



Research & Consulting

Mompreneurs®

Real Life Wonder Women

By Christine Janssen & Erin Higgins, denken Research & Consulting

In their own rights, being a new business owner and a new mother are some of the greatest challenges any woman can face. Doing both at the same time requires a certain set of skills and characteristics including lots of determination, patience, and multi-tasking. (And perhaps that occasional glass of red wine at the end of a hectic day.) Introducing the mompreneur...

What exactly is a mompreneur? Intuitively speaking, she is a woman who simultaneously balances the roles of motherhood and entrepreneurship. The term is typically used to describe a woman who leaves the workplace to raise children and then launches a small, home-based business rather than returning to the traditional workplace. But this isn't the only path to mompreneurship. Oftentimes women are first and foremost entrepreneurs and then become mothers. Clearly, there are a wide variety of circumstances that can lead women to this stage in their lives.

The term "mompreneur" was coined back in the late 1990s by Ellen Parlapiano and Pat Cobe, two leading authorities on women-owned businesses. They are co-authors of *Mompreneurs: A Mother's Practical Step-by-Step Guide to Work-at-Home Success* and *Mompreneurs Online: Using the Internet to Build Work@Home Success* as well as the creators of www.mompreneuronline.com. (Unbeknownst to most people, the word "mompreneur" is trademarked, and Parlapiano and Cobe are actually the only ones who are legally allowed to use the word in commerce.) While the term essentially describes any woman who is trying to balance both family and work responsibilities all under one roof, Cobe agrees that there isn't just one type of mompreneur. The distinction is that this title represents a woman who has at least one child and who has launched her own business. I liken mompreneurs to wonder women with super powers. Both roles are extremely demanding and both carry responsibilities that rarely end when the 5 o'clock whistle blows.

Trends

It is difficult to pinpoint how many mompreneurs there are in the United States, but according to some of the latest statistics from the Center for Women's Business Research (www.womensbusinessresearch.org), the number of women-owned businesses has grown in excess of 40% over the past 10 years, and the number of women who are choosing to stay home to raise their children has increased nearly 15%.

Many new moms in particular have discovered that there are many lifestyle options available to them and those “high-achieving” career women are deliberately choosing not to return to the daily grind of Corporate America. Women who are used to earning a regular salary, spending as they wish, and being intellectually stimulated on a day-to-day basis are often left feeling a bit empty once they become stay-at-home mothers. They find themselves stuck in a chasm between making money and challenging themselves professionally versus trying to be the perfect mother who devotes all of her time and attention to her children. Sadly, societal and economic pressures have driven us to rely on dual incomes to maintain a certain lifestyle, so once the stork delivers the goods and a woman chooses to stay at home to raise her children, couples are looking for creative ways to marry their old and new lifestyles with minimal sacrifices. Today, a large percentage of new moms are highly educated, ambitious career women and want to be professionally challenged, so they are finding ways to stay connected with the business world. The desire to set and achieve personal goals often results in women launching their own businesses from the comfort of home. While not an easy position to be in, it works for many women and can be the best of both worlds.

The trend of women who leave their jobs to have children and then opt to start their own business continues to grow. And don't mistake this for a short-lived fad like big shoulder pads. There is a strong, definitive change in the world of entrepreneurship from both a social and an economic standpoint. Check this out: In 2007, the Intuit Future of Small Business Report was published to illustrate the changing face of entrepreneurs over the next ten years. The study was sponsored by Intuit (www.intuit.com), one of the leading providers of financial management tools for small business, and authored by The Institute for the Future (www.iftf.org), an independent research organization specializing in emerging trends and their impact on global society. The report stated that “the face of small business will dramatically change as seasoned baby boomers, those fresh out of high school, mid-career women, mompreneurs and new immigrants will come together to create the most diverse pool of entrepreneurs ever.” Moreover, the study emphasized that the United States will continue to realize increasing numbers of female entrepreneurs, thus transferring a large portion of the talent pool from Corporate America to the small business sector.

A Day in the Life of a Mompreneur

Earlier this March (2008), we at [denken Research & Consulting](http://www.denken.com) conducted a brief qualitative study to uncover some of the greatest challenges that mompreneurs face. Our objective was to uncover challenges, gather advice and resources, and then share our findings with other mompreneurs so they too can successfully manage multiple roles. Participants were recruited from Ladies Who Launch (www.ladieswholaunch.com), a nation-wide organization that supports women entrepreneurs. In-depth telephone interviews lasting approximately 60 minutes were conducted with select participants who qualified as mompreneurs.

