

SNOBs - Social Network For Opportunistic Businesswomen



There's Power in Numbers for SME's

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The fact SME's are doing it tough is hardly headline news, and it's not just as a result of the GFC. The issues facing small-to-medium sized businesses are in relation to legal and regulatory issues, training, licensing, payroll tax, succession planning; just to name a few.

If you're a business owner who feels suffocated by red tape, squeezed by big business policy or short of resources and support you could benefit from the helping hand that is **SME Boardroom**. It's an organisation that has just been launched by lawyer **Kim Mei-Li Dennis** [right]. As a business owner herself, and former chairwoman of the Small



Business Council of Australia, Kim has the experience and enthusiasm to make SME Boardroom a driver for positive change – and she wants *you* to join.

How will SME Boardroom help small- to medium-size business owners?

Its purpose is to give SME's a united voice. Through surveys, roundtable events and online interaction we want to find out what is causing SME's grief and what, if anything, can the government do to make it better for us.

If SME owners work together and communicate their issues through this group, government and the wider business community will be more accurately informed about what the real issues are for them. If they know what's going on the government might be able to make changes to policy and legislation which have a genuine impact on SME owners and their businesses.

You're also busy running your own SME, so what inspired you to take this on?

The idea was, admittedly, a bit of a knee-jerk reaction to May's federal budget. I just thought; there's not much in this for small business. Plus, I've been thinking for a while I'd like to do something to "give back". My business is **Jungle Management** which is a law firm and, partly through that, I know a lot of business owners who are having a very tough time. In my opinion, no one is really representing them and I felt it was something I could add a lot of value to.

SME boardroom

At your website one of the SME issues is 'cash flow'. I've no doubt that's an issue for lots of businesses, but how could SME Boardroom influence government policy to fix that?

This is precisely what we want to find out from members, because it's not a direct fix. Most of the issues identified by SME's are a combination of things that could be done differently, or made easier.

So with something like cash flow, the sorts of things that come to mind – and this is my personal opinion only – are, for example, bad debtors. This is especially problematic for small business working with big business because they've got longer trading terms.

Cash flow can also be affected by things like being unable to raise finance from the banks. Not having the right education to know how to manage things financially. So the role of SME Boardroom would be to find out if the government is already doing something in that department. If they are we'd ask, 'Why is it not working, why are people still having those issues? Does it need to change it some way?'

Maybe people need more mentoring, information sheets, hands-on assistance or maybe access to some sort of accounting package that would make it easier for them to manage things on a daily basis.

Since launching SNOBS, I've actually been stoked by how much help and information is freely available. But my perspective is probably more representative of start-ups with 1-5 employees...

I was actually speaking with **Austrade** about this last week, exactly this point. I think the government does provide a lot of training programs and resources for small business, but it is particularly suitable for start-ups because they're the ones who are really information hungry and will invest the time and energy to read up on things to save the cost of seeing professional advisors.

Where it starts to become more of a problem, in my opinion, is when businesses start to grow fairly actively, particularly when you're getting toward ten or more staff. The problem for those guys is they don't actually have time to sit there and get educated. They're quite happy to pay somebody to fix the problem but I feel that much of the professional advice out there is not really all that practical for SME's; it's not really hands-on or cost efficient. Sometimes it's quite theoretical and academic as opposed to being useful and something they can implement straight away.

The growing SME's are the ones who are probably having the greatest difficulty because the government isn't really supporting them. It's really been more so up to private business to do that, and they're still learning how to address the needs of those people in the most efficient way.

Does that mean you're mainly seeking members who operate larger SME's, with more like 15-200 staff? Oh no, not at all.

The overall strategy of SME Boardroom is to get as many members onboard as possible so we're representative of the entire SME market across Australia. I think SME Boardroom would be particularly suited for people who want to grow their business. So whether they have 1-2 staff now, the fact is they're going to end up having extra issues as they grow.

The [member] numbers are probably more important to us than anything, and hopefully from there government will be compelled to listen to the views of those members and to make changes to government policy that will have a real effect in people's day-to-day lives.