

# G CAREERS



These women made the recession work for them – here's how...

# HEY RECESSION? WE'RE OVER YOU

The women you see here turned a nightmare economy into their dream careers. Now they want to tell you how they did it.

Prepare to be inspired. By **Grace Timothy**

**M**eet Generation Axed. Women who, like so many of us, have been knocked down by the recession. The crappy economy has left careers stalling; competition for jobs is tougher than ever, there are fewer pay rises and promotions, and a startling 43,000 women were made redundant between December 2012 and February 2013. But we're fighting back. "There are still lots

of opportunities during a recession. When women are made redundant, it can open up possibilities that they never imagined were an option before," says Julie Hall, CEO of Women Unlimited, a community of entrepreneurs helping women to build successful businesses. For starters, there are now 2.8% more women in self-employment than last year. It's time to be savvy and brave and turn your life around. Need ideas? Start right here.

## “I LOST MY JOB, BUT I CREATED A BETTER ONE”

**Robyn Coles, 31,**  
a milliner from Cardiff

"I was head of merchandising at a high-end fashion brand when I was made redundant in April 2011. Suddenly, I felt as clueless as I did when I left university. So, after lots of crying, I used the opportunity to consider what I really wanted to do: make hats.

I spent all summer taking millinery courses at the London College of Fashion – for around £395 a pop – and was hooked. I had maxed out my credit card and had to move in with my brother, but luckily I qualified



### **Robyn's tips**

- 1. No matter what, give yourself some time off each week – relax and process what you're going through.**
- 2. Do something zany to attract attention – I used naked models to launch my collection at London Fashion Week, and it definitely got people talking!**
- 3. Make full use of free marketing tools like social media and free local networking events. I also throw in-store parties – lots of Champagne and hat chat.**

for The Prince's Trust Young Enterprise Programme. I applied online and they offered me a week-long course in business management. I then had to pitch to their small panel – like *Dragons' Den* but kinder – and was given a £1,000 loan to buy materials.

I began making my hats at the kitchen table and used every marketing ploy I could think of to drum up demand – from talking to the press to linking up with local boutiques and flying into the night. Eventually word spread, and a year after launching in November 2011, I was able to rent a little shop.

It's tough going from earning over £40,000 a year to having to justify spending £5 on thread. The £10,000 I made in my first year had to go straight back into the business. But the highs are unparalleled – creating with your own two hands. I can't believe I didn't make the change sooner." ►



## “WE DO OUR DREAM JOBS ON THE SIDE”

**Charlie Gozem** (left) and **Jess Martin**, both 27 and from London, are co-founders of online florist [one-flew-over.co.uk](http://one-flew-over.co.uk)

“Jess and I were raised thinking we could do any job, but we graduated into a recession – finding a job was hard, let alone trying to live the dream. Jess got a job in finance, as an operations analyst, and I work as a retail sales assistant – we enjoyed our roles (and still do), but we both secretly wanted to be florists.

Our day jobs meant we could fund floristry courses – up to £5,000 each – and launch *One Flew Over* from my flat, or rather, the garden. We started with about £500 of our savings to cover the initial materials like ribbons and the odd tool, then bought whatever we needed on each job rather than outlaying lots of cash on things we might not use. We don’t advertise yet: until our website is ready, customers come to us via Facebook, recommendations and our blog – all free!

We’re trying to make flowers more accessible while people haven’t as much to spend on luxuries. They don’t have to be huge bouquets to make an impact – for Valentine’s Day we arranged blooms in jam jars wrapped in ribbon with a handwritten note.

For now we’re putting any profit into the next commission, but eventually we hope to expand into a workshop. Juggling our careers and a new business means getting up before dawn to go to flower markets, and working through weekends – it can be hard, but it’s all ours.”

### Jess and Charlie’s tips

1. Utilise your friends’ expertise – especially the accountants and lawyers.
2. Work out how to pack as much as possible into your free time – turn off the TV, draft emails on the train, work in a café through your lunch hour – make the most of every second.
3. If, like us, you’re not working on your business full time, be honest with your clients about when you will be able to get back to them with realistic timeframes.

