

YOU TOO can start a business

You'll be amazed by the variety of business ideas uncovered by Sonia Williams in her new book *Start Me Up!*

MANY PEOPLE DREAM about leaving the 9 to 5 daily grind behind to become their own boss – coming up with a strong business idea might be the one thing holding them back. If that sounds like you, don't despair.

"Just because you haven't had your own light bulb moment doesn't mean you shouldn't be in business," says Sonia Williams in her latest book *Start Me Up!*, written especially for people searching for a starting point.

To begin with Williams suggests you "assess the 'you' business opportunity. Ask yourself what you are good at. What are your core skills and strengths? Do you have any particular skills or professional expertise that could be used for the development of a business? If you have a hobby, you could capitalise on it."

Another way to come up with a good business concept is to draw on life experiences, says Williams. "Have there been any situations where you thought: 'If only the product or service did...?', 'If only the product or service was...?', 'I wish there was a...'? These sorts of situations are seeds. This is exactly how some successful entrepreneurs have come up with fantastic, innovative, award-winning ideas."

Identifying changing trends can be another way to uncover a good business

idea. "Spotting trends takes research; you need to be observant and alert to changes in popular culture," says Williams.

Some of the hot trends include customising, appealing to individual needs, going "green", blooming baby boomers, health, fitness and self improvement and handmade. These, and eight other trends featured in the book, can form the basis of a good business idea.

If you still need some help with ideas Williams, who has personally established several businesses, has come up with more than 100 business concepts to give budding entrepreneurs inspiration.

To get your imagination working, here

are 10 low-cost business ideas featured in *Start Me Up!*

Printed posters

Any poster first printed more than 70 years ago is classified as in the public domain. This means it is copyright free and you can reprint and sell it. Some amazing artwork is available, including Olympic posters and art exhibit posters as well as material from World War I and before.

These beautiful reproduction posters are often used in home decorating. With a website you can start to sell posters worldwide and you don't have to pay any licence fees.

You could even take the poster prints and apply the designs to improve other products;



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for example, you could recreate a 1923 design and apply it to a range of tea towels, place mats or coasters. The possibilities are endless.

DIY furniture & accessories

Take a dash of IKEA, mix it with a little craft and you have a business idea that involves hand-decorated kit furniture. Flat-pack furniture significantly reduces storage space when items aren't in use, as well as on costs such as freight and delivery. This idea particularly suits children's furniture – chests of drawers, toy boxes and bookshelves.

You may also consider diversifying into homewares, including spice tray holders, bathroom ornaments, toilet roll holders or

mirrors or bathroom stools, to name just a few possibilities. This is an excellent idea if you are extremely artistic, creative and “crafty”.

Value is added to the items by hand-decorating. You could use paints, stencils or other decorative adhesives or accessories.

Because the furniture is in kit form, you can sell it through a website.

This opens up opportunities to offer other services, such as personalising the furniture or homeware. For example, a customer could choose a design from your range and elect to include their child's name.

Cleaning services for vacating tenants

Every month tenants move in and out of rented premises. This business idea is all about offering vacating tenants an opportunity to have their property professionally cleaned, saving them valuable time and money. It also optimises their chances of getting a full refund.

Services could include cleaning carpets, walls, ovens, appliances and, if necessary, touch-up painting of chipped spots or other minor repairs.

To market this business Williams recommends you approach the property managers of various real estate agencies. You could ask them to recommend your services when the tenant hands in their notice to vacate.

The incentive for the property manager is that they have a clean property available for immediate rental, instead of off the market awaiting minor repairs or cleaning.

Target popular areas in and around the city; this is where you'll find young, time-poor professionals who are more likely to use your services.

Sell your own ebooks online

If you have experience or expertise in a particular field, or a talent for research, you could write an ebook. There is a huge market for ebooks in the United States, so be sure to tailor your book to suit an international market.

Start by doing your research: find out about any particular informational needs. What information would an audience pay for? For older women, 55-plus, it could be “natural remedies to help deal with menopause”; for brand-new mums, it could be “how to organise your time with a new baby”.

Once you find the need, you can either write the material yourself, if you have the knowledge and resources, or source your own team of experts and interview them to get the information demanded by your target market. Note, however, that some people may expect a royalty for each sale of the book, so Williams recommends you clarify this with your experts before you record anything.

When you have finished writing, says Williams, it's time to call in “the polisher” – the editor. You can access editors or even ghost

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writers from many online sites such as www.elance.com, www.gurus.com or www.freelancer.com.au.

Once your material is edited you have an ebook you can sell. You can sell your own range of ebooks with a simple site connected to ClickBank.

If you would prefer all the glory, set up a website from which customers can purchase stock directly. This option needs some money invested so your site can process payments and customers download the product.

Williams says that having set this up herself with her own ebooks, she can attest it is quite difficult. You could bundle up your ebooks and sell customers an annual membership to all products and services. This business model would enable you to generate an ongoing revenue through subscriptions.

