

fun & fortune

Two women took their favourite pastimes and turned them into business successes



Nicole gets down to the Nitty Gritty.

Is it possible to take a hobby and turn it into a business success? Cathy Pearce and Nicole Johnschwager both believe so. Cathy, 31, from Adelaide, started renovating houses as a hobby when she was pregnant with her daughter, Tali, now 7.

She bought two rundown maisonettes and within six months transformed them, making a tidy profit of \$70,000.

She used this money to buy a block of 10 units, which she renovated to make a sizeable profit of \$300,000.

Six years later, Cathy has turned her hobby into a multimillion-dollar business with Cathy Jayne Developments, which has an annual turnover of \$100 million.

'I never imagined my hobby would turn into such a huge business, but after I saw the profits I could make on my renovations, I knew I was on to something.'

Mother to Tali, Indianna, 6, and baby Jack, Cathy has no plans to slow down just yet.

'I'm hoping to expand into the Brisbane market next year. I'm also writing a book on real estate and holding motivational seminars for women. I firmly believe women can have it all.'

Nicole, 31, of Sydney, has turned a fun pastime into a thriving business.

While working as a lawyer, Nicole would relax by playing board games with her friends. While Nicole enjoyed them all, she noticed many friends felt they didn't have enough skill.

'I often thought to myself it would be great to have a game everyone could play,' she says.

With this in mind, Nicole came up with Nitty Gritty, a game that tests how well you know your friends, lover, husband or family members. But as Nicole didn't know how to progress her idea, it sat on the backburner until she was 30, when her boyfriend encouraged her to put Nitty Gritty back into action.

'After refining the game, I started looking for a manufacturer and found Tree Toys, the only company who'd manufacture a small lot of 1000.'

Once Nitty Gritty was ready for sale, Nicole thought the hard work was over.

'Although small games stores are supportive, large retail chains don't want the administrative hassle of opening up a new supplier account for one product when they can get 100 products from one company such as American giant Hasbro,' she says.

Suddenly Nicole had a full-time job convincing stores to take on her game, so she formed After8 Games in 2002 and turned her hobby into a business.

'In the first 12 months, Nitty Gritty has sold four times more than predicted and I've manufactured 8000 games to be sold in 400 stores across Australia. I've also launched three other games – Spin the Bottle, The Analyst and Psychic Challenge,' she says proudly.

'My aim is for After8 to become one of the biggest games companies in Australia – I like to shoot for the stars!'

But people considering turning a hobby into a business should think seriously before doing so, says David Baumgarten, CEO of the Eastern Suburbs Business Enterprise Centre in Sydney. David has offered a few tips (left).

**By Kate Mahon
Picture: Kevin Brown**

TOOLS FOR THE TRADE

- ❑ Look at the competition.
- ❑ Do a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis of your product and the competition.
- ❑ Know your real costs, including the time it takes to make products.
- ❑ Have a realistic pricing structure.
- ❑ Map out strategies and objectives.
- ❑ Make a business plan.
- ❑ There are 150 Business Enterprise Centres around Australia that offer free advice. Phone (02) 9369 2844, or visit www.becnsw.com.au.
- ❑ Visit Business Entry Point at www.business.gov.au, a free federal government website to help small businesses.

how to... FIND A GOOD TRADESPERSON

Unless we're DIY geniuses, most of us need tradespeople at some stage and we may feel intimidated – seniors and women in particular. Here are a few tips from the Office of Fair Trading on how to get the best job done.

- ❑ Get more than one quote – on paper with the name and licence number visible. Ask friends or relatives for recommendations.
- ❑ Once you've found someone you like, check with the Office of Fair Trading or state licensing authority that they have the appropriate licence. A general handyman can do some jobs, but others require professional installation.

- ❑ Be sure to make what you want very clear from the beginning and have it in writing.
- ❑ Quotes can blow out due to unforeseen problems, so ensure there is provision for this.
- ❑ If a dispute does occur, try to resolve it with the contractor first – you may find it easier to put your concerns in writing. If that fails, contact the relevant building authority in your state for advice. Failing that, consumer tribunals in each state can help you get redress.
- ❑ For more information, contact the Office of Fair Trading (NSW is www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au) or the relevant licensing authority in your state.