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### Vanessa Phillips – Speech for Princes MayDay Summit 2009

May I take this opportunity to say what a privilege and pleasure it is to be here on such an auspicious occasion.

Firstly I would like to say thank you to EEDA for giving me the opportunity to speak to you, and as my talk will be largely from a business perspective, I would like to thank Business Link for their support over the years as our company has grown, in particular Peter Mulhall who has seen OutSec develop from the kitchen table to an award winning UK company that has become the market leader in its industry. I am sure any of you here who know Peter will be in full agreement when I say that he is a very special individual who puts his heart and soul into any project. I am lucky to count him as a friend

So that's the Oscar acceptance speech over...

Right I suppose you are all sitting there wondering what OutSec is. Very simply we provide online secretarial typing support to UK and European corporate clients. If that sounds dull let me assure you that it most certainly is not. It is a completely new business that could not have even existed ten years ago.

And it was ten years ago that I left London for my new life in the country. My husband and I had decided that the City was not an ideal environment to bring our children up. Like many 30 somethings we were looking for a better quality of life. I had been a PA in London to many high profile individuals and company chairmen and for some extraordinary reason they still wanted to use my services, even though I now lived 90 miles away. And so I set up my first business venture, a small company with one employee, me! The name I chose was Outsourced Secretarial Services, a very grand name for what was a very small business. Over the years we decided that it was too long a name and hence we abbreviated it to OutSec which we felt had a bit more of an internet ring to it.

When I first set up the company it still operated on very conventional lines. Clients would dictate into a recorder, create a tape and then physically send the tape to me by post or motorbike courier to my home in Norfolk. I shudder to think now what global footprint this must have entailed. It was also an extremely unreliable service, dependent on an erratic postal service and the ability of motor bike couriers to actually find our very remote farmhouse. However the business did take off in a very small way and at the end of my first year I had recruited two local ladies in the village to assist me. This involved me physically taking the tapes to them as well. It was clumsy, it was slow but it was fun. It was still a very much a small scale

venture but it did enable me to have a degree of financial independence and I could see that there was clearly going to be, at some stage in the future, a lot of demand for our services. The problem was how we were actually going to be able to deliver it in an efficient manner.

The internet and broadband have completely changed the way that business and society works and the impact it had on OutSec has been incalculable.

Global warming and green issues at the time were very far from my mind apart from my attempt at going back to nature, a standard and well documented response from many 30 somethings beating a retreat from city life. This involved me growing my own vegetables, buying local produce, supporting local businesses and generally embracing the country life. I do recall reading a book which my husband had given me by James Lovelock with his Gaia theory and thinking at the time how powerful it was. However, like many, I perhaps felt that it was a problem that was beyond my control and wasn't that why we had Governments to sort out these bigger issues?

After all what did I know? I was no expert on this.

How times have changed. We are all so much better informed. We all have a personal responsibility to make a difference. I am reminded of a comment by Prince Charles "How can we begin to address poverty, if we haven't first ensured our planet is habitable". Now the focus is very much on the individual and we all realise that no matter how small our contribution it all counts towards the bigger picture. In my small and humble way I thought about how OutSec could make a difference and, with my business hat on, I also thought about how it could benefit my company. The internet was being perceived as ushering in the biggest upheaval in working practices since the industrial revolution in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the words of Marshall McLuhan "the global marketplace was open for business".

