

## CASE STUDY

### Kate Dobson

Worcester Business School

BSc (Hons) IT and Business Management (2002-5)



Kate Dobson

**Q: Tell us about your background. Where have you previously worked or studied?**

A: "My background is mostly in sales and marketing. After leaving school I had a couple of jobs working with animals, where I worked for a homeopathic vet, and realised there was no money in that so went to College and studied sales and marketing. Since then I've been in sales the whole time, mainly in the engineering industry, and most recently I worked for William Kenyon, the industrial textiles company. In 2001 my daughter was born and it wasn't feasible to stay in hotels around the world for weeks on end when you've got a child that needs to be picked up from nursery at 6 o'clock at night so I came to the University in 2002 at the age of 30 to do an IT degree and came out with a First. Whilst studying for my degree I needed some sort of income so I set up a small website design and graphics company called Nefertiti Designs. That's progressed and gives me a steady income but is never going to earn me a million pounds without employing people. My own personal interest has always been in complementary therapies - I'm a Reiki Master and an NLP Practitioner - and wanted to help people to manage stress and promote health and well-being in the workplace. In 2005 I set up Complete Therapies Agency which I've built up to a point where I've now got about 100 associate therapists on my books and I can cover anywhere in the UK from Land's End to John O'Groats."

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**Q: How did you get involved with enterprise at the University of Worcester?**

A: "I went to the Graduate Opportunities Fair at the University in 2005 as moral support for a friend who was looking to meet some of the exhibitors. It was then that I saw the Worcester Innovators Network stand and didn't realise up until then that there was anything in the University for people who wanted to work for themselves. It snowballed from there as I found out about lots more support schemes and funding that was available to me. Then I entered BizCom in 2006 and won the Social Enterprise Award. As a result of that I applied to the Enterprise Fellowship Scheme and won a place which came with a £7,000 grant."

**Q: Did your studies and enterprise activities complement each other?**

A: "My IT qualification has supported my business so that I can spend more of my time selling. The IT systems that I have in place pretty much run my business communications in the background."

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**Q: What were your greatest challenges and how did you deal with them?**

A: "The greatest challenge is time management as I had to juggle being a parent, a degree, Nefertiti Designs, and try to get Complete Therapies up and running. I was fortunate that I had business experience and as a consequence I ran my business in a sales-led manner. As a result I've occasionally been late with my VAT return because I decided that calling for sales appointments was more important. Then I've had to grovel to the VAT office to get my fine back!"

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**Q: What's happened to you since graduation?**

A: "Between the two businesses my turnover is around £100K. The best thing is that I can juggle my time to fit around being a parent and doing other stuff I want to do. I can pick my daughter up from school at 3.00 o'clock in the afternoon, have a couple of hours with her, get her sorted and into bed then I can go back to work in the evening. I plan to do all of my sales calls and meetings in the morning and then I can do all of my paperwork and IT work in the evening. The business is growing gradually but the constraints of my life have caused it to be not as big as I would have liked it to be by now. I've also found out over the last couple of years that I have a lot more competition than I had when I started but I'm now in a position where I'm the established name. I am targeting a few larger companies who want full days or weeks of my service rather than the odd hour. My clients include Mars UK, Norwich Union, Crowther Beard, Neoco, Haymarket Events, and Bromsgrove Council. It's been difficult to get good therapists who want to work hard."

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**Q: What has been your impact on others?**

A: "I've helped an awful lot of therapists to get into an industry that they would normally struggle to access because they have no sales and marketing experience to approach the big companies. I've helped client companies to introduce cost effective ways to manage their employees' stress levels. Because I have business experience I've also been asked for help from other organisations. For instance, the Board of Governors of my daughter's school has asked for recommendations on a few things. My rugby club – Chaddesley Corbett - also ask for business advice."

**Q: How do you measure your success?**

A: "How many hours sleep do I allow myself if I've had a good week! To a degree it's my portfolio of clients as I've got half a dozen big companies and I can use testimonials from them to get another half a dozen big companies that pay my invoices and don't quibble over small amounts. This also relates to the amount of time I have to spend working on the business because it's a lot easier to manage one big client than 20 little ones."

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**Q: On reflection is there anything you would have done differently?**

A: "Keep my accounts up to date and submit my VAT return on time. I'd like to have a bigger business and more money by now but who wouldn't? Whatever I'd have achieved then I would have wanted more. I don't think I could have done anything differently. You need to watch your market and work the way that it's driving you and I've made various modifications to the business plan to compensate for the way that the market's changed."

**Q: Where do you go from here (2-3 years)?**

A: "My rugby club will have won the league! I'd like to have twice as many big clients on my books. I still very much want to do my PhD based on how my business uses IT to manage stress in the workplace. With this in mind I'll also need to keep Nefertiti Designs going so that I can keep up to date with developments in IT. I think I'll continue to split my time equally across the two businesses as I do now."

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**Q: Who would you like to thank for their support and encouragement?**

A: "In a very subtle way Colin Price gave me the confidence that I could actually do it. It was the fact that he took the time and effort to do bits and pieces of extra work with me every now and then, and he didn't make me feel like I was thick if I asked a question."