

Former advertising executive and PR consultant Philippa Pearson turned a passion for gardening into a flourishing business. For advice on how best to nurture and direct the growth of her businesses, Philippa asked Business Link.

Award-winning gardener finds fertile ground for business growth by harvesting expert advice

Former advertising executive Philippa Pearson turned her interest in gardening into a thriving 'horticultural' PR practice when she returned to work after having a family. Then, out of passion rather than for professional advancement, she gradually acquired a string of horticultural qualifications. Gradually, Philippa found she was spending more time designing gardens than running media campaigns. And so her garden design business, simply called 'Philippa Pearson', took root.

"I first started work as an advertising executive working mainly on clients in the fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector, becoming an account manager before I left work to have a family," explains Philippa. "So when it was time for me to start work again, a freelance marketing career seemed the ideal option, combining flexibility for my family life with a chance to use my professional marketing skills."



Being in a position to choose the sector in which to launch her freelance marketing business, Philippa opted for horticultural PR, partly because that's where her interests lie, but mainly because it was a vastly underexploited sector among marketing professionals. "In the late nineties when I started freelancing, there were no other agencies pitching for work with clients in the horticultural sector," explains Philippa, "so I rapidly won work from some of the top nurseries, nurserymen, garden centres and product manufacturers."

Seed of a business idea germinated, and propagated

During her seven years of PR freelancing, Philippa's business flourished and, in parallel, she studied one day a week for the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) Horticulture qualifications, gaining Diploma level. "To help with my RHS qualifications, I took on occasional gardening work and gradually found myself being asked to design whole gardens," says Philippa. "I began to realise that, not only was garden design something I hugely enjoyed, but there might be a living in it for me. I can't honestly say I deliberately went looking for a career as a garden designer – garden design found me!"

In 2005, Philippa focused on her garden design business full time, maintaining close contact with the media and becoming a writer and contributor to the horticultural media in her own right. That year was decisive, as she also won sponsorship to create a show garden and won an RHS Bronze at the Malvern Spring Garden Show.

"From 2005 the business flourished and I won a string of RHS medals for show gardens at events like Hampton Court Palace Flower Show," says Philippa. "That's when I began to realise I would need help to manage the growth and direction of my business. So in 2008 I contacted Business Link and met with the specialist in my sector, Diane Budd."



Fertile ground for ideas

“Philippa had grown her business and reputation to the stage where she could start to be selective about the clients she took on,” explains Business Link Specialist Adviser in Food, Farming & Land-based Businesses Diane Budd. “Having decided which segments of her potential market she wanted to target, the next step was to begin that marketing.”

Philippa was, not surprisingly, highly adept at the media side of her marketing, but was less sure about other channels, like networking. Diane says: “Many business owners imagine that networking means having to stand up and deliver elevator pitches and finding endless leads for fellow networkers, but that’s just one facet of it. Philippa’s proposition is one that sells over a longer term relationship, and networking could be beneficial.” So, following Diane’s encouragement, Philippa found a networking group that meets the needs of her business and is also a pleasure to attend.

Green shoots bordering on rampant success

Philippa says that Diane’s mentoring also led her to examine where she wanted to take her business and, ultimately, what her future development strategy might be. “Of course one of the first questions I used to ask my marketing and media clients was about their objectives,” says Philippa. “So that’s where having Diane’s impartial oversight has been so valuable. As an owner-manager working mostly alone, it is very easy to lose oneself in one’s business. Diane encouraged me to work ‘on’ my business, and not just ‘in’ it.”

My Adviser encouraged me not only to think about my current plans, but also how to increase the value of the business in preparation for my eventual profitable exit from the business
Philippa Pearson



Top to bottom: Girlguiding UK Centenary Garden, Hampton Court; Victorian Aviary Garden, RHS Chelsea; and Brocket Hall, Hertfordshire.

Several of Philippa’s ideas benefitted from her discussions with Diane, including her plans to offer a postal border design service, and then develop a range of branded garden products and accessories to be sold via an online shop. These would add long-term value to the business and help build the ‘Philippa Pearson’ brand.

Diane takes up the story: “I requested factsheets on building transactional ecommerce sites, web marketing and intellectual property protection be sent to Philippa from Business Link’s Information and Intelligence Service (BLIIS).” Diane has also briefed her BLIIS colleagues to conduct market research into medium-term trends in gardening and horticulture, to provide Philippa with market data to help create a marketing and product development strategy.

Business Link helps support a defining, award-winning year

So far in 2010, Philippa has won multiple awards for her show gardens – RHS Silver Gilt and People’s Choice for Best Show Garden for her Girlguiding UK Centenary Garden at Hampton Court Palace Flower Show; and an RHS Silver Medal for her Victorian Aviary Garden at the Chelsea Flower Show. Philippa concludes: “2010 has been a defining year for my business, with my show successes, plus the potential for new garden design clients and developing a new product range. The challenge will be to maintain this momentum and, with Business Link’s support, I am confident of doing that and succeeding.”



NOTES TO EDITORS

About Business Link

Business Link is a government initiative to promote enterprise. In the East of England, it is funded by the East of England Development Agency (EEDA), to support businesses and entrepreneurs in Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk and Suffolk. Business Link's services include:

- One-to-one support from an experienced business adviser (free for established businesses)
- Workshops and briefings on a range of relevant business subjects
- Effective telephone and online support through Business Link's Information and Intelligence Service (BLIIS).

Logos and photographs

High-resolution versions of the Business Link logo and images to accompany this story are available from the Business Link Press Office, details of which follow.

Business Link Press Office

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Additional information:	
Client / company name	Philippa Pearson
Trading vehicle	Sole trader
Size	1 owner manager plus freelancers
Sector	Garden design/land based
Location	Gamlingay, Cambridgeshire
Web address	www.philippapearson.co.uk

Business Link services the client has accessed / benefited from		(✓)
Information & Intelligence Service (BLIIS)		✓
Business advice – 1:1 / Online Adviser (OLA)		✓
Attendance at workshops / other events		
Brokerage using Supplier Brokerage Service (SBS)		
Brokerage to partner / other service		
Grant / voucher / project funding		
Other Business Link services		

Any additional performance data (GVA, turnover, profitability, etc)



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