

Mompreneurs



Discover how three moms are living the dream of raising their kids while running their own businesses.

By Lexy Schmertz



Deepti Shankar sitting with her daughter Tara as she plays with Earthentree Toys.

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Moms everywhere are harboring secret fantasies ... fantasies of starting their own businesses. For many women, the idea of a traditional job and workday is hard to swallow after having kids. So the flexible schedule and intellectual challenges—not to mention the extra income—of working for themselves is too appealing for some moms to ignore.

But starting a business, particularly with a child at home, is no small task. It can be lonely and frustrating when there's no infrastructure or staff to fall back on when your computer crashes or you can't nail down a contract. Plus, it can be expensive with the up-front investment in materials, marketing, and more.

So what drives a mom to take the leap and launch her own business?

Some moms, like Deepti Shankar, founder of [Earthentree](#), just get fed up with their jobs and overall work situations after having a baby. After her daughter, Tara, was born, Deepti returned to her position at an Asian art gallery in [Seattle](#), but the situation was less than ideal. Her salary barely covered the cost of her daughter's day care, and she couldn't even find a place to use her breast pump. For Deepti, it was time to do her own thing.

Deepti's sister in India had sent Tara some beautiful handmade wooden toys from a neighboring village, which other moms had remarked on during playdates and in the park. Since Deepti's background was in South Asian arts and crafts and she felt a strong pull to her native India, she decided to try importing and selling the handmade toys.

Other moms, like Lauren Bentley, have a passion they want to pursue. Lauren, a former fashion editor for *Cookie* and *Lucky*, loved to bake, and after 9/11 she delivered her homemade goodies to the emergency workers in her downtown Manhattan neighborhood.

But it wasn't until Lauren's son Owen turned 5 that she decided to follow her heart and launch Made Fresh Daily. Bentley wanted to make muffins and cupcakes that are delicious and all natural, with organic dairy products, local fruit, and less sugar.

And then there are the lucky few, like Heather Thomson, who create something new—an innovative product that fills a real niche. While Heather was working full time as co-creative director for Beyoncé and Tina Knowles' Beyond Productions and trying to care for her 6-month-old son, Jax, who was recovering from a rare disease that required a liver transplant, she was also getting tired of wrestling girdles while trying to flatten her postpartum tummy. Finally, sitting in her living room, she sewed herself a part-spandex garment—half tank top, half T-shirt—that was comfortable, smoothed unwanted curves, and didn't roll over her muffin top. The [Yummie Tummy](#) tank was born.

It Takes a Village

These are success stories, but it hasn't all been easy. Deepti started by selling her toys at playdates or casual functions, but as her business grew, she struggled to meet federal toy-safety guidelines when it came to the natural vegetable dyes and various components of the crafts. So she sought the help of her husband to navigate the legal issues. Deepti also relied on her family in India to help her work out agreements with the local artisans and manage the product imports.

Lauren turned her baking hobby into a real business mostly due to perseverance and savvy. It didn't take long for a local restaurant to order her cupcakes, so she brought on *In Style* veteran Jacqueline Goewey, who also loved to bake and happened to be good at negotiating and planning. They realized that some food stalls were opening at South Street Seaport in their neighborhood, so they looked into getting a contract. But cleaning

their stalls in the former fish market turned out to be a baker's nightmare, and they had to look for a new location.

Running a business can be tough when reality doesn't necessarily match up with your business plan. But, like all good businessmoms, they have adapted to their situations and adjusted their strategies.

Heather created her innovative tank top in a few hours, but it took three years to formally launch her business. She'd been in the fashion industry for years—working with labels like P. Diddy's Sean John and Jennifer Lopez's Sweetface—but she still needed help. So Heather enlisted the help of her husband, who wrote the business plan, and she raised investment capital from a friend and former colleague at REI Capital. She also brought in her friend Michelle Mooring to develop and manage a relationship with a boutique factory in Taiwan. Then it all came together: She offered the tank tops to wholesale buyers through the showroom of yet another friend, and received 16,000 orders in a single week.

The Mommy Touch

These three women are "living the dream" of managing both family and work with apparent ease—an ease that takes a lot of planning.

Deepti, whose business supports the local economy of an Indian village by employing 100 local artisans, works in the morning while Tara is at preschool and at night when her daughter is in bed. But afternoons are mommy-daughter time.

Lauren's workday ends at 3:30 p.m. when Owen gets home from school, and she bakes at night when he's asleep. Eventually, she and Jackie plan to have their own café where their kids can come hang out and even help bake.

"The best thing about owning my own business is that I work when I need to work," said Heather. But even when she's not in the office, she stays connected to her business all the time. "My BlackBerry saves me."

Perhaps just as impressive as juggling a business and a family is the fact that all of these mom-run businesses are based on doing something worthwhile for community, families, and fellow moms. Earthentree offers children access to original, handmade toys while supporting Indian artisans whose craft might not otherwise thrive. Yummie Tummy helps moms, and women in general, look and feel better about themselves. And Made Fresh Daily sells healthier muffins and baked goods.

"I love the reaction I get when people eat my cupcakes," Bentley says. "People are happy."

What's more, these moms are happy. They're devoted to their kids, but have created something that stimulates them intellectually at the same time. Ultimately, being a mompreneur could make each of these women a better mom.
