

# COUNTRY BUSINESS WINNERS 2010

WE HAD A GREAT RESPONSE TO OUR 'RUN YOUR OWN COUNTRY BUSINESS' COMPETITION, WHERE WE TEAMED UP WITH SPECIALISTS BUSINESS SMITHS TO HELP YOU WITH YOUR VENTURES

## THE JUDGES

- Rhoda Parry**, Editor, Country Homes & Interiors
- Belinda Cooper**, Publisher, Country Homes & Interiors
- Simon Ellingworth**, Director, Business Smiths
- Christina Strutt**, Owner, Cabbages & Roses
- Martine Joule**, Head of Brand Development, Joules
- Dominie Cripps**, Brand and PR Marketing Manager, Joules

## OVERALL WINNER Vintage Scoops

**Hayley Southwood**  
The winner of our competition, Hayley, lives with her husband Paul and children Callum, 13, and Jake, 11, in Whaddon, Buckinghamshire. Previously a nursery nurse, she left her job in May 2010 to concentrate on Vintage Scoops. The idea of launching a business that would bring a smile to her face felt very important to Hayley, who

lost her mum, at just 54, to cancer last year. Inspired by her love of all things vintage, Hayley renovated a 1973 Bedford CF ice-cream van in 1950s style and attends weddings, village fetes and other events. Dressed in retro florals, she serves ice cream from a local farm, as well as drinks such as dandelion and burdock, and sweets with retro appeal. She spotted a gap in the market when a friend tried and failed to book an ice-cream van for her wedding. Vintage Scoops, 07968 987930, vintagescoops.co.uk.

## WHAT THE JUDGES SAID

Hayley's get-up-and-go impressed the judges. They loved the way she'd gone from initial idea to first bookings with energy and enthusiasm. Vintage Scoops is a modern country business that perfectly indulges an appetite for enjoying the traditions of our childhoods – as well as bringing them to a new generation. They thought the 1950s style for the van, and Hayley's own retro dresses, creates a memorable image. They also loved the way her business makes her an integral part of the local community.

## BUSINESS SMITHS ADVISES...

**Decide on a scale for your business:** one van, two or three plus employees,

or the possibility of franchising the idea. **Create a professional image** through the website, stationery and booking forms. **Use low-cost marketing opportunities** such as wedding planners' directories and attending local shows. **Generate press awareness** through the local media and wedding and events magazines and websites.

## HAYLEY'S PRIZE

- The development of her business plan (2 days), including a forecast of profit and loss and cashflow.
- The development of her marketing strategy (2 days), including a prioritised action plan.
- Copywriting (1 day) to further develop professional content for her website.
- Design (1 day) of her company logo.
- The development of her website to showcase the business, including email facilities, the domain name and 12 months' hosting.
- Business coaching (across six 45-minute sessions) with Business Smith Life Coach Jessica Rogers.
- A legal healthcheck telephone consultation (30 minutes) with a Business Smiths solicitor for general legal guidance. ▶



Hayley's company Vintage Scoops sells old-fashioned ice cream, sweets and traditional drinks from a 1973 Bedford CF van (opposite), which she renovated 1950s-style.



**WHAT I LOVE MOST ABOUT MY BUSINESS...**  
☞☞ Pootling along to a local village fete or glorious summer party in Betty – the van named after my Grandma ☞☞

# THE RUNNERS-UP...



Some of Emma's stunning stitched designs and cards

## Illustrated Life

**Emma Cowlam**

Emma, who's from Amersham in Buckinghamshire, is a recent graduate in textile design from Chelsea College of Art and Design, where she specialised in stitch. During her course she was awarded a place at The Fashion Institute of Technology in Manhattan, New York, as part of an exchange programme. Her classes there included illustration.

Emma spends as much time on Illustrated Life as she can, combining it with freelance work on a national newspaper. She is also exhibiting her stitch illustrations and drawings at galleries in the UK and in Brooklyn New York. Using her original, stitched illustrations, Emma creates

stationery such as cards and notelets. Her collection will be expanded to include one-off framed artwork, large-scale illustrative designs for retail and domestic interiors and wallpaper and textile designs. Each piece of her work is original with no two designs the same, and everything is produced completely by hand. *Illustrated Life*, 07988 819144, [illustratedlife.co.uk](http://illustratedlife.co.uk).

### WHAT THE JUDGES SAID

The judges loved Emma's unique designs, which they saw on cards, but were confident could be adapted across other media. They admired the highly individual illustrative style of her work and thought it was flexible enough to create country-themed products and other interiors

styles. They admired the way in which she had taken her degree specialism into a saleable product and her focus in recognising other ways in which it could be used.

### BUSINESS SMITHS ADVISES...

**Decide on a clear direction** for the business: designing and creating all the work personally, or concentrating on design alone?

