



## Female creative entrepreneurs thriving in the Midlands

- More than 20,000 small creative businesses in the Midlands contribute £555m to economy
- A third of small creative businesses in the Midlands are run by women vs. 21% UK average for female ownership of small businesses

A new report by notonthehighstreet.com and Oxford Economics has shown that the changing world of work is seeing more people than ever before turn away from traditional '9 to 5' roles in favour of more flexible and independent ways of working.

This movement towards creative entrepreneurship has contributed to the 27% increase nationwide in self-employment over the last ten years, bringing current numbers to 4.8 million. The 50% increase in self-employed women is particularly notable, now standing at 1.5m.

Today there are 134,000 small creative businesses in the UK, employing 192,000 people and contributing £3.6 billion gross value added (GVA) to the UK economy. One in 40 UK businesses is a small creative business. The industry is particularly prominent in the Midlands, with over 20,000 small creative businesses contributing £555m GVA to the UK economy, and providing employment for 29,000 people. A third of these businesses are owned by women, compared with 21% of small businesses throughout the UK that are female-owned.

A 'creative attitude' to work has also emerged across the UK. In the last ten years, more and more people are finding their own way to make work 'work' for them. They are seeking choice and freedom and thousands are building successful businesses and setting their own work/life agendas as a result. With a record number of two-parent working households, which now stands at 3.6m, people want flexibility.

The findings of the report reveal that two thirds of creative entrepreneurs are benefitting from greater flexibility and freedom, with nearly half citing this as the main motivation for starting their own business. 95% of those surveyed feel a greater sense of achievement and 90% enjoy life more and feel happier as a result of starting their own business.

### **A ticket back into the world of work for mums**

The shift to a different way of working is particularly empowering women entrepreneurs and parents with children living at home. In fact, for one in ten of the notonthehighstreet.com Partners surveyed, starting their own business was their ticket back into the world of work after a period of unpaid leave to care for young children. And this movement is happening nationwide with small creative businesses driving prosperity and economic growth in every single region of the UK.



These new ways of working are being driven by a number of macroeconomic changes:

- an increasingly connected and online world where physical location is no longer a barrier to the reach and success of a business
- advances in technology enabling more of life's functions to be carried out digitally, at any time and in any location (e.g. shopping on the move and outside '9 to 5' hours)
- post-financial crisis environment forcing people to re-evaluate their careers and working lives
- the increasing number of two-parent, or carer, working families looking for ways to juggle work and life, and the reluctance of many workplaces to adapt to this change
- the refusal by many to fit their increasingly diverse lives around traditional work structures which, because of the above changes, are no longer deemed fit for purpose

**Simon Belsham, CEO of notonthehighstreet.com**, said: *"In the last ten years, thousands of small creative businesses have emerged all over the UK, creating jobs, driving wealth creation and contributing significantly to the economy. This is particularly true in the Midlands, where small creative businesses are making a significant contribution to local economy and employment. And with over a third being owned by women, compared with the national average for small businesses of 21%, the Midlands is an environment in which female creative entrepreneurs are really thriving.*

*"These businesses are also highlighting the huge change underway in the UK workforce; a transformation that is seeing more women in work and more people turning to self-employment and flexible working as they shun the traditional 9 to 5 model."*

#### **Midlands case study:**

**Lovetree Design** is a fledgling company specialising in giftware design. It is a husband and wife team who have a passion for quirky design and cool typography. In 2013, Mike and Teresa had a baby boy and felt that there was a gap in the market for personalised baby grows that had an element of cool. So they started designing clothing and prints for their son George and for friends and family. Not long after George was born, Mike was diagnosed with chronic arthritis. This meant reconsidering the family's lifestyle to suit this new reality, and the couple decided it was the right time to develop their hobby into a business. With a background in print, and the drive to learn design and illustration skills from scratch, the couple have built a thriving, and unique, business. Mike said: *"Since we started trading two years ago we have grown rapidly going from £40k sales in our first year to over £160k last year. We have already had to take on more staff to meet the growing demand for our products and we recently moved from our garage to a 1200 sq ft workspace. I never imagined the business would take off this quickly. It's an exciting time for us and we have big plans for the future."*

*Further Midlands case studies below.*

#### **Other report findings:**

##### ***Positive impact of running own creative business***



When notonthehighstreet.com Partners were asked to compare how they feel now relative to how they felt before starting their business:

- 95% now feel a greater sense of achievement
- 90% enjoy life more and feel happier
- 88% feel the industry they contribute to is worthwhile
- 87% feel more fulfilled when they wake up in the morning
- 80% enjoy the responsibilities that come with running a business
- 52% of the Partners surveyed were employed by another business before setting up on their own, and nearly three quarters of those have undergone an entire career change in order to start their own creative business

### ***Empowering women***

Small creative businesses are more likely to be owned by women. 27% in the UK are female-owned compared with the UK average of 21% for female small business ownership. Some 89% of notonthehighstreet.com Partner businesses are female owned. Small creative businesses are retaining women in the workforce and encouraging other women back into it; 10% of the notonthehighstreet.com Partners surveyed were looking after children at home and were not in paid work before they founded their business.

