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FASHION / DESIGN / FILM / FOOD / TECH / ART / SOCIAL CHANGE / TRAVEL

mums who mean BUSINESS

AT A TIME when the phrase 'HAVING IT ALL' has all but been made REDUNDANT, is it POSSIBLE to raise a young family and make your mark in the world of business SIMULTANEOUSLY? Four mums say a resounding 'yes'.

WORDS: DILVIN YASA



IMAGE COURTESY OF ADEN + ANAIS

{movers}

money matters: In our first year of business, we did US\$280,000 in revenue, and we now do tens of millions of dollars in top-line revenue. We can be found in 63 countries around the world and are sold in more than 7000 stores.

advice: Know what you don't know and be ok with it. Surround yourself with people who know more than you do (I'm surrounded by many of them), they make you and your business better.



MANDI GUNSBERGER

38, CEO and managing editor of Babyology (babyology.com.au) and mother to Hayley, seven; Polly, six, and Audrey, one.

the business: A premium online resource for parents, focusing on high-quality, product-focused editorial content for Australian parents.

previous life: Sales and marketing for Hilton, Hyatt and Intercontinental hotels.

the inspiration: I'd been living in the States for five years and when we moved back [to Australia] I noticed blogging hadn't quite taken off here yet. With the birth of my daughter, it seemed like a good idea to start blogging about baby products.

the hard slog: I began the site by putting together a spreadsheet of prams, cots and highchairs I'd researched during my first year of motherhood. I thought other parents would be interested in the information and then I kept adding new content regularly. Once I had enough copy on there, I began hunting around for advertisers, charging very low rates until our traffic started to build and we had more of a following.

I WANTED to CREATE something of MY OWN that could fit in AROUND the new COMMITMENTS of being a mum.

start-up costs: Babyology only cost US\$5000 to get off the ground with registration and web design. With one small child and another on the way, I wasn't interested in starting a business that required a loan or risked our savings. We spent nothing more until we were making revenue.

success: It was when the advertising queries got so out of hand that I no longer had time to write and decided to hire our first writer. That's when I realised that this might become a successful business.

pros and cons: There are so many pros! Obviously the flexibility is great but I also love working with an exceptional group of people, or coming up with a concept while in bed and being able to wake up the next morning and start implementing it. The cons? Running your own business is a 24/7 venture and there is never any downtime.

work-family balance: I get up an hour earlier than the family to get online and on top of my day, then I get everyone ready for school. For me, it's a matter of slotting work around the kids – working from 12.30 to 3pm, then from 7pm to 11pm. I'd love to be doing more uninterrupted work but I don't want to miss out on my kids' lives. This is the constant struggle of working mothers!

money matters: We are currently growing at 30 to 40 per cent each year in revenue.

advice: Research your idea thoroughly, look at your prospective competition and work out your point of difference.



SARAH HARDIE

37, founder and designer of Fabrik (fabrikstore.com) and mum to Jemima, five; Jonas, two, and Jasper, nine months.

the business: A childrenswear line with a vintage feel. A complementary womenswear line has recently been launched.

previous life: Designer for Lee Mathews.

the inspiration: After I had Jemima, I wanted to create something of my own that could fit in around the new commitments of being a mum. I'd always loved embroidery and vintage fabrics and went with making pieces I wanted Jemima to wear.

the hard slog: I started off hand-making a few pieces myself that I sold to friends, at markets and on Etsy.com. I then showed a store a few things I was making and got my first wholesale order. From there I secured agents to represent the range in each state.

start-up costs: There were some initial costs like business registration, graphic design, website, swing tags etc. that I had to invest in. It was probably US\$10,000. My husband also has his own business, so I was able to use some equity from that to get started. >

the hard slog: When I first started out, I held onto my job at The Economist Group, which meant working on aden + anais from my dining room table at night after everyone had gone to bed, well into three or four in the morning. I sold the muslin blankets out of the back of a taxi and then spent hours going in and out of various boutiques with the products. This eventually paid off as we managed to establish ourselves firmly as a boutique brand. In 2008, my business partner decided to exit the business, so I bought her out and in 2009 I left my job to work on the business full-time.

start-up costs: My initial investment in the business was US\$20,000, which pretty much only covered our first purchase order of stock. To raise the amount, I tucked into my savings, borrowed from friends and got a loan.

success: In 2008 I was approached by Target in the US, who wanted to bring the muslin blankets to the mass-market. This was a risky move, as I didn't want to alienate my boutique clientele, so I created a diffusion line, aden + anais, which is now carried by Target, buybuy Baby and Babies"R"Us. Another key success moment was when Adam Sandler's baby was snapped in one of our swaddles.

