



**SUSAN TOMPOR SAYS
FEMALE ENTREPRENEURS
SEE PROMISING SIGNS**

Women-run businesses see reasons to hire again

Think of this as an economic pop-up. A small business here or there starts talking about seeing promising signs of economic light.

And promising signs are pumping up payrolls, as several women business owners in Michigan told me that they once again will begin hiring.

We often focus on what's happening in autos or real estate when talking about the economic recovery. But women business owners are key to watch when it comes to economic development, as well.

"There are more than 10 million businesses owned by women and growing at a faster rate than any other type of small business," said Terry Barclay, president and CEO of Inforum and Inforum Center for Leadership in Detroit.

According to the Small Business Administration Office of Advocacy, women-owned businesses account for 28.7% of all businesses nationwide.

A national study early in 2013 indicated that women entrepreneurs were optimistic about the future.

The survey conducted by Web.com Group Inc. and the National Association of Women Business Owners found that about 85% of women business owners surveyed predicted that more women will become entrepreneurs in 2013 than in past years. And 38% planned to invest more in hiring this year than they did in 2012 — a positive sign for the economy.

That trend appears to be continuing in Michigan.

Some women who own businesses in Michigan told me that they do have renewed hope and plans to expand their business and do some hiring. The women business owners I talked with this summer are cautiously optimistic.

The key word to focus on here is optimistic.

Dierker & Associates, a Troy-based law firm that specializes in intellectual property rights, says more companies, including those in the automotive and computer products industries, are once again confident about their business outlook. Companies are more willing to invest in developing new products and

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that's creating more work for patent-related legal counsel.

"Now, we're ramping up again," said Julia Church Dierker, who started the firm in 2002. Several years ago, the firm had six attorneys when work was plentiful but that was before the economic slump hit hard in 2008-09.

The firm has three attorneys now. But the upswing in the firm's legal work makes Dierker & Associates more willing to hire maybe one or two attorneys within the coming year.

"We would not be actively trying to add to our professional staff if we were not confident," Dierker said.

No doubt, small business owners aren't just hiring to hire. Some new job openings can only be filled by people with very specific qualifications and talents. Many jobs are being created to handle work on clearly defined projects.

Detail Xperts, a Detroit-based steam-cleaning car wash franchise, sees new opportunities after surviving the recession. The company, which has 10 employees now, expects to hire about 50 people for a new operation in downtown Detroit in the next few months.

Angela Williams, who owns Detail Xperts, says keeping



Julia Church Dierker, left, with attorney Juliet R. Kavanaugh, says she will add more attorneys to Dierker and Associates now that business has rebounded.

REGINA H. BOONE/DFP

contacts open and building name recognition during the downturn created a stronger foundation for building the business now. Contacts and sales calls that Detail Xperts made two or three years ago are finally turning into real work, she said.



Angela Williams

We stayed out there," said Williams, who owns the company with her husband Emmanuel Williams.

Paula Tompkins, CEO and founder of Dearborn-based ChannelNet, said her business has picked up as the financial services and automotive fi-

The company has auto detail shops and mobile detailing units and cleans automobiles, trucks, motorcycles, boats and even airplanes.

"We stayed in the forefront.

nancial services sectors have gained ground. She noted that changes in the digital world favor her business, too.



Paula Tompkins

to handle many transactions online.

ChannelNet has 100 employees, the bulk in Dearborn, and plans to hire six people in the next few months and at least another 12 within the next year. The company offers web-based connections to retain customers and build business, which includes a platform for managing the auto lease turn-in process online. Clients include BMW Financial Services and Audi

"Customers are empowered now. They don't want to hang on" with phone calls to call centers, she said. Instead, consumers are willing

Financial Services.

Tompkins founded the privately held company more than 25 years ago in California and opened a Dearborn office in 1996 to be near auto clients. The headquarters was moved to Michigan in 2001. She favors the Michigan workforce, noting that pay packages are 30% higher in California.

"The economy is improving," she said. But companies also realize that it's essential to have a brand website that's customer-friendly. The company's patented software enables consumers to research a purchase, view sales incentives and complete a transaction at a store, through a call center or on their mobile device.

Mark Zandi, chief economist for Moody's Analytics, predicted that small business hiring should grow slowly, but steadily pick up in the next year or so. Credit is flowing a bit more freely to small business owners, he said, allowing them to expand operations.

Many small businesses are tied into the housing market, he said, so as housing revives, so to should hiring. Think realtors, mortgage companies, landscapers, garden supply retailers and hardware stores, law firms, accountants, home improvement, plumbers and electricians, moving companies and trucking jobs.

"It won't be a straight line

— government cuts and tax increases are hurting — but prospects are better over the next several years," Zandi said.

Job hunters won't necessarily find a straight line to a paycheck, either.

The key words to focus on here are training and talent.



Ronia Kruse

Ronia Kruse, president and CEO of OpTech in Troy, said her firm could hire more than 115 people by the end of the year. That's up from 200 employees now.

The company, which provides information technology and engineering staffing, is looking at expanding into office space in downtown Detroit, as well.

But Kruse says the challenge in hiring will be finding the right people with degrees in math, computer science, engineering and the like. She needs experienced program managers, mechanical engineers and electrical engineers.

"Everybody is hiring the talent to deliver the projects," Kruse said. Many companies had put projects on hold during the recession, she said, and now need to move forward.

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