



Training pays off as champion businesswoman beats 24 contenders

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PETER SWITZER SMALL BUSINESS



WOMEN have come to the fore with a new award to find the champion of champions in small businesses, covering 24 categories.

The mantle of Australia's best small business operator went to Ly Lim of South Australia, who co-founded training, design and services company Knowledge Plus. She was driven by a desire to help others enhance their skills to reach their career potential.

She kicked off Knowledge Plus in 2003 and now employs 17 and engages a team of contractors.

In September, Adelaide-based Ms Lim was named South Australia's first Small Business Champion Entrepreneur.

Prior to her national success, she explained the key motivation for entering the awards. As is typical of successful businesses, competitive benchmarking was behind her actions: "We always want to measure ourselves against other businesses. If we win, the outcome generates a positive influence because we are confirmed as going down the right track."

Knowledge Plus provides IT services, learning and development services and business process solutions for companies throughout Australia.

Its customers include BAE Systems, Caroma Industries, Bianco Building Supplies, PPB and Tonkin Consulting. The company has also been a success-

ful tenderer for Australian government contracts to help other small businesses develop their potential.

"We are here today thanks to all of the people who along the way had faith in what we are doing and helped us," Lim says.

"And that includes our staff, our first big client and even the Australian Government that backed our program."

Another woman showing how it is done is Katherine Sampson, who swung open the shutters on her Healthy Habits sandwich business in Collingwood, Melbourne, in 2004 and now has 27 stores across the country. Sampson took out the Gourmet Food/Takeaway Store award. She has created a successful franchise operation with enormous potential for growth.

"Some 442 million sandwiches were consumed in 2004, which equates to a conservative \$2.7 billion — and Healthy Habits is set to take a massive bite out of this highly lucrative market," Sampson says.

Her vision was spot on, with Healthy Habits being named in the 2007 *BRW* magazine as the fourth fastest growing franchise in Australia.

Not a bad effort for a single mum with two children who knew she had to go for broke and build a substantial business if she and her kids were to live comfortably. Before Healthy Habits, she had opened up early prototypes

of her eventual franchise concept.

"I realised I'd have to make it on my own, so in 2000 I opened my second store at Southgate in Melbourne," she says. "In 2001 I opened my third store at The Glen Shopping Centre.

"I changed the business name to Healthy Habits and rolled out the brand across those three, and a fourth store."

In 2004, she sought expert help on franchising, and the rest is now business history.

There are now four company stores and 23 franchisees with four others signed and ready to go. Like many successful entrepreneurs, Sampson has understood market trends and has positioned her business to cash in on them.

"People are much more interested in healthy food because of the rapidly rising levels of obesity amongst our youth," she says.

Reflecting on how she made it happen, Sampson points to two factors: "First, I created the business to have the flexibility to be with my children.

"But secondly, I wanted to leave a mark, and Healthy Habits being the No 1 sandwich bar will be exactly that."

This award is not just a trophy and publicity — Ly Lim has walked away with a \$40,000 prize. For other winners, go to www.businesschampions.com.au.