The photo appeared in a major publication and from then on we developed a loyal celebrity following which helped solidify aden + anais as a boutique brand.

pros and cons: The pros are that I really only answer to myself and my investors, so I don't have to feel guilty about spending time with my girls during 'work' hours, but by the same token, when you own your own business, you never really stop working. A good example would be that I was having meetings in the hospital 12 hours after giving birth to my fourth baby.

work-family balance: Our head office is four minutes from my apartment, so I don't lose time commuting, plus I have a supportive husband and two great nannies to help out. When I'm with my girls I try very hard to focus on them, no calls or emails in the morning or in the evening, but of course there are times when I have to travel or miss things. Mother's guilt is a pretty common thing for me, as I suspect it is for most working mums.



RAEGAN MOYA-JONES

40-something, CEO and co-founder of aden + anais (adenandanais.com.au) and mother to Anais, nine; Lourdes, seven; Arin, five, and Amelie Rose, three.

the business: Muslin baby products in a range of beautiful prints often seen draped around celebrity bubs, including baby Prince George during his first media call. Previous life: Vice president of business development for CFO research at The Economist Group.

the inspiration: "When I had my first daughter in 2003, I went looking for muslin wraps only to find they did not exist here in the US. So in collaboration with my then-partner, we decided to start manufacturing them ourselves," Raegan says.

I DON'T THINK
you can EVER be fully
 PREPARED for the
 AMOUNT of work that
starting your BUSINESS
 ENTAILS but I have the
 LUXURY of fitting work
around my LIFE
 and my FAMILY.

success: We have grown steadily each year, but securing David Jones as a stockist and adding womenswear sold exclusively through my website has been monumental for the business.

pros and cons: I love being in charge of my own destiny but the responsibility of keeping everything going can be exhausting! And I often feel like there just aren't enough hours in the day.

work-family balance: The week is organised so the older kids are in care three days. Jasper comes to the office with me and has a cot and his toys there. I try not to work on weekends but sometimes will go to the office to pack orders or catch up while the kids go for a bike ride with Dad.

money matters: In the first year, our revenue was around US\$20,000 and now we are turning over more than 10 times that.

advice: Be prepared to work hard, be patient, and not draw a wage while the business builds.



RHIAN ALLEN

35, owner and founder of healthymummy.com.au and losebabyweight.com.au, and mum to Kai, two, and Jake, five months.

the business: A health and weight loss business specifically designed for mums wanting to lose weight in a healthy and safe way post pregnancy. One website is loaded with plans and advice, while the other is a range of weight loss products.

previous life: Senior sales and advertising executive.

the inspiration: I was pregnant with my first son and after a lot of research I discovered there was no national business that helped mums achieve post-pregnancy weight loss in a safe and healthy way. I wanted to create a support system and product especially for mums that was safe in breastfeeding.

the hard slog: I got started by writing a business plan and then working out my first year's marketing budget and costs of launching, which I knew was going to be quite high. I then ensured that my family was able to manage for the first 12 to 18 months before the business made a profit, when the brand was being built and establishing itself in the market place.

start-up costs: Approximately AU\$300,000, which covered the website launch, product development and the PR and marketing of the business. To fund this, we sold our house, bought a much smaller one and used the money that was released from the sale.

success: After three to six months, it [the business] was getting quite good traction in the market, then in 2011 I won the Emerging AusMumpreneur of the Year award and was the winner of the Best Customer Service Award, which was great for publicity and credibility. Since launching in 2010, we've helped mums lose more than 400,000kg through our plans.

pros and cons: I don't think you can ever be fully prepared for the amount of work that starting your business entails but I have the luxury of fitting work around my life and my family. The satisfaction of being able to help so many mums get fit and healthy is just fantastic and every day I feel so proud to have been able to make such a positive impact on people's lives.

work-family balance: I write a to-do list every night and prioritise my time. I get up very early to start work and work until midnight every night, which gives me the flexibility to still be a mum. I also have a fantastic nanny who is a huge help in allowing me to run the business and stay sane.

money matters: We turned over AU\$350,000 in 2010. Three years later it's AU\$2.2 million.

advice: Work out the finer details of your budget and make customer service your number one focus. ■

