

Butlers aiming to muscle in on prize

■ Mentor Magic entrepreneur books place in grand final, reports **ADAM KULA.**

The naked ambition of one Portsmouth entrepreneur was unveiled for all to see in the third round of Mentor Magic. The *Dragons' Den*-style competition gave four start-ups the chance to lay their business plans bare in front of a panel of seasoned experts, with the most promising one chosen for the grand final, where they can win free consultancy from Deloitte.

Organised by the Chamber of Commerce, the latest round at the University of Portsmouth's Business School featured the most eye-widening proposition yet – a semi-naked butler-for-hire business, Butlers2Go, run by former Saxton Shore Infant School teacher Gill Vigus.

The Havant-based business was established in February, and offers partial-

ly-nude male models to greet guests and serve drinks at everything from hen parties to corporate events.

They already have 20 butlers serving clients across the UK, but Mrs Vigus told attendees they currently needed around 100 butlers to cope with demand.

Judge Nicola Youern, chief executive of third-sector business Southern Focus Trust, told her: 'I think it's a very simple business model. It's very effective, and very profitable if I've done the sums right.'

'I racked my brains over how you could improve recruitment, and instead of talking about interviewing candidates, I think you should be offering "auditions" at places like student gyms.'

Nigel Taylor, managing director of Taylor Made solutions, said: 'My wife and, worse still, my son

caught me looking at your website, which got me into some trouble.'

But the site isn't sleazy, and I think you should write a lot more about how nice your butlers are as people, because a lot of potential customers may be quite timid.'

Mrs Vigus was vying with three other businesses – glow-in-the-dark house number firm NiteNumbers, home automation service E-Lifestyle Ltd, and HR consultancy Computer Assets Ltd – for the top spot.

Following 10-minute presentations from each, the judging panel took 30 minutes to deliver a unanimous verdict: Butlers2Go served up the best business plan.

Mrs Vigus, along with previous winners will now go through to the final, which will be held at 5.30pm on November 13 at Fratton Park.



Gill Vigus gets a lift from Karl, from her company, Butlers2Go, after winning the latest round of Mentor Magic

PICTURE: HANNAH POWELL

FINAL looming

Butlers2Go has a scrupulous vetting process for its butlers, who receive £65 per hour.

Turnover is now just £16,000, but Mrs Vigus has ambitions to grow the business tenfold in coming years.

Mentor Magic had catered for other innovative ideas in Heats One and Two.

The winners of Round One were sister act Abigail and Fleur Emery, with Team Grasshopper, an organic instant porridge company.

Round Two was won by Jackie Pool of JPA Ltd, who laid out a management package for people caring for dementia sufferers.

All three winners appear in the final next month at Fratton Park.

Higher end of the market hasn't been hit too hard by credit crunch

Gill Vigus is not a typical hard-headed business chief.

A mother-of-two, she gave up her teaching career at the beginning of this year to pursue her own business full-time.

But despite her relative lack of experience, standing before an audience of around 70 enterprise leaders and business students, she was the picture of confidence.

But she did have some help. 'I was amazed to have won, but having a butler by my side was a bonus,' she said.

'I think other people had better ideas than me, but if they had all had butlers beside them, then maybe it would

have been a different situation. I was nervous, well, terrified, actually. But I got more relaxed as I got into it, and was really surprised and heartened to hear the experts think it's a viable concern.'

'I must be crazy to start a business at the start of a recession. But because I'm going for the higher end of the market, maybe that isn't being touched quite as much.'

'We currently do quite a bit of business from private parties, but I'm hoping to break more into the corporate market.'

'Of course I'm hoping I'll win the final, and some mentoring will come my way.'



Tom Wellman from Butlers2Go

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