



**13th ANNUAL MEETING OF THE
WOMEN LEADER'S NETWORK - WLN**

**Australian Women in Small
Business:**

**Opportunities and Obstacles
to Trade**



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Women in small business are a driving force in sustainable economic growth and development in Australia and across the Asia-Pacific region.

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In the Asia-Pacific SMEs:

- Make up an estimated 90% of all businesses
- Account for approximately 40 % of employment
- Contribute an estimated 70% of GDP

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Women's Contribution(1):

- Australia - women own 32% of SMEs
- Korea - own 35% of all businesses
- Canada - own 45% of SMEs
- Indonesia - own 60% of SMEs

Sources: Gibb 2004 and ABS 2005

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Women's Contribution (2):

In Australia women-owned SMEs contribute approximately 40% of GDP

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Self-employment is a powerful vehicle for women's economic empowerment

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Engaging in international trade, particularly exporting, is often critical to the sustainability of women's businesses

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Despite increased trade liberalisation in the region, Australian women are not necessarily experiencing increased opportunities

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Australian women in SMEs(1):

More likely to work in:

- Services Sector:
 - Education; health; retail and consultancy
- Consumer Goods:
 - Food; wine; beauty products; the arts and fashion

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Australian Women in SMEs(2):

Less likely to work in:

- Mining
- Technology

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Objectives:

- To better understand the perceptions of Australian women in small business about their trade activities;
- To contribute to discussion on issues of gender and trade in the Asia-Pacific region;
- To inform policy and program development processes related to trade.

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APEC context:

- APEC leaders recognised that women are critical to the achievement of sustainable economic development in the region.
- The 2007 WLN recommended that responsible ministers identify opportunities and overcome barriers to women in micro, small and medium enterprises.

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Research Question:

What are the current issues and experiences of Australian women in small business who seek to export or import, are currently exporting or importing or have exported or imported?

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Research Questions:

- What are the major export challenges or opportunities for women-operated small business in Australia?
- What are the major import challenges or opportunities for women-operated small business in Australia?
- What measures do Australian women in small business think would help them to expand their import/export capacity or move into importing/exporting?

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Methodology:

1. Literature review
2. Consultations with 42 participants
 - Telephone interviews
 - Email responses

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Australian Women in Export:

- Are 11% of women-operated SMEs who export
- Are more likely to be home-based
- Are more likely to export arts and crafts; financial products and services; food and beverages
- Are less likely to use e-commerce or new technologies;
- Are more likely to export to NZ, UK and Europe than your male counterpart;
- Are less likely to export to USA than a man in business.

Source: Sensis® 2006 & 2007

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What they said...

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Export Challenges:

- Limited resources;
- Lack of access to information;
- Access to networks and mentoring;
- Developing skills;
- Challenges related to foreign markets; and
- Difficulty in business/life balance.

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Resources (1):

- Finance
 - Funding the growth of an export business;
 - Attending trade shows to promote products and services;
 - Difficulty in obtaining credit

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“Attendance at trade fairs and shows is very expensive but it is the main way we are able to market our specialised product. We have to fund these [activities] from our own resources”

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“Even though the grant exists, it does not provide suitable support for early exporters in regards to threshold, paperwork and timelines for the cash to be out of the business.”

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Resources(2):

- Human Resources and Lack of Time
 - Managing domestic business while trying to develop export business
 - Balancing child care and family responsibilities

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Australian women's time use:

On average women spend twice as much time as men on domestic activities

Source: ABS 2006

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"Women who are mums with young children are impacted by additional challenges when operating their business."

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Access to Information and Support:

- Too much information available from too many sources.
- Difficulty finding relevant up-to-date information.
- Lack of sector specific information - especially for exporters of services.

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"An export challenge I am finding is that my business does not 'fit' the models that [export agencies] have for a normal exporter."

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Knowledge and Skills:

- Understanding the characteristics of foreign markets;
- Local customs procedures;
- Compliance and legal business requirements;
- Negotiating customs red-tape and transport processes in Australia.

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Challenges of Foreign Markets:

- The cost of having a physical presence in the foreign market;
- Balancing child care and family responsibilities;
- Safety concerns;
- Language and culture difficulties.

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Importance of Networks:

- Difficulty finding the right networks for business needs.
- Peak business organisations are for large businesses or 'the big boys'.
- Networks are especially important for women in regional, rural and remote areas and home-based businesses.

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Mentoring:

- Critical to building confidence and growing their business;
- Good mentors are difficult to find;
- Lack of visibility of successful businesswomen.

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“Mentoring is absolutely essential. Women in small business are also often pioneers - it opens our minds to what is possible.”

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Balancing Work and Family:

- Business ownership can offer the flexibility to combine unpaid work at home with paid work.
- However, time constraints are a challenge.
- Problem becomes more acute when women decide to grow their business through exporting

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Indigenous Women:

Existing inequalities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous means exporting challenges are exacerbated.

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Regional, Rural and Remote Women:

Geographic location and potential isolation make existing challenges more acute for women in regional, rural and remote areas of Australia.

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Exporting Opportunities:

- E-commerce
- Trade in services
- Exporting to Asia
- Government programs and services

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Importing Challenges:

- Lack of knowledge and skills;
- Limited access to information and support;
- Quality concerns;
- Developing and fostering supply chain relationships; and
- Balancing work and family.

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Ideas to Explore Further(1):

1. Development of an online *Women's Trade Portal*;
2. Provision of e-commerce and export training to regional, rural and remote women;
3. Establishment of a web-based network for regional, rural and remote women;

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Ideas to Explore Further (2):

4. Publication of case studies showcasing Indigenous women in small business who have developed export capacity.
5. The development of online resources targeting women engaged in the export of services.

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Questions?

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