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# Power with panache

We canvass three successful entrepreneurs for their most useful business lessons

**DR NONDUMISO MZIZANA, COO of Sikelela Medical, Dental and Pharmaceuticals – a medical supply company and winner of the entrepreneurial category of the 2011 BWA Businesswoman of the Year Award**

**I was only 12 years when I had my first taste of being an entrepreneur.** I sold oranges and sweets in my neighbourhood and at school. I became a dentist 14 years ago and my formal entrepreneurial career began while serving at a poorly equipped provincial hospital in the Eastern Cape.

**Sikelela supplies medical and dental equipment to the private and public sectors throughout Africa.** We distribute high-end brands of X-rays, mammograms and ultrasound equipment, as well as a variety of other equipment. We're also the sole distributor of a specialised paediatric cardiology device in Africa.

**Dentistry is my profession and I'm passionate about my patients,** but entrepreneurship is my calling. As the founder and COO of Sikelela, I run the day-to-day operations of the company. I strategise, control budgets and decide which international suppliers we should work with. I'm very sensitive about product quality controls.

**Raising capital and overcoming societal stereotypes,** which dictate that women can't be business leaders, were some of the big challenges I encountered when I started my business. Fortunately, my husband believed in my dream and invested his savings in the business without requiring a shareholding. I also injected my pension package into it and received a R30 000 overdraft from the only bank which believed in me.

**Winning the entrepreneur category of Businesswoman of the Year** was a huge honour and a humbling experience for me.

**I believe in empowering other women** through employment and skills development. I offer them bursaries to study clinical engineering, which is one of the highlights of running a successful enterprise.

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#### MZIZANA'S MANTRAS

- Have a good vision, passion and never let your gender hold you back from succeeding as an entrepreneur.
- Develop a thick skin – be tough, persistent and keep knocking on doors until you're heard.
- Learn to manage your time effectively in order to create a seamless balance between business and family commitments.



**ANINA MALHERBE, MD of Cape Town-based Vivid Luxury Marketing**

**You worked in a marketing role at Shimansky before becoming your own boss. What was most challenging about the change in your career?** Not having the support structure of a big corporate behind you is hard. At Shimansky I had an assistant and a whole team backing me up. When I started my own company, I had no staff or support at first. I never knew how hard it would be, to be honest! **Which of your achievements are you most proud of?** The fact that I started my business just before the recession kicked in and persevered through the tough times. I'm also proud of having stuck to my vision for Vivid – to focus only on luxury brands. It would have been easy to compromise and take on non-luxury brands, but I stuck to my guns and today I'm really happy I did. Another triumph was winning our first Prism Award this year.

**By what margins is your business growing and what kind of wealth can be made in your industry?** My business has shown steady growth each year, with net profit almost doubling in the third year. There's considerable money to be made in the industry, although the key is the diversifying of services. Although our core business is PR and publicity, we've started growing the events and media-buying side of our business, which I believe will add to even more substantial growth.

**What advice would you give aspiring young marketers?**

- If you're not a creative thinker, don't go into marketing. I've met a few marketing students who were clearly neither creative nor lateral thinkers, and I felt sorry for them.
- Become a perfectionist. In marketing, attention to detail is often what sets you apart from the rest.
- Grow a thick skin. You're going to need it in the world of marketing!

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**TALITHA BUGWANDEEN, owner of a Juicy Lucy franchise at Galleria Mall in Amanzimtoti, KZN**

**Why did you opt for the franchise route?** I was looking for an investment vehicle to provide an additional source of passive income. The franchise option offered me an established business model and a turnkey solution.

**What are the benefits of being a franchisee?** From 1 March 2011, the Juicy Lucy brand was acquired by Famous Brands. Since May, the brand's seen significant improvements under the leadership of Brent Kairuz. Short- and long-term strategies have been implemented and we can already see tangible results. The key benefits of belonging to such a powerful and well-established franchisor are increased buying power, reduced food costs, more negotiating power, a bigger available network of experts and good, old-fashioned feel-good support.

**What are the disadvantages?** Franchisee businesses need consistency between the different stores and this inherent characteristic doesn't allow for any individualism or personal flexibility. If the leadership's ineffective, then the franchise experience can become a nightmare.

**What advice would you offer other aspirant entrepreneurs?** Women have traditionally found it difficult to be taken seriously as entrepreneurs. However, this shouldn't put you off playing in the same game as the boys. Do proper research into your field. I've found that the success rate for female entrepreneurs is higher in service-related industries such as healthcare, arts and entertainment, professional and scientific services and, of course, the food services industry. To contact Bugwandeen, email: [talithabug@mweb.co.za](mailto:talithabug@mweb.co.za).

