

# INTRODUCING...

## LADIES WHO LAUNCH

In recent years, female employment has rarely stayed out of the news. Damning statistics about gender pay gaps and underrepresentation in the workplace have dominated the headlines of late, giving the impression that women and business just don't go. However, dig a little deeper and you'll discover that, actually, women are really making waves in the business world. While the economic crash in 2008 resulted in job losses and company closures, it also saw the number of women starting up businesses steadily rise. Between 2008 and 2011 women accounted for an unprecedented 80% of the newly self-employed. 20 years ago, fewer than 650,000 women were self-employed – now there are more than 950,000 in the UK. In Tunbridge Wells, hundreds of women are now running businesses across the town. From fashion styling to fitness and everything in between, the area buzzes with creativity and entrepreneurial skill. The high calibre and variety of networking groups we have in the area also provides essential support for women in business – whether they're mums looking to get back to work, or women with creative new ideas looking for a platform to launch, the town definitely has something for everyone. To celebrate successful women in business, we caught up with 11 local high-flying ladies from a broad range of companies to discover what makes them tick...

### SUSIE BENNETT

**Company:** Dandara

**Type:** Property Developer

**Position:** Sales and Marketing Director UK South East

**Web:** [www.dandara.com](http://www.dandara.com)

#### Tell us a bit about your business and your role within it

The Dandara Group has become known as one of the UK's most diverse property developers, building high-end residential, mixed use and commercial developments. My role as Sales Director UK South oversees the sales department, develops and implements sales strategies and controls all marketing activities to deliver results and meet the region's targets and growth requirements.

#### To be successful in business, what attributes do you need?

In my industry resilience is key, along with excellent communication skills and a determination to succeed. Building relationships is vital in all businesses; it may seem basic but you must be able to get on with people and build strong relationships at all levels, internally and externally to your business.

#### What challenges has your business faced in the last year?

Being a new regional set up, we have worked hard to build our brand in the South East where we were unknown. To create a new residential community at Knights Wood in an area which is historically known as an industrial estate had its challenges. With brand awareness and showcasing our quality product in our outstanding marketing suite in June 2014, the public could see for themselves what a unique location Knights

Wood is. With new projects around the corner such as Union House in The Pantiles, we are very excited about the future of the region.

#### What gives you the biggest buzz at work?

There is so much that gives me a buzz at work; my enthusiastic team who are full of energy and commitment, successful sales and meeting regional targets, but I think the main buzz for me is the quality of our product. I still feel excited when I look around a finished house before it is handed over.

#### Do you have any business regrets?

I don't have any business regrets; I have made mistakes along the way but I believe these are the most valuable lessons.

#### Describe yourself in one sentence

I am extremely driven and committed, diligent and innovative; I am open and honest, grateful of my amazing family and friends and I am passionate in everything I do.



Thanks to Paul Meyer, Harriet Rainbow and the Gallery Hairdressers

## GILLIAN FORSYTH

**Company:** Halliwell  
**Type:** Care Home  
**Position:** General Manager  
**Web:** [www.efhl.co.uk](http://www.efhl.co.uk)

### Tell us a bit about your business and your role within it

Halliwell Care Home, based in Tunbridge Wells is part of the Elizabeth Finn Home Group. My role as general manager is to maintain, develop and market the business, which currently provides: respite and long-term care, residential and nursing, post-op rehabilitation and convalescent care, continuing care and gold standard 'Beacon Status' end of life and palliative care.

### How has your business changed and evolved since you launched?

Halliwell has been in Tunbridge Wells from the early 1960s, and when I was brought in, in 2006, I was asked to reinvigorate the business. Since then we have undertaken a four year, £7million redevelopment and expansion programme, which was completed in 2012. I am continuing to develop the business. For example, we have just opened our new physiotherapy room to support post op and convalescent rehabilitation.

