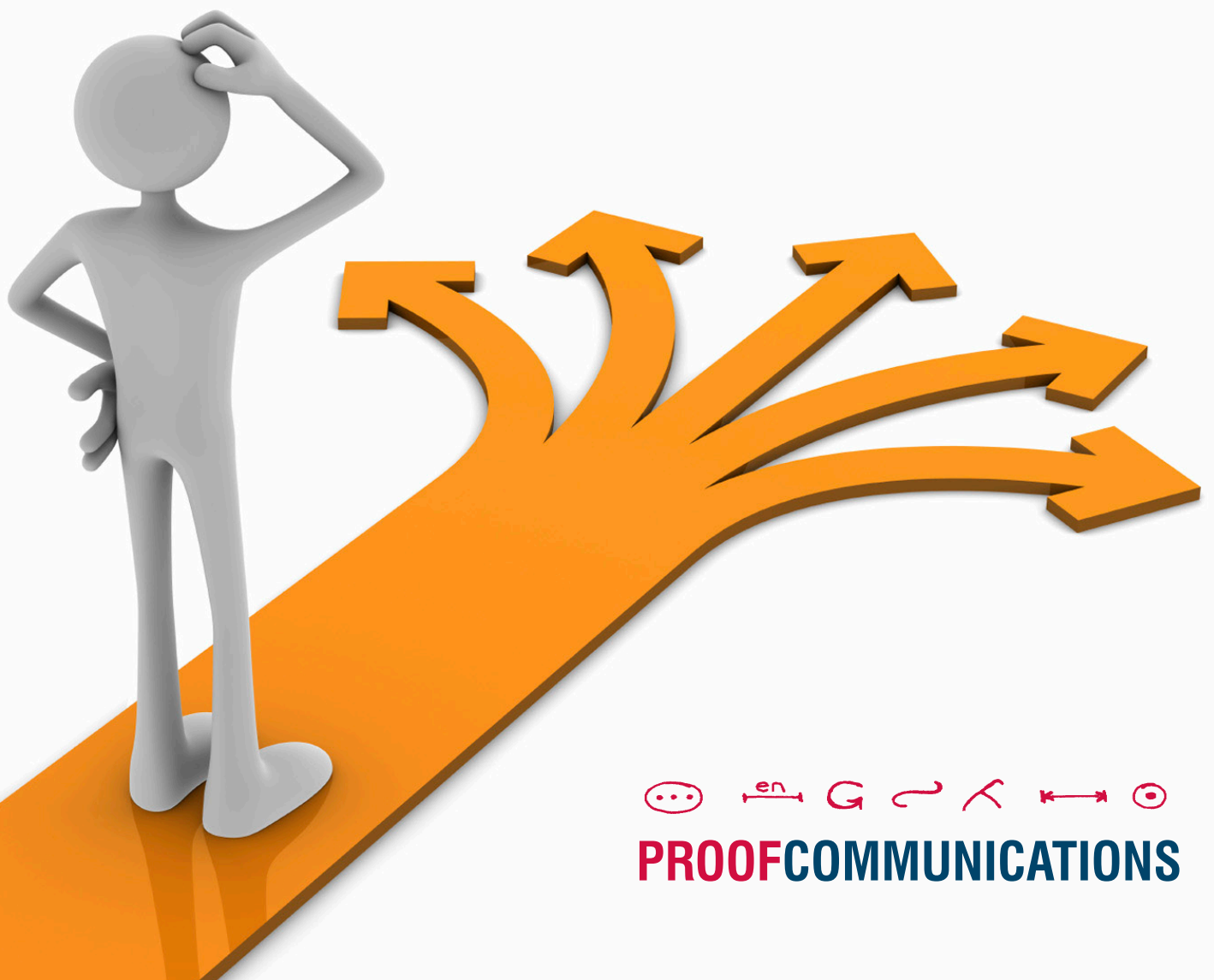


# What I Wish I'd Known When I Started.



# What I Wish I'd Known When I Started.

Well, to start with, I didn't anticipate how long it would take me to put this e-book together.

