

Chapter 18

Adopting ICT in the Mompreneurs Business: A Strategy for Growth?

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ABSTRACT

The advancing pace of women's entrepreneurial activity across the globe represents a promising trend to fuel economic development and social progress (Fitzsimons & O'Gorman, 2005). Research has shown that women-led businesses have strong growth aspirations, are customer-oriented, value human capital and cultural aspects of business and are geared towards financial performance (McGowan & Henry, 2004). Analysis of the reasons why women start a new business, the choice of product/service and industry sector has highlighted the home-based female entrepreneur. This home worker/entrepreneur now constitutes a segment referred to as the mompreneurs - the mothers who decide primarily for family reasons to leave paid employment and establish a business operated from home. Thus, while mompreneurs gain benefits of operating their business from home, they also experience additional challenges not encountered by more traditional female entrepreneurs, one such issue is the central dependence of the business on ICT (Information Communications Technology).

It is advocated that the role of technology is instrumental in determining the effectiveness and efficiency of where, when and how business transactions are undertaken to meet stakeholder requirements in a competitive manner. However, research by the Small Business Forum (2006) suggest the use and application of ICT in small firms overall is poor where entrepreneurs do not capitalise sufficiently on the benefits of ICT. To succeed and grow, mompreneurs' businesses should be using ICT as a backbone for the business in an integrated manner. The objective of this chapter is to examine the adoption and application of ICT in the mompreneurs business and challenges encountered in its effective use. A specific emphasis is placed on the issue of ICT and its use by the mompreneur in undertaking business transactions and as a means of facilitating small firm growth.

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INTRODUCTION

The advancing pace of women's entrepreneurial activity across the globe represents a promising trend to fuel economic development and social progress (Fitzsimons & O' Gorman, 2005). Women now represent more than one-third of all people involved in entrepreneurial activity and are likely to play an even greater role when informal sectors are considered. Female entrepreneurs are increasingly prominent as employers, customers, suppliers and competitors in the global economy. The contribution that female entrepreneurs make to economic development is significant and has increased over time (McGowan & Henry, 2004). Indeed it has been cited there is no greater initiative a country can take to accelerate its pace of entrepreneurial activity than to encourage more of its females to participate. Women entrepreneurs are not only prominent in industries where they are traditionally active, but also in less traditional sectors (e.g. manufacturing, construction and transportation) through the development of a range of services and products (European Commission, 2002). Research has shown that women-led businesses have strong growth aspirations, are customer-oriented, value the human capital and cultural aspects of the business and are geared towards financial performance (McGowan & Henry, 2004).

Analysis of the reasons why women start a new business, choice of product/service and industry sector has highlighted to the author the home-based female entrepreneur, in a somewhat reconfigured context. This home worker/entrepreneur now constitutes a segment referred to as the mompreneurs - the mothers who decide primarily for family reasons to leave paid employment and establish a business operated from home. Thus, while mompreneurs gain the benefits of operating their business from home, they also experience additional challenges not encountered by the more traditional female entrepreneurs, one such issue is the central dependence of the business on ICT

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The chapter commences with an overview of the level of enterprising activity and the profile and characteristics of female entrepreneurs in Ireland. An analysis of the reasons why women start a business leads to a discussion on the emergence of the home-based female entrepreneur, in a somewhat reconfigured context - the mompreneur. A specific emphasis is placed on the issue of ICT and its use in undertaking business transactions and as a means of facilitating small firm growth. The information presented provides suggestions on topics which should be addressed in government policy to facilitate greater and more efficient adoption of ICT as an enabler of firm growth for the mompreneur.

FEMALE ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN IRELAND

In spite of their growing numbers, women-owned businesses continue to lag behind male owned firms in Ireland both for recently started businesses and for established businesses (Forfas, 2007). In 2006 there were 60,000 male new firm entrepreneurs and 21,000 female new firm entrepreneurs in Ireland where men were 2.9 times more likely than women to be new firm entrepreneurs (4.3% of men compared to 1.5% of women). The

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