### What challenges has your business faced in the last year?

A number of care providers have entered the Tunbridge Wells area. This has meant that we need to work hard at communicating value for money, as we are perceived as expensive and at the higher end of the market. What we actually are is high quality at a competitive price.

### What gives you the biggest buzz at work?

Making a difference to the residents and being able to care for them in later life as I would my own mother or father, while providing relatives with comfort and peace of mind.

### Describe yourself in one sentence:

I am organised, a fervent ambassador for elderly care, people person, finisher and doting mother and grandmother!



## DEBORAH RICHARDS

**Company:** Maddisons Residential  
**Type:** Estate Agent  
**Position:** Managing Partner  
**Web:** [www.maddisonsresidential.co.uk](http://www.maddisonsresidential.co.uk)

### Tell us a bit about your business and your role within it

I am the managing partner and owner of Maddisons Residential, an estate agent based on The Pantiles in Tunbridge Wells. The beauty of running your own business is that you decide how things will be done, so I have removed many of the 'pain points' of buying and selling a property. And the vision is working: we have won two prestigious awards and receive 95% of new instructions from client referrals.

### What gives you the biggest buzz at work?

So many things, as I am now working in an industry that I love. I love receiving a recommendation, winning a new instruction, negotiating a deal (that often breaks the previous ceiling price), selling a house that has been on the market for a number of years unsuccessfully with another agent and handing over the keys to the new owners. But probably, the best bit is building really strong, open relationships with my buyers and sellers that see them writing the most lovely testimonials.

### What challenges has your business faced in the last year?

My previous jobs had always been with really big brands, and I completely underestimated the power of that brand to open doors. I have such a passion for what my agency delivers, but the biggest challenge is getting in front of sellers to tell them! Once we are invited to pitch for an instruction, we have an almost 100% record of winning the instruction. I just still want to tell more people about the difference we bring to the world of estate agency!

### What advice would you give to someone thinking about starting up a business?

Do it in something that you love. Starting a business is hard, exhausting, lonely and nerve-racking! But if you love what you do, your passion and energy will be infectious to others and carry you through to the times when you will look back and realise it was the best decision you ever made.



CRAIG MATTHEWS



## HELEN TURNER

**Company:** Property Turner  
**Type:** Property Search Agency  
**Position:** Owner  
**Web:** [www.propertyturner.co.uk](http://www.propertyturner.co.uk)

### Tell us a bit about your business and your role within it

Property Turner is a professional home finding business that acts for buyers looking to rent and purchase homes in Kent. Most of our clients are either relocating from London or abroad and seeking a family home with good communications and that's close to good schools. However, we have also acted this year for a number of clients looking for a second home by the seaside and a number of retired clients who want to downsize and appreciate having all the stress taken from them. I have a couple of professional ladies who work with me, both with property experience and both having excellent local knowledge that can only be gained from living in their patches. However, I oversee all the instructions and negotiate the transactions.

### How has your business changed and evolved since you launched?

I initially thought the business would all come from clients looking to move from South West London, but actually a lot of business has come locally and from abroad, which surprised me. We have adapted to meet demand and so cover all the coastal areas as well. I have also acted for a number of developers seeking opportunities to build or refurbish properties, both for personal occupation and commercial gain.

### To be successful in business, what attributes do you need?

I believe that relationships are really important for my business, so you need to be able to get on with everyone and communicate regularly. Also, you need to be organised and constantly proactive at marketing.

### What advice would you give someone thinking about starting up a business?

Do your research, know your market thoroughly and lovely product.

### Describe yourself in one sentence:

On an ideal Saturday, you will find me around the kitchen table chatting and laughing with family, then walking the dog with my friends before watching a *Harry Potter* film!



