

Competitive horizons

Brexit fears for food supply chain in UK

A survey conducted by the Food and Drink Federation and other trade bodies has revealed growing concern in the wake of Brexit among firms operating in the UK's food supply chain. Farms, food processors, supermarkets, and restaurants use a considerable number of European Union (EU) workers who are considering their future in the face of growing uncertainty about their continued entitlement to work in Britain. The report, as published by www.uk.reuters.com, points out that some companies have already seen EU staff leave. Around two million EU nationals currently work in the UK, with a fifth being employed in the food and drink sector. Of the 672 firms surveyed, 36 per cent stated that access to EU workers is important if their business is to remain viable. According to the report, any significant disruption to the industry is also likely to have implications for the price and availability of food in the UK.

How firms can capitalize on consumer concerns about sustainability

Growing consumer engagement with sustainability provides considerable scope for business organizations. Purchase decisions of many consumers are driven by emotions and can prompt them to strongly favor companies that support environmental and social causes. When company and consumer are passionate about the same causes, the emotional connection becomes even stronger. Charitable donations and other gestures are ways in which firms can indicate their backing. Informing the public about the causes the business supports and why is another smart move. Entertainment through videos is an effective way of getting the message across. Social media is obviously a valuable option in this respect as it is a proven mechanism for targeting like-minded individuals. It is also a good policy to stay informed about current concerns. Organizations can then use this awareness to market products that can provide sustainable solutions to the issues. Positive responses become likelier still if sustainable products also result in savings for the consumer.

China looks toward more enhanced automation

An article published by www.chinadaily.com.cn reports that China is intensifying its efforts to enhance capabilities in robotics and artificial intelligence (AI). Integration in areas that also include additional technologies like big data will help the country's aims to further automate its society. Developments can additionally facilitate significant upgrades to manufacturing plants and become a key driver of economic growth in China. Education, health care, and entertainment are among the sectors showing a greater demand for automation. Scope for development has prompted the government to launch a \$147.9bn investment plan to create an AI core industry by 2030. It is hoped that related businesses worth up to ten times the initial investment could be generated because of the plan. The report notes that such ambition is part of China's goal of becoming an industry leader in AI. Domestic sales in robotics are predicted to increase to \$6.28bn in 2017 as the country strives to meet rising competition from overseas firms.

A positive way to deal with employee mistakes

Employee errors are often met with rebuke or even threats of dismissal in some cases. However, such responses often only serve to exacerbate the problem, a report published by www.industryweek.com claims. People should be held accountable, but creating a climate of fear and uncertainty is not the answer. Employees would not perform to the best of their abilities when they are concerned about possible punishments. Instead, the report suggests that managers should adopt a positive approach that incorporates three steps. In the first instance, it is ideal to praise the employee for some aspect of his or her contribution in terms of attitude or performance. Doing this unreservedly is important. Starting the interview in such a way can make the employee perceive the process as reasonable. Following this, the manager should point out where the individual has come up short but emphasize that failure is a collective responsibility. The key here is not to apportion blame or embarrass the person involved. Finally, it can pay to invite suggestions from the employee as to what alternative courses of action could have been taken. Give them time to consider and arrange a follow-up meeting to discuss the issue further. Managers who respond positively when mistakes are made can be rewarded with workers who are better focused and enhanced performance at individual, team, and organizational levels.