

WOMEN

Here at Dynamic Business we couldn't help but notice the trend in 30-something women setting up successful web-based businesses. We picked our favourites and asked their advice for others thinking of doing the same.

IN WEB

STORY JEN BISHOP



Jenene Crossan of Flossie.com

New Zealander Jenene Crossan has taken women's use of the web and made it into a thriving business. Now based out of Sydney, Flossie Media Group is a privately owned company bringing together the 'best of the best' female-centric websites to make it easier for women to find relevant content online and for advertisers to target the hugely influential female consumer.

Through its masthead network **Flossie.com**, it has been successfully connecting women with 25 websites since its launch in New Zealand in September 2008. It launched in Australia in July this year with 49 sites and one million Australian unique browsers.

CEO Jenene, 30, founded the nzgirl website in 1999, aged just 21. She has overseen its growth over the last decade to become New Zealand's largest online magazine for women with more than 90,000 members. So, what inspired her to start her first web business? Simple: "The discovery of a large communication and media gap for young women spurred on the creation of nzgirl. No New Zealand-specific media channels were available – either online or in print – for young women. nzgirl sought to fill this gap and successfully did so."

Beware anyone who thinks starting an online business is a lot easier and cheaper than a bricks and mortar one though. She adds: "I think it's a very challenging industry dominated by a few big players. It's very difficult for smaller businesses to get up and running and it takes an enormous amount of money, skill, time and effort to get a model right. Sure you can get a website up, but that's not creating a business."

Jenene is delighted with Flossie's quick success in Australia. "We've only been live for a few months and are already sporting bookings from multinationals such as L'Oreal, Procter & Gamble, Disney and Nestle. The industry knowledge of Flossie is strong and the demand for advertising grows steadily every day. Has it exceeded our expectations? The answer is, unequivocally, yes."

She has some great advice for Australian women thinking about starting an online business and it starts with asking yourself a lot of hard questions: "What's your niche and what problem do you solve? How will you communicate it to the masses? How will you productise it?"

She adds: "Ask questions for as long as you can and pose them to as many people as you can until you have a very strong understanding of the industry and technology you are entering into. The online industry is an exciting, fast-paced one, but it's also cutthroat and often a graveyard for small businesspeople with good ideas. Once you've answered all those questions as best as you can, hold on tight, take a deep breath and look out! It will be one hell of a ride."

Flossie Media Group is privately owned, backed with investment from private equity company Movac investment, early stage investors of Trade Me, which sold to Fairfax in 2007. Lloyd Morrison is another key Flossie member who is considered one of New Zealand's leading businessmen and investors and is a shareholder and original investor in nzgirl Ltd.

In Australia, Flossie has 49 sites. The masthead delivers content to women in all stages and ages of life and covers niche areas including entertainment, business, relationships, craft, pets,

children, holidays and health. Sites include Daily Addict, MyDr, BeautyGoss, Dogslife, eatstreets, careermums and entrepreneur-ette. A further 15 sites are expected to be announced this quarter.

Flying the flag for Melbourne is **TheWallstickerCompany.com.au**, founded by friends Fiona Gathercole (35) and Jen Menz (36), who decided to cash in on the growing trend for vinyl wall stickers which could transform a room for very little cost, as well as being removable so great for the rental market. Revenue has tripled in the three years since they started the business and the team has grown from just the two of them to five members of staff. The business is using social media to create a community feel to its website and keep regulars coming back for more.

"An online business just made sense to us," said Fiona. "You have less overheads so your margins are higher and there's more flexibility with what you can offer. These days, the majority of customers look online before going to an actual shop so I think you need have an online presence."



Fiona Gathercole and Jen Menz of The WallStickerCompany.com.au

Bianca's specialty is corporate gift giving and she has worked with clients like Commonwealth Bank, St George, Westfield, BP, Leo Barnett, Macquarie Bank and ACP Publishing. She decided

to turn her passion for detail and luxury into a career. Tired of outdated, tacky and one-dimensional gifting options, she was on a mission to breathe new air into the gifting service, one immaculately tied ribbon at a time.

"I had noticed the lack of luxurious hampers on the internet and was mortified by the dated and daggy options available. I wanted to get away from cane baskets and curling bows and bring the wow factor and style back into gift giving. I woke up one day and thought 'Right,

I'm going to do this!' and Pamper Hamper Gifts was born."

Having previously worked in hospitality, advertising and now as a mother, Sydney-based Bianca is something of a guru when it comes to uncovering what people want. After finishing high school and completing a hotel management scholarship with the Sydney Hilton, she went on to become an event manager, thriving in the industry for many years. She later moved into an advertising executive role with ACP, igniting the ambition and tenacity that later saw her open up her own business.

Sam Winter, who owns **SassiSam.com.au**, has a web business with a real difference. It's fronted by her alter-ego, a cartoon called Sassi, who has her own everything, including voice and language. The website is all about bringing out the 'girlie' girl in you and spoiling her with some serious shopping fun.

"It's about making your shopping experience easy and the clothes fun to wear," says Sam, who is in her thirties (although Sassi's in her twenties!). "Sassi Sam is your online gift destination for all things fun and girlie, sourced from around the world."

