

KENT WOMEN IN BUSINESS

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Jacqueline Gold

Liberating
women in the
bedroom and
boardroom

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KENT WOMEN IN BUSINESS





Jacqueline Gold

by Hilary Steel

Jacqueline Gold, Chief Exec of Ann Summers is a lady who has liberated women both in the bedroom and the board room. She is proof that determination, passion and belief in a business idea can really pay off. So how did Jacqueline eradicate the 'raincoat brigade' image of sex shops to positioning Ann Summers as a leading UK retail brand?

She has been referred to as the 'Queen of Sex' in the Media, although she would prefer 'Princess of Pleasure' which is far more fitting with her attitude towards her brand. Having not started out with the intention of shocking people, she has pushed boundaries that have changed the way that women feel about sex and possibly about themselves.

Do you think women are gaining in confidence in the workplace?

JG Confidence is in my opinion one of the biggest issues affecting women in business. So many women lack confidence and allow that to hold them back in their careers. As women, we need to realise how great we are and that we can achieve brilliant things if we believe in ourselves and our ability. We need to build confidence in girls from a

young age and keep re-enforcing this as they go through school. If we allow young girls and young women to believe they can achieve anything they want, then I believe we will start to see a change.

What can women do to take responsibility for their own career advancement?

JG Be confident in their abilities and not afraid to tell their employers



business are those that surround themselves with a strong team who all bring an expertise that when combined can achieve great things. I know where my strengths are, but I also appreciate that our MD, CFO and other team members have different strengths and we combine all of these to achieve the best outcome for our business.

Do you think women can 'learn' to enhance the skills they already have as opposed to trying to 'compete' with men?

JG Women shouldn't be afraid or ashamed to be a woman. As a woman, you should never try to imitate a man, you should be proud of who you are and stay true to yourself. The more you try and pretend to be someone else the harder it will be for you as you will never be truly sure who you are and what you stand for. I remember when I first started out in business, I was a young woman in a man's world and I thought that to be taken seriously I should dress a certain way – I wore suits with big shoulder pads, glasses, pulled my hair back – all because I thought that's what I needed to do to fit in. It wasn't until one day someone said to me that I looked like a politician that I realised I wasn't being true to myself and since that day I have always dressed and had an appearance that works for me, not what I think others want to see.

Business is competitive, that's a fact so there will always be an element of competition whether that's with men or women. All I would say is that the best approach is to focus on yourself and your business, don't obsess over what competitors and others are doing. Of course, be aware but always focus on you and your goals.

where their strengths are and how they can and should be utilised. Women tend to look for validation before pursuing opportunities, men on the other hand will just go for it. Women need to be proud of the skills they can offer and not afraid to ask for that promotion or pay rise. If you believe you deserve it and have the evidence to justify it, then go for it! Don't let lack of confidence or uncertainty hold you back.

How important is personal development in business?

JG Incredibly important. Any individual needs to grow and develop their skills and learn from those around them. No individual can be an expert at everything, and the most successful people in

Ann Summers Facts

- First Ann Summers shop opened in 1970, Marble Arch
- Party Plan concept introduced in 1981
- Over 140 stores in the UK, Ireland, Channel Islands and Spain
- Roughly 38,000 vibrators sold each week, (7 per minute)
- Over 7000 party organisers hosting roughly 4000 parties per week
- Acquired Knickerbox in 2000

What's the most 'entertaining' product you have launched?

JG Having worked at Ann Summers for over 30 years there have been thousands of products all of which offer varying levels of entertainment!! For me, the Rampant Rabbit will always be my favourite product. It's such an iconic product and brand and has played and continues to play a significant role in the Ann Summers business. We are incredibly proud of our Rampant Rabbit and our new store designs have a giant black bunny rabbit as the centre piece to our vibe circles, it's safe to say we definitely have the world's most famous rabbit.

How does it feel knowing that you are responsible for many a stifled chuckle and deep belly laughs across the country?

