

Women into Business

'Budding Entrepreneur' Diane Hall, MD Southern Contracting Services

Turning a dream of being your own boss into a reality can be a daunting process, especially when it is in a male-dominated industry like construction. Having the right attitude and determination is critical to success.

Fortunately Diane Hall had that in abundance when she launched Southern Contracting Services in 1997. In her first year she reached nearly £1m turnover.

'As a young woman in a typically male-orientated industry I have been perceived by some clients as "a bit of totty" and I have had to assert myself and work twice as hard to prove my credibility,' she said.

Diane originally worked in a sales role for a similar company and became frustrated knowing that she could actually achieve more and provide a better service. In January 1997 Diane set up her company, SCS Ltd. By June 1997 the company was registered, and it achieved ISO 9002 certification in May 1998. The first significant order for SCS was from Benetton F1 Racing Team for abrasive blasting and painting of a 10,000 sq.m wind tunnel – which was a phenomenal achievement and challenge.



Diane's previous employer had by this time ceased trading and several former colleagues joined her with a team comprising an estimator/contract manager and her own work force.

Many of the tasks Diane has undertaken over the years would have been carried out by a qualified "expert" in any other company, and for Diane this has meant a massive learning curve.

'Being the MD always remains a challenge – to keep the company focussed and find new methods and ideas to keep us going forward,' said Diane.

The business link service is available locally and provides the information, advice and support you need to start maintain and to grow a business.

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'You can find yourself restricted by your own limitations and knowledge. This is where I found Business Link's advice and support invaluable. Always there at the end of the phone for free business advice.'

Since 1997 SCS has carried out various projects for the Environment Agency, water authorities, councils, pharmaceutical companies, and other F1 teams. She has focused on a quality-driven service. The grit blasting and painting industry is such a "man's world" and Diane has always tried to offer a much more professional, business approach which her clients have found refreshing.

Diane adds: 'This has increased customer satisfaction, excellent references, referrals and repeat business. Our services have expanded into construction works and our portfolio of clients continues to grow.'

Trevor Thoroughgood, Business Link Adviser for SCS, said: 'Diane has a fantastic attitude to business and demonstrates that simply getting things done is often a core skill in running a business. She has shown an immense talent in her ability to develop and maintain a tremendous support team, allowing her to balance work and family life.'



Company overview

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| Established | 1997 |
| Sector: | Construction |
| No. of employees: | 20 |
| Turnover: | £?m |
| www.southerncontracting.co.uk | |

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