

«Alma now has a wonderful life in rural Kilkenny, and she feels privileged to have a raft of talented clients on her books.»



be news, looking at something and saying we can take this and turn it into a trend.”

High flying job it may be, but it's not without its pressures, as Alma explains.

“There's a lot of burnout in PR because it's very pressurised. Particularly if you work in agency, which is what I ended up doing. When I came out of college it was 1994, and back then there were really no jobs in PR. It was very much a closed door society and the big agencies were very difficult to get into.”

Like many of her generation, Alma had to leave the country to find employment.

“I went off to London in 1994. I went over for the purpose of looking to get into PR, but maybe picking up a regular job in the meantime. I went for a job as a receptionist in an advertising agency in Fleet Street, and I was called back for a third interview. In the third interview they said ‘We're actually not interviewing you for the receptionist's position any more, we're interviewing you for a media buyer job.’”

Alma had no experience of advertising, but she got the job and thought she'd try it and see how it went.

“I did that for a year, it was very busy and exposed me to another side of media. A media buyer is the person that books the ads with newspapers and magazines and television. For instance, if Heineken was my client, we'd decide where their target market, and look at what that age group reads. A lot of the time was spent on the phone, arguing over prices, trying to get the best price for your client. The phone was constantly ringing. I didn't enjoy it at all, but I thought I have to do this for a while if I want to get ahead. The whole Celtic tiger hadn't taken off in Ireland then. I came back a year later.”

Very much a homebird, Alma didn't relish the hustle and bustle of London, and yearned to come back to Ireland.

“I hated living in London,” she recalls. “I missed my family terribly – we're an extremely tight knit family. I stuck it for a year and decided I don't want to do this any more. I came back to Kilkenny and sent out a hundred CVs and covering letters to in house PR and PR agencies – my mother was there licking the stamps for me!”

All the stamp licking paid off and Alma landed herself a plum job in an agency in Dublin.

“I got a job in a boutique agency in Dublin called Communicado PR, based in Ballsbridge. That was June '95 and that was my first proper PR job. It was a great learning ground for me because it was a very busy agency, but there were only four of us working there so you had to learn things very quickly. It was great, but very, very busy. I was put under a lot of pressure early on. I've always had a very strong work ethic, and if I was ever offered the easy route or the hard route, I always took the hard route. While I was at the agency we controversially introduced alcopops to Ireland – I worked on that. Also Cuisine de France and the Pub Lunch of the Year Awards, as well as C&C Wholesale and Sutcliffe Catering.”

Alma's career took off and she moved from Communicado to bigger and better things.

“I then moved to a large global agency which had a reputation in Chicago – at the time it

director at twenty five, which at the time was very unusual. That was an exciting time – it was '97, things were taking off and we had all the big hot clients. A lot of hotels were moving into Dublin at the time, I worked on the Fitzwilliam Hotel which had Conrad Gallagher going in with his Michelin star. I worked on the Four Seasons, the Renvyle House Hotel, Heineken and Vodafone was a big account of mine – I launched the camera phones for them in Ireland. There were a lot of a big consumer brands, we had them all at the time.”

Success had a downside, however, and the demands put on Alma at the time were huge. She says: “The thing is, in PR, with a big global agency, they nearly feel that they own you. I was working incredible hours, going in at half seven in the morning and I might not get home until ten o' clock at night. I had seven PR consultants on my team, and it was really, really tiring. I was getting a bit disillusioned because I was so busy and so tired all the time, there was no end to it.”

She continues: “I was kind of the golden girl there. They put me on anything that was high end, or any troublesome clients that needed to be turned around, I was put on. I felt everything was coming at me.”

Fate, as it often does, was to lend a hand.

“Things came to a head when I had a car accident. That happened in 2002. I only got a

