

Meet the new Dragons in town

With the hunt to find London's 'first model business woman' well under way, *Sarah Hamilton* talks to the savvy duo behind The City's Top Model Entrepreneur competition: Richard Farleigh of BBC's *Dragon's Den* fame, and entrepreneur, Chelsey Baker

The City's Top Model Entrepreneur competition has been set to encourage entrepreneurial women to start their own business and to showcase the talent that London has to offer. More than 21,000 people have started a new business since December 2008 and businesses owned by women have doubled in the last ten years. The drive is now on to find applicants who possess business acumen, a flair for fashion and the innovation to become the UK's next success story. We met up with the two leading entrepreneurs to find out their success stories and the concept behind the idea.

Why did you launch this competition?

Chelsey: I have worked in fashion since I was sixteen; however my focus and passion have always been on the business side of the industry. I felt it was time to launch a business competition that encompassed beauty, intelligence and entrepreneurship.

How is this different from other competitions?

Chelsey: The focus is more on female enterprise – helping young women realize their true potential in the fashion industry can be through business and commercial know how, rather than modelling. The competition focuses on pitching and

presenting a business idea, how to correctly dress for success and represent your own brand, encouraging intelligence, personality and drive to get ahead in the industry.

Who can apply and what are the judges looking for?

Chelsey: We're on the look out for real women, not super models. Someone who could grace the pages of a fashion magazine, endorse an office product and at the same time be a great business woman.

Richard: Those who have drive, determination and a flare for fashion can apply. I'll be looking for my next investment opportunity of course! This is an incredible opportunity for female enterprise and I can't wait to see what business ideas people will come up with.

How did you both end up working together?

Chelsey: I met Richard at the Business Start Up show. I'd already worked with numerous other well known entrepreneurs, but when I met Richard he stood out as having the charisma, patience and the business success I was looking for in a judge for The City's Top Model Entrepreneur.

How have you achieved success?

Chelsey: By having immense self belief and unrelenting determination. I've always been self-employed as well. From day one I knew that I was more than capable of being my own boss. I have always made my dreams a reality and not been influenced by what others expected of me. Shift your perception to be successful in your mind and you'll be successful in life'

Richard: Good luck, I guess! I am only half joking because I believe you have to grab the opportunities that come along – try different things, keep an open mind, and work hard. You'd be surprised how "lucky" you can then be. I've had careers in investment banking, finance and backing

businesses, and in each I've taken that same approach. I also have an inner belief that I can succeed. That helps me with motivation and also to deal with failures, which are inevitable.

What advice would you give to women looking to succeed in business?

Chelsey: Be determined, overcome fear, listen to yourself, be strong and trust your instincts. Know who to take advice from, but also know your competition.

Richard: Use your strengths. Often women are more people oriented than men. And because, sadly, there are fewer women than men in the business world, women can stand out.

Do you believe it's harder for women to succeed in business than men?

Chelsey: Absolutely not, that's a complete myth – unless you buy into the concept that it is. If a woman believes that the world is against her, she's starting out at a huge disadvantage. I always believed that I deserved my success and what you believe about yourself will massively influence the results you get – no matter what sex you are.

Richard: There is no reason for that. Consequently we are seeing over time, an increasing number of successful women.

How is beauty relevant in today's society?

Richard: While looks shouldn't matter too much, the modelling industry, for example, is huge. Bringing together looks and business is the meeting of two juggernauts!

Richard, how do you think this competition compares to *Dragons' Den*?

It has many of the components of *Dragons' Den* – competition, analysis and drama, for instance – but brings in the new elements of looks, fashion and style.



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Do you have any tips for dealing with Men in Business?

Richard: – Many women are realising that it's not just the men who can have it all, women can also achieve anything and everything if they just put their mind to it. Don't feel threatened by the men in suits - be confident, position yourself correctly and you will be surprised at what you can achieve.

In a post-feminist world aren't beauty contests a little outdated?

Chelsey: Firstly this is not simply a 'beauty pageant'. We are looking for someone dynamic with beauty, creativity and brains. Beauty is often misunderstood; however it is a characteristic of a person. It is admired by all society and comes in many forms.

Richard: We are not looking at just 'Outer Beauty', but beauty as a whole which is measured by a number of factors including personality, intelligence, elegance, grace, charm and integrity. This is something that should be admired not criticised.

Are you suggesting that you need 'model looks' to be successful in business?

Chelsey: Of course not, however confidence and presentation are important. We live in a society that places a very high value on aesthetics, so having 'model looks' is not necessary for success but being able to project the most attractive image of yourself is.

Richard: We are trying to advance the world of fashion and business by breaking down social stereotypes that suggest you cannot be beautiful and intelligent. We are helping by providing young women with the knowledge they need to be a success in business. ■