If you are interested in selling ebooks online, Williams recommends *How To Make Money While You Sleep* by Brett McFall. Another source is www.ebookapprentice.com. You can sell ebooks on the site www.lulu.com.

Toy rental service

Instead of selling toys, rent them out instead. Children quickly tire of toys; once they have worked out how a toy wiggles and jiggles they move on to the next whizz-bang product. A toy rental service is the perfect solution; parents don't have to continually buy expensive new toys.

The main barrier is the initial investment required to stock your rental service. With a little street smarts you can find bargains on eBay, at end-of-year sales and in second-hand outlets.

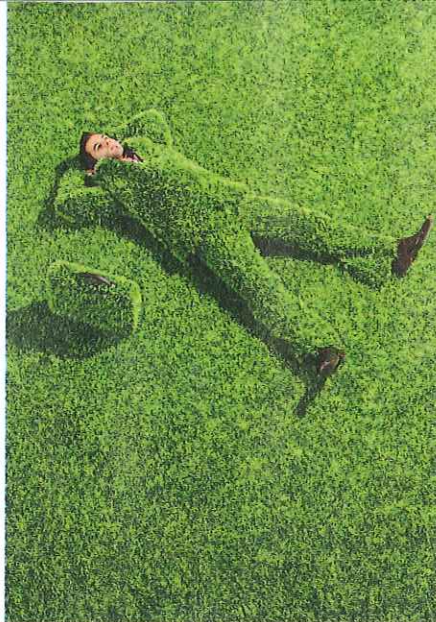
You could charge a rental fee per toy or set a basic membership fee for six months or a year. To cost-effectively market this business you could offer a free month's membership to any parent who introduces a friend to the business.

To get your business up and running, Williams suggests looking for ways to infiltrate mothers' groups. Place advertising materials at various childcare centres, for example.

Advertise in your local newspaper. Because of postage limitations, target mums and dads within a 20-kilometre radius of your base.

Thank-you notes

So much preparation goes into planning a wedding. After the big day is over there are still a lot of loose ends to tie up. Sending thank-you cards is often the last thing on the just-married couple's mind. But it must be done, so why not offer this service?



“Seek out a product or service you want to work in, one that really interests you”

Get the word out about your services through wedding planners and other businesses in the wedding industry.

If you have systems set up so that the gift and sender are recorded when the gift arrives, you will find this a very easy business indeed. You should be able to earn at least \$1 per thank-you plus postage for your notes. As some guest lists run into the hundreds this could be a nice little earner.

Flatpack assembler

These days most furniture comes flat-packed. If you're good at putting things together you can make money helping people with their ready-to-assemble furniture. To promote this business ask one of the largest flat-pack suppliers, IKEA, if you could leave your cards at their checkout counters.

You could promote your business through home-style magazines. There is little capital investment required since most flat-pack furniture sets come with instructions and allen keys. A couple of screwdrivers and a mallet, and you're in business, says Williams. You could charge an hourly rate or a flat fee.

DVD burner

How many of us have hours of footage on outdated videotape? You can capitalise on this by offering to transfer images on videotape to DVD discs. There is a huge market for this service, says Williams.

You will need the technology to convert videotape to DVD. The financial outlay is minimal and you will make your money back after only a few clients.

Pass out fliers at school and church functions, or place ads in the newspaper. Promote your services through video rental stores.

Promote local community

People move interstate and to new suburbs on a daily basis, yet there is rarely a welcoming party to introduce the new resident to local services. Williams says you could provide this service through real estate offices or the council. Local companies would pay to have their products (or coupons for their products/services) included in a special “welcome basket” for new arrivals to an area.

A new resident has no established loyalties so it's a great opportunity for a local business to get in first.

Chances are the new resident will be receptive to a free sample or discount. And each business might pay you \$50 to \$100 a month to supply them with new customers. In some areas you could get 100 businesses to participate in this manner.

It might take some time to build up a business this way, but if you were a lone ranger in your area it should be fairly easy. Once you're established you could implement the same business idea in other communities.

Reunion planner

Every year groups of people get together for a reunion. All kinds of people, from high school graduates of a certain year to sailors who crewed on the same ship, will attend some type of reunion occasionally.

Organising such an event is time-consuming and daunting for amateurs. As a result, says Williams, there is a lucrative market for professional reunion planners who will handle all the details. To promote this business, you need to go to the source of potential reunions. Start with well-established schools and their past students. Once your business is established you can expand to other markets.

Whether you opt for one of these ideas or one of your own, choose something you're passionate about and really interested in.

“Success does not normally flow from ventures where the main objective is purely to make money,” says Williams. “Seek out a market you desperately want to work in. Find a product or service that really interests you. To be successful in business you need to live and breathe the merits of your product or service.”