It has been a pleasure to read everyone's contributions and I thank everyone who shared their experiences.

Referrals are oxygen for the businesses included in this e-book. Everyone's website or contact details are included, so please support your fellow micro and home business operators.

During the 9 years that Proof Communications has been in business, I have been lucky enough to work with many home and micro business owners. When they invite me to write or edit their sales and marketing documents, I usually start by asking them why they started their own businesses, and their experiences along the way.

Consequently, I have heard a lot about the highs and pitfalls of running your own business. And of course, I have had my own hurdles to leap over.

It is my clients' responses and my own experiences that prompted this e-book. When you read the stories shared in *What I Wish I'd Known When I Started*, you will see that micro and home business owners are bound together by many of the same issues. There is comfort in knowing that you are not the only one struggling with website technology or financial statements, for example.

I have learned from them, and I hope that you will too.

Rosemary Gillespie  
Proof Communications

[www.proofcommunications.com.au](http://www.proofcommunications.com.au)

Tel: 02 9314 7506

Mob: 0411 123 216

# Getting started

## What I wish I'd known when I started was...

...Discipline in planning and keeping focused on the right priorities is important for staying on track. This is a skill that you need to keep developing.

**Anne-Marie Orrock, Corporate Canary Human Resources [www.corporatecanary.com.au](http://www.corporatecanary.com.au)**

...How much time and money it takes to establish a small business, not to mention all the different hats you have to wear. Most small businesses struggle, and establishing a brand is a bit of a mad undertaking, but all the hard work is starting to pay off. I guess if it hadn't been such a challenge I would have become bored. I'm a "where there's a will there's a way" type of person. I won't give in if things get difficult, I'll try harder and/or a different tact.

**Nicole Cassey, Bubbaroo [www.bubbaroo.com.au](http://www.bubbaroo.com.au)**

...How much time my small business was going to take. Home businesses sound great but they certainly upset the balance of work and life. When once upon a time a 12+ hour day would have been laughed at, it quickly became the norm.

**Annie Anderson, Creative Director, annieB's [www.anniebs.com.au](http://www.anniebs.com.au)**

...How much self-motivation I would need. Fortunately I've never been lacking in persistence, except when it comes to exercise.

**Rosemary Gillespie, Proof Communications [www.proofcommunications.com.au](http://www.proofcommunications.com.au)**

...Not to under capitalise when you first set up. Work out what you need to run your business and set up an adequate amount of money to purchase everything. Trying to buy capital equipment (furniture, computers, fax, copiers, tools and equipment, vehicles etc) from cash flow is counterproductive.

...Purchase good quality equipment, buying cheap often means buying twice. I bought a \$200 laser printer and it only lasted 18 months!

**Mark Chaston, Mark Chaston Financial Planning [www.mcfp.net.au](http://www.mcfp.net.au)**

...Be very definite about your vision. Know who you are and what your niche is and stick with it. Don't waver or go off looking for anything in desperation. The only outcome is a stream of work from a source you are not happy with.

**Darryn Parkinson, Your Abode [www.yourabode.com.au](http://www.yourabode.com.au)**

...Be clear on the purpose of your company, vision and goals - it will help you move in the right direction and help you assess decisions as they come up.

**Sha-mayne Chan, 2birds Design [www.2birds.com.au](http://www.2birds.com.au)**

...How long it would take to generate income.

...The best way to structure my business.

**Janine Carrucan, Townsville Mobile Mortgage Brokers [www.tmmmb.com.au](http://www.tmmmb.com.au)**

...How to register my company, and register for GST and an ABN. I only found out what to do by word of mouth. I couldn't find any easy or helpful resources online that told me what to do. Now I often have people asking me this question.

**Katrina Gibson, Copy by Kat [www.copybykat.com.au](http://www.copybykat.com.au)**

# Getting started

## What I wish I'd known when I started was...

...How much time you need to allow for major tasks. Don't be surprised if they take months rather than weeks. If I had known how long it would take to gain trademark registration, not to mention pulling everything together for websites and e-newsletters, I might have faltered. Once I decide to do something, I want to do it that day. I'm impatient by nature, but I'm also someone who persists, so my advice is to stick with it. You'll get there eventually.

