

Log on and get the net working for your dream

Is new technology driving more start-ups, or is it a desire for independence, asks **Penny Power**

I STARTED my own business 12 years ago and can say that without the ability to leverage technology and people power, there is no way I could have built a global, sustainable, profitable business. I often wonder if there's a way of analysing all the failed start-ups over the years. Were they begun by people who didn't know how to connect online, which would have enabled them to keep their costs low and their marketing noise high?

I'm a total evangelist for the online world, not just for finding clients but also for finding an audience that can communicate with you and guide you (providing you listen carefully) into better business practices. Inside the online world you're part of an ecosystem of brains and hearts, where social networking communities have a heartbeat and the most incredible brains. Plugging into this world at almost zero cost has to be the best way to start a business without funding and with time at a huge premium.

I imagine the world of the employed: fearing redundancy, feeling they don't control their own lives and knowing that a greater force holds their financial destiny in their hands. It makes me shudder.

Don't get me wrong, owning your own business is terrifying, a roller coaster of emotions. It's when you discover how strong you really are and how determined and how much

you like yourself and others like you. It's no longer just about finding money each month but about finding yourself and others. Certainly if you get these bits right, then the money will flow.

So, for the 5-9er, those who've decided their destiny must be in their own hands and who prefer having clients to a boss, what does it take to make this work?

I guess some people are lucky as their employer allows them to create a safety net without hiding

'Once you are ready to launch your business you'll be amazed at the power of friendship...'

the fact and they happily build their business outside office hours.

I know of one such man, Peter Simoons, who was able to do just that. He exited from his high-paid corporate job over a two-year period to form strategic alliance consulting practice, Simoons & Company.

He joined the world of social networking at the outset so by the time he left his employer he had the best asset for this new business,

which is a personal brand and a huge network that knew him and liked him as Peter and not as 'Mr Corporate'. He was on his way without a timelag and built his personal network before self-esteem and identity issues could take over. Being self-employed and selling yourself for the first time, however, is an enormous chasm to cross and must never be underestimated.

In 2008 Adam Lovelock created his e-mail marketing business Astonish Systems, in Andover, Hampshire, while, like his business partner, in full-time employment.

"I would describe us as the 'early hour workers', starting at 4.30am before work," he said. "We both had mortgages and business start-up costs to pay so it would have been impossible to simply move away from the comfort of employment."

The challenge for Adam and his partner was keeping in touch with clients and making them his top priority when they contacted him while he was still in employment. So he turned to social networks as his preferred method of communication rather than using the phone or e-mail.

This type of networking was such a critical part of his early success and has been ever since, that on reflection Adam feels it should be recognised as one of the first lessons to be taught in any business start-up programme.

The ability and the emotion of starting a business while still employed varies enormously. If you are in a large company like Peter



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was, you can negotiate this aspect just as he did.

However, the experience of Sally Asling, founder of SurreyLets, a residential lettings and property management business in Guildford, was quite different.

She tried to have the best of both worlds but guilt got the better of her. She soon came to the realisation that her employer was suffering because of her new business interest. So she left and had to work incredibly hard to build her brand quickly and with credibility to ensure her family survived the financial storm.

Mark Sinclair founded yBc, an internet channel that provides business advice to start-ups and small business through videos.

"The reason social media works so well for 5-9ers is that the world has fundamentally changed," he said. "Prospective and existing customers are creating just as much demand out of hours as during 'standard' business hours and there's a complete haze of

working hours now. Providing you reply within a 24-hour window your message will get through on time and be read when they have time as well."

It is clear that 5-9ers have several opportunities at their disposal. The 'connected' social world allows us all to build a personal network without

shouting about what we are doing. In this 'social' world you have the ability to build trust online, where people get to like you. If you are unable to use the full power of social media for fear of losing your job or because of time restrictions, take a leaf out of the Facebook generation's book

by building friendships. Once you are ready to launch your business you'll be amazed at the power of friendship in business. Being social no longer has to be placed in the box marked 'Social'.

Cheque out time: Orange UK and Barclaycard

WE'VE heard much about the future of the chequebook and its imminent demise. Well with a new venture from mobile phone operator Orange UK and credit card giant Barclaycard the humble cheque, it seems, is doomed.

Orange and Barclaycard have joined forces to develop mobile-payment technology including wallet handsets.

The two companies will work together to launch new products and services that will allow their combined customer base of more than 28 million to use mobile phones to make payments and manage their finances. A full roll out of the technology is set for 2012. Customers will be able to use

handsets to make 'wave and pay' style payments of up to £10 at retailers where contactless payment readers are installed. Almost 10,000 outlets including EAT, Pret A Manger, Caffé Nero, Books Etc and YO! Sushi now have the system in place.

An Orange UK spokesman said: "At the moment the partnership is discussing handset roadmaps and timescales with manufacturers."

The companies also plan to expand their partnership to incorporate other contactless services such as ticketing and transport. Earlier this year, Barclays announced it would be working towards moving all debit cards onto a contactless payment system with all replacement cards issued from now being enabled.

JADE SERMON

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