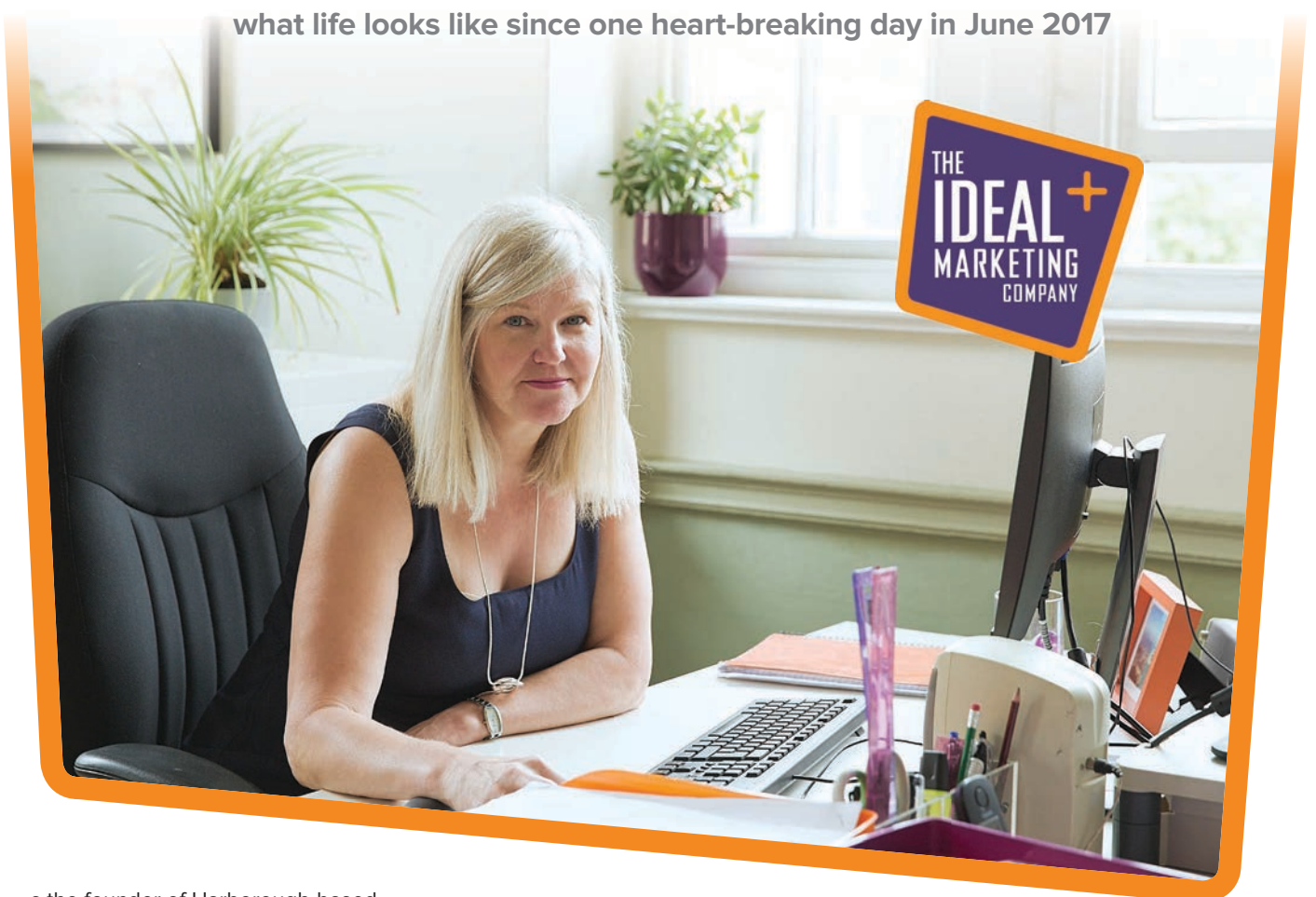


# Growth

## in the face of adversity

When inspirational local businesswoman Helen Campbell's life took an unexpected and tragic turn she found strength she never knew she had – Niche took a seat with her to discover just what life looks like since one heart-breaking day in June 2017



s the founder of Harborough-based marketing agency The Ideal Marketing Company, Helen's husband Alastair Campbell was a well-known and highly respected businessman whose drive to provide a bespoke marketing service to the local business network and beyond culminated in Helen becoming part of the company too.

After setting up the company in 2003, by the end of the first year of trading, the company had grown sufficiently for Alastair to ask Helen to join him with the remit of working on PR projects for clients.

Helen said: "When Alastair set up

the company it was never in the plans for me to join him. Prior to starting a family, I had worked in education as a deputy headteacher and in 2004 was working as a part-time teacher while raising our two young sons. However, when Alastair said he needed me I decided that as we made such a good team in our personal life why shouldn't we in our working life too?"

