

FGBA 2009: A NIGHT TO REMEMBER

On March 18, the UK's top entrepreneurial talent was celebrated at a glittering event at the London Marriott Hotel for the third annual Fast Growth Business Awards. We spoke to the finalists, judges and winners to bring you a taste of the proceedings

The Fast Growth Business Awards (FGBA) is always a lively and champagne soaked affair. The only difference this year was that it gave business owners a much needed chance to forget about the negativity enveloping the UK and give themselves a well-deserved pat on the back for all of their companies' efforts.

Shortlisted for the awards were 44 companies that spanned a wide-range of sectors, from manufacturing to retail, IT and marketing – FGBA finalists can provide you with anything from security guards to make-up. The diversity was impressive and it was inspiring to see so many bright people with such fantastic ideas all in one place.

But then again, perhaps this could've been a recipe for disaster? A roomful of bullish entrepreneurs, all competing for the same prize – surely there would be too much pride and ego at stake for there to be a happy outcome? The characteristics of an entrepreneur aren't easy to define, but if one shared attribute emerged at the FGBA, it was that they don't like to lose. Every company owner seemed convinced that they deserved to win and that they would do so, no matter how formidable their opposition appeared. Thankfully, those who missed out were able to be control

their urge to shout 'fix' or 'recount' when the result didn't go their way, although there might have been a few murmurs.

The competitive tendencies of entrepreneurs were described well by David Soskin, a former finalist with Cheapflights.co.uk, who this year acted as an FGBA judge. In his speech at the start of the event, he said that the judging process had been particularly tough, not just because of the standard of entries, but also because of the strongly expressed opinions of those involved.

"Many of the judges, of course, are entrepreneurs themselves. You may think that is a good thing. But there is a problem: because entrepreneurs tend to have strong views, think they are always right and won't take no for an answer," said Soskin.

"So," he added, "getting entrepreneurs to agree on the most deserving applications is somewhat akin to herding cats. The debates we had on judging day were, to put it mildly, robust. But at least there was no physical violence and we finally came up with agreed results."

Also involved in the judging process was a lady who knows a thing or two about both great events and business. Kanya King, founder of the MOBO Awards, said that she found the entrepreneurs present at the FGBA inspiring and enjoyed the networking opportunities. "It was very slick

and a fantastic event for networking. I really enjoyed it and it was nice to be at an event where I wasn't doing the organising."

King agreed with Soskin that the judging process had provoked a healthy debate over some very interesting companies. "I think when you get a lot of entrepreneurial people there's bound to be a lot of strong ideas and opinions."

After a boozy meal, Adam Shaw, the BBC journalist, led the audience through the nine categories, unveiling a stunning array of exciting companies all with distinct brands (see winners' list on page 27). Of those nine winners, four were selected to go through into the final round for the overall

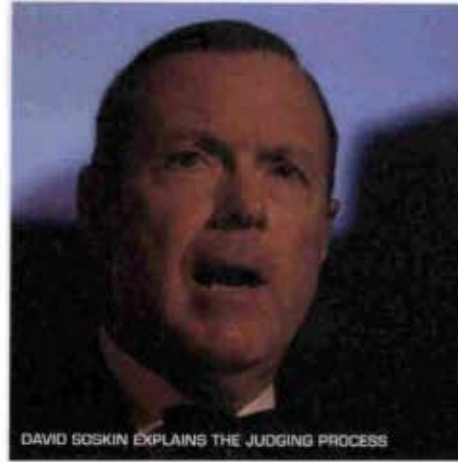
prize of Fast Growth Business of the Year 2009. Instant Offices Group, King of Shaves, Seatwave and Truancy Call were identified by the judges as the most deserving (see more on them overleaf).

At the final outcome it was King of Shaves that sealed the top spot. Founder Will King and chairman Hiten Dayal came to the stage for a second time to collect their prize. However, there were, as the cliché goes, many winners that night, although sadly not all could be afforded prizes.

Ollie Chivers, of sponsors T-Mobile, summed up the evening well when he said that the "dynamic way in which these businesses achieve and sustain such rapid growth never ceases to impress", describing the FGBAs as "an inspiring showcase of entrepreneurial talent".

