



(L-R) Linda Barton, Chairman of the IQPS, Alexia Padgham, Carmen Macdougall of CMA Coaching and Training and Jacky Workman, Chief Executive of the IAVA

Kent businesswoman wins pioneering award

A Kent businesswoman has won a major award in the first UK-wide scheme recognising the skills of virtual assistants.

Alexia Padgham, 38, of Sellindge near Ashford, was named the 'most outstanding virtual assistant of 2007' in the start-up category, among peers who have been in business less than 18 months.

A VA from Leamington Spa, Vanessa Anderson, gained the accolade in the more established VA business category of 18 months and over.

The awards, presented as part of a day-long conference for VAs in Milton Keynes, were designed to boost awareness of the rapidly growing profession of virtual assistants, who support businesses or individuals in a personal assistant's role but from their own premises.

Carmen MacDougall, from Staffordshire, launched the nationwide search for the most outstanding virtual assistant of 2007 in September last year after creating a support network and a national training resource for such assistants across the UK and Europe.

The International Association of Virtual Assistants and the Institute of Qualified Professional Secretaries backed the initiative as sponsors and judges.

Jacky Workman, Chief Executive of the IAVA, and Linda Barton, Chairman of the IQPS, said: "We were delighted to be able to nominate Alexia and Vanessa as winners in their respective categories. Their submissions reflected the high standards they had set themselves, and had achieved, and are an excellent benchmark for VAs everywhere."

Alexia walked away with prizes including a PR campaign for her business, a professionally designed logo, a marketing consultation, a three month VA coaching programme, free IQPS and IAVA membership for a year, a Fujitsu Photo Scanner and a winner's certificate.

Alexia said: "It hasn't quite sunk in yet, but I'm obviously delighted and extremely proud to have won this award.

"I hope it is a reflection of the passion and commitment I have for the industry, which I feel has given me more control over my life, both at work and at home."

Alexia first set up her VA business, called Your VA, in April 2006 after she was made redundant from her PA position of 12 years, working for the Chief Executive of P&O Ferries.

Instead of searching for a similar position with another large company, she saw this as a positive opportunity to challenge herself and do something different.

Alexia added: "Somehow, losing my job happened at just the right time. I wanted to spend more time with my daughter, Francesca, and the PA role meant I sometimes didn't get home until six or seven at night.

"That, coupled with my ambition to work for myself, made me remember a magazine article I'd read a couple of years previously about a PA who'd set up in business working 'virtually' for several clients from home.

"I found out about a course that taught you how to use the latest technology to work effectively from home and how to market yourself as a virtual assistant, Carmen MacDougall's VA Mastery Course, and signed up straight away.

"It sounds idealistic, but being a VA has added so much to my quality of life. I am pursuing my chosen career and using the skills I've gained over the past 20 years while getting all the benefits of working for myself, from home."

"I also feel a huge sense of achievement knowing that I provide an invaluable service to my clients. They benefit not only from my experience, but also from a cost-effective PA service without the drawbacks of taking on in-house staff.

"I hope this award also gives them a boost, knowing they are employing the services of a first-class VA"

VAs make it achievable for even small start-up companies to gain the professional services of a personal assistant, because they are only charged for the time spent on their work.

With advances in technology, and a business focus on flexible working, Alexia believes this is the way forward for the personal assistant's role.

She now wants to mentor others in setting up their own VA business and is set to begin training this summer.

For more information on the service offered by Alexia at Your VA, call 01303 814818 or visit www.yourva.co.uk.

Ends.

Issued by Katie Love, Passionate Media, 01543 468621.

For more information, call Alexia Padgham on 01303 814818 or Carmen MacDougall on 01785 224 577.