

Find Success Online

By Ashley Cisneros

Time and time again women have proven that they can do it all — be mothers, wives, active participants in their communities and churches, plus excel professionally. Statistics show that minority women are showing incredible economic strength. According to the Center for Women's Business Research, the number of firms owned by women of color increased 32 percent between 2002 and 2008. Today, the Internet is allowing even more women to start their own ventures. Here are three Latinas who are open for business — online.

<http://www...>



Ivette Mayo

The Power of Gratitude

Ivette Mayo knows a thing or two about the value of culture. The online entrepreneur started Yo Soy I Am™, LLC, a consulting firm that helps businesses develop a competitive advantage through cultural awareness training, in 2006. A year later, she started Yo Soy Expressions, a line of Latina-inspired greeting cards. "The name, 'Yo Soy I Am' reflects our bi-cultural existence as Latinas," she says. "I wanted my businesses to celebrate the excellence of *mujer Latina*."

She leveraged her experience working in marketing, sales, public relations and training to start 'Yo Soy I Am.' The mother of two started networking with business organizations, especially Hispanic ones, in Tampa, Fla.

Through word of mouth, Mayo began to receive numerous referrals and requests for speaking engagements. To express her gratitude, she searched for

Spanish thank-you cards to send to her contacts, but found very little. "There might have been one or two, but they didn't say what I wanted," she explains. "I printed a *muchas gracias* — thank you — card from my inkjet printer and my clients loved it."

Mayo knew she was on to something. She started visiting the greeting card aisles in local stores, took notes on dimensions and wrote down the companies that produced the cards. When she got home, Mayo searched the company websites that produced the Spanish cards.

An avid artist, Mayo started sketching her own designs for the cards and soon met a graphic designer and a printer. She launched www.yosoyexpressions.com in Spanish and English to market the cards and sent press releases to local and national media.

Mayo says that about 80 percent of her business is online-based. "Having an Internet-based business is easier than a business with a storefront," she says. "I was looking for convenience; the ability to work from home and the ability to have a real hand in the growth of the company and the products."

She hopes to find the right retail outlet for the cards. "I am proud that I have created something Latinas can identify with," she says. "Latinas have incredible and powerful souls. The Internet is just another place to demonstrate our greatness."

Hard Work Pays

Iveth Reynolds knows what it means to work hard. In the early days of her career, she often arrived to work early and worked through lunch to maximize her time. One day a mentor told her, "You could easily be running this company one day."

Rather than taking over the company, she started her own in 1998. Today, Reynolds, a Nicaraguan, owns Tri-Mar Consulting, Inc., a national staffing and recruitment firm in New York. Tri-Mar offers technology and business development recruitment to mostly small to mid-size companies. About 60 percent of Reynold's business is online-based. E-mail allows her and her staff to expand Tri-Mar's reach to an international level. "Technology is very cost-effective," she says. "The Internet, e-mail, web cams and web conferencing make doing business easier."



Iveth Reynolds

Like many women, Reynolds took some time out of her career to have children. After the birth of her second child, she returned to the workforce and had to work her way up again as an administrative assistant.

During this time, she also worked on her business plan for Tri-Mar. She tapped into the resources made available by her local chamber of commerce and hired a personal coach.

Word spread about Tri-Mar's services, and this led to more projects for the new company. While growth is something most entrepreneurs hope for, it can also be a challenge for new businesses. "We had to be selective with our clients," she says. "Our services may not match every potential client we come in contact with. We had to control our growth."

Reynolds was fortunate to have several mentors, and a few who became like family to her. "Mentorship was very informal for me," she says. "Sometimes it wasn't until later, upon reflecting back, that I realized that certain people were my mentors."

According to Reynolds, her biggest challenge is finding balance in her busy schedule. "One of the advantages of having your own business is that you make up your own hours," she says. "My number-one priority is my family and I make sure to keep an up-to-date calendar, so that I stay on track with everything."

Remember Your Roots

Entrepreneurship is in Miriam da Matta's blood. The fifth of seven children, da Matta grew up in Mexico and worked at her

father's store starting at age seven. "My dad was a strict man. He told us, 'If you don't work, you don't eat,'" da Matta says. "He encouraged us to be business owners and avoid working for others."

Da Matta earned a degree in marine biology, but always wanted to start her own business. In 2005, she saw an infomercial about capital funding and was inspired. By 2007, she started Panamerican Capital Solutions from her home in Redondo Beach, Calif. "We help businesses convert their income stream — accounts receivable, government receivables, credit card transactions and more — into cash capital to help them sustain their business," she says.

She received training from the American Cash Flow Association, which provided her with information on different funding companies and helped her make contacts.

Success didn't come right away. She worked with 15 prospects before closing her first deal. She usually meets her clients face-to-face initially, but also has several clients in Texas and Florida whom she's never met in person. "Speed and practicality are what makes the Internet beautiful," she says. "I can work at anytime; I don't have to keep typical 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. hours. I can work while my daughter is asleep."

Da Matta found her niche in the Latino market and has recently experienced an increase in equipment leasing from beauty salons. "The key about this business is that my customers need me — they need the funding for their business," she says. "A lot of my clients don't know much about credit. They may not have a credit history. The funding companies I work with can help these clients gain capital and establish credit."



Miriam da Matta

11 Tips for You

Interested in starting an online venture? Consider the insider entrepreneurial advice from these business owners.

Tips from Ivette Mayo

Research your competition. If you plan to launch a website, use a search engine to find companies that are currently selling your product or doing what you want to do. Print the web pages of the site and make notes on what you like and don't like.

If you need a developer, be prepared and show him/her your printouts and notes up front. Envision what you may want in the long-run and have these features built into your site from the start. You can activate them later when you're ready. Getting them built in the beginning can save you from add-on costs. Shop around and find someone who understands your needs and your level of 'technical talk.'

Tips from Iveth Reynolds

Stay abreast of technology.

Embrace change. It's easy to get into a routine of always doing the same thing in the same manner, but you may find ways to be more efficient.

Stay true to your niche in all business decisions.

Get a mentor or coach.

Create an advisory board to turn to if you have questions and want to share ideas.

Tips from Miriam da Matta

If you need to educate yourself about technology, take a course provided by your local library or community college. Write a good business plan and revisit it periodically. You can get assistance from chambers of commerce and business-related associations.

Currently, she is working on opening an eight-person calling center in El Salvador. The center will provide basic information to prospects and get them started on the application process, giving her more time to focus on following up and closing more deals. **L**