



Mums who mean **BUSINESS**

Having a baby used to mean giving up your career, but when these mums found inspiration in their little ones, their business empires were soon born as well

Elizabeth Murphy, 41

FOUNDER OF LA TORIANA. MUM TO TIANA, 5, AND STEP MUM TO BRYCE, 24, ALLIRA, 22, AND KYLE, 20

When tragedy struck Elizabeth, she decided to find a job that gave her more time with her family. She founded www.latoriana.com.au, a website that sells Australian and designer products for babies and parents around the globe.

The inspiration: "When Tiana was born premature a year after my daughters Lara and Victoria were born premature and became angels, I decided there was more to life than teaching nursing at university. I became inspired to set up my own online boutique after I took my daughter to a birthday party and there was another little girl wearing the same dress. I chose the name La Toriana as it's an amalgamation of my daughters' names and I wanted to keep them together and close."

In the beginning: "I saved money, sourced suppliers and canvassed mothers' groups, asking what they liked and needed, and what they felt was missing. I bought little by little and, as I sold items, I slowly increased stock and suppliers, and developed my website. This was over a two-year period, so it was a slow transition until I launched in September 2007."

Balancing work and family: "I ensure work and family are kept separate. I work within kindy hours and make sure we go on holidays or have weekends away to enjoy time as a family."

Pros and cons: "[The pros] are definitely the flexible work hours and being able to work at home in my PJs! I haven't come across any negatives yet."

Challenges: "Initially, I had questions like, 'How do I get a website? Where do I find customers? Where do I even start?' It can be very confusing in the beginning."

Charity: "We're launching a premature baby section where 10 per cent of sales will go to the National Premmie Foundation. After having three premature babies, I want to be able to support others in a similar position."



Elizabeth and Tiana, 5



THE BIZ:
PRODUCTS
FOR MUMS
& BABIES



Sally Hailey, 38

DIRECTOR/OWNER OF SWEET LILLY MATERNITY MUM TO LILLY, 3

While pregnant, Sally noticed a gap in the market for stylish maternity wear, so she launched a website where mums-to-be can get great preg fashion.

The inspiration: "I'd always wanted my own business but I didn't know what I wanted to do. When I had difficulty finding funky yet affordable maternity wear, I knew the answer was staring me in the face."

In the beginning: "I used my credit card and some of our redraw facility to get started. I'd been a marketing manager in the UK, so it was important for me to get a feel for the market here. I set up www.sweetlillymaternity.com.au and offered everything from baby clothes and maternity wear to skincare and gift boxes. Maternity clothing was the most popular product, so I chose to concentrate on that."

Breakthrough moment: "My big break came when I put money into Google Adwords (to advertise next to Google search results) and also by advertising with *Cosmo Pregnancy*."

Balancing work and family: "Lilly is in kindy three days a week and I try to cram as much as I can into those days. I take her to my supplier meetings, which can be embarrassing when she spits the dummy!"

Pros and cons: "It used to be all about flexibility, but now I value the creative input. The downside is you can't tune out and not think about work."

Challenges: "You have to try things to know whether they work and sometimes that can eat into the cash flow."

Annual turnover: "Around \$100,000 in the first year; it's since doubled."

What's next: "I'd love our label, Lilly B, to get more international interest."



Sally and Lilly, 3



THE BIZ:
STYLISH
MATERNITY
GEAR



(l-r) Joshua, 8, Michelle, Max, 1, and Jacob, 5

THE BIZ:
ORGANIC
BABY
PRODUCTS

Michelle Vegrinec, 35

FOUNDER AND MANAGING DIRECTOR OF GAIA SKIN NATURALS. MUM TO JOSHUA, 8, JACOB, 5, AND MAX, 20 MONTHS

Michelle started GAIA Skin Naturals in response to her own children's needs. It's now the most widely distributed natural baby hair and skincare brand in Australia.

The inspiration: "When Joshua developed eczema at eight weeks old, I couldn't find products for his condition so I ended up formulating my own."

In the beginning: "I worked in pharmaceutical marketing but left to concentrate on raising my family. I began mixing up formulas on the kitchen stove at home, then found a biochemist who could work with me to produce the range I wanted. I was 36 weeks pregnant with Jacob at the time, but I went out on foot and presented GAIA Skin Naturals to pharmacies in Melbourne."

Breakthrough moment: "In 2006, we were approached by the buyers of Coles supermarkets and we're now stocked in all Coles Australia-wide. GAIA

Skin Naturals is also available in selected Franklins, independent supermarkets, many pharmacies, and health food and baby stores across Australia. In fact, we have approximately 3000 stockists."

Balancing work and family: "I had a fully equipped nursery in my office so I could take care of Max while I worked. My husband and I allocate specific blocks of time just for family, when we don't answer the phone or talk shop."

Pros and cons: "Building something for my children's future and helping people in the process is something I love. The negative side was living on the poverty line while the business was getting started."

Challenges: "Funding was a big issue in the beginning. We sold our properties and sunk all the proceeds into the business. It was a huge risk, but we made it."

Annual turnover: "Approximately \$50,000 in the first year. Now we're looking at in excess of \$3 million." ▶





Julie Lemmon, 36

**FOUNDER/DIRECTOR OF CRADLE ROCK.
MUM TO EVA-VALENTINE, 6**

Frustrated by the lack of groovy baby gear available in remote areas, Julie took her lifelong love of retail and created an online business.

The inspiration: "As a mum, I found shopping stressful. I also grew up in a small town, so I could empathise with not being able to find anything funky nearby, and I started thinking mums might like to shop from the comfort of their couches."

