
Powell, Denise C., "Creating Opportunities for Women on the Web: A Mother's Quest." *Women, Work, and the Web: How the Web Creates Entrepreneurial Opportunities*. Smallwood, Carol. London, United Kingdom: Rowman & Littlefield. 2015. Print.



Chapter 2

Creating Opportunities for Women on the Web: A Mother's New Mother's Quest

By Denise Powell

My Story: The Lead-Up to Starting My Online Endeavor

I can recall when the first words hit me. My budding 15-year-old mind was struck by how the human brain could twist and morph a collage of random thoughts and images into something coherent, something powerful. It was the first poem I wrote, and certainly not my last. The process allowed me to look at the world differently and expanded my consciousness. If reading and writing poetry could enable me to expand my view of the world, I thought about how others could also be similarly, and positively, affected.

I went on to study creative writing at the University of Iowa to engulf myself in the writing process and to learn from the best. I knew early on that I wanted to get into the publishing industry, to make books. Unlike today, in the year 2000, I rarely used the Internet for email, let alone for job searches. Thus, when I graduated that year, I sought out my connections in the industry, which happened to be in academic publishing. This would be a stepping-stone, as my real passion was for more creative genres like fiction, poetry, and nonfiction. At age 22, I left my hometown in Illinois and boarded a plane to New York City. All I had with me were a couple checked bags containing all the items I would have to start my life there. Perhaps I knew that the “things” I had with me would be insignificant compared to the mental toughness I would need entering an unknown territory of survival in one of the most daunting cities in the world. Luckily, I was equipped with a few innate tools, such as a fierce independence and ability to take risks, which would set me up to thrive in a place like New York.

I was hired as the Editorial Assistant for the Geography and Geology Acquisitions Editor at Wiley Publishers. I stayed with the company for a few years and was eventually promoted to Associate Editor. During my years at Wiley, I learned a great deal. Such as, what goes into making a good book, how to work with authors, and what makes a good editor. I continued to write poetry and see readings when I could. New York proved to be a great literary haven peppered with places dedicated to poets where you could see incredible slam poetry competitions and readings, including the Nuyorican Poets Café and the Bowery Poetry Club.

I spent 8 fantastic years living the carefree life of a woman in her 20s with opportunities and her whole life before her. I was one of the lucky ones. To live in a country and at a time where women are treated fairly equally, are educated, and increasingly successful in their careers, often surpassing men for higher-level jobs. I

had hoped that one day, I could help other women somehow who do not have the same opportunities.

I ended up marrying a man I met at Wiley. We were both avid travelers and had a thirst to see more of the world. We decided to leave the city, and our jobs, and travel around the world for a year. Being do-gooder types, we volunteered along the way with orphans in Africa, and abused animals in Thailand, which helped shape and shift our view of the world.

Upon ending our year of travel, just after the world financial crisis, we had to figure out where to go. We settled in Boulder, CO, near where my husband was born. Suddenly, the excitement of traveling came to a halt. I was not only in culture shock, but I had to re-invent myself. I had no job and, due to the recession, very little opportunities unfolding to get one. I reached out to a former colleague at Wiley who started her own company based out of Connecticut that provided marketing services to large academic publishers. She was hiring freelancers to do editorial work for her company virtually. I was able to work from home and make my own hours, receiving contract work. Never before had I experienced such freedom and I realized I needed flexibility in my work. Working from home provided that. However, there still seemed to be something missing from the scenario. I was becoming less focused on the niche of academic publishing I was so well versed in, and still felt I needed to do something more, something creative that could possibly help others in some way.

I became pregnant in May of 2011 with my first baby. Having always focused on my career, I anticipated the work-life balance would be a challenge for me. I was right. I was lucky enough to have a relatively easy pregnancy, and work throughout. But I had to slow down and take care of myself, something that did not come naturally to me. Once I had the baby in February 2012, I found myself sending work emails from the hospital. This seemed wrong, as I wanted badly to focus on my family but considered myself responsible and never missed a deadline. Eventually, I had to put my freelance work on hold for a while and tend to my new baby. The first few months were an amazing and challenging time. I loved my baby so much, but I was in a holding pattern. Thrust into an unknown territory while I mourned my old life. When the smoke from the first 6 months of motherhood cleared a bit, I was able to focus and re-center a bit. I had needed to be buried for a while in the newness of motherhood. I recognized when it was time for me to return to myself a bit, while still maintaining a healthy bond with my child. It's not an easy balance, and the timing may be different for everyone. I felt ready to take on a new endeavor but I did not want to dedicate all my free time, which was only a couple hours per day, to working for someone else.