The participants represented a variety of industries from around the country and were at various stages of mompreneurship. Some of them were new to motherhood with a newborn at home; others were a little more seasoned with up to five children. Some were more experienced entrepreneurs with businesses existing for up to five years; others had just started their businesses within the last six months, and one woman was still in the midst of launching. Despite the fact that there was great diversity within the group, plenty of common scenarios and challenges surfaced. Here's what we found.

Oftentimes, it was the transformation to motherhood that sparked ideas for new products/services and ultimately inspired these women to launch a new business. These days, if women can't find what they want on the market, they take it upon themselves to create it with the hope that other mothers will benefit. These are true entrepreneurs as they are developing products that fulfill a need and/or solve a real problem. This was a common thread with the women we interviewed. Many of their businesses were created to improve or simplify their lives – or their children's lives – since they became wives and mothers. Ideas ranged from managing lifestyle changes to designing and selling organic baby clothing and products to developing fashionable and functional maternity wear. As Susan Mussaffi, mom extraordinaire of four and owner of Organic Cottontail (www.organiccottontail.com) discovered, "when you're aware of the desire, opportunities start presenting themselves."

When asked to explain a day in the life of a mompreneur, we found these women to be extremely organized and they crammed an incredible amount of tasks into each day, constantly swapping hats. Most do this methodically; seamlessly switching from "mom mode" to "work mode." While each woman had her own unique schedule, their priorities were the same: kids come first, then business, then other obligations. When describing themselves and how they manage their day, they made a clear differentiation of when they were in "mom mode" versus "work mode."

Although some of the interviewees admitted to occasionally questioning what the heck they were doing and how they were going to stay afloat, they continue to be encouraged by an inner voice and of course the thrill of small accomplishments. Signing on a new client or finally grasping the ins and outs of SEO were positive reinforcements that they were moving in the right direction. In addition to having the support of people who believe in them, having an optimistic attitude and the burning desire to succeed definitely helps keep that spark alive.

Challenges

The greatest challenges of mompreneurship were tightly linked to a lack or mismanagement of time, not necessarily money. While traditional entrepreneurs who don't have children might place an equal emphasis on time and money, it

is clear that mothers need to be masters at time management and possess extraordinary organizational skills to meet never-ending demands. Mothers and entrepreneurs alike can relate to the overwhelming feeling of trying to “do it all” and trying to be the best at everything. Imagine trying to be the best wearing both of those hats. (yikes!) Something tells me these women would be in favor of cloning.

Other obstacles mompreneurs face are finding a reliable and trustworthy person to help with childcare, managing their finances, and dealing with the “G” word. Guilt. It seems to be a no-win situation... when they spend time with their kids, they feel guilty for not tending to business, and when they are putting in hours in the office, they feel guilty for not being with their kids. Some women also mentioned the fear of change and success. This is not uncommon for entrepreneurs in general as they are often uncertain how they will actually handle being successful and profitable.

Suggestions and Coping Mechanisms

In order to cope with the stress of mompreneurship, these wonder women so kindly offered their words of wisdom as well as a few tricks of the trade.

Plan Your Work & Work Your Plan

Women are naturally great planners and that is precisely what helps them keep all those balls in the air. Make technology your BFF (i.e. Blackberries, Outlook) or squeeze the value out of a good old fashioned calendar. Set up weekly and daily schedules and stick to them. One interviewee said it so succinctly: “divide and conquer.” Get your husband and older children to help more with household chores, making dinner, and cleaning. Treating your calendar like “The Holy Grail” will help keep your entire life on track, all in one place. The next step is to prioritize your priorities. Since both children and business vie for the title, it is crucial that your schedule specifies when you are in “work mode” and when you are in “mom mode.” When in a particular zone, be fully dedicated and focused. And don’t feel inadequate or unproductive if you are unable to tick off your entire To Do list each day. There is always tomorrow.

As organized as you might be, there will constantly be surprises and zingers that can throw your day into disarray, so try to be as flexible as possible. Expect the unexpected and do your best to roll with the punches. Having a good sense of humor will also help manage the day-to-day challenges and keep your own meltdown at bay.

Do Your Homework

Nearly 50% of the respondents highly suggested doing a substantial amount of research prior to starting a business. Nichole Albanese, owner of Lucky For Baby (www.luckyforbaby.com) and mother of two young boys, said in hindsight she wished she had done more research and planning before launching.