JG It's great that some of our products encourage laughter and smiles, but what I'm most proud of is that our product offering has really empowered women in the bedroom. Yes some of our products are funny, who isn't going to laugh at penis pasta! But the majority of



what we do is focussed on providing women and men access to products that allow them to have fun in the bedroom and enhance their sex lives. Our goal is to fearlessly unleash sexual confidence and I know from the huge amount of feedback that we get from customers that our products have played a significant role in many lives and changed relationships for the better.

Do you think companies need to look at ways to encourage women back to work after maternity leave?

JG Definitely, I personally think maternity leave is too long and that there needs to be more choice for families around who takes the maternity leave. For some families to have the choice between the mother and father having the time would be of huge benefit. Maternity leave is of course a wonderful time for you and your baby. However, for many women during this time they begin to feel they are losing their identity. They worry about what their maternity cover is achieving in their absence and how they are going to get back in to the workplace. I would encourage employers to maintain regular contact with staff that are on maternity leave, to make sure they still feel part of the business and are valued. I very much hope that the government will in the near future change the maternity leave policy to make it more flexible for women and their families.

Can you have it all being a mother and a career woman?

JG I believe you can have it all but not necessarily at the same time. I have had a very successful and rewarding career which I still love, and I'm also lucky enough to have a wonderful husband and daughter. I had my daughter quite late in life and that was the right decision for me.

I also feel that we need to be honest about what having it all actually means. It's going to be different for every individual and we should be understanding of what having it all means for each individual.

Does being a parent make you feel guilty working?

JG No it doesn't. I believe I'm a better mother for being able to work and that I can teach Scarlett so



much more having that balance of successful career and home life. As long as I can continue to balance my time and get the priorities right then there shouldn't be any guilt.

What advice would you give to a mother returning to work?

JG Firstly, return to work when it's right for you. Don't be pushed by others to go back sooner or later than you want. Everyone will have an opinion but it needs to be the right decision for you. When you do return, take time to re-engage with colleagues and associates and spend time understanding what has happened in your absence. Make sure that you let everyone know that you are back and what you bring.

Do people have a pre-conceived idea of what you are like because of the company you have built up?

JG I think a lot of people think I have this huge shelf above my bed with numerous toys and accessories that I pick from every night, I can tell you that's definitely not the case! As an aside from that, people will always have a view on what they think you will be like, its human nature. I believe that most peoples' pre-conceived ideas aren't to do with the business I run but the fact that I'm a female CEO. A lot of people expect me to be loud, aggressive and a ball breaker as that seems to be the view on what a makes a successful woman in business. I'm the opposite of all of these things. I have my own way of doing business and I don't need to



shout and bang my fists on the table to be heard.

How do you respond to the negative reactions to your business?

JG Running a business like Ann Summers will always attract controversy and as a business we know that not everyone will like what we do. To be honest, I don't want us to appeal to everyone; if we did then we wouldn't be unique or have that point of difference that's so important. Ann Summers is a brand that has so much talkability, and on the whole this is always really positive.

When there have been negative reactions or comments then we always address these, we aren't afraid to be a business that stands up for what it believes in. Recently,

I have found that people who have negative views about the business have based these on the Ann Summers from many years ago; their views are outdated and the last time they went in to a store or shopped with us was over 10 years ago. Outdated views are an ongoing challenge for us, but we will succeed in changing these!

Do you listen to your heart or your head in business?

JG A mixture of both. I definitely always trust my gut feeling, but I'm not the type of person to make a rash decision, I will always weigh up the options.

We launched the Kent Women in Business Awards this year as a way to encourage growth and

collaboration in the county. Do you think this kind of recognition has a positive impact?

JG Yes absolutely. It's great to reward and acknowledge success and to do it within a specific community is a fabulous initiative. To have recognition from your peers within the business community is a real reward too.

Do you have a mentoring scheme in place within Ann Summers?

JG We have a programme called Rising Stars which is the best example of how we mentor and develop staff. At the start of each financial year around 10 colleagues are chosen from across the business through a nomination process to be selected for the Rising Stars programme. They are chosen because the business believes they have huge potential to grow their career with Ann Summers.

