



## Elizabeth le Noble

**Position:** Managing director

**Company:** Corporate Compliance Partners

**Length of time in position:** Four years

**Financially it just makes sense to ...** "be aware of your own risk profile; know how tolerant you are of loss."

**Married at 16 and a mother at 20,** Elizabeth le Noble lived a whole lifetime before she went back to school at 27 to study business. Today, she runs her own company, Corporate Compliance Partners, with a staff of 15 and top financial industry backers. Her firm provides corporate compliance education and services for ASX companies. Annabel McGilvray fires some questions to her.

### **What does your business do?**

We provide professional company secretariat services to publicly listed companies and our key value is that we understand the ASX listing rules. There are 311 of them and they're interpreted by spirit and intent. It's not black-letter law like the Corporations Act.

I have also written The CCP Corporate Governance of ASX Listed Entities course, which is being run nationally, administered through Tribeca.

We're also looking at an IT program. It's called ALEXIS (Automated Listed Entity Exchange Information System) and is specifically for ASX-listed companies. It's the last bastion of the public world that has not succumbed to technology. Ultimately, it won't be just for the ASX, but for the worldwide market.

**Since going back to school, you have completed two degrees and a certificate of management from New York University's prestigious Leonard N. Stern School of Business. How did that experience influence you?**

NYU Stern was a turning point for me. Here was this little blonde Aussie chick with the president of Johnson & Johnson. It was an elite school with elite people, and everybody wanted to be in my team because I could get up there and talk. They kept pushing me to the front.

When I returned to Sydney, I was sitting at a boardroom table taking minutes, listening to the directors' discussions, thinking, "Come on boys, make the decision," and I thought, "If I can't do better than that, then I deserve to be taking their minutes." I went back and asked myself, "What do you know?" I knew compliance, corporate governance and the ASX. So I drew up a business plan for CCP, and I still have it.

### **How did you raise the capital?**

I approached Dr Don Stammer [former director of investment strategy at Deutsche Bank], and he wanted me to talk to Phillip Costa, the chief operating officer and company secretary of Deutsche Bank at the time. I worked with

them over a couple of months and got their feedback. We were having lunch one day, and they asked how much \$100,000 would buy them, then wrote cheques for \$100,000 each.

Two years later I returned a fully franked dividend to them, a bigger return and in a shorter time than any of their other equivalent start-up investments. Don and Phil remain investors and mentors.

### **Have you had any difficulties in what is still a male-dominated arena?**

I have never felt at a disadvantage in a boardroom because I am good at what I do. I am aware of being female in a male-dominated area, but I got over that pretty quickly. I use my communication skills; women tend to be better at that in general. And I think I've tried to turn everything I could to my advantage, rather than pout about it not being fair.

### **How do you balance your work and life?**

To me, work is my hobby. I think the work/life balance is contextual; it depends on the person. I choose to work 10 hours a day, five days a week.

I also think it's situational. There are times when, if you are a managing director, it's impossible to have a balance and you make sacrifices. Then there are other times when you take back.



## Bronwen Ryan, Susan Oakes

**Position:** Directors

**Company:** Marketing for Business Success

**Length of time in position:** Three years

**Financially it just makes sense to ...** "budget before you spend any money."

**Office politicking** is not a problem for Susan Oakes and Bronwen Ryan. Given that their office exists only in cyberspace and they manage their marketing software firm predominantly via email and telecommunications, there's not much opportunity for that sort of thing.

Oakes and Ryan are the creators of M4B, a software package which provides a step-by-step marketing solution for small to medium-sized businesses (SMEs).

Marketing is often considered the domain of big business and Oakes and Ryan have 35 years worth of combined experience in marketing for companies such as Coca-Cola Amatil, American Express and Pfizer.

But April this year was the first anniversary of the launch of their own product, and neither is missing the boardroom fracas of their earlier experiences.

"You sometimes miss the interaction," says Ryan. "But you have the flexibility."

"Flexibility and freedom," says Oakes. "I'm in the office working in 30 seconds, instead of wasting that time in travel."

Ryan and Oakes met while working in marketing for Thomas Cook 11 years ago. They became friends before both moving on to join other companies.

Oakes later set up her own marketing consultancy and discovered that there

was a need for a marketing solution that could be readily employed by SMEs.

"I was talking to small businesses and realising that everyone wanted to do marketing, but there didn't appear to be a process in place," she says.

Meanwhile, Ryan had left her job with American Express and moved to the NSW central coast to begin a family. Oakes rang to discuss developing a scaled-down version of the process used by big businesses.

"We knew from our background that there was a process to marketing, and so we began talking about it, thinking that if we could put a process in place it would make life a lot easier for small businesses," says Oakes. "And the ideal way would be to put it into software."

They threw themselves into researching the possibilities, established their company, Marketing for Business Success, and discovered there was no equivalent product in Australia or, as far as they could determine, internationally.

They then took the concept to software developers. It was the start of a long process: putting the ideas into a form that could be presented as a package requiring the least maintenance and producing the most effective results.

Oakes and Ryan like to describe their product as "MYOB for marketing".

The pair says small business consultants have embraced the concept. There are plans to take it overseas and already a large number of the hits on their site ([www.m4b.com.au](http://www.m4b.com.au)) come from international users. But, having funded the development and launch from their own pockets, they are excited enough about its take-up by Australian businesses.

"We have invested a considerable amount of money in the product," says Ryan. "But there is that sense of achievement and satisfaction of working on a product that you've developed yourself and started from scratch."

Despite the growing demand, they haven't felt the need to set up a separate office. Ryan remains ensconced on the central coast and Oakes operates from her home in southern Sydney. But they speak every day and the telecommunication wires snaking between their homes have become their virtual workplace.

"We keep each other in the loop on everything," says Oakes. "I think it works so well because there is total trust and respect, plus a good sense of humour."

At least once a month they catch up somewhere for a face-to-face meeting. But with their meticulous planning, there's not much need to leave home.

*Annabel McGilvray*