

BigFish



Issue 3

The magazine for women in business

**Time for
a change?**

**Are you
working 25/8?**

**100% economist
100% mother**

Rebecca Harding,
statistician extraordinaire

**Myth
busting**

6 business
myths exposed

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BigFish

The magazine for women in business

Welcome to the third edition of Big Fish.

The new issue draws its inspiration from the Darwinian principal of survival of the fittest. The requirement constantly to adapt and react to our environment has never been so acute as in today's competitive SME marketplace.

All businesses are faced with the pressure to stay one step ahead of the competition and continually mould their business to the changing needs of their market.

editor's letter

This issue is packed full of advice, tips, statistics and case studies of women who have successfully changed the shape, focus or approach to their business, with enviable results.



The greenfingerted Nutscene girls from Angus offer us the benefit of their experience, how they brought a product from the 1920s seamlessly into the lives of 21st Century consumers. See pages 10–11 to find out more.

Together with the author, we review the latest Global Entrepreneurship Monitor Report, examining how women's enterprise is changing the shape of the business marketplace in the UK.

Not forgetting our regulars, we continue to deliver a detailed directory of websites you may find useful when researching your business, alongside top tips on how to start a home based business.

As ever, the team would love to hear from our readers. Look out for our "Does Sex Matter?" debate on page 9 where you could win a case of Champagne for your efforts.

Enjoy the issue.

Marie Knock
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Cover Girl
Rebecca Harding,
Senior Research Fellow,
London Business School

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We are all familiar with the legends and fables of old – the princess in the high tower, the knight in shining armour. But myths are not just confined to our childhood fairy tales. Whether it's starting a business, or raising finance, many versions of reality exist which can alter your perceptions of what you can achieve, often raising invisible barriers that prevent you from following your dreams. Let's take a look at a few of these business myths and separate fiction from fact. After all, how long were you really prepared to wait for that knight?

Badly myth-taken

Myth #1 Jargon is used to confuse and deceive

FACT: Many people use jargon simply because they are used to doing so. On occasion, this can leave you feeling confused as things can sound complicated and, as a result, they may not appear to be relevant to you when actually they are. Many people are often unaware they are using jargon so much, so don't be afraid to ask for clarification. You should always feel confident about asking jargon users to explain themselves.



Myth #2: Female-only networking events are 'anti-male'. They marginalise women and little business is done.

FACT: Many women use female-only networking groups as a stepping stone to mixed events, which for some women might otherwise appear intimidating because they fear having little common ground to share. Many women use both mixed and female-only networks as they enjoy the different approaches and find that they establish firm business contacts at both. If women business owners were determined to be 'anti-male' then they would be closing off a major sector of their market. So this is unlikely to hold any water as a theory.

Myth #3: You need a complex business plan to start a business

FACT: The more solid information you can gather for your own use, the more accurate the business plan is likely to be. But a banker or other outsider does not necessarily need all the details, so it's important to keep your plan clear and concise and focus on what the reader NEEDS to know – it should clarify your main business aims, define the context and set out your long-term objectives. For a step by step guide to producing a business plan download the "Starting a Business" guide on www.bankofscotland.co.uk/women

Myth #5: Banking is still all bowler hats and bandit screens.

FACT: The days when your voice echoed into a vast banking hall as you sat waiting for your bowler hatted manager to return from his boozy lunch are long gone. The increased focus on equality and diversity within organisations, coupled with flexible working hours contributes to an increasing number of women in employment, whilst the changes in design to the banking environment make branches an altogether more appealing environment for customers. Above all, it is attitude that counts and Bank of Scotland is working to ensure that it has an inclusive, expansive approach to the provision of its services and a broad appreciation of the wide variety of customers and lifestyles.

Myth #4: It is better to use personal savings when starting or growing a business than incurring debt with a bank.

FACT: Studies have shown that women are wary of accumulating debt to fund new developments and growth – this has led to slower and more incremental growth among female-led businesses. Business debt is often necessary if your business is going to succeed. Take advantage of the support and advice available from your Bank and you'll see that borrowing needn't be a barrier.

