

Mother Knows Best

With more women shunning corporate America and branching out on their own, the number of mother-daughter businesses is on the rise.

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Like many entrepreneurial success stories, Beckey Neal's and Kim Godsey's began with a hobby. Both mother and daughter were working in the medical field -- Neal as a hospital nurse, Godsey as a lab technician -- when they started pouring candles together at home in Mississippi. Originally, the activity was just for fun, but Neal had the idea to open a small retail shop during her extra time on weekends. In 1999, they opened Wicks n' More in Tupelo, Mississippi, based around their signature hand-poured pillar candle.

Within a year and a half of opening, Wicks n' More was taking up all of their time and profitable enough to replace their medical salaries, so they quit. "When we realized that we could do something we loved doing and make money, it was even better," Neal says. "The store was so successful that we had no choice but to keep it going."

Today, the business focuses on wholesale manufacturing and occupies an 83,000 square-foot manufacturing facility in Mantachie, Miss. Revenue now stands at approximately \$6 million and Neal and Godsey oversee as many as 60 employees, depending on the season. Their candles are sold in more than 3,000 boutiques and department stores nationwide. "It's definitely grown above and beyond what we expected," Neal says.

When it comes to [family-owned businesses](#), fathers and sons have long been considered the classic entrepreneurial team. But the explosive growth of women-owned businesses has paved the way for a new breed of entrepreneurial pairing: mother-daughter businesses. Although no concrete statistics have been compiled for the number of mother-daughter businesses nationwide, family-business experts say their ranks are definitely growing.

Experts point out that over the past decade, there has been a shift in the cultural environment of the workplace, and women have gradually received more acceptance as business leaders. From 1997 to 2006, the number of women-owned businesses increased 42.3 percent -- almost twice the [rate of growth](#) for all U.S. firms, according to the most recent data from the Census Bureau. Today, the United States is home to an estimated 7.7 million women-owned businesses.

The image is a screenshot of a web page from Inc.com. At the top, it says "Million-Dollar Moms" and "Back to Inc.com". Below this is a navigation bar with links: "< Previous Slide", "Start Over", "Begin Slideshow", and "Next Slide >". The main content area features a photo of two women, Beckey Neal and Kim Godsey, with the caption "Wicks n' More Beckey Neal and Kim Godsey". Below the photo is a text block: "What started as a hobby pouring candles in their garage turned into the prominent candle manufacturing company, Wicks n' More, for mother-daughter team Beckey Neal and Kim Godsey. After almost eight years in the business together, the pair still remain front and center, operating an 83,000 square-foot manufacturing facility in Mississippi and selling their signature candles to more than 3,000 boutiques and department stores in the country." To the right of the photo is a promotional banner for "Save \$50 When you post a job! Reach millions of job seekers!" with a "POST A JOB NOW!" button and a "monster" logo. At the bottom right, there is a "JOIN NOW AND EARLY FREE NIGHT" button. The footer contains copyright information: "Copyright © 2007 Manueto Ventures LLC. All rights reserved. Inc.com, 7 World Trade Center, New York, NY 10007-2395. Contact Us | About Us | Subscribe | Advertise | Legal/Disclaimer | Labelled With: ICRA | Privacy Statement".



"Women have proven themselves in the working environment," says Kurt Glassman, co-founder and president of Leadership One, a Sacramento, Calif.-based consulting firm for family businesses. "Just because you're a man doesn't mean that you're the best-qualified person to run the business anymore."

As a result, many children now perceive their mothers as [role models](#) in the business world, according to Glassman. "Daughters are seeing from their mothers that you can have it all," he says.

In addition to the inherent mother-child bond, Neal and Godsey attribute their success to shared business philosophies. "From day one, we had the same expectations and goals," Neal says. "We are always focusing on having a better candle and putting out a high-quality product."

Neal and Godsey say their disagreements are usually confined to the color or name of a new candle, but they concede that every business suffers from the occasional dust-up. "There are a lot of trying times when you need to have respect for each other not just as mother and daughter, but as a business partner," Neal says.

While family businesses tend to have more than their share of conflicts, one of their [biggest advantages](#) is an inherent sense of trust, according to Ira Bryck, director of the Family Business Center at the University of Massachusetts. "There's trust that nobody's going to stab you in the back," Bryck says. "In a family business, you can think in terms of how are we going to use our talents and express our values in the long run, rather than worrying about how we are going to get 20 percent in the next 10 years."

Bryck says that having all the money stay in the same piggy bank, so to speak, adds a level of comfort to the business that can be beneficial. Jonelle Raffino, founder of South West Trading Co., a wholesale yarn company that specializes in manufacturing yarn from sustainable fibers, says she cannot imagine anyone she would rather have handling the books than her mother, Jonette Beck. "The first person I went to was my mom to help me, because there's nobody I trust more," Raffino says.

Watching her mom start a successful corporate event-planning business while growing up, inspired Jodi Wolf to join her mother, Paulette Wolf, professionally. Jodi entered college with plans to become a child psychiatrist, but after Paulette solicited Jodi's help planning an opening-night party for Cirque du Soleil, Jodi decided that she had found her calling. "It was really in my blood, and it felt like the right thing to be doing," Jodi says. She has been in business with her mom since 1993.

Paulette, who started her business, Paulette Wolf Events & Entertainment, almost 30 years ago, says that she always dreamed of working with her [next of kin](#). She started taking Jodi to events when she was 10 years old, but says she never pushed the idea of going into business together. So, when Jodi came to it on her own accord, Paulette was thrilled. "Jodi has totally changed the business," Paulette says. "It has grown three times more than when I was doing it alone."



Over the years, mother and daughter have planned several high-profile events, such as coordinating the entertainment at the athlete's village during the 2006 Olympics in Atlanta, and helping to put on the annual Air and Sea Show in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. Even though Paulette and Jodi spend long hours on the job, they still take family vacations together. Their drive to work is strictly social. "We have a rule in the car -- listen to music and talk socially," Jodi says. "We are not allowed to talk business."

Jodi says she believes the open and honest nature of the relationship with her mom makes for their tight bond. "I have always looked at [Paulette] as not only my mom, but as a best friend," Jodi says. Getting to know one another on a business level has also helped Jodi to understand her mom in a different way, outside of family interactions.

Working together in a [business environment](#) can help to mitigate the inherent threat of conflict that often exists in a mother-daughter relationship, according to Glassman. "The business environment can help mothers and daughters see themselves more objectively," he says. "It helps daughters to understand their mothers more as a whole person, and it helps mothers to understand the unique needs and desires of her daughter."

For Jonelle Raffino of South West Trading Company, one of the challenges she encountered when she started working with her mother was learning how to manage her emotions. "When you're having a tough day, the first people you're going to cut loose on is your family," Raffino says. "And it's hard to bluff emotion with family." Every now and then, if things turn ugly, Raffino calls in her dad to act as a mediator. Running a business together, she says, "has been a constant process of learning to respect each other on such a new level."

Raffino says that aside from having a unique product, South West Trading's image as a family business has been a huge [draw to customers](#) as well. "Our customers relate to us on a much more human level because they have gotten to know us as people," she says. "If there's accountability with the business, we stand to that as a family."