

# Penny Lowe



Penny Lowe formed her freelance business, Wellington Consulting Limited, in June 2003. Aimed at helping small and medium sized businesses get things done, the company's portfolio of services covers a broad range of activities, from accounting and bookkeeping, project management, software evaluation, employee selection, customer relationship management (CRM), training and interim management through to marketing services, event management and a variety of back office services. Wellington also offers consulting services to larger firms that can benefit from having an independent analysis of their problems and challenges.

At 46, Penny relishes the variety of work that she undertakes for the company's diverse client base, and this was one of the key drivers in her deciding to operate as a freelancer two years ago. "Clients have offered me permanent, full time positions," says Penny, "but I would rather help them employ someone so that I can move on. Whenever I discuss a possible assignment, I make it clear that I will never work for one company on a full time basis. The benefit to the client is that it is more cost-effective if I turn up only when work needs doing."

Originally trained as an accountant, Penny worked in practice before moving into the commercial sector. In 16 years at Sage CSM, she managed every department except finance and administration; her various roles

encompassed training and training management, support management, business development, major account management, customer relations management, and project and product management. Whilst there, Penny also completed an MBA through the Open University, inspired by a course that she had done at the Women's Institute residential college.

She joined BancTec International as a project manager responsible for software development, and having turned the project around, moved into business development to promote and organise product training worldwide. After the events of 11 September 2001, in common with many other companies, the American corporation disbanded the department, and Penny was given notice. This proved to be the catalyst for her new freelance career. "They asked me to continue working for them after my notice period," she explains, "but I decided that if they weren't prepared to keep me permanently, I would move on."

A consistent strength throughout her career has been Penny's ability to turn problem projects and departments around. "Wherever I have worked," she admits, "I have always been asked to take on roles that have either been neglected or had problems, and this has continued now that I am running my own business. Sometimes my clients don't even know that they have a problem until I uncover it, and are always pleased that I can sort it out before it attracts the attention of the authorities or causes internal wrangling. My work often leads to financial benefit."

Like many freelance consultants, Penny is always worried about where the next projects will come from. "As I like to solve problems, put processes in place and make businesses self-sufficient, I am always doing myself out of future work," she says. "The

Company: Wellington Consulting Ltd

Address: PO Box 3425  
Wokingham  
RG41 2ZY

Phone: (0870) 766 4982

Web: [www.wellingtonconsultingltd.co.uk](http://www.wellingtonconsultingltd.co.uk)

Email: [enquiry@wcon.co.uk](mailto:enquiry@wcon.co.uk)

flip-side is that clients who are happy with the results I've achieved for them quite often find new projects for me, because they know that they can expect a high quality of work."

Most of Penny's new business comes from referrals and networking, and she appreciates the importance of making time to go out and talk to people, even when she is busy. Her membership of Refer-On has resulted in some good introductions, not least with reliable suppliers, and involvement with the local Chamber of Commerce has resulted in new business leads. She also teaches strategy and management for degree and other recognised qualifications, and although this 'regular' work sometimes gets in the way of other projects, there is benefit in some bread and butter work during term time. .

Penny believes that the broad range of services offered by Wellington Consulting helps to differentiate her business from its competitors. "The fact that I respond to the needs of the clients and am happy to meet people outside normal working hours also helps," she says. "I try not to take on too many clients, because I don't want the service levels to be diluted. My sole objective is to help clients develop their businesses by taking away the nasty bits and project managing to get ideas implemented, and so it is important that I work closely with them. After all, it's their business."

In its first two years of operation, Wellington Consulting has handled a diverse range of projects. Penny has implemented a CRM system for an Independent Financial Adviser in the City, and another for an office interior company. For a health spa, she produced a prospectus and financial plan, and she has undertaken several project planning assignments and marketing campaigns, including finding 'stuffers and stampers' for thousands of envelopes.

Penny has also taught management to a group from a national accountancy firm, where the 'students' in the class of 16 ranged from the office support person in the IT department to qualified accountants dealing in corporate

finance. "For me, the most satisfying and enjoyable thing is working with people," she says. "They are all different."

Penny has good advice for other people wanting to move into freelancing. "First and foremost, you must have some money in the bank," she says. "You need time to run a business, and time is money. Lack of funds can be a terrible distraction and cause you to lose focus. Be aware of the employment status issues too – that's why I joined PCG. Freelancing isn't easy, but can give you more choice. I work many more hours for less pay, but I enjoy being able to choose what I do. I'd like to increase my charge-out rate now that I have established a track record, so that I can afford to work a little less."

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**Penny Lowe, Managing Director  
Wellington Consulting Limited**

Husband Michael is a senior policy adviser for HM Revenue and Customs. Penny's 17-year-old daughter Penelope is studying for her A-levels, and is employed by the business part-time. She has helped with mailshots, PowerPoint presentations and the like, and sometimes substitutes for Penny at Chamber of Commerce breakfast meetings, where she has had good practice at delivering the one-minute company pitch.

PCG believes that freelancers have a valuable role to play in the UK's economy, generating wealth and employment and offering some of the brightest and best talent around - consultants, advisers, contractors, engineers, specialists, professionals. This profile was originally published in PCG's Freelancing Matters, Issue No 6. Copyright © PCG 2005



Outside work, mother and daughter keep horses, and according to Penny, this provides a modicum of work-life balance. "The horses are very obliging, as they have got used to being hurried or turned out when I'm wearing posh work suits," she laughs. "I do not like housework, and it is the first thing to be moved to the bottom of any 'to do' list. Thankfully, television is not my favourite pastime, as I don't have time to watch it. I believe in packing as much into each day as I can."

The other activity that Penny shares with her daughter is membership of the Women's Institute, and she is enthusiastic about learning from members – mostly of an older generation - whilst having an evening away from work. "I have to turn the mobile phone off during meetings, so it really is an escape," she says.

Penny enjoys teaching and is working towards further accreditation in the field. It was through training motorcyclists that she met her husband. "Since then, I have taught many things, including scaffolding, folding sheep fleeces, and, currently, strategy. As I've said, I like variety."

Her "can do" attitude and love of variety are reflected in the company motto: "We're here to help", and in the logo – a pair of blue wellington boots.



Professional Contractors Group Ltd  
Sovereign Court  
635 Sipson Road  
West Drayton  
UB7 0JE

t: (0845) 125 9899  
f: (0845) 644 4105

w: [www.pcg.org.uk](http://www.pcg.org.uk)  
e: [admin@pcg.org.uk](mailto:admin@pcg.org.uk)