs which never get done. For 400 Kroner an hour she posts letters, finds Christmas presents, and chooses new curtains for customers.

Our customers are people who work a lot, and who wish to use their time outside the office on things which are pleasurable. A washing machine which leaks or an insurance claim are not top of that list, says Brynteson, who can show a customer base which is growing.

The local community is changing. Earlier one could ask one's mother to let a workman in, or get a neighbour to look after the children. People move more and many do not have a stable social network. We do many of the tasks that previously we did not need to concern ourselves over, she says.

Be dependent. Brynteson's firm operates as a personal assistant who can be used as little or as much as the customer wishes. Buy:time has the key to the client's home, and often the task to be performed is banal but time consuming.

We have a network of people we rely on, who we can use for our clients. To find a responsible, available, and good plumber is a difficult task in London. We have done it many times now, and have a large network of people we use for different tasks.

When customers come to Buy:time for the first time, Brynteson asks them to go through all the areas in which they need help.

People are welcome to come to us with a special project. When it is completed, and they see how we work, the threshold to use us again is lower. A typical customer has a list over things to do which are quite simple and which they hand over to us, says Brynteson.

Most of the tasks which her firm carries out are those which require that the customer is physically present at a place, rather than being in the office.

The concept "Lifestyle management" comes from the idea around what the Concierges in the finer hotels do for the hotel's guests. This service was picked up early on by Credit Card companies, who offer services on different levels depending on the colour of the card. American Express launched with its black Centurion Card a service which promises to help customers with "all" their needs in connection with travel, shopping and entertainment.

Fringe benefit. The Concierge company TenUK was started in 1998 and was amongst the first in Europe which delivered this type of service. Now it provides the service for several of

the larger credit card companies, while around 25 per cent of its client base are private individuals.

Most of the customers come via large companies, which has bought a common membership for employees which is an important fringe benefit in addition to the annual aroma therapy, says business development executive Sarah Hornbuckle in TenUK.

Membership costs from NOK 600 a month up to several thousand, dependent on an individual's needs-

Do you experience ever that a customer is embarrassed to ask for help?

No, completely the opposite. Those who use us, are typically proud to have cleaning help. That says something about how successful one is in terms of career, when one can buy oneself free from boring home tasks, says Hornbuckle, and adds that the customer base is equally men and women.