

CAREER & WORK

Mothers OF REINVENTION

WATCH OUT FOR THE 'MUMPRENEURS' – WOMEN WHO ARE LEAVING CORPORATE LIFE IN DROVES TO REINVENT THEMSELVES RUNNING SMALL BUSINESSES WHILE BEING WITH THEIR KIDS, WRITES **FRAN MOLLOY**



WHEN NICOLE Hosie's daughter Brianna was born, her employer offered her the chance to continue her senior management position part-time – she could even work from home occasionally.

And although it sounds like a dream job for a young mother, Nicole has since left to start her own business, RosiePose, an online children's clothing store that means she can work from home permanently.

Nicole is typical of a growing number of enterprising women who are leaving paid employment to create their own, far more family-friendly workplace – which is usually at home, surrounded by their kids.

"It was hard to be part-time and still manage other people, and the office was still a long way from Brianna's childcare centre, which is just round the corner from our home," says Nicole.

Although Brianna still attends childcare two days a week, she is there for shorter days and the centre is close enough for Nicole and Brianna to walk there.

"I thought it might be a bit lonely at home, but it's good to be around Brianna all day," Nicole says. "Even though my attention is on the business a lot, I'm still available."

With a tightening job market and ageing population, companies like Nicole's former employer are trying to be family friendly to attract young parents.

But they are not meeting the needs of plenty of women who have decided to completely reinvent themselves as small business owners, rather than as employees, giving them the opportunity to earn a living without compromising their family life.

"Women who have kids are not starting businesses because they can't get part-time work," says single mum of two, Melissa Khalinsky, who founded an online community called Business Mums Network five years ago. "Most of our members could get a part-time job easily if they wanted."

Melissa's network has over 250 members across Australia. In a recent survey, she found that more than 70 per cent of her members started a small business so that they could be with their children.

Small business mums are nothing new,

Melissa says, pointing out Australian history shows "even convict women started businesses to earn an income around their kids."

A famous example of such early entrepreneurs includes Mary Reibey, who ran a farm and imported liquor while she was a widow raising seven children.

But Melissa believes that the internet has changed the nature of business for mums, allowing a lot more flexibility in the types of businesses that they can run and in the time frame that they can do business.

The Network's online forums are very active, with mothers from all over Australia posting messages, brainstorming, asking for and giving advice about a wide range of business management issues.

The Network also provides members with a supportive customer base – many members have online stores and find that Christmas brings a flood of orders from other members.

Schoolfriends Chriss Kourakis and Georgia Emerzidis both have three children and have joined forces to run their online store to distribute Petit, a French range of children's toiletries.

The business came about when Chriss, a Petit customer, discovered the Australian distributor had closed down – and negotiated to take over the contract.

Chriss stores all of the products in her garage and the two women each work from their own home, getting together regularly and keeping in touch with phone calls and emails all day.

If there is a downside, it is this: for many small business-owning mothers, work doesn't stop at night – and both Chriss and Georgia admit they are often up working in the middle

You don't have to bust a boiler to make it work

Find Out More

Business Mums Network:

businessmums.com

A web-based network of mothers who operate their own business, established by Melbourne mum Melissa Khalinsky.

Little Miss Stella:

littlemisstella.com.au

Stella Katsaros specialises in PR for small businesses run by mothers.

Minimedia Productions

minimedia.com.au

Early-learning DVDs, developed by former barrister Francesca Beattie.

Petit

petit.com.au

Children's fragrances and toiletries.

Rosie Pose

rosiepose.com.au

Children's clothing online.