## “THE RECESSION CREATED A GAP IN THE MARKET – AND WE JUMPED ON IT”



**Isobel Dando**, 35, (left) head of network development for Rolls-Royce in Sussex, and **Victoria Bennett**, 30, head of brand partnership for Barclays Wealth in London, co-founders of vintage jewellery website, [dandoandbennett.com](http://dandoandbennett.com)

“Isobel and I both come from generations of jewellers, and have been friends for years. When the banks hit the headlines, the price of gold and diamonds began to rise, and jewellery became one of the safest and most sensible places to invest money. It struck us as a prime opportunity to use our insider knowledge. Having considered making our own jewellery, we felt vintage jewellery was the best fit – if someone is going to spend money during a recession, they want something unique and of genuine value.

We put down £10,000 of our own savings at first – about 80% went on stock and the rest on a website and branding. We started buying at auctions and estate sales, and selling out as fast as we could re-stock. All our profits went back into buying more jewellery and instead of expensive advertising, we became serial networkers. We really worked at going out and meeting people wearing our pieces – we were meeting potential customers all the time. One of those people happened to be a buyer for The Bluebird in London – 12 months after launching, we were being stocked in a major store!

Fitting it around our jobs can be tricky – there’s a lot of early-morning admin and late-night phone catch-ups. As the pieces are all one-offs, we can’t buy in bulk, so we probably won’t take a salary until year three, but we had to make the most of the climate – it was perfect timing.”

### Victoria and Isobel’s tips

1. Look for a gap in the market and make a plan, starting with what investment you need in terms of time (often forgotten) and money.
2. Do your research. If there isn’t anyone doing what you want to do, ask yourself why. If there is, could you do it better?
3. Think about your plan in the short term, medium term and long term. Is there scope for growth? ►



## “I CHANGED MY CAREER PATH AND LANDED MY PERFECT ROLE”

**Nancy Coburn**, 26, digital campaign manager in London

“I started my career as an intern at a music magazine, just as the recession hit and they tightened their budgets. Even though it was my dream to become a music journalist, I quickly realised it was really unlikely I’d get paid work, no matter how hard I worked to prove myself. The general buzz was that the future of the music industry was in digital, so I worked on the website as much as possible and made the most of the company’s IT training – instead of just partying at gigs all week long, I was learning how to use HTML, Excel and how social media can boost a brand. I used gigs to network – there’s always a manager, agent, label representative, PR and an array of assistants with each artist, so I made sure I introduced myself and made myself known to as many of them as possible. You never know who might know of a job coming up



### Nancy’s tips

1. Having a basic grasp of HTML and social networking puts you in a really strong position for most businesses nowadays.
2. Remember, it’s OK to make mistakes. If one thing doesn’t work out, focus all your energy on what’s next.
3. Make connections and keep in touch with as many people as possible. You never know when someone has a job going, so if you’re interested in what they do, make sure you let them know.

and it’s a great way to see what everyone does. I eventually landed a job in digital marketing at DECCA Records – part of Universal Music – building sites for artists, managing their social networks and publicising online streams. It’s a great place to be at the moment. I still get to write, listen to amazing new music and work directly with artists such as The Lumineers, while also working with digital companies such as Spotify, who are at the forefront of the industry right now.”

## “MY HOBBY BECAME MY NEW CAREER”

**Natasha Bailie**, 28, from Singapore, founder of online vintage emporium, [natashabailie.com](http://natashabailie.com)

“I always wanted to be a fashion buyer, but when the recession hit, the retail industry stalled and it seemed I would be someone’s assistant for years. Meanwhile, I was selling my own vintage clothes on eBay for some extra cash. I’d bought most of them at charity shops, and realised I was doubling my money! After another gruelling week at the office, it struck me: I was already doing my dream job, just on a small scale. I put £200 towards new pieces and even with the fees and postage costs, within a week I’d made £500 on eBay. I quit my job and my



### Natasha’s tips

1. Don’t launch a product without an online presence. If you have an idea for a website, but don’t have a huge budget, see what you can do yourself. [UK.mrsite.com](http://UK.mrsite.com) is a great facility for designing your own.
2. Work from home to save on overheads. You may be able to claim back on some household bills – consult HMRC (see over) for info.
3. Sign up to every blog, newsletter and Twitter feed from related businesses – you may get marketing ideas, hear about events or just find a supportive network of people.

husband offered to learn HTML code and build me a website so that I was more of a ‘brand’ than just an eBay shop. A lot of people had a similar idea, so I specialised in 1950s gowns from auctions and estate sales, using Twitter and Facebook to spread the word for free. I also blogged – I tried to put up fresh content every day, and within six months I had over 3,000 followers on Twitter alone.

