

Start me up!

More and more women are voting with their feet and setting up their own businesses in our region. Mwaah's legal eagle **Joyti Henchie**, mum of 3 and Head of Family Law at Attwaters Jameson Hill celebrates the reasons why and points out the must-do's when taking such a leap of faith.



I love reading in each Issue of Mwaah about the fabulous women who are grasping the nettle of self employment and going for it in our local towns! Isn't it wonderful that we have energetic, ambitious young women such as photographer Rebecca Callaghan, Natalie at Consortia, Naomi at Harpers Beauty and Sophie at Traditions and now Loopie Lou's - all of whom are featured in the What's New pages of this Mwaah and all determined to make Bishop's Stortford's high street an attractive destination for women like us? Go girls!

In my own day job, and also that of my commercial colleagues who advise businesses of all types and sizes, we know that the biggest motivation behind a business start up is the desire to work more flexibly – the work and family life balance is perceived as better when you run your own business, rather than being an employee.

In our experience women entrepreneurs are so positive about the benefits of being self-employed. They gain greater independence from setting up their own business, achieve higher job satisfaction, increase their confidence, and say it gives them greater self-worth.

We've noticed that redundancies and the difficulty of getting the right job during the recession has given many women the drive they need to start up a business for themselves. There's also been a rise in the number of what the government call 'manual/unskilled' female entrepreneurs - indicating that starting up a new business is not just for those with degrees. That's marvellous news, as this should lead to the gap in numbers between female and male entrepreneurship narrowing

(despite women making up half of the UK population, they only constitute 27% of the self-employed).

With the web and social media penetrating the lives of so many of us, setting up a business which can utilise online marketing platforms has made it easier for women to start out in both 'professional' services (eg accountancy, consultancy, graphic design) and 'cottage' industries (eg arts, crafts, baking and so on) which can be kicked off from home.

The web is also home to many sites offering women inspiration, mentoring and advice on issues regarding the start-up of a business, such as the availability of grants for certain business types. These include www.everywoman.com, www.women-unlimited.co.uk, www.enterprising-women.org, www.prowess.org.uk and www.wireuk.org. Please check them out.

The government is also promising to do it's bit. Apart from a team of 20 advisers (most of whom are women!) specifically set up to help Small and Medium Enterprises, GrowthAccelerator is a new partnership between the government and the private sector which sees proven business experts working with companies to identify their barriers to growth and how to overcome them. This includes tackling problems such as securing finance, commercialising innovation, developing leadership and management capability. More information on the scheme can be found at www.growthaccelerator.com or by contacting Mwaah's own business and executive coach, Tina Dulieu at www.coachingdynamics.co.uk who is a registered and approved GrowthAccelerator coach.

What are the top 10 most popular women's business start ups?

According to a comprehensive report by Simply Business, the UK online business insurance broker, creative and service-driven businesses dominate the types of business that women are currently starting.

Cleaners, beauticians and hairdressers fill the top three slots, followed by pet minders, cake makers and market traders, as well as caterers, teachers and those offering accountancy and financial advisory services. There has also been a 16% rise in self-employed female lawyers over the past year!

The results suggest that female entrepreneurs are good at seizing on emerging trends, with the high ranking of cake making a possible reaction to people's new found thrift and inspiration taken from BBC's The Great British Bake Off.

There has been a 95% increase in women starting up as market traders since 2009, as they embrace the popularity for local market produce and capitalise on any talents they have for cooking or making arts and crafts.

There has been a sharp rise in the number of women embarking on business in the traditionally public sector spheres of education and health, with female start-up education consultants up by 61% and independent nursing businesses up by 46%.