### ***Empowering parents***

55% of creative entrepreneurs working with notonthehighstreet.com have children living at home, compared with 41% of working households nationally. When considering the rise in the number of two-parent working families - up 14% in the decade to 2016 - and the need to work flexibly around childcare, it is not surprising that this industry is attractive to, and supportive of, working parents, particularly as we know that two thirds of notonthehighstreet.com Partners work from home, meaning no time or cost is spent commuting. Nine out of ten Partners with children at home ranked freedom and flexibility in the top benefits of starting their own business.

### ***Employment on the rise***

Total UK employment has risen 9% from 29.1m ten years ago to 31.7m today. UK employment for women has risen by 1.4m to 15m over the last decade.

### ***Self-employment on the rise***

4.8m people were registered self-employed in 2016, compared with 3.7m ten years ago; an increase of 27%. The increase in self-employment amongst women is even greater, growing by 50% over the same period – from 1m to 1.5m. Male self-employment has risen from 2.7m to 3.2m in the last ten years.

### ***Flexible working***



In the ten years to 2016 part-time work has increased from 24.9% to 26.4% of all employment, and full-time work has decreased from 75.1% to 73.6%. The majority of notonthehighstreet.com Partners work full-time but flexibly, fitting working hours around personal life and other commitments.

## Case studies – The Midlands

**Honeywell Bakes** was set up in 2013 by two sisters, Rosie and Rebecca Honeywell-Ward, who hand make iced biscuits for thousands of people across the country who want to treat their loved ones with unique, edible gifts. *“My Dad is an entrepreneur so I grew up with the idea that you could be successful running your own business,”* said Rebecca. *“I previously worked as a photographer but the hours were antisocial and when I started having children, I knew I wanted to set-up a business that would fit better around the demands of motherhood. It’s certainly hard work and I’m often found in the kitchen at 11pm icing biscuits or managing orders, but the freedom and sense of personal achievement it gives me makes it all worthwhile.”*

-Ends-

### Notes to Editors

For a full copy of the report, infographic, and national and regional versions of the press release, please go to: [www.notonthehighstreet.com/workthatworks](http://www.notonthehighstreet.com/workthatworks)

### About notonthehighstreet.com

[Notonthehighstreet.com](http://Notonthehighstreet.com) is the leading curated modern marketplace connecting the best small creative businesses, with the world. The brand has gained the trust and loyalty of its customers through offering an alternative to the High Street: a curated product selection with unique designs, high-quality craftsmanship and inspiring stories behind the people that make them.

Customers choose to support small creative businesses and therefore contribute to building the great creative talent and community of artisans across the United Kingdom. Shopping with [Notonthehighstreet.com](http://Notonthehighstreet.com) is an opportunity for customers to be a conscious consumer, bringing human values back into retail and enabling the things they buy to say something about who they are.

Founded in 2006 by Holly Tucker MBE and Sophie Cornish MBE, the brand has experienced exceptional growth with gross sales (TTV) in 2016 reaching £158 million and delivering a compound growth rate of 135% since launch. Under the leadership of newly appointed CEO Simon Belsham, there is renewed energy and focus on building a brand that will captivate customers for decades to come by supporting Partners’ growth and innovation.

With a team of over 200 at its headquarters in Silicon Upon Thames, South West London, [Notonthehighstreet.com](http://Notonthehighstreet.com) is Chaired by retail veteran Darren Shapland and backed by media and technology company, Hubert Burda Media and venture capitalists including Index Ventures, Industry Ventures and Eight Roads Ventures.



### **About Oxford Economics**

Oxford Economics was founded in 1981 as a commercial venture with Oxford University's business college to provide economic forecasting and modelling to UK companies and financial institutions expanding abroad. Since then, they have become one of the world's foremost independent global advisory firms, providing reports, forecasts and analytical tools on 200 countries, 100 industrial sectors and over 3,000 cities.

### **Available for interview:**

- Simon Belsham, CEO, [notonthehighstreet.com](http://notonthehighstreet.com)
- Andy Logan, Associate Director, Oxford Economics
- Ian Saxon, Senior Economist, Oxford Economics
- Ella D'Amato, Chief Commercial and Partner Officer, [notonthehighstreet.com](http://notonthehighstreet.com)
- Any of the case studies mentioned above. Other case studies also available.

**Photos** of case studies listed also [available here](#).