

Contributors



Duncan Bannatyne

The multi-millionaire business investor on taking his new venture to market



Carol Alayne

The UK's most celebrated women's tailor explains why you have to take risks



Sir Martin Sorrell

The godfather of advertising on the need to keep your message simple

“You have to take risks”

Over the past 21 years Carol Alayne has gradually built up her reputation as one of the UK's best master tailors. Now, catering exclusively for female customers with Tailoring for Women, she tells us how she made a niche for herself in a 'man's world'

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The classic image of a London tailoring business is of one run by an English gentleman of a certain age from a stuffy shop in Savile Row. But Carol Alayne is different – an independent businesswoman running her couture company out of a trendy apartment-workshop in East London.

Originally a banker from Detroit, Carol had always wanted to work with clothes. She recalls: "I started off during the 1970s, making clothes for office workers. I then had the opportunity to come to London to visit Savile Row."

Female tailors were not commonplace in 1970s London. "I was very unusual for Savile Row. I was

American, and a woman in an extremely male-dominated world," she says. "I didn't find it too difficult, though, probably because I was American and I wasn't afraid to ask questions."

Carol's first venture in London was The Concert Store, providing tailored garments for international musicians of all genres.

"I made a garment for the soprano Jane Eaglen's Hollywood Bowl debut," she recalls. "She was a colossal personality and it was a huge challenge, but to see her wearing my design on television and watch her walk out on stage was incredible."

Despite fitting easily into the Savile Row tailoring fraternity, Carol was still keen to work exclusively for women.

"It was a difficult strategic decision to make for the business – to leave Savile Row – but I eventually moved exclusively into the women's market," she says.

Part of Carol's business plan was setting up a home/work space in up-and-coming East London. "It works so well because I am at my work 24 hours a day – by living where I work, I have managed to eliminate all that wasted time commuting."

Today, her company, Tailoring for Women, is a thriving small business that produces 100-120 garments a year, and includes clients as

diverse as Dame Kiri te Kanawa, Clarissa Dixon-Wright and the British Olympic shooting team.

Such is Carol's brand reputation that she claims to have improved her sales, even during the recent recession.

She maintains, however, that businesses need to take a cautious approach during the tough times: "Make sure you look after your cash. Understand cash flow and keep an eye on it weekly, if not daily. Keep looking for ways of running your business more cost effectively."

Tailoring for Women's success is, Carol

believes, down to her relationship with her customers. "In 21 years, I've never had to refund anyone their money, or had a finished garment which hasn't sold, so I must be doing something right!"

It's crucial to deal with, and embrace, risk, she says. "Malcolm Plews, my old mentor, once said: 'The man who never made a mistake, never made anything.' And it's so true – you can't be afraid to take risks."

She points out, too, the steadfast support she's received from the Bank. Carol has been a loyal NatWest customer since the start, and says she gets all the help she could need.

"As a business customer I can get advice and questions answered 24 hours a day," she says. "I love the term Relationship Manager; and I have Emma Brooks, who is superb."

"I've been with NatWest for years and it's always been a good relationship. When I've had issues in the past – whether to get a card machine or how to handle foreign transactions – Emma keeps me right."

tailoringforwomen.com

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