

Clare King runs *Clare's Cupcakes*, a high-end cupcake business catering for weddings and corporate events in the London area. She lives in Wimbledon with her husband and two children, aged four and 18 months.

'Baking came to me late. Mum was a professional baker, she even made cakes for Prince Charles. Typically, I went against what my parents did and wasn't interested in cakes, building a career in public relations instead. But when I went on maternity leave in 2007 I decided to learn how to make cake decorations. I practised and practised, and started making cupcakes for friends. Because of the nature of my career, the cakes were seen by a few PR agencies. They asked me to do cakes for events like product launches and film premieres. It all went from there.

'The first cupcakes I sold were to a PR agency for a make-up brand. It was launching a new range of lipsticks and eyeshadows and the cupcakes had to have lips and eyes. I was a bit out of my depth as I'd only been doing flowers and butterflies up to that point, so I just had to jump in. I've now made everything from dolphin cupcakes for the Discovery Channel to cakes that look like Sacha Baron Cohen's character for the premiere of *The Dictator*. I've slightly learnt on the job. I'm so busy that there's no time ▶



Cupcake queen: Clare specialises in cakes for weddings and corporate events; left, balancing the books; she spends her evenings making sugar roses; her collections of vintage crockery, cake cases and ribbons



Could you make cash from cakes?

Your friends crave your cupcakes, your colleagues sing the praises of your sponges – but how easy is it to turn your baking hobby into a business? We spoke to three women who did just that

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out to practise – you just learn it as you're doing it.

'I kept Clare's Cupcakes part-time for a long time. I went back to work after my first child, but I've been running the business full-time since 2011, after the birth of my second child. When I was still at my job, I was making cakes in the evenings and weekends. Some evenings I'd come in from work at 7pm and go to bed after doing 500 or 600 cakes. Now I rent kitchen space where I do a lot of baking but I still do small things from home – at the moment I spend the evening making sugar roses after the children have gone to sleep. Mum helps me with childcare. Juggling the business with two kids would be incredibly difficult without help – if you're in the middle of baking a cake, you can't really stop.

'Business is good but people are keener to haggle on prices since the recession. I have found, though, that if you're confident in the quality of your work people will believe it's worth it.

'Cupcakes are everywhere now. It's a blessing and a curse. Everyone and their dog feels like "I can make a cupcake, therefore I can set up a business". You have to be realistic – your friends might say your cakes are great, but are they really, compared to what's out there? Look online and if you genuinely think you can match what's out there at the moment, there is nothing to stop you. Try it – there are no start-up costs. Set up a website for free, like I did. Investigate the local market first, and try to do something different – if they're all making cakes, try cookies. If I was starting out now, I'd still want to do cupcakes but the trick would be to find something that isn't covered by thousands of other people.

'Everyone needs cake for special occasions and there is room for a lot of cake businesses. Just make sure that you do quality things. It's a good idea to invest in a decent camera, too, so you can take fantastic pictures of your work for your website. Talk to other cake makers on Facebook – there's a supportive cake business community online if you need advice. If you work hard and produce beautiful cakes, the world is your oyster.'

clarescupcakes.co.uk



The American dream: from top, Lisa's super-sized cakes and traybakes are a hit at Kirkstall Deli Market in Leeds; she bakes at home from 8am until 11.30pm; right, Lisa sells her wares at Leeds' Kirkgate Market



Lisa Gair runs a cake business called *The Yummy Yank*, selling American-style cakes including brownies and peanut butter cheesecakes at farmers' markets and food festivals around Yorkshire. Originally from Maryland, USA, she now lives in West Yorkshire with her husband. They have five grown-up daughters.

'My cake business started as a hobby. In 2008 there was an announcement in the local parish council news about a new farmers' market in the village hall and I thought running a cake stall would be a bit of fun. I didn't intend to turn it into a business. But the farmers' market started slowing down 18 months ago, and I had cakes left over so I started selling them at another local market. It just snowballed from there and has turned unexpectedly, but with open arms on my part, into a real business. I now do at least five farmers' markets a month, plus private orders and food festivals.

'I've always loved baking. It's so much fun. If there's ever stress in my life, baking is the answer. Even though I bake nearly 24/7 now, I still find it relaxing. My cakes are typically American. They're big with lots of layers, not because I'm trying to impress, that's just the way we Americans do it! I make brownies and pecan pie bars, strawberry shortcakes, and a super-sized chocolate cake – four big layers of rich chocolate



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sponge covered in a dark chocolate frosting. My cake/cheesecake combinations are probably the most popular – the chocolate cake/peanut butter cheesecake one is flying at the markets right now, all the slices are normally gone within the first hour.