Myth #6: Cashflow finance is a facility used only as a last resort.

FACT: Cashflow Finance has come a long way in the past few years and is now recognised as an aid to smoother cashflow and a vehicle for business development and growth.

June Walker, New Business Director for Bank of Scotland Cashflow Finance, is keen to set the myth straight. "Having been in business myself, I understand that many women struggle with the thought of putting up the family home as security in order to help the business grow. At Cashflow we understand their fears and can show them a way of using what is often the business's biggest asset, the sales ledger, to fund future business growth."

Working 25/8

“You don’t need a pair of breasts to take a child to the dentist.” It’s an amusing statement, but she wasn’t being glib when she said it. Shirley Conran was making the point that women often tend to feel they have to do EVERYTHING themselves – and do it perfectly. Is it any wonder, then, that women are getting burnt out? Because the manifestations of female stress tend to be mental and emotional rather than physical (i.e. women often become visibly tense, anxious and upset rather than developing invisible stomach ulcers and heartburn)*

Housework helps burn off 144 calories an hour, and gardening up to 350.¹

– they are often then criticised for not being able to “hack it”. So how can women best deal with these stresses and what do we mean by work life balance anyway?

We all have it – that piercing guilt of having to schedule in some quality husband time, the worry that our children will grow up dysfunctional from too many hours in front of the television, the acknowledgement of the gym membership card bought but rarely used and yet the sense that we’re not putting in enough hours at work if we are serious about getting into the corner office. The reality is there’s no single way to make this guilt and time pressure magically disappear, but the slightly comforting news is that you are not alone. Statistics indicate that a fifth of gym members fail to make it through the doors². Even if you can’t change things overnight, how can you help yourself feel better about how you are managing your time?

Step one: Find your own trumpet and blow it!

We live in a society where stores open 24/7 – extending the boundaries of our working day. Where email has instantly transformed the timescales of communication, enabling work to continue after hours on the train, at home and at weekends. What goes unnoticed by ourselves is that we are achieving more in 24 hours than ever before – but – loyal to our feminine genes, we rarely recognise this, choosing only to focus on the things we don’t achieve instead of those things we do.

Step two: Sort out your priorities

We would all love to go to the gym 5 times a week and become an expert in a new skill within the month, but if you set goals that dominate as opposed

to motivate, you may find yourself back to square one with even more time pressures, feelings of guilt and lower self-esteem. You really have to isolate the things that are most important to you; do you want to work every spare minute to maximise chances of promotion, or is it more important that you shift that stone you gained which is still clinging affectionately to your hips? Is getting home in time to cook a proper meal and ensure the family eats together your number one priority, or would you rather hang all that and go to an Italian class? There is only one 6pm in every day and you can’t be in six different places at once. So instead of complaining about that immovable fact, just sort out the best possible way that you believe you can spend it. And be satisfied with your choices. We all know the economics of opportunity cost – and time is definitely NOT elastic...

Step three: Let go of the superwoman image – Learn to delegate

How many times have we caught ourselves unintentionally scolding those who are helping us? Whether it’s your husband loading the dishwasher backwards, employees slowly learning a new skill or partners taxiing the children around the scenic route, we feel that if a job’s worth doing then WE should be doing it. We need to learn to accept that there is more than one way to get a job done. Successful delegation to someone you trust will free up your time; and you know you’ve learned that on a dozen management courses. Develop other people’s skills and capabilities and help generate new ideas. As for those little mistakes – they are a great way to learn and you won’t make them again... This carries the same weight when you’re talking about your business ventures as well. Delegate some of the pressures, advice and decisions to those who support you – partners, bank, business adviser, etc. Take advantage of the help that is on offer and don’t feel it is a weakness to accept help. It’s sound business sense to do so.



*“Stress and the working woman” – Marilyn J Davidson and Sandra Fielden. Reproduced from the Handbook of Gender & Work by Gary N Powell, (London. Sage 1999).
1 and 2. www.nimblebread.co.uk

She’s a GEM

As Director of GEM UK and author of the influential GEM UK report, Chief Economist at the Work Foundation, and, a Senior Fellow at London Business School, Rebecca Harding is an unsung heroine of the ‘women in business’ marketplace and yet remains modest about her achievements. We find out more about the woman behind the statistics.



