

# Going it alone...

Government statistics show that more and more women are choosing to start their own business, with 30% of the UK companies being owned by women. **Libby Sibilev** speaks to a young businesswoman whose example demonstrates that a successful entrepreneur does not have to be a grey-haired, middle-aged male.

She is only 30 yet Katrina Wells has already been running her own garden design company for two years. A graduate in Creative Arts from Manchester Metropolitan University, she has had no formal business training and didn't set out to be a garden designer. "I wanted to go into the creative industry after I finished university, but ended up drifting into floristry," says Katrina.

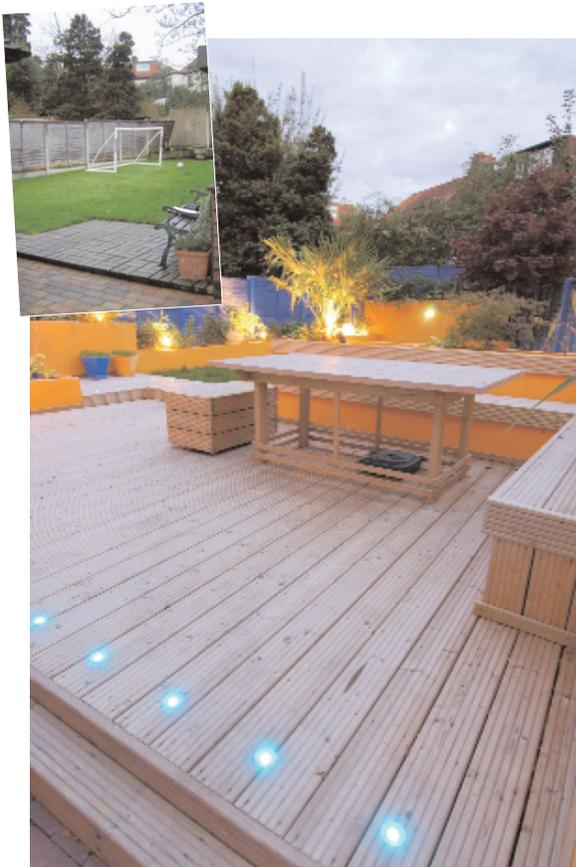
Six months later she landed a job with Imagination, one of the world's largest design consultancies, initially starting as a content producer for the Journey Zone at the Millennium Dome. She then moved into the role of creative producer to co-ordinate events such as the opening of the Tate Modern, Guinness Storehouse and Harry Potter film launch. But in 2002, four years after joining the organisation, she was suddenly made redundant.

"It was at this point that my interest in gardening, which I had since childhood, re-emerged," says Katrina. "My friend and I placed an advert in the local paper and soon after, the company Earth Designs was born. To this day, 30 gardens have been built across London and the South East."

Garden design is not the same as gardening and is concerned more with creativity than with planting seeds. It includes hard landscaping, structural design, lighting and installing water features. The garden design process starts with a free garden design consultation in the client's garden and simple concept drawings are produced, the budget, practicalities and time frame are also discussed. A garden plan, based on the initial concept, is then drawn, along with a budget costing anything from £4,000-£60,000 and a mood board, and then presented to the client for sign off. Once contracts and deposits have been exchanged the work is scheduled in and the build begins.

Katrina is passionate about her job. "The most enjoyable aspect of my work is transforming a patch of land into a dynamic, funky and pleasurable space. People have cried after I have built gardens for them, which is quite a powerful moment - one client said I made a dream come alive - quite strong stuff really for just moving some mud around into a pretty shape."

But setting up and running a company can be an arduous and daunting task, which begins with the entrepreneur gaining a thorough knowledge of the business, its customers and competitors. It is equally important to



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possess sales and marketing skills, to have the financial ability to plan and control money matters and, of course, to have the capital to get the company off the ground. Katrina admits that she was very inexperienced when she went into business: "I was naïve and struggled due to my lack of

business experience. Speaking to friends who had a business background and to people working in the industry proved invaluable," she says.

In addition to evaluating your potential, it is essential to come up with a business plan, laying out what you want to achieve and do some research to estimate how much will be spent on the business week by week. A business plan is vital when borrowing money from lenders.

Business Link, which is a government organisation, holds free advice sessions on how to set up a business plan. But Katrina did not find their service to be very helpful. "I was put in touch with one of Business Link's freelancers who was passionate about big business making and he did not believe that my ideas could work in practice. Had I been a 35-year-old man, he might have behaved differently," she says.

There are three main types of business structure used by small entrepreneurs: sole trader, partnership and company. Each has its own advantages and disadvantages, which your accountant or solicitor will help explain. Katrina opted for the limited company, since some of her business' sponsors and shareholders are silent partners. She is a managing director but in fact fulfils the role of creative director, as well as doing all the marketing and PR work. The company also employs a team of 10-12 people who have various roles ranging from office to manual work.

Her work is a roller coaster. Some awful weeks are interspersed with great times of intense creativity and satisfaction with a job well done. So what exactly is it that has helped Katrina to stay afloat and expand her business? In her words, "It was a combination of luck, charm, tenacity and real passion that helped me to get to where I am today."

## I N F O

For more information on Earth Designs visit [www.earthdesigns.co.uk](http://www.earthdesigns.co.uk)

To find out more on how to start a business visit: [www.businesslink.gov.uk](http://www.businesslink.gov.uk)