**Plan target markets for each individual product line**, such as cards, textiles and so on.

**Develop the website** to fully showcase the designs.

**Put together a sales strategy** based on personal selling or through retailers.

**Use PR opportunities**, such as local newspapers.

## Kidlet

**Vivien Jones**

Vivien has recently moved to Overton in Wrexham County with her Canadian husband Marcus Oleniuk, and children Sasha, five, and Isabel, nine. She grew up in Hong Kong, where she met and married her husband, and where the children were born. The move to north Wales allows the family to be near to Vivien's parents and sister.

Vivien started Kidlet to create a business that would work around her family life in the UK. It currently takes up part of her time, with the rest devoted to her children and setting up the family's new home, but she aims to grow the business and spend more time on it during the next year. Vivien makes children's homewares and accessories using designer, vintage and recycled linen and bold cottons. All are hand made, have a natural feel and are aimed at design-conscious parents who want to furnish their children's rooms as stylishly as they do the rest of their homes. *Kidlet*, 07756 025152, [kidlet.co.uk](http://kidlet.co.uk).

### WHAT THE JUDGES SAID

The great design and fresh, original style of Vivien's children's homewares caught the eye of the judges and they thought the products would be appealing and stand out in the highly competitive children's market. They thought she showed strong knowledge and understanding of the potential buyers of her homewares and also had the ability to present and market her products successfully.

### BUSINESS SMITHS ADVISES...

**Create a clear strategy for the business** and write a plan with measurable targets and time-bounded stages.

**Plan the facilities** needed for making the designs in line with the size of the business that's being created.

**Put together a pricing strategy** appropriate to the target market.

**Plan approaches to suitable retailers** and prepare individually tailored presentations. ▶



Vivien's products include cushions, a pencil roll reflecting the colour wheel and children's bags.





Stella (far left), Pippa and, in the background, Bluebell, their caravan-turned-traveling shop, from which they sell their eclectic gift sets. The ones shown here are called (from top) Happy Campers, Off to the Beach, and When the Boat Comes In.

## Happy Hampers

### Stella Wilson & Pippa Carter

Stella and Pippa run Happy Hampers together. Stella lives in Biddenden in Kent with partner Rob Wilson and children Scarlett, eight, and Honor, six. She also works freelance as a TV broadcasting compliance officer, juggling this, family commitments and Happy Hampers. Pippa lives in Tenterden in Kent with husband Mike and has two grown-up children, Rebekah and Jonathan. As well as being part of Happy Hampers, Pippa runs a b&b. Stella and Pippa first met at a local summer fair.

Stella and Pippa create individual gift baskets containing vintage china, cookware and home accessories, which are then beautifully finished with ribbons and buttons. They collect the china as well as retro and vintage objects and accessories, and each basket has a theme inspired by something they've found. In summer, they also sell wicker picnic baskets containing vintage china, rugs and more. They take an old-fashioned caravan to shows, which becomes their shop. Vintage tableware is also on offer. *Happy Hampers*, 01580 292684, [happy-hampers.com](http://happy-hampers.com).

### WHAT THE JUDGES SAID

The uniqueness of each basket and the idea of re-using found treasures impressed the judges. They loved the way in which Stella and Pippa had used a theme to put together eclectic objects, giving each basket a 'story'. The business is distinctive at shows because of their caravan storefront and the presentation of their products is professional and attractive.



### BUSINESS SMITHS ADVISES...

**Find low-risk retail partners**, such as antiques and interiors stores.  
**Upgrade the website.** Do this temporarily if there is no current budget – for example, think about working with

design students from a local college.

**Set up an Ebay shop** to reach potential international buyers with little spend.

**Focus on the existing products** before adding new lines to maximise the value of the original concept.

## Wild Strawberry Picking

### Carole Taylor

Carole lives in Oakham in Rutland and is married to Stuart. The couple have four grown-up children, Cheryl, Laura, Emma and Lucy as well as four grandchildren. She works full-time on her business, spending time on sourcing and making as well as promoting.

Carole creates new furniture and lampshades from old. She takes previously used pieces she sources herself, then restores, re-covers and paints them. She makes only one or possibly a pair of each item so customers know they are getting a unique design for their home. Her latest line is pretty retro-style girls' dresses and coats, which are usually made to order. Her products are aimed at those who love contemporary country style, and appeal to a wide age group. She aims to offer value as well as environmentally conscious buys. *Wild Strawberry Picking*, 01572 770389, [wildstrawberrypicking.co.uk](http://wildstrawberrypicking.co.uk).

### WHAT THE JUDGES SAID

The judges were very enthusiastic about the way in which Carole's business re-uses materials and gives home essentials a new lease of life. There were similar types



New from old; Carole gives furniture and lampshades a new, more glamorous lease of life by 'upcycling'.

### BUSINESS SMITHS ADVISES...

#### Decide on a retail strategy.

Selling through third parties is a lower-cost and lower-risk option than taking on the rent, staffing needs and so on of a shop.

**Consider a presence in large cities**, where additional markets of shoppers interested in upcycled pieces can be accessed.

