

Boomers discover the business of freedom

Technology allows us to be creators at any age and as LORRAINE PAGE finds, combined with a lifetime of experiences, our retirement years can be a launch pad for modest and rewarding start-ups.



IMAGE: JAN STRANDSTROM

Everything old is new to Glenda Alexander.

Baby Boomers have started to retire and, hot on their heels, Generation X is primed to take their place.

Yet many Boomers show no sign of slowing down and living out their golden years in self-indulgent, meaningless activity when the golden age of technology beckons.

They're using plump retirement funds and a deep well of experience while harnessing creativity left dormant by decades of slaving at less imaginative jobs.

The low cost of setting up a global business on Etsy.com was an "out of the blue" drawcard for Glenda Alexander, 69, following her retirement four years ago from a long and demanding career in senior executive positions.

What started as a creative hobby selling digital images, prints and cards on

her rent-free online shop, cardcurios.etsy.com, expanded less than 12 months later to include vintage and antique goods.

Today that focus has remained and panders to her lifelong passion for collecting old and beautiful things that she now has permission to buy but doesn't have to keep.

She was already tech-savvy, focused and organised from working in high-pressure jobs, but had no real experience in retail.

"Photography was the biggest struggle for me," said Glenda.

"I invested in props like head, hand and body mannequins, and I bought a light box.

"I found software to enhance the photos, and it took me a long time to work out that the only place I could

photograph well was on my back veranda because of the light."

The United States is her biggest customer country with repeat buyers, due in part, she said, to monitoring purchasing trends, though she's found the public to be an "unpredictable beast".

"There's no point in having stock that nobody wants even if I think it's amazing," she said. "I used to sell teacups, saucers and plates regularly. It's now virtually impossible to sell them, but just when I thought high tea was no longer fashionable, I sold five sets in one day."

Apart from mastering photography and learning how to set up a stock inventory, another big learning curve was marketing.

Michael Kava, small business marketing consultant with Little Marketing Services, says it's not just older people who grapple with working out a good marketing plan. Many fall into the trap of coming up with a plan before they've worked out how to position their business differently from anyone else.

Whether someone wants to take over the world with their business, or just have it as a little money earner, people need to figure out their objectives beforehand.

"A business that positions itself differently from other competitors is key," said Michael. "If you think about new brands that have come out and have been successful, they all offer something that is a little bit different from everyone else and the way they communicate it."

Even then, a unique business idea communicated in a poor way, is destined to fail.

"Keep the message really simple," he

said. "People don't have a lot of time to filter through information.

"Social media often doesn't equate to dollars and it's easy to get inflated egos caught up in the 'Likes'. At the end of the day, we're in business for people to purchase, not press a button and like our comments. So engagement is one thing, purchasing is another."

As for promoting her shop, Glenda thinks she's done a reasonable job by taking advantage of Etsy and Google ads, and cross promoting her Etsy website to her stand alone cardcurios.com website. She has a Facebook page for the shop and a business page on Pinterest. She posts

"people need to figure out their objectives beforehand."

religiously to both.

As for positioning her business differently from other competitors, she takes pride in offering faultless goods, very good customer service and being extremely picky about what she selects for the shop.

"I will not select anything with a major flaw, and if I buy something and get it home and discover it's not what I thought, I will not sell it," she said. "I don't want people complaining about what they receive. If something gets lost or broken in the mail, I'll refund."

Ian 'Watto' Watson, semi-retired heavy vehicle driving instructor, would

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regularly accompany his wife to her favourite Christian bookstore and head for the men's section looking for material he might want to read.

Frustrated at finding nothing suitable, he'd think, "I know the heart of an Aussie man", as he recalled the tens of thousands of hours spent with mostly male, fellow Aussies in the confined space of a truck cabin teaching them how to master a crash (gear) box.

The business motto for Ian's truck and motorbike training centre is: "Come and let us treat you like a champion".

"We want to give them more than just a licence; we want to encourage them in their life," he said.

Although his weakest subject at school was English, he forged ahead as a newbie writer in 2012 and engaged a book editor and publishing consultant to help establish his own publishing

company, Watto Books. His motto, and almost 30 years of running a business that's taken him into the heart of a bloke, percolate through the three books he has self-published to fill a hole in the Australian book market.

With catchy titles like: *Every Bloke's a Champion ... Even You*, *Champion Blokes 'Shed' Their Shame*, and *Champion Blokes Learn to Love*, his books are filled with down-to-earth words of encouragement, especially for men.

From a business point of view he has covered all his publishing expenses.

And thousands of copies of his books are in print or on CD, recorded by Ian himself to capture the Aussie flavour of his words.

At 72, the founder of Shed Happens, nights where men come together monthly in a supportive space, is more concerned that his books reach their

target audience than personal recognition.

Stringing beads was the unlikely start to a jewellery making business that took retired school teacher, now silversmith, Anne Townsend, more or less by surprise.

While still teaching part-time, she was asked 10 years ago if she would be interested in a bead show at the Brisbane Showgrounds. "I thought why not?" she said.

She began designing necklaces and earrings and giving them her own inimitable contemporary style using unusual clasps or large centrepieces. From there she added to her creative skills and attended the Goldsmith's School learning how to work with silver.

Now 77, she moved from Brisbane to Sydney last year to be nearer family and was faced anew with the perennial problem of getting her work before buyers.

She admits a search of her name on the Internet brings up educational books she authored during her 60-year teaching career, and not her jewellery.

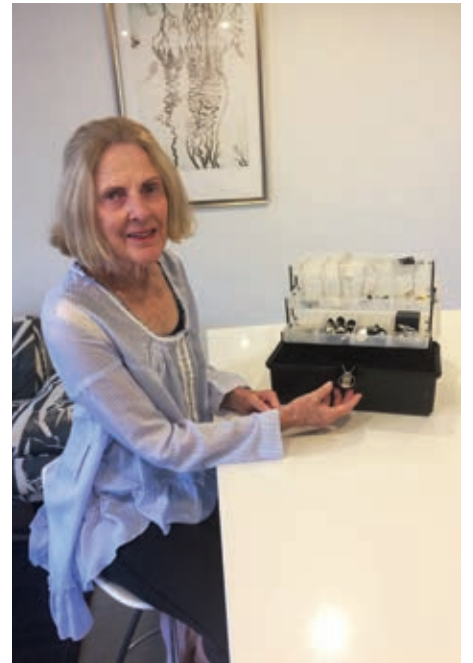
"I've tended to go through people I know and maybe have an outlet at the hairdresser, then the markets," Anne says. "I sell enough to buy some more silver and start again."

She puts images of her designs on Instagram to garner comments and for the benefit of those who want to see her work, but this doesn't translate into sales.

She's considered having a website, but doubts she can produce enough pieces to keep it going, and fears it will force her into mass production.

"I don't want to have anybody telling me what to do or how to do it," she says. "I think it's really important to have a time in your life where you can say, 'This is me.'"

Whether retirement means starting your own business, or just having more time to enjoy new hobbies and the



Anne Townsend and her design pieces.

grandkids, a recent study of 25,000 older Australians may help more people think positively about retirement.

It found retirees become more active, sleep better and reduce their sitting time. The lifestyle changes were more pronounced in people who retired from a full-time job.

TIPS TO KICKSTART the business of you

- Know your skills, knowledge, ideas and personal attributes
- Identify niche needs and potential markets
- Explore how to reach them
- Draw on your lived experience and a lifetime of networks
- For small business advice visit business.qld.gov.au



Ian 'Watto' Watson writes with the Aussie man in mind.

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