

WORKINGLIVES

Ali Hui with her children,
Jack, six, and Ruby, two.



when baby means business

Having a baby sparked the entrepreneurial as well as maternal instincts of these three former corporate careeer women

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Having a baby can dramatically affect your career path. Sharp suits are replaced by T-shirts emblazoned with food stains, business meetings give way to breastfeeding, and the bank balance, once so healthy, dwindles to pitiful proportions.

Although long hours and far-flung conferences are out when parenthood arrives, being a good mother needn't draw a halt to career success. Take a good idea, lateral thinking and an excellent network, and anything is possible.

Pia D'Ambros-Smith, Ali Hui and Morella Lascurain were all successful corporate women before having babies. Although children were part of their life dream, so was pride in their professional achievements. So they got thinking, and all entered the baby industry.

The three women met at Parent and Child shows where each had a stall, and are part of a growing number of 'mumpreneurs'. Although they all admit they don't meet as regularly as they'd like (such is the nature of the time-poor!), they stay in touch by phone and email. Using each other as business mentors as well as their support network, and drawing on previous professional experience, they have all carved out a second successful career – and acquired great friendships too – without sacrificing their families.

ALI HUI Mum to Jack, six, and Ruby, two. Owner of Babu (www.babu.co.nz) Ali, 35, set up designer baby bedwear company Babu after losing her second baby at 18 weeks in 2002. "I'd been working really hard as sales manager for a medical company and needed a change," she says. "I'd been trying to find a top sheet for Jack's cot and couldn't get the stretchy, non-Lycra fabric I wanted, so I created Babu."

Ali admits running a successful business and a family isn't for the fainthearted. "Setting up a company when you have children is harder than anyone imagines. Without support from friends and family and a great network of other mums in business, it would be impossible. I'm often on the computer until 2am then back again at 5am. My personal time is when I dry my hair and put

ali's tips

- * Make sure you have a great network to share contacts, information and support.
- * Only connect with people whose products you really believe in – that way you'll feel happy to back up each others' businesses.
- * Keep lines of communication open, and don't be afraid to admit when things are getting too tough.



PIA D'AMBROS-SMITH Mum to Leonardo, two, and Roman, four months. Owner of Nappies Direct (www.nappies.co.nz), winner of the Actionmail Excellence in Marketing Award category in the Westpac Enterprise North Shore Business Excellence Awards, 2005.

"I worked in advertising, and was totally career-driven," says Pia, 32. "Then one day I'd just had enough, so I left and started my own business."

Pia launched Nappies Direct, a baby product delivery service, in 2002. "I knew nothing about the products, so I talked to all the mums I could. I found what they said really helpful, which is why my company now runs on the basis that we all learn from each other."

It wasn't long before Pia had Leo, who went to daycare while Nappies Direct was getting established. Nappies Direct is now so successful that Pia's husband Kevin gave up his job at advertising firm Saatchi & Saatchi in 2005 and works with her, setting up their corporate marketing and sponsorship arm, Mums Direct. Nappies Direct has five staff. "Everyone in the company is a parent," explains Pia. "We're currently trying to job-share so they can spend more time with their kids."