During my pregnancy, I had started a poetry blog of my own work, as it kept me writing and gave me a sense of purpose and accomplishment, not to mention a creative outlet that I so desperately needed. My work was out there, and others

could read it, which gave me motivation to write and a voice to be heard. I found that when I was able to write, it enabled me to relocate a part of myself that had been dormant. If writing had given me such a sense of joy and empowerment, why not help give that to other women feel the same?

Harnessing the increasing opportunities the web provides while combining my academic training and career experience in the publishing industry, allowed me to follow my passion—to bring forward the literary work of women all over the globe to express their voices through poetry. As the project evolves, I am seeking a combination of microloans, click-through dollars, and other enabling technologies to help me determine how women writers can not only be empowered, but also make money through publishing their creative works on my online literary venue, The Voices Project.

I know that being a mother with young children, while trying to keep a sense of your own identity, or uphold a career, is very hard work. For those mothers who have the desire to have a more flexible schedule in order to spend more time with their children, while still fulfilling their own entrepreneurial visions, I have a few tips on how to get started based on my experience.

General Tips for Mothers with Young Children Seeking to Launch an Entrepreneurial Venture

The following are tips for women who are seeking a work-life balance while also having young children at home. Not all women have the same goals for their lives and careers. These tips are meant to help guide women who have the desire to start a new creative or business venture from home while they raise young children. The first three, most new moms have heard before. I think they are worth repeating.

- 1. Do something for yourself everyday, no matter how small.** Take a class, go for a walk, sit alone with a cup of tea. Clear your head. Ideas will start to flow if you have a good daily rhythm and can get small breaks from your child. I know I am a better and more present mother when I am able to get breaks and have something of my own.
- 2. Get help with your child, if you can.** Even one day a week may help you gain back some of your identity as you remain immersed in the all-consuming role of motherhood.
- 3. Get some sleep.** If you're running on empty or are burnt out, you likely won't be motivated to start your online venture.
- 4. Make a list of what you want and don't want out of a career.**

- a. Once the baby is on a schedule and you are feeling comfortable with motherhood and have a handle on it, take 20-30 minutes to yourself during the baby's naptime to write down what it is you want. Be specific. Avoid focusing on what your skills are, but what it is you want. Do you want to work part-time? Make your own hours? It's good to hone in on what it is what you really want, and don't want. How can starting your own online company help you get to those goals?
5. **Reconnect with your passion.** When you focus on what it is you truly feel passionate about, you hone in on what truly makes you happy. Life's too short to ignore what really drives you.
6. **Brainstorm ideas for your online venture.** Once you're determined what you want, start using that time to brainstorm ideas for your online venture. Ask yourself these questions: What will it take to get started? How many hours per week are you able to work on it? Who can help with the baby? If no one can help, consider using nap times and after the baby is in bed. How viable is the idea and how might you test it without spending money? Who can you partner with? How will you advertise? Is this something that has potential to turn into a money-maker for you, even if it's a small amount?
7. **Get your elevator speech down.** Once you're determined what your project will be, come up with 2-3 sentences or a mission statement for your venture. Keep it short, to the point, and very clear. This is your new endeavor that you are excited about. Make others excited too, and make them believe in it, like you do.

Take Advantage of Technology

This bold new world of the Internet creates opportunities that we never would have had even 5-10 years ago. Women with young children have the ability to create their own business online and run them from home.

Raising a child is one of the most important tasks a woman will ever undertake and parenthood is not to be undermined. It's a tough job. For me, personally, I knew that in order to be a better mother and be more present with my child, I also had to be in touch with myself and have something of my own I was working toward to create positive change in the world and set an example for my daughter. Through creating The Voices Project, I am able to manage my work from home, during the hours I make for myself. At times it is hard and I still have many goals I wish to achieve with regards to the future of the project. It's a work-in-progress, like many other things in life. The present day is an interesting time to live, when we can drive our futures and

create our own outcomes by taking advantage of the technology at our fingertips. Use it to create yours.

