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STEPHEN TIMMS LAUNCHES SIXTH ANNUAL DTI / INTERFORUM E-COMMERCE AWARDS

Now in its sixth consecutive year, www.ecommerce-awards.co.uk has a prize fund of over £200,000 to reward business excellence in UK enterprises

07 April 2004: Stephen Timms, Minister of State for Energy, E-Commerce and Postal Services, will, on 7th April, be launching the sixth annual DTI / InterForum E-Commerce Awards, sponsored by the Royal Bank of Scotland Group. Since their inception in 1999, the DTI / InterForum E-Commerce Awards have been recognising and rewarding innovation in the application of information and communication technologies to improve the business performance of small and medium sized enterprises in the UK. On 6th October 2004, the overall national winner stands to receive a total prize of £40,000 in cash!

UK businesses are making more sophisticated use of ICT than ever before – a fact to which the E-Commerce Awards have been a witness over the duration of the Awards programme. Since their inception, the Awards have received over 6,500 entries, with year-on-year entry numbers growing at an average rate of 50%. In addition, the criteria for entry have become ever more competitive. From the first year in which 'innovative use of the fax' was a category, the Awards now have categories for, among others, 'best use of broadband', 'teleworking' and 'advanced supply chain'.

The Awards are a joint initiative between the Department of Trade and Industry and not-for-profit campaign group InterForum and are being sponsored nationally for the sixth consecutive year by the Royal Bank of Scotland Group.

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Speaking at the launch of the 2004 E-Commerce Awards, Stephen Timms commented, "The E-Commerce Awards are the opportunity to showcase best practice in the innovative and effective use of e-commerce among UK organisations that are using ICT to improve efficiency, productivity and competitiveness as part of their overall business strategy."

"Once again the Awards have been enhanced and adapted to reflect the changing abilities and needs of UK businesses through the introduction of categories for teleworking and rural businesses. With entries growing year-on-year both in terms of quantity and quality, I look forward to seeing the range and quality of this year's applicants."

Phil Flaxton, Chief Executive of InterForum, commented, "Over 6,500 companies have entered the DTI/InterForum E-Commerce Awards since their inception in 1999 and InterForum's members have raised more than £2.5 million to support the development of the programme during this time. With the DTI's continued backing, these awards go from strength to strength."

The Awards are open to any UK business with up to 250 employees which would like the opportunity to win a slice of the total £214,000 cash prize fund available. They are run on a regional and national level and recognise areas in which organisations can demonstrate business transformation: e-business start-ups, e-trading, e-business, best use of broadband communications and, new this year, best use of teleworking.

Andy Ross, Director of E-Commerce for the Royal Bank of Scotland Group, explains, "E-commerce is vital to the overall competitiveness of both the UK economy and individual businesses within it. Businesses large and small can benefit from new technology to improve all aspects of their business, such as process efficiency, cost management and marketing."

The overall National winner will receive a top prize of £30,000 plus £8,000 for being either a National category winner or National Innovation Award winner. Each regional award winner will receive £2,000. Confirmation of all dates, times, judging guidelines and entry criteria can be found on www.ecommerce-awards.co.uk.

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Building on the successful launch last year of the new innovation categories - the National Innovation Awards - this year's Awards will continue to reward those businesses which can demonstrate business excellence in: use of mobile & wireless technology, advanced supply chain integration, and, also new this year, best rural e-business. Each Innovation Category winner will be presented with an £8,000 cash prize, awarded at a national level.

Regional winners of the awards will be selected during 12 heats across the UK, including England, Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland, with local awards events taking place in September. Regional winners then go forward into judging for the national finals. The 2004 E-Commerce Awards will culminate six months' from launch at the national final and Gala Dinner to be held at Grosvenor House Hotel in London on 6th October.

Applications for free entry will be through an online form at the web site www.ecommerce-awards.co.uk. In addition companies can be nominated online.

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Notes to Editors:

1. www.interforum.org is a not-for-profit organisation that helps British companies to conduct their business electronically. All of InterForum's activities are governed by the need to raise awareness of the many business opportunities and challenges presented by new Internet, information and communications technologies. InterForum works to ensure that education, legislation and technology are in place to help British businesses to profit from the digital economy. For further information on InterForum please visit its website <http://www.interforum.org>
2. The DTI drives our ambition of 'prosperity for all' by working to create the best environment for business success in the UK. We help people and companies become more productive by promoting enterprise, innovation and creativity. We champion UK businesses at home and abroad. We invest heavily in world-class science and technology. We protect the right of working people and consumers. And we stand up for fair and open markets in the UK, Europe and the world.

For further information on InterForum, please contact:

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