So was there anything that linked the companies, apart from their ability to grow in the face of a poor economic climate? "I think the companies here all had strong management teams," said King. "People were combining really well. In many cases people here had come from other successful businesses and were helping new ones secure resources and get on the right track to success.

"Especially given the current climate, it's great that there are events like this. We are in challenging times and hopefully seeing companies like this will encourage people to set up more businesses. The businesses here just go to show that you can become successful when other businesses are failing." ▶



DAVID GOSKIN EXPLAINS THE JUDGING PROCESS



L-R: ROCCO LOSCALZO AND RIK ALEXANDER OF MONUMENTAL GAMES AND STUART COLE OF BUSINESS LINK



L-R: ADAM SHAW, CAROLINE KINSEY, CIRKLE AND KANYA KING, MOBO ORGANISATION



WINNERS ROUND-UP

T-Mobile Fast Growth Business of the Year

KING OF SHAVES

The innovative shaving products business is already tracking towards a 10% market share with its Azor razor, launched last June, and has gone beyond the position of a challenger brand (see page 32)
Shortlisted: Truancy Call, Seatwave, Instant Offices Group

Service Business of the Year

ASPECT MAINTENANCE

The £8.7m property maintenance company which is revolutionising the industry with its customer-focused approach

Shortlisted: DriveTech, Octavian Security, Stone Computers

Best Use of Technology

TRUANCY CALL

Now in over 1,000 schools, the messaging business is growing in a market that isn't going to go away (see box-out, page 28)

Shortlisted: Novacraft, The Research Partnership, Webmart

Female Entrepreneur of the Year

CAROLINE KINSEY

The founder of PR company Circle, Kinsey also mentors other female entrepreneurs and has been selected to join Peter Jones' National Enterprise Academy (see box-out, page 30)

Shortlisted: Christina Domecq, Suki Gallagher, Rabinder Buttar

Product Business of the Year

KING OF SHAVES (SEE ABOVE)

Shortlisted: Gemma Kidd Make-up School, Summersdale Publishers, Tripleplay Services

Green Business of the Year

FRAMPTONS LTD

The business halved its carbon footprint in two years and has pledged to send no waste to landfill by 2010

Shortlisted: Chess Telecoms, Specflue, The REAd Group

International Business of the Year

INSTANT OFFICES GROUP

This visionary company now has 100 million sq ft of office space in 75 countries and turnover is expected to hit £30m this year

Shortlisted: HH Associates, Mobica, Wine Intelligence

Innovative Business of the Year

MONUMENTAL GAMES

The innovative games company is tipped by the judges to be a household name following the launch of its *Football Superstars* game (see box-out, page 30)

Shortlisted: Skyscanner, Trimega Laboratories, iProfile

Online Business of the Year

SEATWAVE

The rapidly growing secondary ticket exchange which was formed in February 2007 now has 500,000 tickets for sale at any one time (see box-out, page 28)

Shortlisted: Buyagift.com, Whitelabeldating.com, Lovefilm International

Angel or VC-backed Business of the Year

SEATWAVE (SEE ABOVE)

Shortlisted: Etc Venues, Urban Wimax, Skycanner

Retail/Leisure Business of the Year

THE BOOK DEPOSITORY

Exploiting the long tail in the books market like no other, this business' aim is to make 'all books available to all'
Shortlisted: Tossed, Hi Ho Silver, Black Circles

Finance Director of the Year

JON COILEY OF ACORN ENGINEERING GROUP LTD

This shrewd FD has a track record of improving both performance and competency

Shortlisted: Emma Warren, Hi Ho Silver; Ian Storrier, Penta Consulting

One to Watch

BRIGHT IDEAS GLOBAL LTD

The company behind the innovative USB computer power saving device, the Ecobutton, which shows how much energy it has saved your machine

Shortlisted: Lucky Voice, The Pathology Group, T-Mac Technology

Visit www.fgba.co.uk to watch interviews with all the winners



L-R: ADAM SHAW, WILL DAVIES AND NICK BIZLEY OF ASPECT MAINTENANCE AND INSUREANDGO'S PERRY WILSON



MOBO FOUNDER KANYA KING AND MOMITISE'S AL LUKIES



L-R: ADAM SHAW, HITEN DAYAL AND WILL KING, KING OF SHAVES AND OLLIE CHIVERS, T-MOBILE