## CAROLINE WEISS-JONES

**Company:** BDHL  
**Type:** Private Medical insurance  
**Position:** Director  
**Web:** [www.bdhl.co.uk](http://www.bdhl.co.uk)

### Tell us a bit about your business and your role within it

BD Global Medical is part of Berwick Devoil Healthcare Limited (BDHL), a specialist private medical insurance and group risk broker. I bought into the company in 2012 and became a 50% shareholder. We launched BD Global Medical in January 2015 to look specifically at the international health insurance market and the global transient nature of certain aspects of the world's population. My focus has primarily been on the marketing and new lead/business generation, following the launch in the Caribbean in February 2015 of the new website, [www.bdglobalmmedical.com](http://www.bdglobalmmedical.com) where I hosted an event for local businesses, dignitaries and press.

### What challenges has your business faced in the last year?

As well as setting up BDGM, going live and generating new enquiries, our main challenges have been time zones and slow broadband. Technology is playing a big part in the growth of BD Global Medical, however, early morning and late evening calls to fit in with time zones and having slow broadband for Skype calls does become frustrating; without the tech, however, the business would not have got off the ground.

### What do you know about business now that you wish you'd known when you started?

I wish someone had told me that 'marketing' your business is actually one of the hardest things you'll ever have to do. Reaching out to new people and attracting new business is difficult and, more importantly, keeping their attention is even harder. Throwing money at a snazzy marketing campaign does not necessarily solve the problem, but having a voice and a personality is one of the most effective tools anyone can master.

### Do you have any business regrets?

Not specifically, except that I wish that I had learned earlier in my career to trust my gut instinct and be more confident about what *my* niche and mission was.

### Describe yourself in one sentence:

Passionate, funny and sensitive, I'm ambitious and competitive, genuine and honest with a down-to-earth outlook; I'm a professional woman who adores her family, loves to laugh, loves her business and her business partner.



## NIKKI MITCHELL

**Company:** Sofas & Stuff  
**Type:** Custom Made Sofa Company  
**Position:** Managing Director  
**Web:** [www.sofasandstuff.com](http://www.sofasandstuff.com)

### Tell us a bit about your business and your role within it

I run a lovely large showroom in Eridge, near Tunbridge Wells, called Sofas & Stuff, which sells bespoke sofas, chairs and beds. They're handmade in England but covered in any fabric in the world.

### To be successful in business, what attributes do you need?

Enthusiasm for, and knowledge of, your product, as well as the ability to listen in order to understand your customers' needs.

### Where would you like to take your business? Any plans for the future?

I would like to establish more working relationships with local companies, such as interior designers, fabric emporiums and architects. I've hosted some art exhibitions and talks in the showroom and I would like to do more of that, perhaps a concert!

### What advice would you give to someone thinking about starting up a business?

Definitely give it a go, otherwise you will always wonder, "what would have happened if..." However, make sure you are prepared and seek professional advice on anything you aren't sure of.

### Describe yourself in one sentence:

I'm very enthusiastic about what I do and I like to think I am quite creative; I also love a good chat!



## PAM LOCH

**Company:** The Loch Associates Group  
**Type:** Employment Law, HR Advice, Training & Mediation  
**Position:** Managing Director  
**Web:** [www.lochlaw.co.uk](http://www.lochlaw.co.uk), [www.hradvise.me](http://www.hradvise.me) & [www.lochtraining.co.uk](http://www.lochtraining.co.uk)

### Tell us a bit about your business and your role within it

I set up Loch Employment Law in 2007 to provide expert employment law advice to employers mainly, but we also advise individuals as well. As an employment lawyer, I also often encountered situations where employers had good reasons to discipline or dismiss an employee, but they often went about it the wrong way. I saw a need for HR support and set up HR Advise Me to provide day-to-day HR support. Having set up Loch Training and Loch Mediation now too, I still provide employment law advice and HR solutions to clients, but I'm also the Managing Director of these businesses as well.

### To be successful in business, what attributes do you need?

I think you need to be constantly open to change and to continually review what you have done to see if you can improve on what you do. While you may have some great ideas, it is also really important to listen to other people and encourage everyone in your business to put forward their suggestions and thoughts.

