



Earn *six figures* doing what you love

Make big bucks, from home, having fun? These women got creative and figured out a way to have it all. You can too. BY DEBBIE KOENIG

Everybody thinks I'm a housewife," says Amber Dusick. "Even friends and family act like, 'Oh, that's so cute that you keep yourself busy with your crafts...'" The suburban Los Angeles mom doesn't bother to correct them. "When you meet someone, you don't just announce how many Facebook fans you have, or that some years you make more than your husband," she says. That's right: Amber is a six-figure housewife, bringing in a cool \$100,000 last year through a mini empire of online D.I.Y. businesses. She's one

of many determined and talented women who've pinpointed where their interests meet the marketplace. They reap major rewards—money, satisfaction, freedom—and say it's all within reach for the rest of us. Amber and 10 others walked us through what it takes.

Ten years ago, Amber was working as a graphic designer and planning her wedding to Josh, a neurosurgery researcher. A lifelong artist and crafter, she wanted to D.I.Y. the event, but couldn't find much help online. So she came up with her own ideas, like embellishing an inexpensive dress and building an ornamental chuppah. When other brides-to-be flipped over the pics she shared on message boards, Amber had her “aha” moment: This could be a business. She sensed that more women were interested in old-fashioned, hands-on projects—not to mention saving money with them. “At the time, the D.I.Y. wedding resources online were limited, mostly huge wedding-industry sites,” she says. “There was an opportunity there.” So she launched Do-It-Yourself-Weddings.com, full of step-by-step instructions for customizing everything from centerpieces to shoes on the cheap.

By the time the newlyweds returned from their honeymoon, the site was growing exponentially. Amber had hoped to someday quit working for other people so she could have a more flexible schedule for her future kids, and it seemed like the perfect moment to dive in. She sold her car for \$6,000, enough to live frugally for six months, and left her job. “I knew there were no guarantees, but I



“The main thing with each project is just that I *did* it. Take the first step and see where it leads.”

was determined to make it work,” she says. “The last thing I wanted was to go from happily working for myself to having to look for another job.” Her determination paid off: Two and a half years later, she was earning double her old salary, all from Google ads on her site.

That kind of money doesn't happen overnight, though. She started two more successful D.I.Y. sites and an Etsy shop in the years after her wedding site took off. The birth of her first son led to Make-Baby-Stuff.com, and you can probably guess what followed the purchase of the family's first home, untouched since the early '60s: DIYHomeDecoratingIdeas.com. “The main thing with each project is just that I *did* it,” she says. She also developed a popular blog, Parenting: Illustrated With Crappy Pictures. It has gained her the most renown, but the least amount of dough. Still, “it's very fulfilling to do things that you love,” she says.

Her passion for creating and sharing is what keeps Amber going on all of her projects, and it's something a lot of women can relate to. Even if we've never considered turning a hobby into a business, we still carve time out of our weeks to cruise Pinterest or crochet. Amber's been able to take her talents, add a lot of hard work, and make actual money. Her failures—a couple of sites and a jewelry business that didn't fly—helped her figure out what brings in the dollars. “Someone with a 9-to-5 job they hate might say, ‘You're so lucky, I would love to do x-y-z,’ but they don't take a single step in that direction. I'm not saying you can quit your job and overnight start selling baby clothes and have a career, but you could get a sewing machine and make one thing. Take the first step and see where it leads.”

You don't have to be crafty to find a new career the way Amber has. Think about what you'd like to get up every morning and do, and let these women motivate you to follow their well-paid path. ➤



An idea from Do-It-Yourself-Weddings.com, above, and at right, wooden toys Amber sold on Etsy.



If you love: *travel*

Crafts designer: Pamela Roskin lives in Brooklyn, NY, but fell in love with Bali, so she started working with Balinese artisans to create sterling silver jewelry. She sells pieces—like gorgeous bangle bracelets—from her new company, Nineteen Seventy-Four, on QVC.com. If you've got connections to a particular region, seek out artisans whose work you can interpret for the North American market.

Travel agent: From her Indiana home, Julie Sturgeon runs Curing Cold Feet, a full-service travel agency and website. Her secret? She's actually an independent contractor with MTravel.com, which is the "host agency" division

of Montrose Travel. Host agencies provide their contractors with crucial support, like training, marketing assistance, and the group buying power travel agents need to get good prices for their clients. Learn more about host agencies through the National Association of Career Travel Agents (nacta.com).



Julie Sturgeon

If you love: *all things creative*

Art teacher: Paula Cohen-Martin used her background in illustration to teach neighborhood kids in her Fanwood, NJ, home. Now her floating art school, Picasso's Basement, offers classes like Make Your Own Comic Book and Animal Art at parks and preschools. To launch your own class, network on local parenting message boards and post fliers.

Freelance illustrator: Annie Dwyer Internicola of Kingston, NY, majored in studio art but worked in other fields until having kids. She created a portfolio of pen and digital



Jessica Caballero

drawings, then networked to find her first client. With artistic skills, you can do it too.

Stylist: Jessica Caballero of Atlanta had an eye for style, so she started a business from her home to help people consign high-end items. Now, a year later, she styles dozens of clients and has a by-appointment consignment shop. Think you've

got the fashion chops to do the same? Start by bartering your services, then build a website to show off your successes.

If you love: *social media*

Digital marketer: With millions of blogs out there, corporate marketers need help pinpointing which ones will reach their audiences. Enter the digital marketer. Casey Benedict is the owner of Kitchen Play, a Philadelphia-based agency that connects brands with food bloggers through culinary events. Spend lots of time following blogs and social media? Think about how you can serve brands looking to connect with your community. Then camp out on Twitter and Facebook to spot the ones in need of your ideas, and reach out to them.

Consultant: If you ever worked at management level—and love adding to your LinkedIn connections—chances are you can find home-based gigs as a consultant. Bethany Gladhill of Saint Paul, MN, spent years in arts and nonprofit management, and now helps clients with fund-raising, finances, human resources, and creative problem-solving. Networking is key, and your Twitter account can keep you connected from home and help you track the trends in your field.



Casey Benedict

If you love: *minding the details*

Virtual assistant: On a typical day, virtual assistant Jan Udlock might clear out a client's inbox, tweet on her behalf, or organize a project, all from her Portland, OR, home. Sound appealing? Get a feel for the work by joining a free forum like Virtual Assistant Forums or VANetworking.com.

Small business owner: If you have a job you love, but think it's impossible to do it from home, take inspiration from Sheyna Burt of Woodbridge, VA, who worked for years at big law firms but now runs her own practice from her house and lets her staff work at home. Just be prepared for tons of nitty-gritty work as a small-business boss.

Transcriptionist: CarolLee Kidd of Tobyhanna, PA, used her attention to detail to start CLK Transcription. She now has a roster of home-based workers who transcribe doctors' notes, seminars, speeches, and more. Other than some basic equipment, you need sharp listening skills, a good grasp of English, and an inquisitive mind.



Sheyna Burt