The Logistics: How to Get Started with your Online Venture

Start with an Idea

No matter what your idea for a new business or creative endeavor may be, I believe it's important to not only use your current skill set, but to follow what you're passionate about (as mentioned above). For me, it was poetry and women's issues. Identify what it is for you and how you can turn that into a product, services, or a creative project. Write down your vision and how you see it coming into fruition. What will it look like? What problem will it solve for people?

Create an Online Presence

There are a few web hosting companies out there that charge a small monthly fee for hosting your website. They provide templates that you can use to design your own website with your very own personal flare. Most sites are very user-friendly, have a plethora of designs to choose from and step-by-step instructions on how to create one. You can also choose an option to create a new email address through a package on the same site. For example, the one I created was editors@thevoicesproject.org. You can create one or multiple emails to accompany your website. I also have info@thevoicesproject.org to direct people if they have any general questions regarding my project. To look more professional, it's a good idea to have an email address with your company name after @, rather than a Yahoo or Google address. I currently use Weebly for The Voices Project and have had a good experience.

There are a few notable companies to choose from that I have either used myself or have heard good reviews. I've noted the free resources below, along with a couple that require a monthly fee:

FREE hosting sites:

1. Weebly (<http://www.weebly.com>)
2. Blogger (<http://www.blogger.com>)
3. WordPress (www.wordpress.org)- note: you may need to know a little more about graphic design or Photoshop to use this site. If you are seeking to, and have the skills to do more with your site, this one may be for you

Site that charge a small fee:

4. GoDaddy (www.godaddy.com)
5. Network Solutions (<http://www.networksolutions.com>)

Note: For creative/crafty projects, like making clothes or selling a handmade product, you can create your own store on [etsy.com](https://www.etsy.com).

Advertise Your Online Project:

Now that you have your website launched, it's time to get the word out. Here are a few steps you can take to drive traffic to your website:

1. Send an email to friends and family with a BRIEF description of your project with a link to your website.

Your family and friends are a key network of people who know you and want to support your project. Ask them straight out to post it on their social media sites and encourage their own networks to check out your website. Depending on the type of project you have, research various online venues that you can advertise on.

2. Create a social media page dedicated to your business.

Create a Facebook page exclusively for your business. Include details on your mission and a brief description of what you do. Also create a Twitter page for your business. Post everyday if you can. There are ways to link to your social media sites from your website if you also have a blog on your website that you post on regularly. That way, you only need to post once as your website blog post feeds into Facebook and Twitter. Cross-promote your business on your personal social media sites.

3. Partner with other companies of interest

Reaching out to colleagues in a similar industry with a common goal is a good way to advertise. Do your research and before you reach out, but sure partnering with a certain company will not be a conflict of interest for either party. Often, the owners of other sites will be happy to exchange advertising on their site for advertising on yours, as sort of a cross-promotional effort by both parties. It's a win-win for everyone involved. For example, I created a "resources" page on The Voices Project site, and list all my partners on that page, sometimes including logos or widgets provided by those partnering sites. In turn, they provide me with a free classified add on their site or include me on their list of resources.

4. Post a classified ad:

Again, depending on what the focus of your project is, you can look into other venues, or online magazines, that offer classified listings for websites like yours. To advertise my "call for entries," I found that *NewPages.com* was a great venue that offered me an option to post a free simple classified ad. For new moms, *Literary Mama* also offers something similar. A lot of sites may offer a simple free ad, or you

may need to pay to post an ad with a logo or an ad with more verbiage. Find sites that will support your niche and see what they offer in terms of classifieds.

5. Using Google AdWords (<http://www.adwords.google.com>)

Creating an account with Google AdWords is fairly easy. **NOTE: If you choose to use AdWords, proceed with CAUTION.** If you do not monitor your account closely, especially the first few days, you are at risk of paying more money than you bargained for. You can always change the amount. AdWords agents are available to help if you need it. If you do not have a little money to spare for advertising, AdWords may not be for you.