"I make money through sales from my online store. My revenue has continued to grow year-on-year by focusing on mainly PR and building my brand through online social networks. I'm introducing an advertising model this year to create an additional revenue stream via my blog and collaborating with other brands."

Sam adds: "Starting an online business—any business—is hard work and takes lots of commitment and self belief. For me, starting

"The online industry is an exciting and fast-paced one but it's also cutthroat and often a graveyard for small businesses"

"It's really important to keep the website looking fresh and interesting which we hope will encourage people to revisit. We launch new designs each month and have competitions going as well as encouraging our customers to give feedback and send photos of their creations in."

"I think it is essential to be part of the social media world. You can gain a lot of knowledge from this as well as reaching many people that you would not normally be able to. I think it's important for both online and regular businesses as it allows you to network with such a wide variety of people and businesses."

Bianca Kristallis, 31, juggles being a mum of twins with running **PamperHamperGifts.com.au**, a

luxurious online gifting company that specialises in hampers and customised, personalised corporate solutions. Pamper Hamper, which launched in 2004, insists on the best quality products and works with some major Australian brands.



Bianca Kristallis, PamperHamperGifts.com.au



Sam Winter's alter-ego Sassi Sam

► an online business wasn't easy. I had so much to learn and it wasn't as popular here in Australia when I started more than three years ago. I also didn't have the great networks in place that I do now.

"Starting my own business has been the hardest thing I've ever done

and some days I wonder how I keep going. It's a constant learning curve and you have to wear a lot of hats when you're the one and only resource. If you're passionate about what you're doing and have tonnes of self belief, it's definitely worth it though!"

Her advice for other women thinking of doing the same is that you can never do enough research first but sometimes you do just have to go with your gut feeling: "As long as it's feasible and can be sustainable then it's worth giving a go but you really have to believe in yourself." She adds: "I also think it's important to figure out the type of website you need because so many people get websites built for them that are really expensive and many aspects of the platforms aren't needed. Think about the website from a customer's perspective; it's not about you, it's about your audience. And finally, find your unique selling point in whatever it is that you choose to do."

Melanie Hawgood has swapped finance for fashion in setting up online jewellery boutique **Mico-Mico.com**. A former business development manager for Macquarie Bank, she reassessed what she *really* wanted to do with her life after taking maternity leave in late 2007 to have her fourth child.

Melanie, 35, began to struggle with the concept of returning to a full-time position and decided it might be time for her to explore finally having her own business. Having always had a strong desire to go out on her own and "live the dream," she decided it was time to take a leap of faith. For months she asked herself what she'd do if she could do *anything*, but continued to draw a blank. Her maternity leave was fast coming to an end and she resigned herself to the fact that she'd have to return to the rat race for a little longer. But, in a twist of fate, she was made redundant. It turned out to be a mixed blessing.

It was at a friend's wedding that Melanie realised the opportunity for a successful business lay in the online world. It was the perfect medium

to create a business with low start-up costs that was not physically dependant on her and she could oversee from anywhere. With her mind set on the worldwide web, Melanie went on to create the Mico-Mico.com site.

"In Australia, we are in our fashion jewellery infancy and I found that the only option was the aged Michael Hill style or a much younger and less ardent Diva look. Neither of these appealed to me," she says. "When I started seeking out international brands, I found so many options and thought it would be great to give other girls some different pieces; pieces that really complemented their personality, and so Mico-Mico was born."

She enjoyed a dream start as she entered the market at the height of spending 18 months ago. With strong sales front end and a strong Australian dollar to import with, Mico-Mico was looking great. However, in October 2008, the currency market crashed and the term GFC became all too familiar. With a background in

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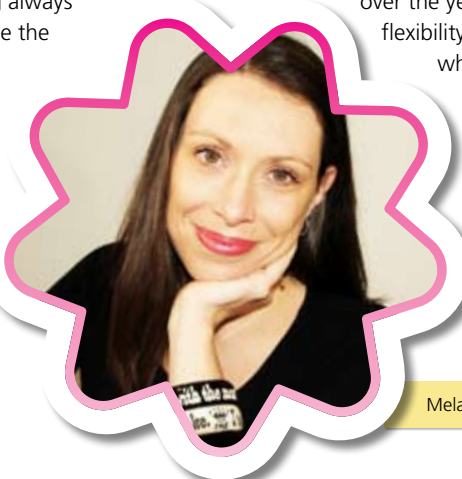


finance, Melanie was well placed to objectively look at all her options and had an understanding of the current markets. She was determined to survive and with a true entrepreneurial spirit, began to look for new opportunities to diversify her income streams.

Melanie acquired the Australian distribution rights to two of her brands and began the journey that now sees her as the sole distributor for two of the country's hottest new import labels: Viv & Ingrid and Jessica Kagan Cushman. Business is booming and Melanie says being a mother has taught her a lot of the essential skills she needs.

"I have started applying the skills I have learned as a mother over the years to my business with the keys being flexibility and adaptability. I can be whoever or whatever I need to be in any situation and I can find multiple solutions to any problem. Skills such as these are key to surviving in business and life in general."

Neither a designer nor a fashionista, Melanie is well on her way to becoming the next big thing in the Australian fashion jewellery sector, giving the women of Australia what they want: "Fun, flirty, fashion choices!" **DB**



Melanie Hawgood of Mico-Mico.com