

GROWING TALENT

Advances in technology that enable flexible working are key to creating business opportunities, as garden designer Alice Bowe demonstrates

Two years ago I was drawing all my garden designs by hand, but as my business expanded, so did the need for technology to support it. When coming up with the initial garden designs, drawing is still my most important creative tool. But now I use computer-aided design and a host of other technologies to allow me to cope with the growing demand from customers and to turn that sketch into a finished garden.

By working out which technologies suit my needs, my business has gone from strength to strength. I was thrilled to be one of the winners of BT's Essence of the Entrepreneur 2006, which recognised the way I use technology to provide customers with inexpensive garden designs.

Technology brings financial rewards

Without technology, I couldn't run a profitable business. I have BT Business Total Broadband in the office and it is especially useful for my Garden Design By Post service – a low cost service for those on a budget, such as first-time buyers. Customers fill in a questionnaire online and upload photos of their gardens. Through broadband I can easily access services such as Google Earth and Ordnance Survey maps to get photographic footage of the garden. It cuts out the need for me to visit the site, which saves the customer money.

It's not just my postal business that benefits from technology. My bespoke garden design

commissions take me all over the country so it's important that I can take my office with me. My mobile and laptop go everywhere and I'm a big fan of BT Openzone hotspots. I can stop at a coffee shop or petrol station and get online securely – which is great if I have to view photos from a project, sort out a problem or amend designs and surveys on the move.

I have to be flexible, the nature of my work demands it. Customers often want me to visit in the evening or at weekends and I need to be available for them – but the technology means I'm efficient and it cuts out downtime too.

Achieving success

My three golden rules for running a successful business would be – first, never forget the personal touch; you must be available and approachable for your customers. Next, don't become complacent; constantly improve your product or service. And lastly, find a balance between work and play. Stop work at a fixed time each day, even if you don't want to. ■

COMPANY PROFILE

Company: Alice Bowe

Website: www.alicebowe.co.uk

Set up: 1 January 2005

Locations: Nottingham and London

Turnover: has trebled in the last year

Technology: BT Business Total

Broadband, BT Openzone

PHOTOGRAPHY: PEROU



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Alice Bowe, artist and garden designer

2007 awards: get your entry in now

The 2007 BT Essence of the Entrepreneur awards are now open, so to be in with the chance of winning an exclusive portrait photograph by one of the world's most respected photographers, Perou, make sure you enter soon.

WHAT ARE THE JUDGES LOOKING FOR?

It's now your chance to enter BT's Essence of the Entrepreneur 2007, a campaign to find the UK's 20 best entrepreneurs and celebrate the achievements of small businesses that are embracing technology to meet their business needs. Photographs of the winners, shot by Perou, will be exhibited at gallery@oxo on London's South Bank later this year.

HOW CAN I ENTER?

Businesses must submit their entries by 20 July 2007. They must be privately owned, employ fewer than 75 people and show that technology has played an essential part in their success. Full details of how to enter, along with terms and conditions, can be found by visiting btbroadbandoffice.com/entrepreneur