**Rosemary Gillespie, Proof Communications** [www.proofcommunications.com.au](http://www.proofcommunications.com.au)

...How important it is to get good advice on whether it is best to start-up as a company or sole trader.

...Ask yourself the hard questions: Can I really do this? What are my intentions? You might be a one-person business today, but try to see yourself in 2 years: perhaps you will have 12 staff! People limit themselves by not thinking that growth might jump from nowhere! Surround yourself with mentors who are broad thinkers. I was fortunate to have great mentors.

...Know your weak spots and learn your strengths. You will need to perform many different roles at the beginning, and you have got to find enough time for all of these at some point in your week.

**Tammy Farrell, Core Health Consulting** [www.corehealthconsulting.com.au](http://www.corehealthconsulting.com.au)

...Your first idea may not be your best idea. Have a clear focus and continue to adapt to find your niche.

**Liane McGrath, ThinkTime** [www.thinktime.com.au](http://www.thinktime.com.au)

...That I should have worked for someone in the industry I wanted to work in, part or full time, rather than plunging into my own business full time.

**Michael Kelly, Kelly Speech** [www.kellyspeech.com.au](http://www.kellyspeech.com.au)

...Do what you do best and outsource the rest!

**Sarah Donges, The Beauty Tutor** [www.thebeautytutor.com.au](http://www.thebeautytutor.com.au)

...I'm glad that I didn't know what I didn't know or else I would have never jumped in.

**Sarah Bryden-Brown, Director of Content,** [kidspot.com.au](http://kidspot.com.au)

...Starting from scratch is incredibly hard work, and very confronting at times. But persistence pays off – hang in there.

**Rosemary Gillespie, Proof Communications** [www.proofcommunications.com.au](http://www.proofcommunications.com.au)

# Making the most of your time

What I wish I'd known when I started was...

...How to use my time more effectively when I started my first business. I used to waste so much time on areas that were not important.

**John Corban, John Corban Business Coaching** [www.johncorban.com.au](http://www.johncorban.com.au)

...To carry a book around with me and write everything down. I'm still not that good at doing this but it makes it so much easier to capture ideas / contacts / mileage.

**Anna Meadows, Sycamore Research and Marketing** [www.sycamore.com.au](http://www.sycamore.com.au)

...Start writing your business/systems processes down as you go. This helps new staff understand what to do and will save you a lot of time in the future. It also helps you to see your processes and assess whether they are working or should be changed. You can keep a note book or a file open on your computer to jot things down as you think of them or at the end of the day.

**Sha-mayne Chan, 2birds Design** [www.2birds.com.au](http://www.2birds.com.au)

# Trusting in yourself

What I wish I'd known when I started was...

...To listen to my intuition. I'm good at this now.

...To trust the universe and to meet every opportunity with an abundance philosophy. A little philosophical – but it works for me!

**Liane McGrath, ThinkTime** [www.thinktime.com.au](http://www.thinktime.com.au)

...To remind myself (in stressful times) that my business partner and I are only really answerable to each other so we can do what we like!

**Anna Meadows, Sycamore Research and Marketing** [www.sycamore.com.au](http://www.sycamore.com.au)

...How much you need to believe in yourself, and have confidence in your abilities. While it's easy to say, it's hard to do at times. That's why I have a great network of supportive fellow micro-business owners who are generous about sharing their thoughts and ideas. Much as I love working solo, having access to such wonderful people is a real bonus of life outside the corporate world.

**Rosemary Gillespie, Proof Communications** [www.proofcommunications.com.au](http://www.proofcommunications.com.au)

# Promoting and marketing the business

## What I wish I'd known when I started was...

...How important it is to know your target client group and what it is about your business that makes it different to anyone else's!