'Coming up with the name The Yummy Yank was straightforward. It means the obvious, my cakes are yummy and I'm a Yank. But more importantly to me, my late father's nickname was Yummy and his twin brother's was Yankee, so it has special meaning. It's important to have a memorable name for your company – it sets you apart.

'The Yummy Yank has been a proper business for 18 months now – once I expanded from running the stall in the village hall I had to get my catering certificate, liability insurance and register my business with the council. Word of mouth led to a few private orders, but it was joining Twitter as The Yummy Yank that made my business what it is now – people seek me out and I've sent cakes to customers as far away as London.

'I've been able to make a living from my cakes since I went full-time with The Yummy Yank in 2010. I do incredibly well at the markets and through private orders. Now I'm trying to think with both my business head and my heart about where I go next. I'm working out what's financially viable, as I'd like to get myself known around the country, and send orders to different places without compromising on quality. My husband suggested getting someone to help with the baking, but I'm not ready. It's my reputation on the line.

'When I'm not at the market, I typically bake all day. I get up early and turn on my two ovens, then check my emails. I'm ready to go in the kitchen by about 8am and the ovens will be on until about 11.30pm. I'm working harder than I ever have in my life, but love every minute! I love the interaction with the customers and the other stallholders. The camaraderie is second to none. Grown adults stand in front of my stall with their mouths wide open when they see my cakes – it's just the best feeling in the world. I can't think of anything I would rather be doing.'

theyummyyank.co.uk ▶



Cake therapy: Kate's love of baking and the focus it needs helped her cope after her partner died; left, her new business specialises in cake pops



Kate Emmett runs a cake business called *Cake Poppins* from her home in Jesmond, Newcastle upon Tyne. Formerly an investment banker, she turned her hobby into a business in 2010 following redundancy and the death of her partner.

'Running a cake business isn't for the faint-hearted. There's loads of work but it's definitely a passion, not something you do to get rich. Even those at the top of the trade don't live in the lap of luxury.

'I've always enjoyed baking, but didn't plan to make it my job. I went to Oxford, then spent years in investment banking in London, though it was never really my thing. I got a corporate job back in the northeast in 2003, then worked for five years in the oil services industry.

'Everything changed in June 2010. My partner Wayne died suddenly and a week after his funeral I was made

redundant. I felt like I'd lost everything. I tried my best to carry on, and baking helped. It's therapeutic – you weigh things out, it's methodical and you switch off your brain. But three months after Wayne died, one day I thought "I've had enough". I took an overdose. Two days later my mum found me. I had a lucky break and thought, "I've got to rebuild my life". I had nothing to lose and some money from an out-of-court settlement so I decided to try selling cakes for a living.

'I took a useful one-day course called How to run a cake business. I followed the teacher's advice and did an NVQ in food hygiene and registered as a food business with the council. I officially started in March 2011. I also took cake decorating classes. It's amazing how, with lots of practice, you can go from baking cookies to a four-tier wedding cake.

'I specialise in cake pops – little cakes on sticks – and my sister came up with the name *Cake Poppins*. Word of mouth spread as I made cakes for parties. I don't advertise, but I often pop a business card

in the cake bag and I've just set up a website. People Google 'cakes Newcastle' and they find me, I get a lot of orders that way. There are

lots of local cake makers but the demand is there; I'm turning down work. Not as many people make cake pops as cupcakes but I love them. They're creative and fiddly. People ask for fun things like cocker spaniels or octopus pops and I enjoy turning their ideas into cakes.

'I love what I do, but I don't know if it's financially viable long term. I now also run classes and my outgoings are low but I dream of a pension. People say as demand goes up you should put your prices up, but I'm not at that point yet.

'I've made loads of new friends through cake. I work at home so I've had to push myself harder to get out there. I used to be terrified of public speaking, but I'm not scared by cake pop demonstrations because I'm talking about something I love. Starting my business has been therapeutic and it's brought me out of my shell. I'll happily talk to anyone who'll listen about cake!' cakepoppins.co.uk



Want to set up a cake business?

Here are five things you must do to get started, before you get to the fun part of making and selling your cakes:

■ **Speak to the tax office.** If you're running the business full-time, you'll need to register as self-employed;

if you're running it on top of your day job, you'll need the correct tax codes.

■ **Contact your local council.** You'll need to make an appointment with them for an environmental health officer to come round to inspect your kitchen.

■ **Take a tip from Lisa** and take out public liability insurance.

■ **Get a food hygiene certificate.** Kate did an NVQ, but you can also complete an easy course online. You'll then be able to display the certificate

in your kitchen and as a badge on your website.

■ **Set up a website.** You can use free templates on blogger.com or wordpress.org. Don't forget to use sites like Facebook and Twitter to market your fledgling cake business, too. ♦