

How to juggle babies and business

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Launching a business while looking after a newborn is exhausting but rewarding, say these entrepreneurs

Julie O’Leary had been working tirelessly for two years to get her luxury watch brand ready for launch. During the day she held down a full-time job and in the evenings worked at turning the dream of running her own business into reality. But a few months before she aimed to go live with [Told & Co](#), she discovered the project wasn’t the only new arrival that year – she was pregnant with a baby boy.

The former PR and marketing professional says she found out she was expecting in February 2015, gave birth that September, and oversaw the launch of the company in November the same year. She says that while the first trimester was exhausting, it wasn’t until her child arrived that she realised how much of an upheaval it would be.

“The first couple of weeks after Jamie arrived were just madness,” she remembers. “The fact that we operate exclusively online was my saving grace though. I would be up a lot of the night with the baby and when he would fall asleep at 4am, that’s when I would be sending emails to our team.”

She adds: “It was absolutely crazy, when I look back now. There is so much going on and it is so emotional as well. You have this person who you are completely responsible for. You can barely look after yourself or the baby and you are trying to think about the business as well. It’s very hard.”

Eric Brantner, founder of [Scribblrs.com](#) and father to a 17-month-old daughter, also makes the most of quiet moments at night to work on his business. “After everyone has gone to sleep I’ll put in an hour or two of work. Some employees might get some 2am emails (I don’t expect them to reply!),” says Brantner, who lives in Houston, Texas.

Brantner launched his business while his daughter was still in hospital. She was born eight weeks early, and while healthy, was kept in hospital for six weeks until she put on weight. Brantner, who runs several websites with his two brothers and his business partner, said: “In the early days I’d be at the hospital cranking out articles for the website,” he says. It’s exhausting looking after a newborn and launching a business, he admits, but taking care of yourself by exercising and eating healthily helps.

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While nothing can prepare mums- and dads-to-be for the reality of becoming a parent, are there steps small business owners can take to ensure the joy of starting a family doesn’t turn into a nightmare for their freshly launched startup?

Darla DeMorrow, professional organiser, decorator and author of [the Pregnant Entrepreneur](#), advises women to write a maternity business plan before the birth. The US-based mother of two suggests writing a one page document that outlines how they will support themselves and the business financially while on leave. Whether that’s two weeks, six weeks, or a year, she advises business

owners to calculate their fixed costs needed to keep the business healthy while they are home taking care of their newborn. It's also important to make clients aware of their situation should it affect their ability to deliver more physically demanding tasks.

Australian entrepreneur Beverley Scheepers, founder of pregnancy advice programme [the Pre-Parent Project](#), says pregnant businesswomen should take advantage of the extra energy boost many mothers experience during the second trimester to put a strategy in place.

That could include hiring an interim worker to take the reins and handle client inquiries, for example, and making sure everybody in the team, from their accountant to social media manager, is prepared to take on any extra responsibilities. The more planning, the easier it is to step away from the business for a while, says Scheepers.

“They call that first three months after birth the fourth trimester and that's the biggest change for mum and the baby – it is really a critical period,” she says. “You don't want to have the pressure of trying to maintain a business during that time, so create a supportive framework by setting up processes and preparing staff.”

Gemma Pond, 35, founder of healthy drinks company [Nuva](#), says she was lucky to have the help of a business partner with 25 years experience when she went into labour the same week as the UK launch of their flavoured spring water in June last year.

Although the product is now stocked in 1,000 outlets and they recently raised £1m in investment, she wouldn't have achieved this without relying on a team she trusted and who believed in the concept. Having family and friends willing to help with childcare was also crucial.

As a result, she was able to take three months off after the birth, with six weeks doing very little except dipping in to reply to emails, and four weeks working from home. Now she has returned full time with flexible hours, and works from home on Fridays so she can spend more time with her family.

Pond says: “I am quite selfish with how I spend my time now. I make sure that I always have breakfast with my family and don't have to be at my desk at 9am. And I always make sure I get home in time to have dinner with the children, bath them and put them to bed.”

Finding the right balance between time with the baby and working on the business requires careful prioritisation of tasks, she adds. “The priority for me has been to make sure the children are happy, because if the kids aren't happy, it has a knock-on effect on everything else.”

Rosie Speight, co-founder of nutritional supplement brand [Equi London](#), launched the business in April, going live with the product on [Net-a-Porter](#) the next month. She gave birth to her daughter in the middle of the pre-launch drama and had just two weeks off from emails. She says the period after that was a “whirlwind” of pitching to retailers, meeting the press and preparing the logistics team and web builder.

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“It was insanely busy and trying to keep sharp on three hours of broken sleep was at times all too much,” she admits. “Trying to get into the swing of motherhood, get back on emails, be as proactive as Equi needed me to be, as well as keep on top of the mountain of laundry, was no mean feat and there were days that would go in the blink of an eye as I literally hadn't stopped.”

Some days she would be feeding through conference calls – emailing with one hand while she fed with the other – and running home from meetings to pump. “It’s tough but I knew that I would be making sacrifices and I love the fact I get to be a mum and at the same time be challenged professionally, so I wouldn’t have it any other way.”

The most important piece of advice is not to be too hard on yourself, despite the huge challenges that starting a business and having a baby at the same time can bring, says Pond.

“Sometimes it is a battle being a mum. You always feel guilty,” she says. “But you need to just realise that guilt is a waste of energy. Everything you are doing and striving to achieve, you are doing for the benefit of your children. So as long as you get the balance right and are happy with the priorities you have set, keep going. The children will be happy if you are happy.”

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