**Create a company website** to capture online trade.

**Concentrate on existing strengths** before thinking about other strategies to optimise the time of one person.

of business entered into the competition, but Carole's homewares stood out strongly as objects that would complement a modern country home beautifully, and which had been put together with real panache. She also presented her products professionally, showing good promotional skills.

## Happier Planet

### Harriet Campbell

Harriet, husband Lachlan and children Archie, who's a student, Georgia, 15, and Ivo, 12, live in the village of Hanford in Dorset. She spends her time working on her Happier Planet bowl covers alongside her mail-order website Hunter Gatherer, which sells her own and others' homewares, gifts and accessories. Harriet's cotton Happier Planet bowls were inspired by hotel shower caps and traditional bead-edged food covers. They have elasticated edges that keep them in place, are designed to be used instead of tin foil or clingwrap to keep food fresh, and can be washed and re-used. Each has a message such as Waste Not Want Not, Tomorrow's Breakfast and A Little Bit Of... *Happier Planet/Hunter Gatherer*, 01258 861885, [huntergatherer.info](http://huntergatherer.info).

### WHAT THE JUDGES SAID

Harriet's bowl covers stood out as a beautifully simple but useful product. The design is executed with a witty touch the judges



Harriet's bowl covers encourage a little traditional thrift, with a fun twist.

adored. The judges thought the food covers are perfectly in tune with today's desire not to create waste and make home budgets go further, and the designs have vintage style that makes them perfect for a country-themed kitchen, complementing other retro designs. They could also see the product's clear appeal to a number of high-street retailers.

### BUSINESS SMITHS ADVISES...

**Drop the Happier Planet branding** as it feels like an eco company and combine with

Hunter Gatherer to promote both the food covers and the existing small business.

**Work on branded packaging** to use on the product in retail outlets to create an appropriate and memorable identity.

**Prepare to present products to high-street chains.** Understand what will happen during this process and how to make the most of opportunities.

**Use professionals where they can add value to the business**, for example a graphic designer to create a logo. ▶

## Airstream Vacations

### Jill and Robin Bradbury

Jill and Robin live in Aulnamain, Edderton, Ross-shire, Scotland, and have two grown-up daughters, Elizabeth and Claire. As well as running Airstream Vacations, Jill works part-time for a local charity and Robin volunteers there. As the business grows, the couple plan to adjust their work balance and Jill will spend the majority of her time looking after guests.

The couple own two vintage Airstream trailers, located in the stunningly beautiful Scottish Highlands. These classic caravans from America have an instantly recognisable rounded aluminium body and vintage models are treasured by the trailers' fans in America and around the world. Guests can stay in the trailers and enjoy the retro ambience of both interior and exterior of this design classic as well as the relaxing



views and sightseeing opportunities in the local area. They also receive a welcome hamper of local produce from the Scottish countryside. Airstream Vacations, 01862 821656.

### WHAT THE JUDGES SAID

The judges loved the idea of offering guest accommodation in fabulous natural surroundings. The iconic trailers have rarity and

novelty value and are attractive to both Airstream enthusiasts and holidaymakers looking for somewhere interesting and comfortable to stay. They thought that the vintage trailers and the retro look of the interiors captured the current mood of nostalgia and the location capitalised on the trend for holidaying in the UK.

### BUSINESS SMITHS ADVISES...

**Maximise the vintage appeal** and comfort of the trailers' interiors to capture the widest potential market of holidaymakers.

**In the short-term, create a web presence** by making use of online directory listings.

**Also make use of little or low cost marketing opportunities** such as through local and national tourist boards.

**Create a website** as soon as possible to appeal to those not familiar with Airstream trailers as well as aficionados.

*Robin and Jill love 1950s style, including the music and fashions, as well as the retro Airstream trailers that have inspired their holiday business. The trailers are set in the amazing landscape of the Scottish Highlands.*



## 5 STEPS TO STARTING YOUR OWN BUSINESS

If you've been inspired by our winner and runners up, here are our top tips...

**1 Make a plan and stick to it.** Start by doing one thing well and don't dilute your efforts by pursuing other ideas too early.

**2 If you want to open a shop, don't just open it near your home because it's convenient.** This may not be where your target market shops.

**3 Don't just expect people simply to find your website** – there's too much competition. Targeted marketing needn't cost much but will get your name in front of your potential customers and your web address with it.

**4 Always create a professional image for your business.** A telephone-answering service is better than an answering machine, and needn't cost much. An email address with your company name in it looks better than your service provider's.

**5 Concentrate on what you're good at** and call in specialist help for other business essentials. You won't feel the same about your business if you spend all your time managing cashflow when you just want to be creative.

### MEET THE EXPERTS

Business Smiths are small business specialists. Experts in their fields, Business Smiths can provide help in planning, marketing, IT, web development and many of the other professional supports a small business needs from time to time, by the hour, the day or the project. For more information and a range of free tools for your business, call 0845 053 1907, [businesssmiths.co.uk](http://businesssmiths.co.uk).

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