

SECRETS OF MY SUCCESS

Have you ever dreamed of quitting the boring 9-to-5 to pursue your dreams? *Pride* talks to two women who went ahead and did just that.

Name: Sonia Meggie Age: 33 Occupation: Director of Harmony Productions

Harmony Productions launched in 2001 and is one of the UK's leading global arts and events companies, showcasing theatrical performances in the UK, the Caribbean and Stateside. Acts include Bill Bellamy, Gina Yashere and Richard Blackwood. Sonia co-ordinates performances, secures sponsorship and maintains partnerships.

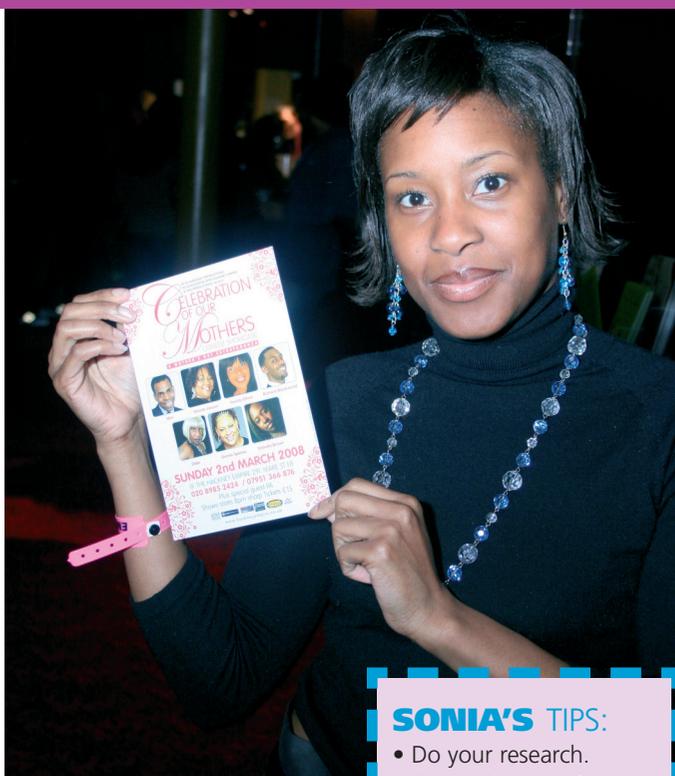
VISION: It was originally a concept by Kenneth Drysdale, my business partner, and together we became one of the most established black-owned production companies in the UK. We organize events from youth programmes and comedy shows to drama productions, charity dinners and excursions. Harmony Productions manages urban events and distributes media productions that reflect life in a multicultural society in the 21st century. We also have a foundation whereby we contribute a percentage of our takings to promote community events and support youth-led initiatives. We are driven by opening doors for others and recruiting new talent into the organization as we know how difficult this industry can be.

CHALLENGES:

It's a very time-consuming and demanding job, so I always make sure I get a work/life balance. As a small team, we have a lot of casual staff working with us, so recruiting reliable staff can be challenging. We have to ensure that the shows go smoothly as we sometimes worry that an artist may not be available. Fortunately we have not had any disasters! Marketing can be a challenge as there is still a stigma attached to black entertainment. You're trying to persuade clients to recognize you as a professional outfit. When we're getting our shows to cross over, sometimes people think that their audiences won't understand this. But I believe humour is humour, and it doesn't come with race. Once they see that we can deliver, it opens up many doors.

MOST ENJOYABLE:

The most enjoyable aspect of my job is seeing the vast number of people who turn up at our shows. Everyone is taken aback, and there is real positive energy in the audience. We're blown away by the response of the audience. The venues are filled with laughter. When you peek at the crowds from



backstage, you can see tears of laughter rolling down their faces. Seeing people smile, getting feedback from people who say they had a good time or it was one of their best nights out, is just the best feeling! We also ran a summer project where we thought we'd attract about 30 young people, but we actually attracted 150. That felt rewarding.

SONIA'S TIPS:

- Do your research.
- Ensure that you have adequate finance.
- Ensure that you have good mentors to advise and guide you, as business can be a very dog-eat-dog world!
- Stay determined and focused.
- Always maintain self-belief.

www.harmony-productions.com

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Name: Mavis Amankwah Age: 33
Occupation: Managing director of Rich Visions Ltd

Mavis set up the award-winning Rich Visions, which specializes in ethnic communications, to bridge the gap between public and private sector organizations and the ethnic businesses and consumers they want to reach through effective marketing strategies.

VISION: I was an IT manager for many years before realizing that that industry wasn't for me. In the interim, I'd organized lots of events such as beauty pageants in the community, which I was very passionate about. I was bullied at school for being black as well as African, and that has always fuelled my passion for the community and working with, not against, each other. In 2004, I got fed up of the 9-to-5 and decided to launch my own communications company.

CHALLENGES: The business was self-funded. I managed to secure the money I

needed with the help of family and friends. Running a business was new to me, so I was learning along the way and networking as much as I could. The challenges were winning over high-profile corporate clients. Since the services we deliver are quite niche, we had to educate the mainstream about what we can deliver before they bought into our service. I also got burgled twice and lost everything, including our computers. I overcame all of those challenges because I'm a fighter. I don't give up and I just got on with it, no matter what.

MOST ENJOYABLE: Winning pitches and making clients happy! We have rapidly expanded, with clients including the Home Office, DEFRA (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs), HSBC, the NHS and many more. Our company went from the initial £6,000 per annum to a turnover of £250,000 in two years.

MAVIS'S TIPS:

- Seek as much advice as possible from professionals such as Business Link.
- Develop a good business and marketing plan.
- It is advisable to get a business mentor.
- Don't forget about your loved ones. Sometimes we can get so engrossed in the business, we don't make enough time to spend with our family and friends.

www.richvisions.co.uk