How do you turn raw quantitative data into an inspirational resource for engaging and inspiring women in business? Rebecca Harding, who is also a Senior Research Fellow at London Business School, asked herself this very question and set about creating a report that is not only crammed with fantastic national data, but is also a really good

read and comes from the heart and soul of a talented woman who is juggling all the aspects of life that you will recognise.

Author of the influential GEM UK report and lifelong fan of Ipswich Town, Rebecca, mother of two and the proud owner of one dog, has fought tooth and nail to get where she is today. “Only in the last year have I realised I can do it. By listening to those around me and realising I have the knowledge to make a change, I have finally built the confidence to speak out.

“I’ve had to be really entrepreneurial in the way I have managed my career,” explains Rebecca. “Being female, I have had to go about building my career differently as there are few mechanisms for the promotion and support of women in academia.” When the crunch came and Rebecca opted to leave full time academia and join the London Business School as a senior research fellow and the Work Foundation as its Chief Economist, many spoke freely about the decisions she was

making and the impact they would have – “They thought I was barmy – convinced I was throwing everything away. It was really, really tough and I’ve made it this far by thinking ‘stuff it, if you won’t help me I’ll do it my way.’” With her self-proclaimed degree in tenacity and her vast research into entrepreneurship in the UK, Rebecca is more than qualified to comment on the barriers facing women entrepreneurs in the UK today.

Despite her enviable determination and impressive CV, Rebecca recognises herself in many of the statistics quoted about many other women. Like the women in her survey, modesty prevents her from shouting her achievements from the rooftop, remaining rooted in the knowledge that “I’m a mother and a normal person first, everything else comes second.” Her consistent

emphasis on the fact that she is no superwoman is both a source of modesty and frustration for her. “I could go away for a week and find out my name has disappeared completely.

“BEING FEMALE, I HAVE HAD TO GO ABOUT BUILDING MY CAREER DIFFERENTLY AS THERE ARE FEW MECHANISMS FOR THE PROMOTION AND SUPPORT OF WOMEN IN ACADEMIA.”

Facts & figures

- Female-run businesses are more likely to use technology that was not available a year ago, and, be providing a product that is new to some or all customers
- Once established, female businesses are more likely to create between 6 and 20 jobs than their male counterparts
- Female entrepreneurs are less likely to attempt to access external finance, but when they do, they are more likely to be more successful than men.
- There have been major improvements in levels of female entrepreneurship in the East of England, the North East, East Midlands, Northern Ireland and the South East since 2002.

(Global Entrepreneurship Monitor United Kingdom 2003. Rebecca Harding.)

I'm used to being the woman in the next office whose name no one knows."

Her own experiences of fighting a glass ceiling in a male dominated environment, coupled with her own hardships over the years make you realise that when she says she's been there to experience the bad times life throws at you, it's not just lip service.

Describing Rebecca in three words would not be easy, but those immediately springing to mind are "Honest, Passionate and Human." Without a doubt Rebecca knows what it is like to cry at work, to feel the strain of providing for a young family and the battles faced in self-promotion. "People see me rushing onto a train, and I know they are all thinking 'who is that mad woman?' I always look like I have just ran a marathon."

Besides her family on whom she dotes, Rebecca's work is what keeps her going. "I do it all because I really do believe in my work and I enjoy it. It's important to me that I keep doing a good job, and having the research taken seriously is very important to me. I would love to see GEM UK become the definitive source of information with expert views and statistics on business start ups so we can really start to understand and help those minority groups who may not have access to mainstream provisions. Most importantly, I don't want people to think I am dumbing down the issues by making them more accessible. There is no dumbing down in GEM. But I do choose to write in a way that leaves the reader feeling in charge of the material; that they not only understand it, but are motivated to take it on board and use it actively."

