

Women in Business. In Niagara. It happens. And it's Awesome.



Fun fact: I'm a woman. And I work in business in Niagara. There are a lot of us here in this fair region. You've probably seen us running small businesses. Working in retail and service jobs. We're pretty versatile and hard working. If I do say so myself!

Small businesses are a driving force of employment opportunities in Niagara. And women are starting or running many of these businesses. We are a diverse group, but generally [our businesses tend to be smaller than others](#), with most of us working as solo entrepreneurs or employing fewer than 20 people. Just because our businesses are small, doesn't mean they aren't mighty though. They [offer employment and economic growth to the region](#), and perhaps, more importantly, they offer many of us the flexibility and creativity we need to balance our lives and find satisfaction. As Greater Niagara Chamber of Commerce president, Mishka Balsom, notes, "Women start businesses that align with personal values and offers freedom, flexibility and control."

One Woman's Story

Just ask Valerie Fyke, owner of the [Atrium Spa in Fort Erie](#). Val was raising two children when the owner of the Atrium Spa approached her to manage his business in 2004. Val declined because

she had recently closed a family business and needed time to recharge and reconnect with her family. A few months later, she agreed to work as a receptionist at the spa because it fit her life. In 2007, when she was ready, Val offered to buy the spa. For her owning a business wasn't all about making a profit, though.

"Most business owners aren't driven by money. One of the great things about owning your own business is that it can give you the flexibility you need to find balance in your life. I have always structured my work days to allow time for my family. Running my own business allows me to do that. It lets me be more present and with my children."

Women often [open their own businesses out of necessity and passion](#). Like Val, we often prioritize work-life balance and need the flexibility to create our own schedules to make that work. Many of us also prioritize living out our passions. For Val, that meant building a dynamic, creative business and a team of strong, professional women to work with: "With the spa, I have been able to build and live in an amazing atmosphere of support and creativity." The 13 women that work at the Atrium Spa are like a second family, and together they satisfy the needs of their clients, and their own need to feel fulfilled through work. That supportive atmosphere has also drawn together an amazing community of clients that have supported Val and Atrium Spa on its journey to evolve and improve.

This sisterhood of supportive women extends beyond the business for Val, and for many other female entrepreneurs. In building her business, Val was very active in the Fort Erie Kinettes, the Greater Fort Erie Chamber of Commerce, and with other community organizations. She developed valuable relationships with other women in business, including Diana Venturini, the original manager of the Atrium Spa. And she wasn't afraid to reach out for advice or support as she navigated the ups and downs of running her spa business.

Niagara Supports Us

For many women in business, navigating the start up and then staying the course as we grow our businesses can be challenging. [Luckily we have plenty of supports](#).

Of course, we can reach out to local credit unions to guide our small business financing and development. I mean, I may be a tad biased, but I think [PenFinancial Credit Union](#) is the perfect go-to for this purpose. Their co-operative banking model and truly local connection, gives them the ability to provide entrepreneurs and business owners with quicker responses, one-on-one advice and provide member businesses with ongoing guidance to ensure success.

If we need more than financial support, we can reach out to several local organizations:

- [BioLinc at Brock](#)
- [Cowork Niagara](#)

- [Fueled Minds](#)
- [Innovate Niagara](#)
- Niagara College ([Innovation Centres](#); [Community Services](#))
- [Small Business Support from Ontario.ca](#)
- [Startup Niagara](#)
- [Venture Niagara](#)

These groups can help us develop business plans, apply for grants, secure funding, and nurture our growth. Many of them can also help us connect to our community and create our own communities of support.

When it comes to finding such community support, networking is a great way to go. Networking with other female business owners can help us stay motivated and focused on sustaining and growing our businesses. The Greater Niagara Chamber of Commerce offers several networking opportunities, and president Mishka Balsom notes, “At the GNCC, women in business is important to us, and we have showcased this with our [Women in Niagara Council](#), a council dedicated to supporting the success of Niagara’s businesswomen, and with our gender-parity Board of Directors.” With the GNCC’s regular events, women in Niagara have the chance to attend skill-building workshops, and meet other like-minded business owners and network in ways that support our businesses and our peace of mind. All of this makes us more likely to succeed in business and in life.

Women in Business

in Niagara

Small and micro businesses are a driving force of employment opportunities in the Niagara Region. The majority of businesses in Niagara employ 1-4 people, and women often find themselves starting such small businesses out of passion and necessity.

Being solo entrepreneurs, or running micro- to medium-sized businesses, offers women the flexibility and creativity they need to find more balance and satisfaction in their livelihoods. The support they find in our communities helps them grow and sustain those livelihoods. Together, the sky's the limit.

TYPES OF BUSINESS

62% of female-owned businesses in Canada are in the service sector in:

health care & assistance;
information & culture;
arts/entertainment/recreation

WHY WOMEN START?

Women start businesses for many reasons. Often because they want a business that aligns with their passions and personal values.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Women draw on many supports to start and grow their businesses:

community & networking organizations;
friends/family; other business owners; government and financial institutions, etc.

ITS ABOUT MORE THAN \$

Women are motivated less by money, and more by independence. Owning their own business offers:

freedom,
flexibility,
and control.



Information Sources:

<http://www.niagaraworkforce.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Oct-14-2016-LLMP-ENG-Final.pdf>

<https://www.thebalance.com/statistics-on-canadian-women-in-business-2948029>

<http://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/061.nsf/eng/02968.html>



PenFinancial
CREDIT UNION

The Future is Ours

For Val Fyke, drawing on the support of other women has been the cornerstone of her business. From the inspiration of her entrepreneurial bookkeeping mother, to her like-minded friends, colleagues, and spa team, and now to her daughter, who is graduating with a degree in Business and Marketing and offering her advice and encouragement, Val knows the power of the women in business in Niagara. It's something we can all feel.

As Val says, better than I ever could: "So many amazing things are going to happen for women in Niagara. I just know it. Women are great networkers and we get encouragement and support from women working together in sisterhood. Women aren't afraid to be vulnerable and take chances. So there are great opportunities for women. I see a surge in women entrepreneurs and I can't see it going anywhere but up. We are caring, smart, and resourceful; we are amazing multi-taskers and great time managers; and most importantly, we are not afraid to open our arms and ask for help."

If you are a women thinking of running a small business in Niagara – or if you already do – you are lucky. You have a chance to be creative and flexible. You have a chance to create a life that fits your priorities. And you aren't alone. You have a strong community of support. Together we are awesome. Together we will succeed.