**Tammy Farrell, Core Health Consulting [www.corehealthconsulting.com.au](http://www.corehealthconsulting.com.au)**

...How to sell.

...The importance of knowing a lot about strategy and market analysis.

**Michael Kelly, Kelly Speech [www.kellyspeech.com.au](http://www.kellyspeech.com.au)**

...Read as much as you can about marketing and plan a simple marketing strategy. I wish I had read more when I started my fashion business years ago. Like everything in business, nothing is difficult when we are armed with more information.

**John Corban, John Corban Business Coaching [www.johncorban.com.au](http://www.johncorban.com.au)**

...Being 'in business' is 80% sales and marketing and 20% delivery. So whilst I know I was brilliant at HR strategy and turning that into significant outcomes, with hindsight I would have spent more on preparation, research and development of my sales skills/knowledge and marketing plan/strategy for a year or two BEFORE launching my business. This is because I don't have a sales/marketing background. If you do have that background you have a head start.

**Anne-Marie Orrock, Corporate Canary Human Resource [www.corporatecanary.com.au](http://www.corporatecanary.com.au)**

...Keep records of work! This is a big one for me. Because most of my work is digital, it's often live for a period and then it is taken down. In many cases, I've never kept a proper record. Same with printed material. I need to be more diligent in asking clients for copies that I can use in my portfolio. If I were more organised, I would also request more testimonials from clients, and put those onto my website. At the moment, if someone asks me for some examples of my work, it takes me quite a while to pull some information together. It would be great to have the time to put together a template which I could use on a case by case basis.

**Katrina Gibson, Copy by Kat [www.copybykat.com.au](http://www.copybykat.com.au)**

...Not to bother with print advertising – it's expensive and ineffective. You don't get the return on your investment.

**Nicole Cassey, Bubbaroo [www.bubbaroo.com.au](http://www.bubbaroo.com.au)**

...The amount of time and/or money it takes to get clients. I thought marketing would be as easy as dropping 3,000 flyers into letterboxes around my area and waiting for the phone calls.

...Print media appearances don't seem to work at all. Saying that, I still get customers who first saw me in an article in the *Sun-Herald* two years ago.

...Organise your marketing before you take on clients. The best thing I did was to prepare handouts before I really started having customers. Now I wouldn't have the time to do this.

**Susanne Thiebe, Less Mess [www.lessmess.com.au](http://www.lessmess.com.au)**

...Maintain membership to professional organisations. If you are a small player it gives a degree of security to your clients.

**Anna Meadows, Sycamore Research and Marketing [www.sycamore.com.au](http://www.sycamore.com.au)**

...If you're in a consulting business it takes time to develop strong referral sources. This is probably my greatest learning. When I first started, I thought that after a few face to face meetings the referrals would be flooding in! It is only now that I have a full hand of good referral sources.

**Mark Chaston, Mark Chaston Financial Planning [www.mcfp.net.au](http://www.mcfp.net.au)**

# Building your brand

What I wish I'd known when I started was...

...How difficult it would be to increase brand awareness. So many people love our products and will tell their friends. However, I've realised my products need to be easily available to parents and that means being available in major baby shops. Easier said than done, but we're slowly chipping away.

**Nicole Cassey, Bubbaroo** [www.bubbaroo.com.au](http://www.bubbaroo.com.au)

...You've got to love your logo design and branding. Start with nothing less!

**Tammy Farrell, Core Health Consulting** [www.corehealthconsulting.com.au](http://www.corehealthconsulting.com.au)

...Pay for decent business cards. I got some quick 'n' cheap ones and spent about 3 months being a bit embarrassed to give them to anyone. I saw the light and ordered some decent ones. As my mother would say: Buy cheap buy twice!

**Anna Meadows, Sycamore Research and Marketing** [www.sycamore.com.au](http://www.sycamore.com.au)

...Building your brand and awareness of your products or services is a long-term venture. It never ends. It's crucial to provide the best possible service and to remember to thank anyone who passes you a referral. It's not rocket-science, but good manners go a long way, especially to generating referrals.

