

Balancing the Ratio

The merging of women-led entrepreneurialism and investing

The United States is supposedly the world of opportunity, the world of possibility. A world where you can pull yourself up by the bootstraps and make something from nothing. To entrepreneurs, such idealism is the stuff of-not dreams, but potential. To male entrepreneurs, all it took was hard work and consistent application. To the other half of the population, all it took was a complete paradigm shift. After all, women don't have bootstraps with which to pull themselves up; they have heels on, for God's sake.

Lucky for us, a paradigm shift is upon us, and women entrepreneurs-even if this tough market-are getting the recognition they deserve (no matter whether they wear heels, flats, tennis shoes, or even boots).

The Opportunity Is Out There!

"There are an enormous number of women in every industry and growing high-growth businesses, and women are starting businesses at twice the rate of men," Patty Abramson, managing director of the Women's Growth Capital Fund (WOCF), points out. Yet traditionally women-led firms have gotten no attention. Abramson, however, wasn't the only one to notice that. Similar investment funds, and several female-focused angel groups, have popped up around the nation. Only a handful exists, but those investors know they've discovered something exciting.

Peg Wyant, managing director of Isabella Capital, is one of those investors. "The impetus for starting [Fund Isabella] was a desire to

make money," she candidly states. "Depending on the statistics you read, more than 40 percent of the businesses out there are female-run, but they get less than 5 percent of the capital.... And so we regarded it as a very attractive opportunity." In fact, Isabella Capital is named in honor of Queen Isabella, who funded the most exciting, profitable venture yet: the discovery of America.

But contrary to antiquated preconceptions, funding women is nowhere as risky as the rocky voyage that Columbus took. In the

male-dominated venture world, however, few investors took the time to figure that out.

It's All in Who You Know

The venture capital world thrives on networks. He can be your brother, or your friend's tennis partner's schoolmate's fraternity brother. Either way, you've got an in. And without that in, well, you're out. The biggest obstacle for women entrepreneurs, however, is that just about every investor is male-and women are new to the networking



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"Fundamental might be too strong of a word [for the differences between women and men investors], but I do believe there are some nuances that make a difference. I believe that women VCs can understand those nuances and it makes it easier for the women entrepreneur in many cases than to deal with other VCs." — Whitney Johns Martin