Anything I earned went on new stock at first, then

I saved up and paid a web designer to update the site. Within a year, I was being invited to appear on television, in magazines and at The Clothes Show Live as a vintage expert.

Although not knowing how much I’ll make in a month was scary at first, I still wish I’d made the move sooner. Starting the business during a recession means surely things can only get better!” ►



## “REDUNDANCY CONVINCED ME TO EMIGRATE”

**Lia Pope**, 27, a pre-school teacher from New Jersey, USA

“I got my first teaching job straight out of university, but two years in, massive budget cuts ended my teaching programme. Australia was reporting teacher shortages, and I found out that since I was under 30, I could get a Working Holiday Visa, allowing me to be a working tourist for a year. I travelled around New Zealand and Indonesia first, and met my British husband, Oli, in Bali – an unexpected bonus. We decided to move to Perth together, not only because it seemed like a great place to explore, but also because the economy was booming.

But it wasn't easy. I had to work in day-care for six months, while the Australian authorities checked my teaching credentials, and as a substitute teacher for another six months while I looked for a job. But, eventually, I got one as director of a pre-school.

While it's hard being away from family, we're saving as much cash as possible and loving the Aussie lifestyle. It has definitely changed my life for the better.”

### Lia's tips

1. Be confident and ask locals for advice on finding a job – from how to write your covering letter and CV to the kind of thing you should wear to interviews. Just being chatty often leads you to someone who knows of an opportunity to suit you.
2. Do your research. Immigration lines, online message boards, job seeking sites – they'll all have tips.
3. Save as hard as you can so that you always have an emergency fund. We keep a 'plane ticket account' so that we can get home at a moment's notice.

## “I LEFT MY JOB TO HELP PEOPLE – JUST WHEN THEY NEED IT MOST”

**Poppy Mardall**, 30, from Hampshire, founder of [poppysfunerals.co.uk](http://poppysfunerals.co.uk), an affordable funeral service



“I had a great job at Sotheby's, but I was forever working late, travelling and having to cancel things that meant a lot to me, like dinner with the family or my volunteer work as a Samaritan. I wanted to start my own business, doing something that could help people. The idea of being a funeral director is totally unglamorous, of course – and yet really it's just about helping people through an incredibly tough time, when they need someone who is compassionate, kind and trustworthy. That really struck a chord with me.

I contacted lots of funeral directors to find out how it all worked and what I could offer. I decided to run simple cremations and burials for a fraction of the cost of a traditional funeral. I spent £3,000 of my savings on building the website and branding, hiring vehicles and staff from another funeral director for the first six months. I then spent anything we earned on equipment and rent for our own mortuary space.

People say it's a recession-proof job, but I don't see it that way. Some weeks we have three funerals, other weeks there might only be one. I'm just happy doing work I think is awesome rather than a job everyone else thinks is awesome.”

### Poppy's tips

1. Rather than trying to think of it from a business point of view, try to work out what the world needs.
2. Start telling people about your plans – this will force you to start taking it seriously and get going!
3. Go and meet someone who is doing something related to what you want to do, and ask questions. What are the essential set-up costs? What would they do differently if they started again?

Photographs: Corbis, Alamy, Gemma Day, Sources: Office of National Statistics

## START HERE, MAKE IT HAPPEN!

- [gov.uk](http://gov.uk) Government guidance for starting a business in the UK, from free business plan templates to how to register your company.
- [startups.co.uk](http://startups.co.uk) Practical advice for new businesses and

entrepreneurs: find an accountant, secure office premises, insure your company – all made simple.

- [uk.mrsite.com](http://uk.mrsite.com) Make your mark online and create a professional website for your business.

- [womenunlimitedworldwide.com/planning](http://womenunlimitedworldwide.com/planning) Sign up here for a Start Smart Planning Guide, that helps you decide if your idea is viable.
- [hmrc.gov.uk](http://hmrc.gov.uk) Everything you need to know about tax, national

insurance, PAYE and benefits.

- [princes-trust.org.uk](http://princes-trust.org.uk) The charity's Enterprise Programme can help unemployed under-30s with training, one-on-one mentoring and low-interest loans. ☺