The programme has two parts. The first being intense development through training and coaching with each star choosing their own mentor from within the business. The second part involves all the Rising Stars working together as a team to deliver a commercial project to the business.

At Ann Summers we are immensely proud of the talent we have and want to nurture and develop this as much as we can.

Who comes up with the product names? Descriptions?

JG All of our product names are created in house by our design teams. We have some great creativity within the business and every time we launch a new product I'm so impressed with what they have done.

We really try to make sure our product names and descriptions appeal to our customer and we have done a lot of research in to how our customers want to be spoken to and what they want to know.

What would your ideal Sunday be like?

JG Relaxing in the morning at home with my husband and daughter Scarlett, then a big family Sunday lunch with our extended family.



"Making a significant difference to a large number of people's lives is something to be incredibly proud of. I now earn more part time as a Coach than I did as a Deputy Head Teacher"

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Do you still make up puzzles; will you for your daughter?

JG I haven't made a puzzle for a while! At the moment Scarlett and I do lots of craft activities together so maybe we will move on to puzzles soon!

What three words would you choose to describe yourself?

JG Passionate, loyal and courageous

What three words would those close to you use to describe you?

JG Driven, supportive, honest

Do you have a bucket list?

JG I always have things on my 'Wish List' but I see it as ongoing rather than must do this before I die!

Who is your favourite comedian?

JG Michael McIntyre, I love his style of comedy, he never fails to make me giggle!

Countryside or seaside?

JG Definitely the countryside!

Favourite holiday destination?

JG Italy, it's a beautiful country with amazing food and is an ideal place to go with my family, but also for romantic weekends away – my husband Dan proposed in Rome so Italy will always have a very special place in my heart.

Relax or activity led holiday?

JG I love to relax on holiday so will always try and go somewhere that this is possible. However anyone with a four year old will know that holidays are never quite as relaxing as they used to be!

Who would you like to play you in a film about your life? Who would play your Sister Vanessa?

JG Penelope Cruz and Monica Cruz – it seems fitting to have two strong sisters playing us!

Is there another 'book' inside you?

JG Most definitely, watch this space!

Who would be your ideal dinner party guests?

JG James Corden, Malcolm Walker, Katie Piper, Sir Richard Branson Ant & Dec, Angela Ahrendts and my Dad.

What's your favourite musical?

JG The Lion King – visually it's the most stunning stage production and it's a great musical for adults and children

Interesting info...Ann Summers sells approximately 2 million vibrators per year - That's 38,000 per week, 5,500 per day, 7 per minute and since you've been reading this article we estimate about 70 have been sold.

#WOW Women on Wednesday

In June 2011 Jacqueline launched a campaign to support women in business, an area she is incredibly passionate about. Women On Wednesday, or #WOW, takes place every Wednesday and is run through Jacqueline's twitter page. Each week Jacqueline encourages female business owners to tweet her using the #WOW hash tag along with their business name and a short overview of what they do. Jacqueline then picks her three top entries for that week and re-tweets them to her followers (currently over 39,000). The three winners also receive a #WOW badge which they can display on their company websites.

When selecting the three winners, Jacqueline looks for businesses that are interesting, that have strong brand values and that she thinks have potential to grow and succeed in their industry. She looks for quality products, well designed websites and entrepreneurs who appear to have a good business sense and who have thought about what the consumer wants and how to deliver it.



The success of #WOW has been incredible and each week Jacqueline receives in excess of 200 entries from many incredible businesses.

The #WOW campaign is very much about celebrating women in business and the ever growing number of women who are starting their own business. The weekly #WOW winners, which currently totals over 300, are incredibly supportive of each other and have formed their own #WOW network through facebook and twitter in which they offer

each other support and guidance. Jacqueline stays in regular contact with all of the #WOW winners, offering advice where needed and also asking for regular updates as to how the winners are doing. Every winner has reported a huge increase in visits to their website after winning, with many also seeing an increase in sales.

Follow @jacqueline_Gold