Be Money Confident

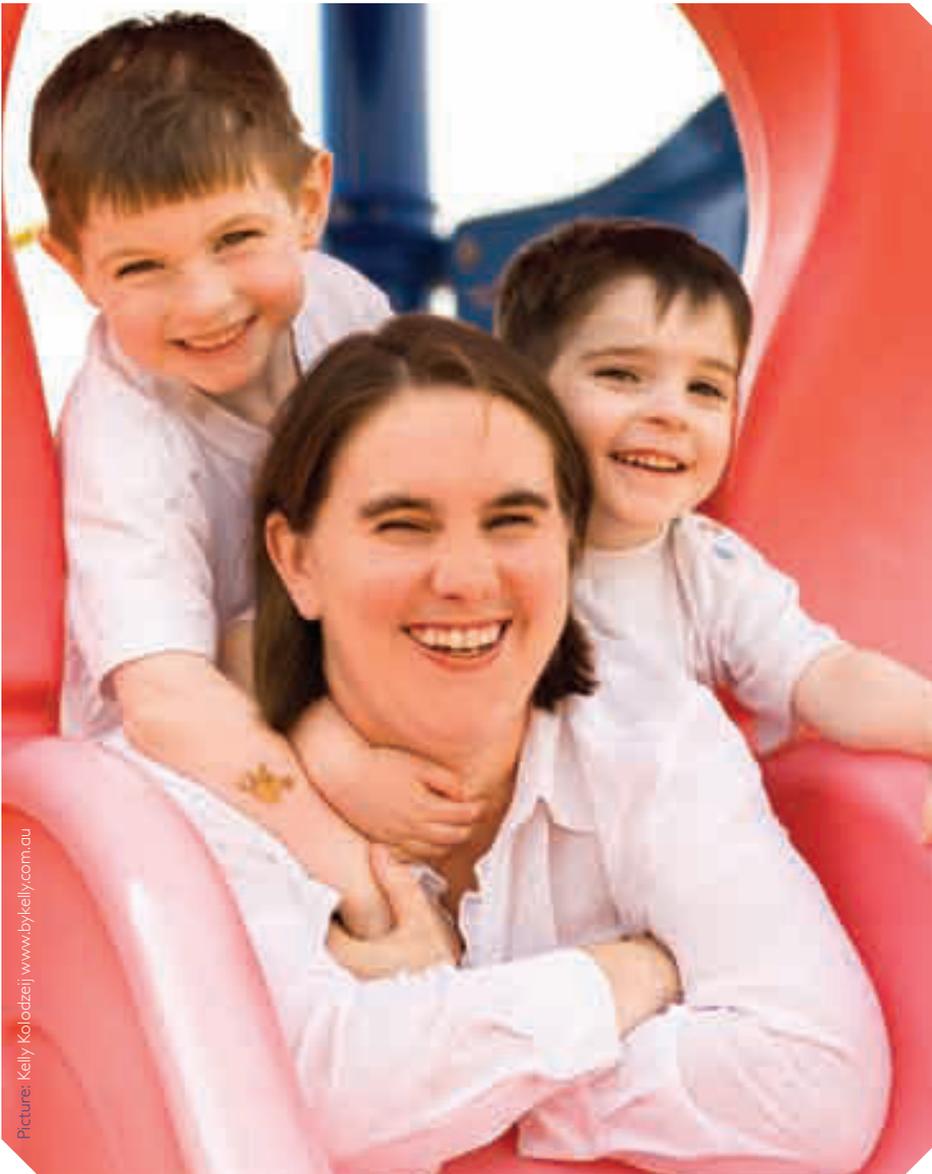
bemoneyconfident.com

Business and career tips as well as suggestions for balancing work and family

of the night to catch up. Also, with six children between them, business is always put on hold for children's sports and school activities, but both women agree they have found the perfect boss – themselves.

Many other small-business mums have also found that their children were the source for a great business idea. Former barrister Francesca Beattie discovered a niche market when looking for safe screen-based entertainment for her son Oliver, now aged four.

These days Francesca runs Minimedia Productions, a fast-growing small business that develops and markets early-learning DVD titles for young children. ►



Picture: Kelly Kolodziej www.bykelly.com.au

Melissa Khalinsky and her two boys Nathaniel and Zachariah.

Alarmed by the research she'd read about the correlation between early exposure to television and attention deficit disorder, Francesca developed a DVD that would entertain and teach Oliver while avoiding the 'rapid visual stimulation' harmful to young children – and realised she had created a marketable product.

But small business mums are not solely focused on the kids and mums market; many are also finding opportunities in the lucrative world of corporate consulting.

For former management consultant Denise Hall, the flexibility she needed as a mum has become the key to her success; her business is

based on supplying talented consultants, who work as 'free agents,' to organisations who need their specialist skills for a short-term project, often in project-based fields like organisational development and training.

Denise has come a long way. "At 36, I was homeless, pregnant and unemployed," she says. She channelled her inner entrepreneur and with another mum as business partner, established the Ace Talent Net agency.

With her extensive experience as an international management consultant, Denise could have had her pick of top executive positions; but she felt that, as a single mum, she needed a certain level of flexibility, and

that is difficult within a large corporation.

Now, she works about 25 hours a week – during school hours – and is able to earn a good income, while keeping an active role in parenting her daughter, Ireland, now nine.

"You don't have to bust a boiler to make it work," she says, adding that she sees many parents caught up in inefficient work settings that waste the time they could be spending with their children.

Efficiency and responsibility are key to making her business work – and her team is not bound by office hours. "We structure our days around what needs to be done – the work to be done is addressed rather than the hours that need to be filled."

Technology helps to make most of Denise's work location-independent – and she has a lot of trust and respect for her team of co-workers.

"One thing I've learned is how resourceful women can be after the birth of a child," says Stella Katsaros, a publicist who specialises in working with mothers who run small businesses.

"Once they decide to commit themselves to their families and work from home, they will come up with innovative business ideas that will make that plan work."

After the birth of her son Sam, now 10 months, Stella moved from doing public relations for celebrities to running her own home-based publicity business.

"I was pleasantly surprised at how supportive these women are for each other," she says, adding that her own business has grown rapidly thanks to strong mother-to-mother networks.

Melissa Khalinsky says putting kids before business is a common characteristic for the small-business entrepreneurs in her Business Mums Network.

"Five years ago, I spoke to business experts in Australia about starting a small business and I was told that if I wanted to be successful I should keep regular office hours and put my children in full-time childcare," Melissa says.

"But most mums running businesses are quite prepared to get up and work in the middle of the night so that they can be with their kids during the day." **FI**