**Rosemary Gillespie, Proof Communications** [www.proofcommunications.com.au](http://www.proofcommunications.com.au)

# Finding balance

What I wish I'd known when I started was...

...Enjoy the lulls! I think when you go freelance as a consultant there's always fear that you'll never have enough work, and in the past I've been tempted to always say yes. Over the years I've learnt to say no a little more, although I'm still not very good at it! I think it's important to take advantage of 'downtime' to think about how you could refine your business, analyse which clients are working and which aren't, update your website, put together a portfolio etc. The reason I went freelance in the first place was a lifestyle decision, so it's important that it continues to be a reason! I do believe that we freelancers often end up working much harder than full time employees.

**Katrina Gibson, Copy by Kat** [www.copybykat.com.au](http://www.copybykat.com.au)

...To keep sight of the bigger picture. My number one priority is my family and our happiness. There needs to be a balance and boundaries set, otherwise the business becomes all consuming!

**Nicole Cassey, Bubbaroo** [www.bubbaroo.com.au](http://www.bubbaroo.com.au)

...Take guilt free time out. We are our hardest taskmasters and when you're running a small business you'll often work 10 hours a day 6 days a week. Do this for too long and you'll burn out. So learning to take time out without feeling guilty is important (and hard – I am still working on this one).

**Mark Chaston, Mark Chaston Financial Planning** [www.mcfp.net.au](http://www.mcfp.net.au)

# Websites....arrggghh

What I wish I'd known when I started was...

...How long it would take to set up my website.

**Janine Carrucan, Townsville Mobile Mortgage Brokers [www.tmmmb.com.au](http://www.tmmmb.com.au)**

...How long websites take to create/organise.

**Annie Anderson, Creative Director, annieB's [www.anniebs.com.au](http://www.anniebs.com.au)**

...Know what you want to start with but make sure your website can grow WITH your business. It must allow you to increase the number of pages and easily change the copy. Get a website with a management system you can use yourself, otherwise you will become very frustrated with your website, and your web people.

...GOOGLE to see what others are doing; what makes them better than their competitors? Learn from what others have trialled and make it work for you! It may be as simple as more colour, more key words, being mobile or being upfront with pricing. Always have in sight what you're up against!

**Tammy Farrell, Core Health Consulting [www.corehealthconsulting.com.au](http://www.corehealthconsulting.com.au)**

...Learn HTML. It's really simple and life is so much easier if you can do your own small maintenance jobs on your website rather than relying on an expert (they are never there when you need them).

...Use open source software programs that are available free or at a small cost. They work exactly the same or even better than building site-specific technology. My favourite is Constant Contact for sending email newsletters. You'd be crazy to pay someone to build you a system of your own when someone has already done it, and you can use it for free!

**Sarah Bryden-Brown, Director of Content [kidspot.com.au](http://kidspot.com.au) Pty Ltd**

...Get a website up quick. Don't underestimate how many people are searching online for products and services. Make it professional and if need be, pay good money for it. When someone is looking for your services online having a professional website implies that you are a professional.

**Darryn Parkinson, Your Abode [www.yourabode.com.au](http://www.yourabode.com.au)**

...Spend time talking to the experts and create a website that not only works for your current business but will grow with you. I am now up to my third website and I have learnt so much along the way. You certainly need to do the figures and work out the ROI on your site. Also don't underestimate the value of a good SEO website that is picked up by search engines. You certainly need to spend the money and have your website copy checked so that search engines will pick up your site.

...Get a website that you can update yourself. This will save you money in the long run.

**Sarah Donges, The Beauty Tutor [www.thebeautytutor.com.au](http://www.thebeautytutor.com.au)**

...Not to rely on web developers to update my site. After a bad experience with one website company, I found a fantastic web developer for my second website. They provide excellent service, and an easy to use back-end system. Now I can easily change copy, upload articles and my blog, send e-newsletters and maintain a mailing list. And, for the first time, I enjoy using the technology.

