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LAUNCH YOUR BUSINESS

Three years ago, when Peita Mages, national promotional manager for Universal Pictures, burnt her hand using a poor-quality oven mitt, it gave her an idea. "Not only had it burnt me, it was just so daggy with pictures of cows and ducks all over it. I realised there were no high-quality oven mitts on the market that were fashionable, so my friend [now business partner] and I decided we'd make some." Other friends noticed them and sparked a flurry of orders, which gave Mages the idea of starting a stall at the local markets. "We had about 50 mitts priced at $20 each and completely sold out!" she says. Customers gushed about the mitts, but complained there were no nice aprons to match, so Mages launched a kitchen accessory brand called Smitten, selling oven mitts and aprons online. Here, she reveals her business style.

Make a business plan

As soon as you realise you're onto a good idea, do a small business course at your local TAFE or community college. They cost only a few hundred dollars and they teach you all the nitty-gritty stuff like getting ABNs, business names and sorting GST. They also show you how to do a business plan, which is the blueprint of all successful companies.

Reinvest profits

Mages and her partner kept their day jobs while running Smitten, which meant they didn't need to draw on their profits – all the money Smitten made went straight back into the business to pay for things like building their website, and buying packaging and labels.

Be passionate

With no start-up capital, Mages has worked incredibly hard to grow her business. It's involved late nights and early starts, but she thrives on the buzz of being her own boss. "A lot of people think that if you run your own business you'll be able to work flexible hours and clock off early, but when it's your own bottom line, you never really stop thinking about it. However, if you're truly passionate, you won't mind," she says.

"Loving this new office."

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CARLOTTA MOYE/ACP

COMMON BUSINESS BLUNDERS

Melissa Seymour, author of *Girl's Guide to Turning Your Idea Into a Business*, describes the common mistakes women make when starting their own company.

- **Not doing enough research** To make sure your business will work, talk to lots of people (i.e. potential customers!), read through Government reports on your industry (see abs.gov.au) and brainstorm with other people who work in the same field.
- **Being airy-fairy with cash flow** You're going to need enough money to get things off the ground, a contingency plan and an accountant with business savvy.
- **Setting your sights too high** Many people overestimate the kind of profit they're going to make, which leads to problems like having too many staff, unnecessary equipment and other headache-inducing expenses.
- **Ignoring your competitors** If someone starts selling a better, cheaper product down the road, you're going to be in trouble. Join associations and visit trade fairs so you can snap up licences to the latest stuff before anyone else!
- **Unreliable, overpriced suppliers** When you place orders, they should always arrive on time. Push hard to get the best price from your suppliers to help your overall margins.
- **Hiring the wrong people** Bad staff can really take you for a ride. Remember that you're the boss, not your employees' best mate. ▷