

Bunclody-based Caroline Tully set up Blackstairs Web Design when she and her business partner, another mum, realised that the area needed more of an online presence. Now their business is going nationwide and the mompreneur is ready to take on the challenge

## 1. About the Business

Blackstairs Web Design was set up in 2014 by myself and Helen Conway. We're based in Bunclody, Co. Wexford, once referred to as the most depressed town in Ireland; we're endeavouring to change that impression by getting Bunclody and the surrounding areas online.

Both of us are professionals, I worked in IT for over a decade and Helen is a barrister-at-law and also a lecturer. But with kids, full-time work was proving too hard. After dropping the kids off and going for a coffee, we started to realise that a lot of the businesses in the area weren't actually online. So, we've been working hard at offering invaluable skills in website design, social media and digital solutions to clients from different industries, as far afield as fake tan, meat retailers to mobile home companies. We offer a complete digital solution. It's not that the majority of people are luddites; we don't take that view. It's the work that social media and managing a website entails, many of our clients find it a daunting prospect and that's where we can help.

We've been scaling the business over the last year, we now work with experts in editing, graphic design, public relations and marketing. This enables us to provide a turnkey solution from inception to professional, search engine optimised, responsive websites that fully meet the customer's needs. Now Bunclody seems to be coming up in the world. Not to blow its trumpet too much, but it's a peaceful place and a lovely environment to bring up families. Locals are thanking us for getting their favourite businesses online. And our reach is expanding outside of the area.

## 2. Motivation to start business...

Starting my own business has been on my wish list since my mid to late twenties. During my years working as an employee, I realised I had a passion to drive goals forward, achieving the best solution for both the companies I worked for, and their customers. It was this attention to detail and energy for doing the job right, that made me realise I should start my own business in an area that I love.

I was a stay-at-home mother from when my first child was born. I threw myself into motherhood 100%. Three kids later, and when the last child started primary school, I decided it was time to start the business. But, I still wanted to be that stay at home mum...my cake and eat it. But something told me 'Why not?'

During the previous years when the kids were younger, I taught myself new applications and kept abreast of technology. My husband continues to work in the IT sector so it was never far away!

I started by creating websites for friends and family. Technology has changed rapidly but the principals and project management concepts remain the same. I soon realised there was a growing market for this line of business. I'd heard stories of poor customer support or outrageous prices. In essence, I felt I could provide manageable, modern websites at affordable prices while being a stay at home mum!

So, I took the plunge.

### 3. Background

My career background spans 20 years in the IT industry.

Starting in programming then moving onto support, project management and eventually IT management.

At the height of my career I was managing a team of 35 individuals and departmental budgets of 1 million euro. I have worked for multi-national companies in Dublin, London, Amsterdam and Silicon Valley.

### 4. Highs & Lows

There are many emotions when setting up your own business. It's exciting time and the sheer sense of achievement keeps my motivation high most of the time. Being self-driven is a key factor and ensuring setbacks don't get in your way is a must. We've had many marketing strategies fall flat on their face, but we learnt from these, took action and found a different approach.

A particular high recently was the launch of SunKiss, a new fake tan brand. Vogue Williams is the brand's ambassador and it has been great fun to work on the site. The same company has also launched a new product called Perkys, which is a breast enhancement tape. We worked with animators and videographers on the site and it was also a really enjoyable project.

The lows are the days I sit being frustrated with compatibility issues and the sheer speed of today's changing technology. What worked yesterday doesn't work today.

### 5. Advice

Today, I work a 35 hr week! Most of this time is when the kids are at school, the rest in the evenings or early mornings. Trying to balance home and work life is a job in itself but very doable. Planning ahead and scheduling is what works for me.

I would advise to:

- Do your research - determine where and when you can work
- Plan childcare in advance - always have a backup plan!
- Flexibility - we can't plan or schedule for everything..
- Keep positive - people are more likely to tell us what we're doing wrong than doing right!
- Be Confident - you had a dream - you have a skill - it will work, you just need to keep trying and don't give up.
- Schedule - keep your kitchen planner / work diary updated
- And if you can - employ a cleaner!!

## 6. Tips

When I decided the time was right to start my own business my children were aged 5, 7 and 9. Getting them on-board was extremely important to me, so I sat each one down and explained my work plans. It turned out they were as excited as me! The kids now appreciate why I have to work. There are days when I'm told that "I like work more than them", but thankfully these are less often as they grow older and wiser!

My tips to anyone looking to balance work and family life are simple. Make sure that you have the full backing of anyone who will be impacted by your work. And that's a big one if your husband works full time also!

You're still the 'wife' and 'mother', so learn to delegate. Voice your concerns and get everyone else to do the same. Solutions are easier to find than you'd think. Schedule as much as you can, ensuring no-one is left out. Try getting everyone involved, make it fun if possible. Teach them new skills ( my sons love any excuse to get online to help out ). Talk about their day in school but don't forget to tell them about your day at work too. Celebrate great exam/sports results as well as business milestones.

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## 7. Next Steps

We will be getting a local restaurant online very soon, we're excited about that. We have new projects and word of mouth is doing us a great service. So our client base is expanding. We hope to offer new services to clients. We're getting the hang of Snapchat and we know that clients need their socials to rapidly evolve on a daily basis. Yes, we're going to be getting busier!

#### 8. Three wishes

1. There were more hours in the day.
2. Faster broadband nationwide
3. Create more jobs for professional stay at home mothers!