

Business Link steers Norfolk Entrepreneur to book success



The passion of Norfolk-based entrepreneur Vanessa Phillips has not only resulted in her business, OutSec, becoming the largest British online secretarial service in the UK since starting out in 1999, but she is now featured as one of the 'real women' who succeed in business in a book entitled 'Inspiring Women' written by Michelle Rosenberg and published by Crimson Publishing.

The book features 26 inspiring profiles, written from interviews with the businesswomen behind some of the UK's best known brands, including Christian Rucker of the White Company, Sahar Hashemi of Coffee Republic, and Vanessa Phillips of OutSec.

Vanessa is a true entrepreneur and has worked with Business Link from the outset to take her business forward. She left school at 16 and completed a secretarial course. She worked her way up in banking into Eurobond Sales and after 10 years of working in the City she met her husband, also a banker by profession. The choice of marriage and children resulted in a move to Norfolk but, whilst this was a challenge in itself, she still felt the need to achieve. Ironically housework and changing nappies inspired her to think of something that she could do 'from the kitchen table'.

A eureka moment struck Vanessa when she read an article on Broadband and the then 'new' digital technology, including digital recorders. Immediately, she saw the potential to develop an online digital typing service, superior to cassette audio tapes, that would enable clients to outsource their typing needs more quickly and efficiently than ever before. Additionally following numerous business awards, particularly for File Manager, an FTP programme that has gone on to be hailed as unique in the market, and clients' unprecedented enthusiasm for the service following the rollout of Broadband, she foresaw that this industry had huge potential.

Although Vanessa had a lot of high level business experience she knew she needed to seek support in setting up on her own. It was

then that she first turned to Business Link.

"Our Business Link Adviser, Peter Mulhall was a very welcome asset to OutSec in its first few years. His regular visits and meetings around the kitchen table with the directors were always of benefit as well as being hugely enjoyable" said Vanessa.

As OutSec grew at a vast rate, Peter continued to work with the business. "These days I still use Peter as a sounding board" said Vanessa. "Getting an independent view of our business is incredibly valuable and Peter quickly grasped the dynamics of OutSec and understood how and why it worked probably better than any other outside advisor".

She continued: "He would suggest, hint, encourage and lead the conversation in such a way that his words were listened to and invariably heeded. His opinion was often sought when decisions regarding future company strategy were involved and his impartial calm approach frequently diffused heated discussions. A debt of gratitude is owed to Peter and Business Link for steering OutSec through the muddy and turbulent waters of a new business start-up and helping it grow into a bigger and better company".

Business Link supports new and established businesses in Norfolk and Suffolk with any business issues. A range of workshops from developing a business idea through to growing a business are available free of charge. This is supported by an Information and Intelligence Centre that can answer any business questions, whether general, specific or technical and one-to-one business advice from Advisers like Peter, who work with businesses to analyse their needs and then recommend a selection of approved suppliers who can help.

Entrepreneurs wanting to explore working for themselves and existing businesses looking for support should contact Business Link on 08457 17 16 15 or visit www.businesslink.gov.uk/east.

