

Women busting small business barriers

Australian women lead the world as entrepreneurs and Alex Bernard meets three who are showing the way

New research shows that Australian women are the most entrepreneurial in the world, setting up new businesses because they want to, not because they have to in tough economic times. The study, carried out by the Australian Centre for Entrepreneurship (ACE) based at the University of Queensland, also revealed that 19 per cent of the businesses surveyed intended to grow their business and employ more staff in the next five years.

According to ACE associate professor Paul Steffens, Australian women put their above average success in new business ventures down to their skill levels and the high media attention given to entrepreneurship in Australia, which provides them with successful role models. Here are three Brisbane entrepreneurs who are each leading the way in different fields.

Vanessa Garrard

Vanessa Garrard took a conference call while she was in labour. Her daughter Jaiden is

now 7 and the business she started in 2006 will turn over \$28million this year. "I was in a conference call with my staff in between and during contractions actually," she laughs.

While Garrard, 34, now enjoys international success, accolades and the satisfaction her works brings her, and she has four children at home: Jaiden and three boys under three. "That keeps your feet on the ground," she says.

Garrard's Chermshire-based business, E3 Style, researches and develops consumer products for Australian and international retailers. One in four Australians already owns a product that E3 has developed and more than two million of those products have been sold in the past year alone. It supplies everything from eReaders and iPod docks to cameras, camcorders and licensed products including Spiderman, Glee, Smurfs and Moshi Monsters to major retailers.

Growing up in Marsden, Garrard started earning money at 8, weeding gardens. By 12

she'd started a business. "My dad had to register the company, Sunstreet Snacks, because I was too young," she remembers. By 18 she moved on to her second business before she moved again, this time into the electronics industry. She learnt some very tough lessons along the way.

"There was a very big deal I'd done that went sour, the company I was dealing with went under but I refused to [become] bankrupt," Garrard recalls. With a \$120,000 debt, she took a job as PA at an electronics company to pay it off. "I tried but couldn't get sales jobs because I was over-qualified. I was earning \$34,000 in that role but I paid off the debt and moved up the food chain, grew their business very successfully and then branched out with two other colleagues and 'bang!' Here we are."

Garrard says she's never felt limited by being in Brisbane, or basing her companies here. "Why should I? Women often pull themselves down, limit themselves. We're leading the industry and yet we don't have a

single customer here in Brisbane - and I get to do the school drop-off."

She also shares her considerable wealth of knowledge with other women.

"I do a lot of mentoring because you don't know what you don't know. Lots of people still don't have a business plan but sink a lot of money into a product, often their life savings, and they get emotional about it. It can go wrong pretty quickly, unfortunately," says Garrard.

Advice from Garrard is simple. Surround yourself with good people. "I have a staff of 23, mostly in Brisbane, but also in LA, Sydney and China. It's my team that allows us to have the success we're enjoying."

Fiona Neale

When Angelina Jolie wears your makeup it's safe to say you've hit the jackpot. Fiona Neale, founder of the Australian makeup brand Issada, can claim such a prize. Neale, 39, a former dental nurse, grew up in Morningside.



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