

TINA WOOLLARD launched her innovative Virtual Assistant company in 2001 as a sole-trading home-based business, serving small-to-medium sized clients.

Having gone from strength to strength, her company has expanded and while she works long hours, she says she loves the freedom of working for herself.

Tina tells us how she started her business and developed it into the successful force it is today.

After working as a PA for various companies for many years and being praised for my efficiency, time management and enthusiasm I decided after thinking long and hard to start my own secretarial business from home.

Armed with the name, TMW Secretarial Services I registered with the Inland Revenue, sought advice from Business Link, created stationery and a website. I advertised like mad looking for free advertising where I could and networked till I dropped!

To my delight was called by a company only a stones throw from my home, who were looking for a part-time outsourced secretary. I attended a meeting, carried out sample copy typing work and they took me on evenings and weekends covering their overflow work.

More than 3 years later still work for this company and several others for whom I work regularly. Good relationships and high standards have rewarded me with a good stream of referrals.

My husband joined the company as a Partner in April 2004 and the same month we became VAT registered albeit voluntarily.

In May this year we were audited and achieved BS EN ISO 9001 : 2000 accreditation for the provision of general, special and virtual secretarial office services. There are only three percent of the UK business population to be awarded this prestigious accreditation and we are very proud.

Thanks to this success, I have been able to add another to my bow. An online copy typing and digital audio transcription website. In April this year, Tesla Typing! went 'live' and in August we branched out to corporate clients.

I've further gone on to create a VA directory website www.va-directory.com for secretarial/clerical/pa/administrative virtual assistants to advertise themselves and for potential employers of their services to be pointed in the right direction for a VA to suit their needs etc.

Last year we were nominated and selected for the Regional DTI / Interforum E-commerce Awards 2005.

I never thought when I started my little business that one 'originally sole trader' VA could grow and gain so much in such a short amount of time.

I hope our success is evidence to anyone thinking of starting their own business that it really is achievable. With the correct research, advice, hard work, determination and lots of networking anyone can achieve .

Be progressive, proactive, don't try running before you can walk and enjoy working for yourself; once you've freed yourself from the restraints of employed existence, you will never want to go back !

Be under no illusions though - it can be a hard slog trying to gain your first client, but if you keep your standards high and never stop promoting your business you can go far!

How the FSB helps



MEMBER

Tina joined the FSB in 2001 at the same time as setting up her business to enable her to maximise her networking opportunities and take advantage of the benefits such as free legal helpline and cover against tax investigations.

Since then Tina has come to understand the role the FSB plays in lobbying on behalf of small businesses both locally and nationally.

Last year Tina received support from the local branch of the FSB in an attempt to improve local postal services to her business. Tina was receiving irregular deliveries from the sorting office which was having an impact on the services she provided to her clients.

Tina says the FSB contacted Royal Mail on my behalf which was a great help to me.

I had neither the background knowledge on mail delivery contracts nor the time to be corresponding with Royal Mail.

Nationally, the FSB continues to campaign on behalf of all small business on issues such as red tape and business crime