

The Rise of Momtrepreneurs

Women are starting businesses at twice the rate of men.

by Kate Winn

When Lynn Kelly gave birth to daughter Kiera last February, she never thought her maternity leave would kick off a small business enterprise. But during her leave, she was astounded to learn how much a friend had paid for brand-name baby leg warmers. So she decided to figure out how to make them herself for less. They proved so popular with her friends that she began to advertise. Six months later, her product is now available in two stores, as well as through craft sales and a new website. Another momtrepreneur is born!

Momtrepreneurs, or mompreneurs as they are also known, are on the rise. Striving to balance work and family, women are starting businesses at twice the rate of men. Though Kelly's enterprise, Little Leggings and More By Lynn, will supplement her teaching income, many moms use their businesses as a replacement for regular 9 to 5 employment. The trend is so prevalent that 2005 even saw the launch of *Mompreneur: Canada's Business Magazine for Women*.

Some savvy moms make their extra income in conjunction with direct sales companies such as Avon or Pampered Chef, while others market their own products or services. Though they begin for various reasons, an important factor is the desire to make their own hours and spend more time with their children.

Tania Quinlan and Rebecca Stewart, who merged their names and aesthetic skills to form Tanecca Mobile Spa, love the increased time at home. "I have the benefit of spending all day with (sixteen-month old) Claire," says Quinlan, "so if I need to go out at night or on the weekend to do a job, I don't feel guilty." Stewart, who quit her government job to stay home with her two children, says the business allows her to make extra money while saving substantially on child-care costs.



Women who are disenchanted with the traditional workforce find that being their own boss is a huge perk, and that they can actually make more money the harder they work. Enjoyment is also a big factor. "I love to go to work. This is the first point in my working life where I thrive in what I do," says Karen Woolley, founder of Music for Mopets, a musical playgroup program. Stewart agrees. "My kids will never hear me come home and say, 'I hate my job,' yet continue to go every day."

For at-home moms, businesses provide the opportunity for both socialization and intellectual stimulation. "For me," says Quinlan, "it is some time away, and every parent needs that, especially stay-at-home moms." Kelly felt that she was losing her identity after the birth of her daughter. "Creating this business has helped me stay connected to the 'pre-baby' Lynn," she says.

Being an entrepreneur isn't always a bed of roses. Balance is a big issue for all moms, and

women who work from home and set their own schedules can struggle to draw the line between business and family time. Although it's great to be able to attend school functions in the daytime, it can be very tempting to spend family time meeting with clients or catching up on business tasks, especially for those with "offices" right in the middle of the "family room."

Depending on the product or service provided, momtrepreneurs must also adjust to fluctuations in income. Stewart and Quinlan's business, providing in-home spa treatments, peaks during wedding season. Woolley, too, says she never knows how many families to expect at her playgroups.

It is also necessary to have a thick skin, as business-moms inevitably face some criticism and rejection of their product or service, which can feel very personal when the business is like another baby they have nurtured and grown.

But for the momtrepreneurs in this story, the good far outweighs the bad. And they strongly disagree with critics who think the term "momtrepreneur" is demeaning and trivializes the role of women in business. "I think it's great," says Stewart. "I'm proud to be a mother, and I'm also proud to be a mother who is teaching her children the value of working hard, earning money and doing something you enjoy. I am a mom and an entrepreneur, so I am glad to see that it's getting enough recognition to earn a nickname!"

To other aspiring momtrepreneurs, Stewart suggests test-driving an idea before quitting a day job. "Plan well, get good marketing support, and don't go cheap," adds Woolley. Quinlan's advice is simple: "If you love it, really love it, just do it!"

Kate Winn is a teacher who began her momtrepreneurial freelance writing business during her second maternity leave.

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