



Jun 22, 2015 00:00 BST

## **Northumbria graduate named Guardian's Leader of the Year**

A Northumbria graduate has received a national award for her business which specialises in providing marketing support for small businesses in the rural Northumberland area.

April Bowden, who graduated with a first class Fashion Communication degree from Northumbria in 2012, was named Leader of the Year for 2014 in The Guardian's Small Business Showcase, for the success of her digital marketing consultancy business.

After being made redundant in August 2014, April decided to set up her own marketing business, Play The Field Northumberland, which had originally started out as her final year project at university.

Aiming to produce creative business marketing for SMEs in the rural county, Play the Field provides social media marketing, photography, PR and branding for businesses in the region, specialising in 'solutions that don't come with the usual big agency price tag'.

She approached the University's Student and Graduate Enterprise team for support in accessing specialist mentoring in areas such as sales and marketing.

April said: "When I graduated I initially wanted to get into retail buying, however social media and photography were both huge interests of mine. Seeing the development of social media from 2007 - 2012, I always knew I could launch a business to utilise this trend. Having already set up the social media for Play The Field in my final year project, I started blogging about the countryside, field sports, fashion and food.

"When I was in the process of setting up my business, I had already gained a large following through my blog with this branding, and because I wanted something contemporary and interesting, I decided to stick with this name.

"Initially, I kept my business quiet as I was unsure what it would grow to be like, if I would be able to find clients or whether clients would like the name. I decided to give it a go and launch a website and Facebook page and start promoting myself and my clients. I haven't been established for long, but I'm really enjoying it, and excited for what the future holds!"

Despite her growing success, the award came as a complete shock to April. She explained: "I actually found out by complete chance. I received an email as soon as it was published to say I'd be named Leader of the Year! It was a huge shock to be recognised nationally and especially in the Small Business Showcase where they have featured established businesses in various sectors with turnovers reaching millions.

Graham Baty, Enterprise Manager at Northumbria, said: "April approached the University for support having already made the initial steps in starting the

business. When we first met it was immediately clear she had identified a gap in the market to provide marketing solutions for businesses in the more rural parts of Northumberland.

“The University has given April access to specialist mentoring in which will hopefully see April go on to continue to grow her business in the next 12 months and beyond.”

Gayle Cantrell, Programme Leader for the Fashion Communication course at Northumbria said: “We are delighted that April has been awarded this accolade. Entrepreneurship is integral to the Fashion Communication programme, with our students winning prizes in the national Young Enterprise Awards for the second year running. April’s success shows how our graduates can use these skills to create viable start-ups.

“Our students’ professional and creative abilities are actively developed through live industry projects addressing the visual, practical, intellectual and cultural demands of an ever-changing society and audience. Employers recognise the creative professional skills our students attain, and we are very proud of our graduate employment rate, with 90% in work or further study six months after leaving.”

With her business thriving, April has high hopes for the future. She said: “I really enjoyed being at Northumbria as it’s one of the best universities outside of London for fashion but my course also really helped me develop entrepreneurial skills to be able to run and develop a business. The skills I gained really were invaluable. Play The Field has only been established for eight months but I feel confident and excited for the future and already have another business prospect in the pipeline!”

For more information about the Northumbria’s Student and Graduate Enterprise service visit [www.northumbria.ac.uk/sgenterprise](http://www.northumbria.ac.uk/sgenterprise) Students interested in Fashion courses can register for Northumbria’s Open Days on Friday 26 and Saturday 27 June at [www.northumbria.ac.uk/openday](http://www.northumbria.ac.uk/openday)

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