### What do you know about business now that you wish you'd known when you started?

Pre-empting what clients want in relation to the provision of information on things such as costs, and being able to provide that upfront, demonstrates a level of transparency, which clients appreciate.

### What advice would you give to someone thinking about starting up a business?

Plan carefully. Think very carefully about your finances and making sure you have sufficient funds in place to support you when your business starts up, particularly if you are unlikely to generate significant income in the first six to 12 months.

### Describe yourself in one sentence:

Work and play are important to me but I also am a great believer in maintaining a good work/life balance and can be spotted at the gym or walking my dog Ellie with my fiancé, for a healthy mind and body!





## SARAH BELLAMY

**Company:** Skippers

**Type:** Interior Design

**Position:** Director

**Web:** [www.skippersoftunbridgewells.co.uk](http://www.skippersoftunbridgewells.co.uk)

### Tell us a bit about your business and your role within it

I am the proprietor of Skippers of Tunbridge Wells, an interiors company offering a full range of services, including full interior design and project management service and production of handmade curtains, blinds and upholstery, together with a range of exclusive soft furnishings and the largest fabric and wallpaper sample book collection in the area.

### What challenges has your business faced over the last year?

We have been focusing on increasing our brand awareness among a wider range of potential clients. We've been using traditional advertising methods such as print media, but also digital and social media; so one of our challenges has been training all our staff to be more aware of the opportunities that social media presents and ensuring we keep our online presence current and relevant.

### Where would you like to take your business? Any plans for the future?

I am really looking forward to this autumn, when we are launching an exclusive range of cushions and throws to purchase in the showroom on Castle Street. I am also launching a new website this winter, which will reflect the diversity of the Skippers of Tunbridge Wells products and services in a user-friendly format.

### Do you have any business regrets?

My biggest regret is that I did not launch my business earlier. I feel very fulfilled, proud and happy.

### Describe yourself

#### in one sentence:

Supplied by my staff and daughter: honest, loyal, patient, tenacious, passionate, enthusiastic and personable. (Their cheques are in the post!)



## JEMMA SMITH

**Company:** Present Yoga

**Type:** Hot Yoga Studio

**Position:** Managing Director and Yoga Teacher

**Web:** [www.wearepresent.today](http://www.wearepresent.today)

### Tell us a bit about your business and your role within it

Present is a beautiful little hot yoga studio in Tunbridge Wells, launched in 2013, where we run yoga classes in a studio heated to 39°C. No matter what the weather outside, it's always warm and cosy inside.

### What gives you the biggest buzz at work?

The amazing feedback I receive from my students about the studio and the classes. I have had so many students tell me that the classes have changed their life. This feedback makes the hard work all worthwhile and reminds me why I set up the business in the first place.

### What do you know about business now that you wish you'd known when you started?

I would say that starting a business is an exciting journey and a learning process, and on this journey I have learned everything exactly when I needed to. I am glad I didn't know everything in the beginning, as the journey might not have been so interesting.

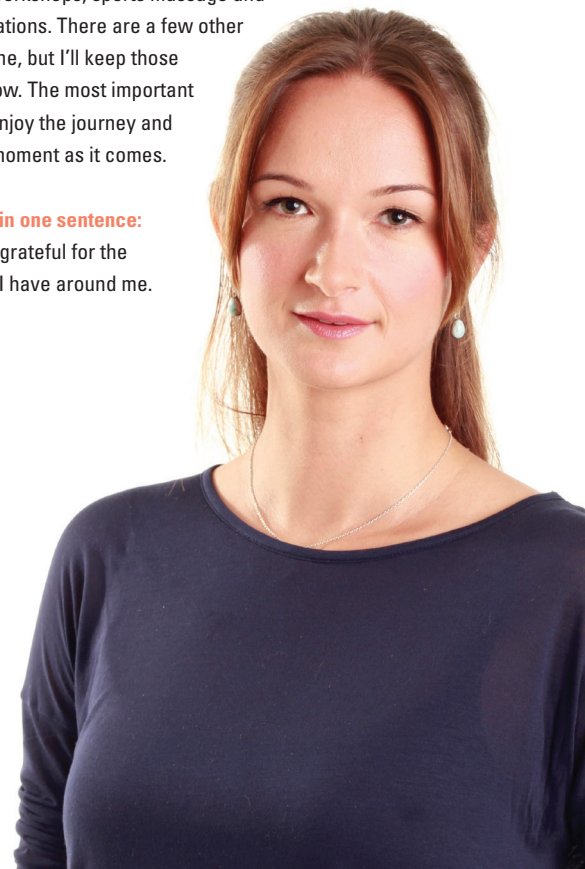
### Where would you like to take your business?