No stranger to the difficulties in gaining access to finance, Rebecca faces a constant uphill struggle each year to raise funding for the annual GEM research and report. "It's like starting a new business each year." Speaking openly of those times she's felt "so utterly demoralised" it's refreshing to see that Rebecca emerged even stronger and more determined to help other women whose experiences are similar. "I find it inspirational that women want more. Much of the GEM research highlights gaps in current provision where many women's lack of self-confidence means they are frightened of the consequences of failure. They are less likely to know entrepreneurs, less likely to access entrepreneurial networks and are therefore less likely to become an entrepreneur. If I can train people to recognise and fill these gaps – and highlight the obvious problems to policy makers – then I feel I have done as much as I could with my limited resources."

Further information on the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor can be found at www.gemconsortium.org

Does sex matter?

**Are you a woman in a man's world?
What about the environment you work in?
Playing the game – are we all equals?
The glass ceiling. Myth or reality?
Fancy a pint? Can we crack the networks?**

Is it time for a change in the way we live and work?

It's no secret that men and women are wired differently. Our gender can influence the way we approach our business and personal lives, as well as the relationships we forge and the career routes we choose. But have you ever thought whether it really does make any difference being a woman in business? Do women have different pressures and motivations and if so, how do we respond to these? Or do you think that gender makes no difference at all in the world of work?

As experts in the field we want to hear from you. As women either employed in business or owning your own business, who better to answer the burning question "Does Sex matter?"

Why not have your say and be entered into a prize draw to win a case of Champagne.

Just email your views, opinions and comments in no more than 250 words to the women in business team at womenandbusiness@bankofscotland.co.uk

The outcomes of the debate will be reported in the 4th issue of Big Fish.

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Days of twine and roses

Through a flexible approach to manufacturing and an unrivalled passion for their products, Sandra Thompson and Shona Hastie have fought hard - and succeeded - in bringing a modern twist to an industry with its roots in the 1920s.

The name itself, Nutscene, is a Scottish dialectal twist on a name derived from their world famous green garden twine which, when tied around the plant, cannot be seen: thus "Not Seen."

Nutscene has been involved in the manufacturing and processing of jute twines and ancillary products for the gardener since 1922. The company patented the first "pull from centre spool" of garden twine familiar to green-fingered gardeners throughout the world.

The growth of the business from the 1920s to present day is proudly attributed to combining a firm grasp of company roots with a keen eye for diversification. Not afraid to apply new moulds

and processes to their business, the Nutscene girls have fought to bring a business founded in the 1920s - and a product from the 1940s - seamlessly into the lifestyles of 21st Century consumers.

"Coming from an engineering background and working for Nutscene, I quickly became interested in the jute product, and the more I learnt, the more I wanted to promote it." This was back in 1989 when Shona joined Nutscene as office manager and Sandra was a supplier to the business. When the owner decided to retire and sell the business, Shona and Sandra joined resources to begin investigations into raising finance for a management buy out (MBO).

Each with similar goals for the future of the business, the successful partnership was established as a result of Sandra scribbling a note of her home phone number on the back of a business card whispering "Call me" when the opportunity to buy the business arose.

"Doing an MBO is very hard, and it wasn't until we secured Small Firms Loan Guarantee funding from the Bank of Scotland that things started to fall into place" explains Shona. Laughing, they discuss their first



business meeting in Sainsbury's car park and the support received from their accountant and the Bank along the way. "I cried for three hours when we finally signed the take-over agreement" recalls Shona, "It was such an intense time. Even whilst putting pen to paper there was a hiccup with the lease and it suddenly all stopped. It wasn't until later that evening when we eventually finalised the take over we thought 'Help, we've done it!'"

It's been little over 12 months since that date and Sandra's and Shona's passion and devotion to their products has rewarded them with a twofold increase in turnover. But it has not been an easy ride.

Battling fierce competition and a male dominated industry, the girls rarely stand still. They have added new product lines, purchased new premises and are working to change the core business activity from twine and garden products to sourcing and supplying carpet manufacturers with jute. What's more remarkable is that all this has been achieved whilst remaining sensitive to the traditional manufacturing methods and to the environment.