Empower yourself by intimately understanding your industry and market. Know who your competitors are and how they position themselves in the market, then make sure you have a competitive advantage and clearly differentiate your product or service. It is a risky endeavor to launch a new business on a hunch, an idea, or a prayer. Since you have limited resources on hand, determine where you should be focusing your energy, time, and money. Building partnerships is also a great way to work collaboratively with a similar or complimentary business. So while your kids are doing their homework, make sure you do yours.

Face Your Fears

First of all, don't be afraid to ask for help, but be selective on the advice you take to heart. You will be pleasantly surprised to find that most people will want to help you (women are especially good at this). Just be specific about what you need. Secondly, don't be afraid to make mistakes. These moments of truth make for the best learning experiences. Many an entrepreneur has flat-out failed more than once before hitting the big time. Remember... entrepreneurs are inherently risk-takers. This is one of the characteristics that sets you apart from mainstream society. Be prepared to work your plan, but also be prepared to adjust your plan when things don't turn out as anticipated. This leads me to my third point... Don't be afraid of change. Embrace it. I bet 99.99% of people on this planet are afraid of change. But change is good. It challenges you and it encourages you to grow. When in need of professional guidance, seek the assistance of a life coach or change consultant like Rebecca Rodskog of Rodskog Change Consulting (www.rodskog.com).

Play Mind Games

Having a positive attitude works wonders. Make a conscious effort to see the good and opportunities in things, people, and events that at first may seem difficult. Throw your energy and enthusiasm out to the universe and notice what you get back in return. Keep negative thoughts at bay. Stay focused and keep the faith. Remind yourself that most people spend their lives in jobs/careers that they absolutely despise. Be grateful that you are wise enough to follow your heart and your passion. Be clear on your intentions, purpose, and goals. Most importantly, never stop believing in yourself, because when the doubting sets in, the wheels start falling off your wagon.

Build a Solid Support System

Let's face it – in addition to the usual stress inducers of being a business owner, mompreneurs also need to know how to manage their 2-year-old's meltdown while running out the door to an important meeting or how to protect business documents from sticky fingers or crayons. Mompreneurs need a reliable support system and special resources. Surround yourself with people who believe in you and encourage you every step of the way. Interviewees stated

that their husbands and girlfriends were their biggest cheerleaders, which is no surprise. Several also suggested getting your entire family on board. If your children are old enough, give them household or business-related tasks to do. Sometimes the younger kids really get a kick out of licking envelopes or organizing things. Not only will this help lighten your load, your kids will feel like they are making a contribution, plus you will be teaching them about responsibility. Also, take full advantage of networking groups such as Ladies Who Launch or subject-specific Meetup groups (www.meetup.com) where you can join hundreds of networking groups relevant to your business. If you don't find what you're looking for, you can create your own group. Voila!

In addition to your moral support group, one of the wisest things you can do to get your business off the ground is to build your own team of subject-matter experts. This could be a financial whiz to help manage your books or a web designer who can whip up a website in a fraction of the time it would take you to do on your own. Outsourcing business tasks that you can't do yourself will enable you to focus on what you do best and what you enjoy the most. Understand that you don't have to do everything yourself. It is a worthwhile investment in your business to reach out to experts and it will help you maintain your sanity.

Manage the Troops

Obviously, if you can afford a full- or part-time nanny, this is a huge help. If that is not an option, work out a schedule with your spouse and look for inexpensive or freebie childcare in your neighborhood. For example, if your gym offers inexpensive childcare, this is a great opportunity for you to escape for some "me time." (Besides, there's nothing better for your mind, body, and soul than some good sweat therapy.)

The key is to develop some sort of system that clearly delineates when you are in "mom mode" versus "work mode." To avoid endless interruptions from children when working from home, try this... I recently read about a woman who gives her children a "visitor's ticket" each morning, good for one visit to mom's office that day. This encourages kids to save all their questions, stories, and woes for one visit, versus interrupting you every five minutes. Once they use their "visitor's ticket," they know they won't be able to bother you until the end of the day when you return to "mom mode." This is a great trick that will help you stay focused, but will also teach kids some good values – time management, encouraging resolutions of their own problems, understanding and respecting mom when she's in "work mode."

Valuable Resources for Mompreneurs

In addition to the suggestions above, here is a list of resources that just might make your life as a mompreneur a little more manageable.

Big City Moms (www.bigcitymoms.com): A good resource for moms and moms-to-be living in urban areas. The site includes a nanny exchange as well as a list of events such as luncheons, classes, and parenting seminars.