The big breakthrough for OutSec was around 2002 when Broadband, thanks to BT, began to be rolled out extensively throughout the country. More and more clients began to buy digital recorders and were able to send and receive work electronically. The physical barriers of an office, the walls themselves were slowly dissolving as we entered a new business environment. It was clear to me that OutSec had gained green credentials almost by default. Let me explain that. If you employ a secretary in your office he or she has to get to your office by train, by car, rarely by foot. Once in the office they sit at their desks using their computers until they have to go home again and repeat that dull tedious commute. A 20 mile round trip commute to work in a car can use anything between 2 and 6 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions per year depending on the type of car. By using OutSec all of that energy wasted in travel could be eliminated instantly. With the OutSec model a client, for example a chartered surveyor, can dictate a survey on his mobile phone, a Blackberry for instance, direct from the property he is in, does not need to return to his office to send the dictated file, as he can upload directly to our server where it will then be routed to his own personal secretary who is located in the comfort of their own home. The entire infrastructure required such as templates, transcription equipment, PC etc is housed on a local basis. By having our secretaries, and we have over 300 of them, all working from home rather than having to commute on a daily basis and, OutSec secretaries have already reduced the carbon footprint of the UK by 3 million miles in a year which equates to more than 1,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Let me just repeat that. 1,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions simply by our clients

having their secretaries working at home rather than in an office. ... This is just one example of how using companies such as OutSec can make a real difference to the inherent problems that we face from climate change.

Once I had realised the implications of this I then began to apply the green principle to other areas of the business. Simple small but significant implementation was my philosophy. For example in our entire office we have just one printer and we use two cartridges a year. Everything that we generate is electronic, all our invoices go electronically, all sales materials, newsletters and communication is by email or VOIP. Business meetings are conducted in a teleconference format and we find SKYPE (I sure everyone here is familiar with SKYPE) to be a marvelous tool for video conferencing as well. Despite the fact that we have a large number of European clients now we have no need to fly anywhere. The world indeed is a much smaller place and I would like to think that the internet can actually bring us all closer together and, on a very personal point, the company still operates from the farmhouse in Norfolk and I have a daily commute of less than 25 yards from my bedroom to the converted dairy where OutSec operates.

We also make a very clear decision in terms of who we partner and ensure that their green credentials are as clear and transparent as ours. And it is not insignificant that our clients now ask this of us too. We have a very wide range of people who use OutSec from large multinational consultancies to universities, from legal firms to doctors. With more than 350 clients and in excess of 5,000 individual dictators the demand for our services continues to grow. One of the great attractions of using OutSec is that the service may be individually tailored to client requirements. So, for example, say you are a dentist in a deprived area of Manchester and you require a secretary with in-depth knowledge of orthodontic terminology. In the past your ability to secure a highly qualified and knowledgeable secretary was extremely restricted. It would be unlikely that one happened to just be around the corner but now with OutSec they can be metaphorically just a click of the mouse away. This ability for our clients to be matched up with a near perfect specialist secretary is just one illustration of how the geographical barriers to employment and recruitment have been eliminated. But many of these clients do not necessarily take on board the knock on benefits that can accrue from such a business choice. When we point out to them that actually they are reducing their company carbon footprint by using OutSec, it becomes another very powerful weapon in our business armoury.

In the same way that our business of providing remote transcription services has moved from being an alternative and slightly eccentric choice to a main stream option for those companies wishing to operate more efficiently, so it is too that the issue of carbon footprints has become important and relevant to all of us. There is no doubt in my mind that the ability for us to promote our company as green has not only tapped into the zeitgeist of the moment but it will continue to have long-term benefits both in a business, commercial and a very personal way. I know that when I tuck my children in bed at night I can do so with a clear conscience. If all this sounds very righteous I can assure you that we do have a sense of humour as well, something I think that is vitally important both in business and in life. For example every year on the anniversary of one of our typist's joining us we send them a bunch of flowers. Now of course the company that we chose to deliver those flowers is green as well. The flowers come from a renewable resource! They are delivered by bicycle and we know that such gestures are greatly appreciated by those who do work very often in isolation in remote parts of the country. One year I received a very amusing email from one of the recipients. The flowers had been delivered

by a rather good looking young man who had a rather big grin on his face as he handed the flowers over. It was only when she read the note that we had dictated to the company that she could understand his somewhat over attentive manner. The card read "Congratulations on being without Sex for a year". We may be green but I can assure you we do not insist on a vow of celibacy with our staff... At the same time, I would like to think that such a glaring typo would not be allowed to pass unnoticed in our company! Thank you once again for listening to me.