

HIGH ROLLERS WITH STROLLERS

Mothers combine raising children with home-based businesses

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Fourteen years ago, Kim de Wolde arrived at work to discover the shop had been abandoned.

It was a jarring realization.

Among the dizzying number of thoughts racing through her head, starting her own business was not her top priority.

Reflecting on that unsavoury turn of events today, however, it turned out to be one of the best things to ever happen to her.

Ms de Wolde, a mother of three, is part of a growing number of successful women, dubbed mompreneurs, operating a personal business from their homes.

Nearly 53 per cent of all self-employed women work from home and the number of women entrepreneurs is growing at twice the rate of men, according to Royal Bank.

Ms de Wolde has watched as her business grew each year and her business acumen right along with it, as she juggled home life with commitments to Cover Your Windows, based out of her Mount Albert home, northeast of Newmarket.

The hard work culminated in a personal best \$750,000 in annual sales.

Surpassing \$500,000 in annual sales has become the norm as she now sets her sights on \$1 million.

"You have to live it, eat it, breathe it and sleep it," Ms de Wolde said.

"I knocked on doors, handed out business cards. It's a lot of hard work."

Hers is the type of success story Prime Minister Paul Martin pointed to in last year's throne speech: "...a Canada where the increasing number of women entrepreneurs has every opportunity to succeed and contribute a vital new dimension to our economy."

Statistics reveal perhaps the best way for women to break through the glass ceiling, long thought to be endemic to corporate culture, is to break out of the boardroom altogether.

Women now generate approximately 40 per cent of new start-up businesses in Canada, up from 30 per cent in 1981 and today about half of Canada's new companies are started by women.

Of course, most women making the leap into the unpredictable pool of entrepreneurship do so with expectations of financial success and personal fulfillment.



Candace Alper of Richmond Hill gets lots of help from daughter Hannah in running her children's music business, Name Your Tune. The company

adapts songs to include the child's name. Ms Alper is one of many women who run home businesses while caring for children.

But for Richmond Hill resident Candace Alper, a home-based business beckoned following the birth of her first child.

Drawing on resources from her husband's career in the music industry, her desire to stay at home at the end of her maternity leave resulted in the creation of Name Your Tune.

She has created a nine-disc CD of children's songs, marketed to parents.

After countless hours in the studio, Ms Alper has injected some of the most popular children's first names in to popular nursery rhymes and songs.

"Instead of Old MacDonald had a farm, you could have your child's first name," she said.

With 1,200 names digitally stored, Ms Alper and her husband are rarely stumped by an order.

Last month's Christmas season proved to be one of the busiest in Name Your Tune's brief history.

"It would have defeated the purpose if I had to leave home for

the business," she said.

"It's been phenomenally challenging but very rewarding," said Ms Alper, a certified teacher and former public relations official and salesperson in the retail clothing industry.

'People misinterpret working from home as nine-to-five including your kids. It's not.'

The challenges, juggling home responsibilities with those of the business and never truly being off work, were more easily met knowing so many others were coping with similar circumstances, she said.

"There's a community out there. It's almost like we're colleagues," Ms Alper said.

Mompreneurs becoming a permanent fixture on the Canadi-

an business landscape has spawned a network, akin to a sisterhood of women entrepreneurs.

Working from home can be isolating, making the need for an outlet all the more important, said Ms de Wolde, vice-president of the business women's networking association.

Women in a Home Office, a similar women's networking organization, started a Newmarket/Aurora chapter earlier this month.

The third-year organization has grown to more than 650 members nationwide, offering women an online directory, discussion boards, quarterly newsletter and meetings with guest speaker via conference call, said Michele Fournier, who runs the Newmarket and Aurora chapter.

With the goal to "educate and inspire", members meet monthly to offer peer support and tackle issues related to the business community.

There have been plenty of sur-

JUST THE FACTS

- In 2001, there were 525,070 self-employed Canadians working from home. Women headed 45.7 per cent of these home-based businesses;
- One-in-three self-employed Canadians are women, up from 19 per cent in 1975;
- Women own and/or lead 34 per cent of all businesses in Canada;
- The number of women entrepreneurs is growing at twice the rate of men;
- Women-owned and women-led businesses provide 1.7 million jobs, compared to 1.5 million jobs provided by Canada's top 100 companies;
- Women generate approximately 40 per cent of new start-up businesses in Canada, up from 30 per cent in 1981;
- About half of Canada's new companies are now started by women;
- The average age of woman business owners is 45. More than half have children;
- More than 86 per cent of Canadian businesses owned by women are service industries;
- Nearly 74 per cent of female-led businesses are unincorporated;
- Nearly 53 per cent of all self-employed women work from the home, as opposed to 32.3 per cent of men.
- Between 1996 and 2001, the number of male entrepreneurs increased by 0.6 per cent while the number of women entrepreneurs grew by 8.0 per cent. That means, for every additional self-employed man, there were nearly 7 additional women setting up a business;
- More than one in four new female-led self-employed businesses employed at least one person other than the owner, compared to a 2.3 per cent decline among male entrepreneurs.

STAFF PHOTO/STEVE SOMERVILLE

prises for Aurora resident Belinda Hansen after starting a cottage industry within the cottage industry of mompreneurs.

Not the least of which was the realization a vast network for women existed within the business community.

After leaving her job as a TV reporter to care for her father, Ms Hansen started canadianhomeworker.com, a subscription website that posts job opportunities for people working from home.

The site has been online for more than a year and now boasts hundreds of members, each paying \$10 for an annual membership, Ms Hansen said.

"I'm surprised I got as far as I did. I became a workaholic. It's hard to tear yourself away," Ms Hansen said.

"People misinterpret working from home as nine-to-five including your kids. It's not," she said.

"It's not for everyone. To me, it's the dream job and a lot of people are in the same situation."