

# Small is beautiful for Sarah Beeny date site

The hugely popular dating website *mysinglefriend.com* won the Business Link-sponsored Small Business of the Year award at the 2009 Citizen and Echo Business Awards

FOUNDED in 2005, the site was created by local couple Amanda Christie and James Barnes, whose backgrounds are in marketing and web development, along with TV presenter Sarah Beeny.

On winning the award, Amanda who is managing director of *mysinglefriend.com*, said: "This is really exciting for us. I am just really, really proud of the whole of the team and what they have achieved."

The original idea came from Beeny, a Channel 4 property presenter (and friend of Amanda's), who approached the pair with the concept of a new kind of website: a place that single people could join to meet each other, but only if they were described and recommended by a friend. It was an idea they hoped would revolutionise online dating.

Researching online dating, the founders felt it seemed a lonely experience, not something their own single friends would consider.

The couple believed in creating a dating environment just like real life, where friends recommend each other and seek out potential dates together. In doing so they created an online community that was attractive to their own friends.

Four years on, *mysinglefriend.com*

is now one of the most popular dating sites in the UK, sitting alongside and often copied by industry giants.

The *mysinglefriend* team hears from more than 70 people each week who say they have met someone through the site and it is common for them to receive wedding photos, invitations – and even baby scans.

The site's success is down to its refreshing approach, however excellence in customer service and safety standards are important too. Each new member is checked and approved and the site offers free, personal dating advice to all.

MD Amanda said: "We believe our innovation and our personal approach have helped dump the stigma once attached to dating websites. Our passion for creating a friendly, honest brand has enabled us to lead a start-up company to the forefront of a competitive industry in just four years.

"Because we are a small team we are able to react quickly and keep on top of what's happening within our industry, making us a leader rather than a follower.

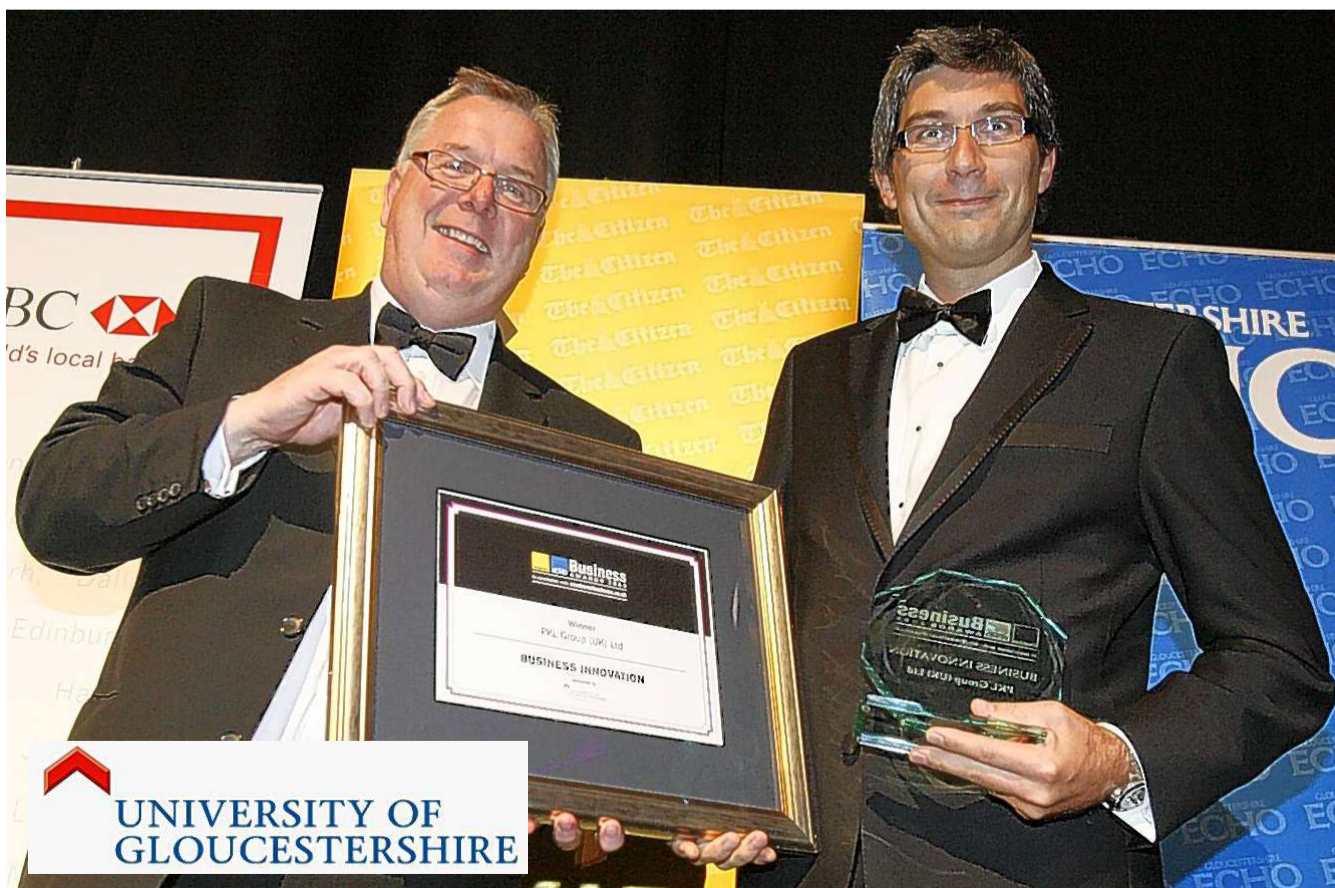
"We've never been afraid to challenge the norm or do things differently."

The runner up for Small Business of the Year was IntoCleaning Ltd.



■ **SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL:** The team from MySingleFriend.com were named the Small Business Of The Year

## Kitchen Pod is a winning idea for PKL



■ **INNOVATIVE :** PLK Group (UK) Ltd

In the University of Gloucestershire-sponsored Business Innovation category, PKL Group of Bishops Cleeve took the trophy

PKL Group is a leading supplier of portable kitchens and catering equipment for hire.

The company serves a wide range of markets including both the public and private sectors. It supplies temporary dining facilities across the UK and around the world, including portable kitchens for the athletes' villages at the past three Olympic games, as well as the British Army in various locations.

Receiving the award, Lee Vines, sales director at PKL Group Ltd, said: "This is about the whole business. It is great to win. We are an international business, but to win something like this in our home county is great. We are very pleased."

Two innovations developed by the company in the recent past are the Kitchen Pod and a service called Kitchen FM.

"Our kitchen pod was designed with the education sector in mind, particularly primary schools" explained

Lee. "The beauty of the Kitchen Pod is that it provides a school with the facilities to produce hot meals on a contract hire basis, so there's no capital outlay. In addition, the kitchen can be put on site and be working within one day".

PKL's Kitchen FM service similarly provides an alternative to the capital purchase of catering equipment. "We design and install the kitchen for the client, then maintain it completely for a monthly maintenance fee," said Lee. "It is certainly nice to be recognised for innovation in our home county. There's PR value in winning awards of course, but I think the event is good for business in Gloucestershire as a whole.

"It's also great to receive this recognition on behalf of all the staff here.

"We're a collaborative company and this award is an honour we can all share".

The runner up in this category was Geotechnical Engineering of Quedgeley.