#### Any plans for the future?

We are about to relocate to a fantastic new studio facility in the centre of town, where we will be expanding our service offering to include both heated and non-heated yoga classes, including pregnancy yoga, workshops, sports massage and nutritional consultations. There are a few other things in the pipeline, but I'll keep those under wraps for now. The most important thing for me is to enjoy the journey and appreciate every moment as it comes.

### Describe yourself in one sentence:

Loving, happy and grateful for the supportive people I have around me.



## JACKIE MORRIS

**Company:** Wood & Pilcher

**Type:** Estate Agent

**Position:** Director

**Web:** www.woodandpilcher.co.uk

### Tell us a bit about your business and your role within it

I joined Wood & Pilcher in 1992, just at the time when John Pilcher, founder and owner, started selling new developments off plan in Hong Kong and Singapore. These properties, located predominantly in London and the South East, were to be let on behalf of the clients and I was given the opportunity to travel to the far east on a number of occasions to promote our letting services. This was the beginning of what has now become our large letting and management department. When John Pilcher decided to retire in January 2010, my business partner, Simon Ellis and I took over his interest in the firm through a management buyout. My role has developed more into the management of the business as a whole, which now includes five offices and 35 members of staff.

### To be successful in business, what attributes do you need?

In my opinion you should be patient but be strong, face any problems and learn from them. Understand and enjoy your business so that it becomes something that you are really proud of.

### What gives you the biggest buzz at work?

The biggest buzz by far is watching a sale or a let reach completion – particularly when it has required a large attention to detail. The delight of a vendor/landlord and in turn a purchaser/tenant in being able to move home through the hard work and efforts of our staff is very rewarding and something to be truly proud of.

### Describe yourself in one sentence

I am enthusiastic  
about anything

I take on, self-critical  
about most things

I do, a good listener  
and I love to laugh!



## KATIE KING

**Company:** Zoodikers

**Type:** Marketing Agency

**Position:** Managing Director

**Web:** www.zoodikers.com

### Tell us a bit about your business and your role within it

I'm the Managing Director of a marketing agency called Zoodikers, which I set up five years ago. We're based in Tunbridge Wells but our client base is UK wide and international. We help organisations to build their brand and manage their reputation in a world where consumers increasingly turn to digital channels for customer service as well as sales.

### What challenges has your business faced in the last year?

Cash flow is the biggest challenge, which is a combination of ensuring you're paid on time by clients, and not overspending. Due to our location, the talent pool isn't as wide as it is in London, so it's sometimes harder to attract the best PR candidates. That said, we've built an incredible team over the past few years and have worked hard to nurture and retain our staff.

### What do you know about business now that you wish you'd known when you started?

Running a small business of less than 10 staff is the hardest challenge in my opinion. You have to be involved in everything and don't have the luxury of IT, HR and legal departments to rely on. Juggling all of these balls simultaneously is even tougher than I thought but I love it!

### Do you have any business regrets?

I had an opportunity to set up a branch of a successful agency in Cape Town but it didn't fit with having a young family. It was the right decision for a young working mum, but I do wonder what life might have been like had I taken that option.

### Describe yourself in one sentence:

For this question I asked my longest standing employee, who answered as follows: dedicated, tenacious, approachable, sociable and a leader. A good summary I think...