Mommy Mastermind (www.mommymastermind.com): Aimed at savvy stay-at-home and work-at-home moms with young children, founder Angela Kane launched this site to help moms and mompreneurs alike manage their hectic lives. In addition to a list of inexpensive or free family-friendly events, Mommy Mastermind offers valuable pod casts and other downloadable resources such as articles and worksheets to maximize your limited time.

Mompreneurs Online (www.mompreneuronline.com): This site was created by Ellen Parlapiano and Pat Cobe, the inventors of the term "mompreneur." It is a mom's one-stop, work-at-home resource, providing just about everything mompreneurs need to know and have, including a networking community, relevant articles and suggested books, and even an online mall featuring products made exclusively by mompreneurs.

The Organized Parent (www.theorganizedparent.com): This is where busy moms go to get organized. Founded by Stephanie Voza in 2003, this site provides tips and products to help keep multi-tasking moms organized. You can find a variety of products from creative filing systems and storage solutions to event-specific survival kits.

Center for Women's Business Research (www.womensbusinessresearch.org): Want to sink your teeth into stats, trends, and characteristics about women entrepreneurs? Here's a top-notch resource that lists most every women's networking group under the sun, has loads of research reports on topics such as accessing capital, and offers suggestions for managing a home-based business. Some reports are free; some must be ordered for a small fee. While I found a few of the documents to be a bit outdated, this site is still a great place to begin your research.

The National Association of Women Business Owners (www.nawbo.org): A few hundred dollars for an annual membership is definitely a worthwhile investment to access hundreds of thousands of like-minded women entrepreneurs around the country. Endless amounts of luncheons, roundtables, and events provide new avenues to build your network and your business.

StartupNation (www.startupnation.com): A robust resource created by entrepreneurs for entrepreneurs. In addition to offering lots of good ideas and strategies for entrepreneurs working from home, this site provides endless amounts of articles, pod casts, blogs, audio/video segments, and networking opportunities to help launch and build a new business.

The MomBA

Although there are plenty of mompreneurs who do indeed have business degrees and the necessary management experience to successfully launch a new business, many do not. And the thought of tackling an MBA on top of motherhood and operating a business is not a wise choice. (Meltdown anyone?) Acknowledging this challenging situation, the Small Business Division at *Capital One* and Victoria Pericon, founder of online resource www.savvymommy.com, have jointly created a list of tips on entrepreneurship to help guide mompreneurs who might not have a business background. To earn what they dubbed a **MomBA**, they suggest educating yourself in the following five areas: innovation, finance, marketing, the Internet (particularly the Web 2.0), and the art of multi-tasking. Thankfully women are experts at multi-tasking, so that leaves you with only four other principles to master.

Aside from researching a wide variety of financing options and drafting a business plan, one of the underlying themes of the **MomBA** is doing your homework. Do the necessary research to properly position yourself for success. For example, they suggested doing research to understand a) your competitors, b) the power of social networking, c) how to efficiently and effectively promote your product/service, and d) whether or not that idea of yours has legs to stand upon.

Future Outlook

Even though being a mompreneur is challenging on so many levels, more and more women are joining the ranks. So is it true? Can women have it all? When posed with this very question, every participant in our study responded with a resounding YES! But there are caveats. Christine Lavin of Fit2BMom commented that “having it all doesn’t necessarily mean having it all at the same time.” Admittedly, balance, sacrifice, and flexibility are all things that enable mompreneurs to have it all in the larger scheme of things. Another mompreneur, Dena Smith-Givens of Primal Parenting Magazine (www.primalparentingmagazine.com) brought up a good point in that “having it all” likely means different things to different people. So ask yourself what it is you want out of your life. What does “having it all” mean to you? Whatever it is, realize that – with a little planning and support – you can simultaneously be a fabulous wife, mother, business owner, and friend.

There is a definite parallel between launching a business and raising children. They both need to be created and regularly nurtured. They both must take baby steps before they can run. Leverage your strengths as a woman, be it great organizational skills or relentless passion and enthusiasm. Be patient with yourself and those around you. Don’t lose site of who you are and what you want from your life. Boldly tell the universe what you have to offer. Spend less time worrying about all the things you have yet to do, and congratulate yourself for all that you are and all that you have accomplished already.

Yes, you can have it all.

[Christine Janssen](#) is the Founder and President of [denken Research & Consulting](#), a boutique consulting firm in New York, NY that provides end-to-end market research and writing services to small businesses, including start-ups. She is also a Doctoral Candidate at New York University, where she is completing her dissertation on women entrepreneurs.