


BUSINESS

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Navigating the supermarket aisles with Ava, 22 months, is easier for Jennifer Kreuzer since she bought an OnTray to hold snacks for her toddler. The OnTray was invented by Laura Hamrick, a mom from Westerville.

‘MOMPREENEURS’ ARE FLOURISHING

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Creative mothers nurture businesses while staying home

By Tracy Turner

THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Call her the mother of invention.

After a frustrating trip to the grocery store trying to shop for food, juggle coupons, look at the weekly specials and feed her infant, Laura Hamrick thought there had to be a better way for moms to get in and out of a store without going crazy.

Her solution?

Create a product that would effectively give moms another hand. The Westerville stay-at-home mom researched and devised OnTray, a container that could be hooked onto a shopping cart to hold food, coupons or other items to free up a parent to shop while keeping toddlers occupied.

In less than two months, Hamrick has sold more than 200 OnTrays at \$6.99 each through her company Web site. One retailer is interested in selling the item in a chain of Minnesota grocery stores.

Hamrick is among a new breed of "mompreneurs," a term used to describe women who leave the work-



The invention and marketing of the OnTray is an example of a growing movement of women running businesses in their homes. Women are starting home-based companies at twice the rate of men.



Laura Hamrick

place to raise children and operate home-based small businesses. And their ranks are growing, according to the Center for Women's Business Research.

Women, who overall are starting businesses at nearly twice the rate of men, now own 5.4 million companies where they are the only employee, the Washington-based center said.

Between 1997 and 2004, female ownership of such companies grew by

18 percent, twice the national rate, the group said.

For many women, working from home gives them the flexibility to spend more time with their children while continuing to contribute to the family's income, said Lesley Spencer, founder and director of Home-Based Working Moms, of Austin, Texas.

The group supports mothers with home-based businesses. Advancements in technology now enable women to do almost anything at home that they can do at the office.

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MOTHERS

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Spencer said.

"Many moms simply no longer want to sacrifice their families for a career or vice versa," she said. "They want to do both: raise their children while maintaining a business or career.

"And most moms say the freedom and flexibility of running a business from home is the biggest advantage."

That view is held by a majority of mothers, who say they prefer to be employed but in positions that do not demand so much of their time, according to a 2005 survey of mothers nationwide by the Motherhood Project, an advocacy group based in New York.

The survey of 2,000 mothers with at least one child found that although 41 percent of mothers work full time, 30 percent say they would prefer to work for pay at home.

Help is here

Several Web sites are available to help female entrepreneurs, including:

- ▶ www.janeoutofthebox.com
- ▶ www.TheBusinessMom.com
- ▶ www.hbwm.com
(a site for home-based working moms)
- ▶ www.sba.gov/women
(the Small Business Administration)

Source: Dispatch research

Jo Anne Geiger is one of them.

The mother and grandmother started her home-based company, Josie Posie Cookies, two years ago. A licensed home baker, Geiger began baking snap cookies (such as ginger snaps) in her home to sell in the small independent bookstore she owns in Granville.

The cookies were so well received that they are now sold in several locations, including Whits Custard in Granville and the Velvet Ice Cream store in Utica.

Geiger, who began her cookie company with a \$5,000 investment, said she enjoyed baking for her son and wanted to make her home work for her.

"I like cooking, decorating and being in my home, and I thought this would be a great place to work," she said. Having a home business offers "the flexibility and freedom to combine work and home life in a creative way."

That flexibility theme resonates with many women, said Michele DeKinder-Smith, founder and CEO of Jane Out of the Box. The Florida-based company provides consulting services for female entrepreneurs.

"Clearly, being home more with family is a key reason many women start their own business, as well as creating the opportunity for financial freedom."

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