Using Sandra's East Asian contacts, the girls' passion for high quality, ecofriendly jute has taken them as far

as India. "All mills are different in price, quality and location" explains Sandra. "We spent 9 days researching the 100 different factories in Calcutta. In fact, we were the first Western Women ever to enter the mill in Bangladesh - everything came to a standstill!"

Rarely fazed by the enormity of their achievements, Shona and Sandra admit "We probably over stretched ourselves a little too much on that particular trip." 'Burning the candle at both ends' was a cliché used to describe the work ethic of Sandra and Shona by their mentor and fellow Board member - a view the girls fiercely deny. "We had a half day to ourselves" explains Shona. "In fact, I got my wedding dress and had my hair done."

Their positive attitude to the barriers they have encountered has been invaluable in securing them the assistance and support required throughout the past year. Only Sandra could describe the way she sourced contacts in the British Embassies as "picking up the phone to the Consul General," whilst in the same breath describing how contact with, and sales to individual consumers at local garden fairs "brings us back down to Earth."

Winning contracts to supply major corporations with jute products is an achievement the girls are rightly proud of, but they still maintain their close links to local garden centres and individual consumers via trade fairs throughout Europe. With various trade fairs and exhibitions already committed to for the up and coming 12 months and new product launches in the pipeline, what is clear is that the business still has a long way to go by Nutscene's standards and no one can be in any doubt that more "good times lie ahead".

**For more information on Nutscene visit
www.nutscene.com**

You get what you give

If you are already a member of a women's network you'll no doubt be familiar with the fantastic variety of events on offer, the value of a supportive network and the benefits of learning from others' experience. With a healthy push for women's enterprise from the Government, the number of support networks for businesswomen in the UK is steadily on the increase. But what makes a good network and why might it be women only? Keen to find out more we spoke to the founders and managers of women's networks throughout the UK and asked them to share their top tips and best practice.

Q: What, in your opinion, has been the biggest development to date for women's enterprise in the UK?

The changing attitude of women themselves. They are more confident generally than they were even twenty years ago; they see more and more examples of women who genuinely balance the good things in life, and they know that it can be done.
(Jill Simpson)

The DTI, Small Business Service, Strategic Framework for Women's Enterprise, launched in May 2003. "Networks and Networking" is one of the action priorities.
(Ruth Livesey)

Q: What has been your biggest obstacle when creating and growing your network?

Getting mainstream business support agencies to take the Women In Business for Merseyside Network seriously and realise that women's business is a big part of a growth economy and it is not going to go away.
(Ellen Kerr)

Q: What does the future hold for women's networks throughout the UK?

Quite a bright future as women are now realising that it is definitely "not what you know but who you know" that brings in the business. More awareness needs to be raised by bringing the women's agenda more in to the mainstream business support arena.
(Ellen Kerr)



Ellen Kerr – Women In Business for Merseyside

The Strategic Framework for Women's Enterprise recognises the need for more infra-structural support mechanisms, but we need to see a commitment from Government to achieve the implementation of the framework.
Many women's business networks are co-ordinated by women entrepreneurs, who give their time and energy on a voluntary basis, because they understand the need to create supportive environments for women like themselves and are committed to "giving something back". As the benefits of such networks is now recognised by Government, it is vital that more mechanisms of support, such as regional networks of networks, are created, to provide support for co-ordinators and act as the vehicles for the sharing of Best Practice.
(Ruth Livesey)

Q: What do you think are the vital ingredients for a successful network?

The main contribution to a successful network is that of the people involved. When you have unselfish, professional guests who have a genuine interest in other people and their specialised industries and, where possible, are willing to help promote others with the use of their own contacts, that will guarantee successful networking.
(Kathryn Moran)

Q: To what degree is collaboration between regional and national networks required to push best practice in the UK?

Regional umbrella initiatives, such as Women's Business Network (North West) Ltd, are essential to support individual networks, helping them to achieve sustainability and growth.

Linking networks together across the region strengthens each network, facilitating new opportunities, opening doors and expanding the networks of individual members, women in business.

An example of effective collaboration: The co-ordinators of three WBN member networks on Merseyside, who got to know each other as a result of meeting through WBN, together organised a joint networking event, bringing together all their members.