In the beginning: "I was an assistant buyer for Sportsgirl, but I left my job to concentrate on this. I researched and put together a business plan before Cradle Rock went online in 2004. The website, www.cradlerock.com.au, has evolved as I've learnt more about the market and received feedback from other mums."

Balancing work and family: "With an online business you're open 24/7, but I'm getting better at balancing everything. I work a few hours before Eva wakes up

and a few hours after she goes to bed. I also employ three part-time staff."

Pros and cons: "The best thing has been the flexibility and seeing my business grow from scratch. Unfortunately, this sometimes means not being able to spend as much time with my family as I'd like."

Challenges: "Cash flow was the biggest challenge. The key was making the business stand on its own without continually pumping in money."

Annual turnover: "I'm happy to say it's now 20 times my first year's turnover!"

What's next: "Expanding Cradle Rock's online presence so it becomes a shopping destination for mums around the world."



Julie and Eva, 6

THE BIZ:
TRENDY BABY
CLOTHES
& TOYS



(L-R) Business mums Tonia, Rachelle and Maria

THE BIZ:
NIFTY
NAPPY
BAGS

Rachelle Baker, 32

CO-FOUNDER OF ISOKI. MUM TO LUCAS, 3, AND RUBY, 2

Rachelle and her friends, Maria Cincotta, 33, and Tonia Startari, 33, noticed there was a lack of stylish yet functional parenting bags and accessories. Now they make and market their own.

The inspiration: "Maria, Tonia and I would spend evenings talking about starting our own business. Maria and I were having babies at the time and had noticed a big gap in the nappy bag market, so www.isoki.com.au went from there."

In the beginning: "I was working in office admin and had just completed a uni degree. Without a proven business track record, the banks wouldn't touch us, so we all invested our savings to get the business off the ground. We then spent 18 months in design and development before launching Isoki in May 2007."

Breakthrough moment: "We had a big launch party and invited media, trade and celebrities, giving us lots of publicity."

Balancing work and family: "During the development stages, we had our day jobs and worked on the business in the evenings. Now we each work three full days in the office and spend the rest of the week with our families."

Pros and cons: "The flexibility is great, but there's also the stress of not knowing if your business will succeed or whether you'll have enough money coming in."

Challenges: "Sourcing good suppliers, enduring a lengthy and sometimes disheartening sampling process and making some difficult decisions."

Annual turnover: "We're still in our first year of trading, but we estimate it'll be approximately \$300,000."

Charity: "For every product sold, \$1 goes to Sydney's Royal Hospital for Women Foundation's Newborn Intensive Care Centre. It ensures the best care and treatment for both mother and baby."



Therese Tarlinton, 33

FOUNDER OF BORN WITH STYLE. MUM TO WILLIAM, 4, AND LUKE, 2

Sighting a great product overseas convinced Therese to quit her job and start www.bornwithstyle.com.au, a website for imported baby items.

The inspiration: "In 2002 in the US, I saw a Jeep stroller. I knew Aussies would love the rugged look and the fun concept, so I looked into importing them."

In the beginning: "I was working as a marketing communications manager, but my husband convinced me to leave my job and take a chance. I borrowed \$100,000 from the bank and bought the strollers. I pre-sold 103 at the Pregnancy Babies & Children's Expo, then visited retailers around the country. Ironically, I also fell pregnant during that time!"

Breakthrough moment: "I did a deal with a PR agency where I swapped baby products for their services; they got my

products into lots of magazines and newspapers, and business snowballed from there."

Balancing work and family: "I work three days a week and spend the rest of my time with my family."

Pros and cons: "The upside is you set your own hours. I also get to test lots of gorgeous baby products. The downside is you don't get a holiday!"

Challenges: "When I gave birth and came home from hospital, I had to catch up on my emails and balance breast-feeding with sales calls."

Annual turnover: "More than \$1 million in the first year and still growing."

What's next: "Exporting to countries in Europe and Asia. Fingers crossed!"



THE BIZ:
COOL BABY
PRODUCT
IMPORTS

Therese, William, 4, and Luke, 2



THE BIZ:
FLATTERING
MATERNITY
FASHION

Leah Madden, 35

FOUNDER OF BLOOM MATERNITY. MUM TO PORTIA, 14, OLIVER, 3, AND SCARLETT, 4 MONTHS

Disheartened by maternity fashion when she was pregnant, Leah founded Bloom Maternity. Today, it's one of the best-known maternity websites in the country.

The inspiration: "I was in real-estate sales and loved wearing nice clothes. I couldn't stand the badly made maternity wear around when I was pregnant, so I had a few dresses made and everybody loved them. That's when I knew there might be a business in this."
In the beginning: "Initially, I produced limited quantities so that I didn't have a huge outlay. Then, as styles started selling out, I was in a better position financially to start growing the range. Now I sell products on my website, www.bloommaternity.com.au, and they'll also be available in various stores from summer 2008/2009. Stay tuned!"

Breakthrough moment: "From the start, sales were good and they just continued to grow. Ranking high in search engines was a big factor for me."
Balancing work and family: "It's really difficult. I had to hire staff pretty quickly as it was just too much for me, but I also put aside time to just be a mummy. Some days I work eight hours, make dinner and spend time with the kids before working a few more hours; other days I might just work a couple of hours then spend my day with the family."
Pros and cons: "Maintaining my identity is important to me, so this way I can still be the career-oriented woman. I've always been and still have flexibility to work my own hours and be a mum."
Challenges: "Finding reliable manufacturers is really hard. I won't accept poor-quality workmanship, and finding suppliers who deliver time and time again is the biggest challenge."
What's next: "Getting our products in store and talking with a few select boutiques about wholesaling." **COSMO**



Leah's inspiration came while pregnant