**Rosemary Gillespie, Proof Communications [www.proofcommunications.com.au](http://www.proofcommunications.com.au)**

# Looking after your clients and customers

What I wish I'd known when I started was...

...There are varying degrees of 'urgent'.

...You don't have to be Superwoman to make a good impression.

...The importance of listening and asking questions.

**Lisa Lonsdale, Avenue Graphic Design** [ph 02 9785 4712](tel:0297854712)

...Remember to say thank you whenever someone helps you out. It might be for giving you a referral or free advice. A genuine thank you is always appreciated and strengthens relationships.

**Rosemary Gillespie, Proof Communications** [www.proofcommunications.com.au](http://www.proofcommunications.com.au)

# And what to do with the ones you don't want

What I wish I'd known when I started was...

...Say no. I used to over quote when I didn't want to work with someone, or felt the project was too big or too small. What happens is that they sign off anyway, and then you end up earning every cent and then some. Now I tell them we're not taking on new clients and that they'd be better served by someone else (If you're feeling really nasty, send them to a direct competitor). I have a larger company that I refer complex stuff to and smaller ones I throw the minor stuff to. The client really appreciates the honesty and chances are the good karma will come back to you in the form of a job that's ideal.

**Zoe Freeman, ZF Web** [www.zfweb.com.au](http://www.zfweb.com.au)

# Money: Asking for it, spending it, saving it, managing it

What I wish I'd known when I started was...

...Having a mobile EFTPOS unit is so handy. It means I get paid immediately.

...Get at least 3 different quotes from suppliers. When I looked around for a designer for my brochure I asked 3 companies to quote. The difference between the highest and lowest quotes was \$600. Barter your way through...let them know others can do a better price.

**Tammy Farrell, Core Health Consulting [www.corehealth.com.au](http://www.corehealth.com.au)**

...Discount printers are very important. Whilst I believe that it is very important to purchase from local businesses to support local communities and feed the cycle of localised sustainability, the bottom line (\$) kicks in and discount wins!

**Annie Anderson, Creative Director, annieB's [www.anniebs.com.au](http://www.anniebs.com.au)**

...Understand the financials of your business and make sure that each area is making a profit. Talk to your accountant or bookkeeper and get a spreadsheet done to show the profit and loss.

**Sarah Donges, The Beauty Tutor [www.thebeautytutor.com.au](http://www.thebeautytutor.com.au)**

...The importance of financial statements. I wish I had sat down with someone that could explain how to read them and use them. I was so concerned about sales and less concerned about profit.

**John Corban, John Corban Business Coaching [www.johncorban.com.au](http://www.johncorban.com.au)**

...To charge market rate. I was afraid to charge the going rate when I started and I discounted a couple of jobs. It's difficult to get the price back up again with those clients.

**Anna Meadows, Sycamore Research and Marketing [www.sycamore.com.au](http://www.sycamore.com.au)**

...To know your numbers. Running a small business is all about doing enough of the right activities.

...We all sell. (If you don't consider yourself a sales person, don't set up a small business.)

...What is required for your sales pipeline. How many phone calls will you have to make to get past the gatekeepers, to find the right person to speak to, to get an appointment with that person, to meet with them, to make your pitch, to get an order that will be executed and result in money being paid to you? Stephan Schiffman has written some good stuff about this – a bit 80s but still relevant. Zig Ziglar is another great read.

**Mark Chaston, Mark Chaston Financial Planning [www.mcfp.net.au](http://www.mcfp.net.au)**

...When you're a consultant, from the first point of contact to delivery and invoice being paid can be months and months. The sales cycle is a lot longer than I anticipated. Developing a strategy for passive income is important. If I had understood this earlier I would have put a passive income strategy into effect sooner. But it takes time to build up passive income too.

**Anne-Marie Orrock, Corporate Canary Human Resources [www.corporatecanary.com.au](http://www.corporatecanary.com.au)**

...Accounting theory and practice! This was by far my steepest learning curve. I also wished I'd shopped around for an accountant as I got a lot of bad advice for a long time. Now I love the accounting side because I understand it and I'm constantly learning more. My accountant jokes that I'm going to make her redundant.