Women are not a homogenous group. Although many of their needs are common, research has also identified that rural women in business, women from BEM communities and women in urban communities have been identified as each needing particular support and encouragement.
(Ruth Livesey)

Q: How much real business is conducted at networking events?

US business authors Paul and Sarah Edwards suggest that recommendations generate 45% of new business among small firms in the service sector.

If someone is made aware of products or services by a trusted friend or colleague, they are more likely to become a customer. The bottom line is not always the driving force of networking. For those starting a business or those who work from home, networking can be a real source of support, an arena to air problems and issues and to find solutions.
(Ruth Livesey)



Ruth Livesey – Women's Business Network (North West)

Ellen Kerr agrees: Different networks do different things for different people.

Q: Why do you believe exclusive female networks are required?



Kathryn Moran – Morley and Scott

Female Networking Events provide a sense of comfort and familiarity for women in business. In a male-dominated society, the very existence of such events enables women to become confident and determined in their own business environments. This is due to networking with other successful women, thus surrounding themselves with encouraging and ambitious flair which

motivates them to triumph in the workplace.
(Kathryn Moran)

Women in business may have fewer opportunities for networking through traditional means such as golf. Women have also been shown to approach business differently (for example, they tend to be more risk averse) and they tend to look for support from their peers. Having said that, I do not believe that women in business should network exclusively through such organisations – that is definitely not good business practice!
(Jill Simpson)

Q: The worst kept secret to date about women's networks is...

Serious business is done and it is all not about kids and knitting patterns!
(Ellen Kerr)

Contributors:

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Ruth Livesey	Women's Business Network (North West) www.wbn.org.uk
Ellen Kerr	Women In Business for Merseyside www.womeninbusiness.co.uk
Kathryn Moran	Morley and Scott www.thewomensportfolio.co.uk

Been there, seen that, shared it

Why so many women are using, and becoming, mentors

Whether you are struggling against the unbreakable glass ceiling or flying solo as a woman in business, the lack of role models and formal structures for women's development means that mentoring among women in business is gaining in popularity. From Rowan Morrison, Assistant Editor of *Scottish Banker*, we can all learn a little something about the value of learning from another's experience and guidance.

Most people can think of at least one interpersonal relationship that has influenced or inspired them in some way. Mentoring, in its simplest form, is the formalisation of such a relationship. It is, as the National Mentoring Network states: "support given voluntarily by one person to another."

Today, mentoring is increasing in popularity, with many people benefiting from a relationship which helps to grow their business and furthers their personal development. It would seem that women in particular find the mentoring experience worthwhile.

Dr Kirsty Ross, who has mentored both men and women at board level in financial services for 18 years, explains: "Women tend to be emotionally and self-aware. They have good interpersonal skills, and are empathetic. Leadership goes hand in hand with these skills, and mentoring can develop them."

Mentoring works for different people in different ways, but the benefits of being involved in such a relationship, for both mentee and mentor, are significant. With experience as both a mentee and a mentor Kate Macinnes, Director of icp creative communicators, is well placed to advise: "A mentor's role can range from being a coach to a sounding board. Mentoring is different from business coaching in that is not just about giving feedback on how the mentee is conducting their business, but also about support and encouragement.



Mentors are usually totally unaffected by the politics and culture of the mentee's organisation, so can give an unbiased view and a broader take on issues affecting them."

Ross agrees, adding: "In my experience, when women get to a certain level in business, they often feel they can't ask questions of their colleagues. There are all sorts of

practical things a mentor can advise on. I have worked with my mentees on a variety of problems, from helping one to learn about different types of wine and giving her the names of good restaurants for client lunches, to advising another on whether it was time to leave their company."

For mentors themselves, the opportunity to learn about different organisations from the people who work in them is fascinating. Mentors also get the satisfaction of putting something back into the business community while developing their own abilities and understanding in the process. "From mentoring, I've learned about businesses I had no prior experience of," says Macinnes. "I have an appreciation of different organisational cultures from my own, and it has also helped me progress my management skills."

