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## Is now a good time to start a business?

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Sacramento Business Journal - by [Kelly Johnson](#) Staff writer

During challenging times, the typical reaction is to hunker down and play it safe.

Watch and wait, pinch pennies, stay with the tried and true are common refrains.

But sometimes and for some people, the best strategy — even in a recession — is to ignore that instinct and instead take some risk and go for it.

Some local entrepreneurs have done just that in the past few months. For some, the gamble is already paying off financially. For others, the payoff so far is in the form of personal satisfaction. Sometimes the “go for it” mentality is contagious, and can inspire and motivate other small-business people to push forward during bleak times.

Diana Burke, a Lincoln restaurant and catering business owner, took a huge risk by launching with her sister Coleen Coffey a new food products company called Mom Likes Me Best!

Debbie Baldini and her partners started in February an online and catalog business in Folsom selling specialty gifts and items for women to pamper themselves.

Jeff Marmins in Folsom dropped a perfectly fine practice consulting on sales processes to become a social media adviser, a subject that excites him and doesn't feel like work.

Michele Smith left behind a lucrative marketing job to launch her own marketing and communications company after seeing what she thinks is a huge opportunity, and within a few months is already making more money than she was at her safe, former job.

The reasons the entrepreneurs took the risk of launching a new business during a recession vary. None of them, however, were motivated by needing a fall-back plan due to a layoff or business failure. The four all were doing fine in their other ventures. Instead, they were



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Diana Burke, right, along with her sister Coleen Coffey (not pictured), developed a line of sauces based on the recipes of their 82-year-old mother, Doris Flocchini, left.

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driven by the business potential they envisioned, a desire for something they could get excited about, or in one case, a wish to create a tribute and leave a legacy.

### **A stand out**

Baldini, president of chief merchandising officer for Cambria Cove, and her fellow retail industry veteran partners have been working toward establishing their online and catalog business for a couple of years. Toward the end of 2008 and early this year, they mulled over whether they should wait or go forward despite the recession. Most people wouldn't, they acknowledged. That's just why, Baldini reckoned, it was a perfect time to launch. With few other new companies competing for attention, Cambria Cove would stand out and garner media attention, they figured.

"We are thrilled with the reaction," Baldini said.

National and independent bloggers are buzzing about the business, and national publications and TV producers have approached the company, she said. Cambria Cove stands out because there's not much "newness" out there, she added.

### **Passion as inspiration**

Marmins, 41, used to help clients write business plans, find for them everything from staff to furniture, and otherwise assist them in hanging up their shingle. After seven years doing that, he launched Social Media Path in January, his new business of advising on viral marketing, largely online, for emerging brands. The bulk of his work, he said, is coming from collaborating with traditional marketing agencies "that don't have this talent in-house." He's also teaching seminars and online classes on social media.

He's already so busy, he said, "I have not had time to print a business card."

Last week, Marmins partnered with digital media production company Peppers.TV, and agreed to locate his company in the same building.

Launching a new business was risky, he acknowledged.

"I disregard the need to be comfortable," Marmins said. "It's a big risk, but a necessary one for my goals for my family."

There's a market for, and the economy is friendly to, his new business, and it's something for which he has passion. He and his wife scaled back on expenses, and he's relying more on his wife's income.

**Sometimes, Marmins said, "you have to roll the dice."**

### **Targeting a trend**

Even though she had a good job as marketing director for architecture and planning firm **Mogavero Notestine Associates**, Smith gave notice in October.

She had ridden the dot-com and homebuilding waves, and with a background in the homebuilding industry, she saw another wave of potential. Homebuilders have laid off their marketing people, but they still need brochures, logos and other marketing work to be performed.

In November, Smith launched M Communications, a Sacramento marketing, public relations and events management company, which relies on independent contractors instead of employees.

Now she's about to launch a second business, 3L Publishing, for which she already has six authors lined up.

The inspiration for entrepreneurship that put her "over the tipping point" was a recent book about women re-inventing themselves, called "Second Bloom." Michelle Gamble-Risley is the book's co-author, and now Smith's business partner. Gamble-Risley is merging her marketing company into M Communications.

Smith learned to shut off people who were telling her she was nuts to start a new business in the recession.

### **Leaving a legacy**

"People need to know it's not easy," said Burke, the restaurant owner and caterer who started the food products business, said of launching a new company. But, she added, "They need to push. They need to be willing to push to birth a dream."

She should know. She's waited for her dream for 17 years, ever since she and her now late husband bought Simple Pleasures Restaurant & Catering from her parents. Burke wanted to honor her mom, 82-year-old Doris Flocchini, by marketing the potato salad made from Flocchini's recipe. As it turned out, selling the dressing from which others can make their own potato salad was more feasible. And instead of just the dressing, there are a total of five dressings and sauces. They all carry a label with a vintage picture of Flocchini.

The Mom Likes Me Best! venture finally happened because Burke's sister had been laid off and had time for research. Now Coffey's a partner in the food products business.

With the sour economy, Burke knew the timing was bad and that "it's a gut-wrenching risk." But, she added, "We just felt like if we didn't do it now, when would we?"

In addition to honoring her mother, she had another motivation for proceeding with her dream: "We felt it was our duty in this community to give people a little ray of hope."

She wanted to assure longtime customers that the restaurant would survive, and demonstrate her family's determination and commitment. Burke also wanted to support Placer County by using local people and companies to produce her product. The launch party was two weeks ago. Orders are coming in, even from halfway across the country.

Making her new venture a success will be challenging. But, Burke said, "We've never been afraid of hard work."

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