The duo became a force to be reckoned with supporting each other in the growth and development of the business every step of the way. "Never one for organisation, Alastair left that

side of things to me and our strengths and weaknesses worked really well with each other. English had always been my specialism and so I really enjoyed working on the PR side of the business, writing press releases and articles and liaising with journalists and clients. The company steadily grew to hiring more team members and moving to our lovely office on Market Harborough's High Street."

Over the years that followed, the business became a recognised and respected portal for every aspect of



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marketing including strategy, SEO, web design, brand development, social media, PR and email marketing. Alastair also played a role in setting up local networking groups the Business Agenda and the Harborough branch of Working Breakfast. He added chair of the Chamber of Commerce to his CV in 2017. “So many friends thought we were mad to be working together as a married couple, but it honestly worked, and we couldn’t have been happier with how our business was evolving.”

Then on a summer’s day in June 2017 Alastair went into the office like any other day. Just a few hours later he suffered a heart attack collapsing in front of his team. The prolonged cardiac arrest left him in a medically induced coma, unaware and unable to speak or communicate in any way.

“That day was like any other, only slightly lighter because of the wonderful holiday that we had enjoyed as a family the previous week. A

physically fit man, Alastair had run several London Marathons and had completed the Harborough Half Marathon a matter of weeks before. I got the call and knew immediately it was serious,” Helen shared with us.

Of course, she couldn’t have known just how serious things were to become. After learning that her husband was in a critical condition having received CPR for over 50 minutes, the medical staff told her his coma was not only necessary, but lifesaving.

The kind of life he would have thought was never imagined. “They told me from the outset that he would likely have significant brain damage.” Alastair woke from the coma, but the brain damage was extensive, and the Alastair Helen had known was no longer there. “The struggle when you visit someone who you spent 29 happy

years with who is still physically there but not present in any other way is unfathomable until you go through it.”

And go through it she has. Just two days after he was hospitalised Helen walked into the office and assured the team that things would go on, for Alastair’s sake, hers and her team’s. “I knew he wouldn’t want the business to stop because he had. For a start he had worked too hard on it. Then, our team of course needed their jobs and I realised after some time had passed that I needed it too – and not only because I had a mortgage to pay.”

In keeping the business going she drew strength in putting one foot in front of the other each day to continue to maintain and then grow the business as he would have wanted. “People often ask me how I continued

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with things when my personal life was so painful, and I think really it was something I could control, something I could distract my mind with and something positive at a time when other things really weren’t.”

In fact, Helen and her loyal staff did more than just maintain the business. Continuing to work at the company four days a week in between hours spent at the care home with Alastair, Helen took on the role of Managing Director in January, working to grow the business with the help of her talented team.

“At the age of 51 I really had thought I would be winding things down career wise but because of the way life goes I’m doing the opposite! I am, however, very proud of the fact that we have emerged stronger than ever, recording our highest turnover ever in the company’s history during the first quarter of 2018.”

The team has grown in the face of adversity to include a devoted staff who have unique and individual areas of expertise as well as adhering to the values that Alastair set from the word go, which are still firmly at the centre of the business.

“From the start the company has always been about providing a genuine service. If we don’t think something will work for a client we tell them, if we think that perhaps an aspect of what they need is something that is outside our expertise, we tell them. We like to think that our clients respect this honest approach.”

A ‘hands on’ boss, Helen continues her husband’s belief that employees should not be expected to do anything above and beyond what they themselves as business owners would do. “I would never ask an employee to do something that I wouldn’t do – they see me working just as hard as they do, hopefully building respect and motivating them to excel. Something must be working as our team has never been stronger.”

For Helen, the change in her future has been particularly hard to process.

“I struggle sometimes with the fact that so much has changed in the future I imagined for myself. Life is busy, I visit Alastair almost every day in the care home where he resides, I am running the business and yet I always ensure I have some time to enjoy life still and have a wonderfully supportive network of family and friends. The changes have meant I have had to step out of my comfort zone a great deal and I have felt personal reward for that. I enjoy what I do and uncovered strength I never knew I had.”

What’s next for Helen? “Business wise we will continue to grow, to expand our services and continue to evolve in what is a fast-paced industry. But I have learnt the importance of spending precious time with friends and family as well as Alastair, finding further balance in my life where I can. Later this year I am taking a trip with our two sons to Thailand with money that was originally set aside for travels with my husband. In a way, the trip will



be in honour of the father, husband and man that Alastair was – I know it is what he would want.”

The Market Harborough based team provide bespoke marketing services including strategy, SEO, web design, brand development, design, social media, PR, copywriting and email marketing.

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