So what makes a mentoring relationship work? Ross states: "A mentor is a guide – not a problem solver. They have to dig around and establish what makes their mentees tick, making suggestions so that mentees are able to come up with their own solutions."

"A level of mutual respect and trust has to be there," Macinnes adds. "I think you need to have an interest in people and be able to listen well. Being a mentor is not about telling people what to do or being judgemental." Structured mentoring relationships can also lead to networking opportunities and establish friendships. For women in business, mentoring provides a feeling of solidarity and support, coupled with access to the knowledge and wisdom of a mentor who has already learned from the mistakes a mentee may not yet have made.

Business tips

How to start a home-based business

Some well-known names have their origins in a home-based business, such as Virgin, Friends Reunited and Karen Millen. So, if you are considering this option, here are some tips from Emma Jones to get you started:

- **What is the big idea?** The most simple business ideas are often the best so find something that involves using your skills, packaged to appeal to an identified audience of customers. You might want to check out the "Working From Home Top 50 Opportunities" guide available through the Home Business Alliance at <http://www.homebusiness.org.uk>
- **Create some space.** It is important to define your workspace area at home; use a spare bedroom, garage or any other available space that can be modified into an office.
- **Spend time on your IT and telecoms infrastructure.** Running a business from home means you depend heavily on your telephone/computer/mobile phone. Take advice on the best equipment to buy at the outset and identify an IT consultant who can provide support at short notice.
- **Choose your business address.** A number of people opt against using a home address on business cards, websites or other promotion materials. You can pay each month to use a serviced office postal address or check out a new franchise that is expanding rapidly in the UK and offers a postal service. <http://www.mbe.uk.com>
- **Identify ideal meeting locations.** Explore venues in your area so when a client or prospect calls, you can suggest an appropriate meeting place. This might include hotel reception areas or, more formally, hiring a room in serviced offices on an hourly basis.

Remember that if you are thinking of starting a home-based business, you are not alone, and there is plenty of advice out there to help you along the way.

"The culture and success of small businesses is so often a reflection of the business owner. By focussing on who you really are, developing the necessary business skills and doing what it takes, you can enjoy a business which supports your ideal lifestyle rather than a business which runs your life."

Alisoun Mackenzie, Business Coach.

Emma Jones is founder of Redbrick: the UK's leading voice on Regional Entrepreneurial Development.

www.help

To assist you in every aspect of your business life we've pulled together a list of websites we hope you'll find useful.



To obtain details of further websites why not view our useful links section and browse our Big Fish library at www.bankofscotland.co.uk/business/bigfish3

Networking Groups

www.aabw.org.uk

The Ayrshire Association of Business Women is the leading business, entrepreneurial and professional women's group in Ayrshire.

www.networkingwomen.co.uk

North East-based networking initiative.

www.thewomensportfolio.co.uk

The Women's Portfolio conducts a monthly networking lunch based in and around London with inspirational guest speakers and a broad range of members.

www.womenahead.co.uk

Women Ahead offers an environment that encourages, supports and inspires women across Dundee & Angus to achieve their business ambitions through networks.

www.womeninlaw.com

Women in Law provides a reliable network for women lawyers and an opportunity for communication between women practitioners.

Other Relevant Websites

www.enterprisenation.com

An event to explore the routes to securing this country's entrepreneurial future.

www.homebusiness.org.uk

The Home Business Alliance is the only trade association which specialises in home businesses. The HBA exists only to serve the interests of its members – the self-employed, freelancers, small family businesses and those wanting to set up their own home businesses.

www.iba.org.uk

The Institute of Business Advisers is a non-profit making organisation for individual business advisers, counsellors, mentors and trainers who specialise in helping small to medium sized businesses.

www.theworkfoundation.com

The Work Foundation exists to inspire and deliver improvements to performance through improving the quality of working life. It believes that productive, high performance organisations are those committed to making work more fulfilling, fun, inspirational and effective, and who through engaging their workforce succeed in integrating the many aims crucial to organisational success.

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Lines open Mon to Fri, 9am - 5pm. Please quote Big Fish 3 when calling.

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