

# Entrepreneurial skills for the micro enterprise

'What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us' Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803 – 1882)

by Alison Branagan, arts consultant.

## The origins

'Entrepreneur' derives its origins from the French root 'to undertake' or 'to go between'. It is the spirit of undertaking something novel and innovative, and may take the form of either pushing forward with avant-garde activities, or combining elements from previous concepts into new markets or products. Entrepreneurs within the business world often act as 'go betweens' between supplier and the consumer. For example, Marco Polo was said to be the first entrepreneur to import a number of goods from the Orient to Europe during the 13th Century. Entrepreneurs often move from humble beginnings to go on to build empires. They are also the adventurers that move into new areas of enterprise.

## The skills

Making a success of your business venture, whether it be a commercial, ethical or a cultural concern, relies on various related matters such as being a part of appropriate networks, having a talent and often possessing or acquiring sources of financial support. It is a myth that entrepreneurs who build successful reputations or ventures have done so without either naturally possessing or attaining other skills.

During several years of research and conversation with entrepreneurs, I have identified various entrepreneurial skills that appear to be an essential ingredient for securing success.

These include a combination of factors such as:

- Ambition and determination
- Enthusiasm, confidence and belief in oneself
- The ability to make connections and spot opportunities
- Creative problem solving
- Possessing empathy and being able to cultivate appropriate contacts
- Interpersonal skills such as being able to inspire, motivate and persuade others
- The enhanced vision to undertake large-scale initiatives



Above: Yves Klein 'Leap Into The Void' 1960 (Photograph by Harry Shunk ©)

- The ability to take calculated risks and having the nerve to work outside convention

Other important concerns are keeping up with the pace of technology and innovation within your field, using software for devising a useful database, developing an Internet presence and being aware of the importance of presentation skills and design. Cultivating an understanding of business strategies, such as the importance of negotiation tactics to gain more time, money or resources, is also essential to raise and maintain an enterprise and fend off challenges from competitors.

Some other important entrepreneurial traits are overcoming rejection and failure, and the ability to bounce back and try again. As Ronald E Osborn said, 'Unless you try to do something beyond what you have already mastered you will never grow'. It is hard when adventures into unexplored markets or new products or services go wrong. However many of our best-known entrepreneurs have made mistakes. The trick is the ability to recover, recognise what went wrong and try again.

## The barriers

Other barriers to development are a deficiency of trustworthiness, self-discipline and good time management. Much business is conducted on the basis of trust and word of mouth recommendations can lead to a regular source of opportunities.

## Case studies

One thing that key figures from the arts and business worlds such as Yves Klein, Charles and Maurice Saatchi and Anita Roddick, have in common is an understanding of the principles of inventiveness and entrepreneurial strategies.

Artist Yves Klein's stunts included printing catalogues of paintings that didn't exist and the selling of invisible paintings. Klein used the picture shown (which you will be relieved to know is a cut and paste job!) to produce newspapers about himself which courted public and media interest.

Though the reasoning for his creative activities is not a business in the definition we would understand it today, he is still remembered as a flamboyant character and remains an inspiration to many artists to this day.

Charles and Maurice Saatchi have enjoyed mixed fortunes in their advertising businesses. When they founded their empire in 1970, they apparently used publicity-seeking antics to appear more successful than they actually were, such as renting swanky offices for a few hours and pulling in people off the street to answer the telephones for short periods of time to impress their first customers.

Anita Roddick founded her international retail cosmetics chain, The Body Shop, in the early 1970s. Advocating environmental and social values during the early 1970's Roddick built a business empire upon ethical principles. Company branding and trademarks became a symbol of trustworthiness, with an ethos of using natural ingredients, recycled containers and paper bags made from sustainable sources.

## Success

Entrepreneurs who have developed their businesses successfully have done so through a variety of means and have prospered not through merit alone, but also through a flexible and open mind which is responsive to change and circumstance.

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## New special interest group: Creative Industries

The first meeting of the Creative Industries special interest group will be on Sunday 28th September from 7pm to 9pm. The group will be of interest to artists, performers, musicians and all creative people in North London who would like to meet other like-minded professionals.

Venue to be confirmed. Contact the North London Enterprise Club on 020 8366 8244 for details nearer the time.

# IT News

## New business tool

Losing critical business data can be a great concern to small businesses in particular. A new business tool, BT Datasure, recently launched by BT Business is designed to help businesses back-up data, as well as access archived data more easily.

For more information, go to: [www.bt.com/business/datasure](http://www.bt.com/business/datasure)

## Small businesses could be wasting profits

Businesses are losing money by not keeping up with new Internet systems and e-commerce strategies, according to law firm KLegal. Businesses could lose on average 15% of their total profit because they are not adapting quickly enough to changing technology.

For more information, go to: [www.kpmg.co.uk](http://www.kpmg.co.uk)

## New website to help small businesses

The Small Business Service has launched a new website: [www.connectbestpractice.com](http://www.connectbestpractice.com) which aims to help small businesses to adopt best practice in business. The website provides support and best practice information as well as a substantial resource library, online videos and self-assessment tools to boost performance.

To view the new website, go to: [www.connectbestpractice.com](http://www.connectbestpractice.com)

## SMEs 'missing out' on web marketing

Less than a quarter of SMEs use the web as a marketing channel, according to new research released by BT Openworld.

The study revealed that 32% of SMEs rely on personal visits to promote their products and services, with telephone communication coming a close second as a preferred way of marketing.

But less than one in four SMEs use the web and email to generate new business, which BT Openworld head of business broadband, Jerry Thompson, claims is "an important channel in the sales and marketing mix."

Thompson acknowledges that visiting customers and prospects is an excellent way of building personal relationships and encouraging sales, but added: "For SMEs looking to punch above their weight and compete with larger players, it may not be practical as it is such a time-consuming activity."



He argues that the 24-hour nature of the web means potential customers can access sales and marketing information, making it a vital promotional channel.

"The web is an ideal tool for SMEs keen to build up awareness amongst their target audience, whether it is simply communicating via email, setting up a web site or full blown e-commerce and online sales engines," added Thompson.

However, another survey by internet survey provider, Via Net.Works, indicated that for small businesses, internet and email services have overtaken the telephone as primary channels of communication. The poll showed that loss of email or web access would seriously disrupt 72% of SMEs, compared with 69% who would be at a loss if phone lines went down.

The survey found that nearly a third of small businesses would experience an 'immediate financial impact' if their network was disrupted.

Via said that 80% of firms now look for service providers that offer service level agreements which outline how quickly faults will be corrected.