...To do your own bookkeeping when you start out. It gives you a really good idea of where money comes from and where it goes. It makes you a better business person in the long term.

**Zoe Freeman, ZF Web [www.zfweb.com.au](http://www.zfweb.com.au)**

# Home office versus office space

What I wish I'd known when I started was...

...Don't bother with renting premises. Working from home is completely normal for people these days. I've met people who now run big businesses that started around the kitchen table and talk wistfully about that time.

**Anna Meadows, Sycamore Research and Marketing** [www.sycamore.com.au](http://www.sycamore.com.au)

...Don't hesitate to set up from home. In 9 years of running my own business, I have never been asked about my office arrangements, except by people curious about what it is like to work from home. Those that ask usually comment that they couldn't do it – too many distractions. If you are organised and disciplined, working from home may be right up your street. It suits me perfectly.

**Rosemary Gillespie, Proof Communications** [www.proofcommunications.com.au](http://www.proofcommunications.com.au)

# Legal stuff

What I wish I'd known when I started was...

...To get everything in writing. Even when we produce a small website we still prepare a seven page proposal. It tells the client what's involved, how much it will cost and how those costs break down. It includes payment terms and delivery dates and rates and as much information as is necessary to make sure that everyone knows what's going to happen before, during and after the project. When the client gets their initial deposit invoice, they can't claim they expected to pay on delivery. It doesn't have to be legalese. In fact it's better if it's not, but have them sign it or agree to it in writing.

**Zoe Freeman, ZFWeb** [www.zfweb.com.au](http://www.zfweb.com.au)

...Protect your Intellectual Property and branding. Get your logo/business name trademarked. Buy up all possible websites of your business name: .com/.com.au/.net etc. Have all staff/contractors/outsourced people sign a confidentiality or non disclosure agreement, including your pr/marketing people, web and graphic designers.

**Sarah Donges, The Beauty Tutor** [www.thebeautytutor.com.au](http://www.thebeautytutor.com.au)

# How to keep going, even in tumultuous times

What I wish I'd known when I started was...

...Hold your nerve, even through the tough times. Keep at it and at it and at it. Persistence will get you there.

**Darryn Parkinson, Your Abode** [www.yourabode.com.au](http://www.yourabode.com.au)

...Review where you/the company is heading at least once a year. Is what you offer still relevant? Are you still doing what you want to do? What has changed and what needs to change? Review what you are doing before it gets too late and you feel that you should have made changes a year ago as changes take time. I would review your brand strategy as well as your business strategy.

...Keep learning! Whether it's in the skill of what you do or on running the business. There is always room for improvement. I never thought I would have to do so much reading.

**Sha-mayne Chan, 2birds Design** [www.2birds.com.au](http://www.2birds.com.au)

...Be an "overnight success" in 5 years. It takes time and there is no such thing as instant success or an easy ride – anything worth having is worth fighting for and if it's worth fighting for then it's worth having.

**Mark Chaston, Mark Chaston Financial Planning** [www.mcfp.net.au](http://www.mcfp.net.au)

...Don't get distracted from your goals or plans. If you're a consultant, as I am, it's all too easy to accept jobs or projects that your heart's not in. They just bog you down. Be brave. Pursue the work or clients you really want. And no matter how long you've been in business, take some time every 6 or 12 months to be proud of your achievements. Look back on your projects. Which ones have you really enjoyed? How much money have you really made? What do you want to do in the next 6 months? Write it down and keep it close by. You don't have to show it to anyone else, and you don't need a 20 page marketing or business plan. A few bullet points are enough to keep you motivated.

**Rosemary Gillespie, Proof Communications** [www.proofcommunications.com.au](http://www.proofcommunications.com.au)

# What's next?

**Your comments:** If you have any feedback on *What I Wish I Knew When I Started*, I would love to read it. Email me at the address below.

**Something to share?** If you would like to share your Top Three *What I Wish I Knew When I Started* experiences for the next edition, please email me at the address below.

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