

## A network for lonely but creative London entrepreneurs

by community reporter, Ben Benedict, 11.22.06 – ©The Londoner with permission, weekly circulation 105,000

Creativity comes in many forms and one of the most challenging is entrepreneurship. November marks the 13th year for London's Homepreneur Network, founded and still directed by local writer and communications professional Sandy Ross. There are no membership dues; it's pay as you go. While entrepreneurship is a part of her history, her involvement came from some corporate nurturing.

"I grew up with a father who was an entrepreneur in London," Ms. Ross says. "In my 20s I was a secretary with Labatt's. In 1990 they were downsizing and I was invited to leave. When I was out networking, I would explain that I was 'between opportunities.' I had about 30 interviews in the same career path but was told repeatedly that I was overqualified. "Entrepreneurism didn't just grow out of that, because my father was an entrepreneur, but it was a door to opportunity. I looked at a job where I wasn't too overqualified and it was Me, Incorporated.

"Writing was always a passion and Labatt's supported and nurtured my interest while I was there. So while I had just started doing that, I was now going to do that with my own clients." She began Word's Worth Communications in November, 1992, and joined the Chamber of Commerce to connect with other professionals with mixed results.

"The first year I joined the Chamber of Commerce it was a hefty investment. I think it has changed but at the time I was meeting sales representatives of huge companies. I wasn't finding other me's,"



Sandy Ross is the founder and director of London's Homepreneur Network.

November marks 13th year for the network that's served hundreds of entrepreneurs over the years.

Ms. Ross says. "I wasn't meeting people who I could share with or learn from. So I did what every entrepreneur does, I created one [network]. I wish it sounded more strategic, but I was feeling lonely and invited a few people to lunch with the hope it would take off."

The end result was having 32 people at the first meeting and London's Homepreneur Network was born. Since then it has seen 650 different proprietors and community partners attend monthly meetings. These events attract about 20 people each - but not always the same people - about three-quarters of whom

are women, which is reflective of the national average, Ms. Ross says.

"These people were out there and they wanted out of their basement and bedroom offices. They wanted to find each other, professional

wisdom and as much as we all want clients, we wanted like-minded peers who get it," she says. "The interesting thing about entrepreneurship is that we are not connected in our products and services; we're connected because we're the lone eagles who are masters of our own economics. We share that idea this is our 'baby' in a way that employed people are not aware of."

Her level of commitment and knowledge of issues has made her a great community resource.

"One of the most common issues is what I call fear of fee. What do you charge? It's been a discomfort in my business life. Collectively as a group it still comes up. Then there's word of mouth, how do I

get people to recognize me? A part of that is simply sticking it out and staying around long enough. You have to stay around to illustrate the confidence and to gain the trust of clients and their money. The hardest part is to survive to that point."

When asked where the organization is headed and what more she can contribute she takes a thoughtful pause.

"In the last couple of years I've been reading up on the topic of after entrepreneurship. There are a number of people who leave entrepreneurship very successfully, but what about the unique psychology of leaving your own business? Sometimes it fits into succession planning or having a buyer (or not) for your business. Where can you safely talk about those issues? Perhaps you can't tell your spouse because they're invested in the outcome. Perhaps I'm in a key position to deal with that because I get it," Ms. Ross says.

Either way, she has and will continue to be a great resource to our community for what is hopefully a long time. I know personally she was a great support and inspiration to me when I decided to focus on my writing full time and I'm grateful. ❖

To learn more about The Homepreneur Network or Word's Worth, contact Sandy Ross at 519-871-word (9673) or visit [www.SandyRoss.ca](http://www.SandyRoss.ca).

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