First, you create an account online. Then, create your first ad campaign by taking the following steps:

- a. Choosing where your ad will appear on your site
- b. Decide on a budget, or how much you're willing to pay each time someone clicks on your ad (I recommend starting small—maybe 10 cents per click)
- c. Pick key words that can help your ad show in searches. Agents are available to walk you through the process if need be. Do an experiment and see the kind of response you get. You can check your stats on your AdWords account. You can always pause the advertising should you feel it's not working they way you want it to.

Making Money

There are a few ways you can earn a little money by taking advantage of advertising opportunities on your website. Bear in mind, you'll need to do your research and really learn what it is your specific audience will find valuable in terms of ads you place on your website. To get the most click-through, you'll want to test the ads and note what does not work, and keep refining your strategy. Advertising may not earn you big money, but it can certainly help, especially if you focus on your audience and keep your ads targeted.

1. Use Targeting Advertising with Google AdSense (<http://www.google.com/adsense/>)

The Google AdSense program allows you to make money advertising on your site by placing targeted text ads generated by Google on your pages. They appear in rectangular boxes running down the side or across the bottom of a web page. First, you'll need to create an AdSense account. This is very simple and you just need to follow the step-by-step instructions provided by Google AdSense. Once you are signed up, you can place your ads on your page. Weebly allows you to drag and drop

the Google AdSense box onto each page so you can place the ads where you want. You'll link your bank account directly to AdSense and any money you make will go direct to that account. You can monitor your earnings on your account page. Keep in mind, this is not a way to make big money, but you may make some. With The Voices Project, I am experimenting to see if I may be able to divvy up what I make from AdSense to my contributors as a way to help them earn something too.

2. Promote an affiliate product on your site.

Joining another company's affiliate program is another way to get started with internet advertising. Affiliate links are not ads, they allow you to make money by promoting someone else's product. You have an opportunity to earn commission each time someone you've referred makes a purchase. Posting a banner on your site that links to the affiliate site or publishing a newsletter article about their product can help encourage sales. Do your research to find a program that best fits with your site. Different affiliate programs offer different payout options. Some, for example, offer 10% commission for each sale while other spay up to 50%.

For more on this option, check out the following links:

Amazon Associates (<https://affiliate-program.amazon.com/>)

iTunes Partner Program (www.apple.com/itunes/affiliates/)

The Affiliates Directory (<http://www.affiliatesdirectory.com/>)

Refer It (<http://www.ecommerce-guide.com/>)

3. Sign up for a blog-specific ad program

If you have a blog, you can sign up for feature blog-specific ads on your site. You'll want to think about the types of ads your audience will find interesting and valuable. A couple notable affiliates follow:

Amazon Associates (<https://affiliate-program.amazon.com/>)

Crisp Ads (<http://ww38.crispad.com/>)

4. Providing products and services.

Use a "lean startup" model, an incremental and customer-interactive approach that Founders gain a deep personal firsthand understanding of their potential customers' needs before locking into a specific path and a precise product. Before spending money building your product, first test the product or services to make sure they may be marketable by offering them anyway before they are built. Build, test and search for a business model, while iterating and evolving based on customer feedback. The goal is to test, refine and scale ideas fast and affordably.

The key questions to ask at every step:

- What insight do I need to move forward?
- What is a simple test I can run to get that insight?
- How do I design an experiment to run that simple test?

Keep up the momentum

Life gets busy, especially for people with a family. Set aside 30 minutes, at the very least, everyday to post on your website blog or social media site, reach out to a potential partner, or talk to someone about your project. Think about what you do often in 30 minutes that may seem as a time-waster. Instead of going to fold laundry or answer emails, put that on hold. Ask yourself “if this is the only thing I accomplish today, will I be satisfied with my day?” If you prioritize properly, there is no need to multitask. You don’t always need to be focused on finishing everything. Focus on one attainable task at a time, as not to get overwhelmed.

If you have an idea, and a little time set aside, why not test it with the online tools available to you? When you’re ready to begin, these tools can help make your life a little easier by allowing you to work from home and still be attentive to your family.