

BlackBerry?"). Some of these women also discover that their husbands grew content having them at home. To help overcome self-imposed hurdles—including lack of confidence—Samuels suggests small steps, like continuing to list “lawyer” or “accountant” (instead of “stay-at-home mom”) on the “occupation” line when filling out paperwork at the pediatrician’s office. “Sometimes women completely divorce themselves from people who are working and become isolated,” she says. “That’s not a good thing to do.”

For Bandini, the newly unemployed news anchor, all thoughts of returning to work take a distant back seat to her soon-to-arrive babies. Financially, she’s comfortable, thanks partly to her husband, who runs an aviation-equipment company. But even as she prepares for motherhood, her agent, Pam Pulner, will be making sure TV execs don’t forget about her. Bandini may wait until her children are in school to begin working

again, but Pulner says most of the TV women she represents resume their careers more quickly than they expected. “When she wants to come back, there will be a place for her,” Pulner says. With luck and over time, more women will be able to find their places, too.

With ROBBIE BROWN and CLAUDIA ADRIEN

MOMS MEAN BUSINESS

➤ Inspired by the dot-com boom, a growing number of women are dreaming up new ventures while the kids are napping.

BY ANNA KUCHMENT

It wasn’t long into my maternity leave when I hatched my first idea for a new business: I’d start a “night-care center” where sleep-deprived parents could drop off their newborns and head home for eight hours of uninterrupted slumber. In my case, it was more of a 3 a.m. fantasy than a viable plan. But, since having my daughter, Eliza, seven months ago, I’ve met a surprising number of moms who’ve launched ambitious businesses within months of giving birth.

It’s such a phenomenon that there’s even a trademarked term to describe it: Mompreneurs. “It definitely is a trend,” says Sharon Hadary, executive director of the nonprofit Center for Women’s Business Research. Earlier this year the center released a study showing that one-woman businesses, the group that most new moms fall into, have been growing at twice the rate of the national average. You can see evidence of this each time you Google a new baby product: moms are marketing their own hand-embroidered burp cloths, pacifiers that snap shut when tossed to the ground,

hygienic seat covers for grocery carts, neck-to-toe bibs and practically any type of baby necessity one can think of.

What is it about motherhood that stokes entrepreneurship? First, there’s usually plenty of downtime for daydreaming. “A lot of businesses were born during naptime,” says Victoria Colligan, cofounder of Ladies Who Launch, which helps women brainstorm and start new ventures. Then, for those who can afford to quit their jobs or take a long leave, it’s as good a time as any to take a risk. “You’re not working anyway, so what do you have to lose?” says Laura Deutsch, who founded Baby Bites NYC, a series of luncheons for new moms, earlier this year when her daughter, Ava, was 6 months old. Deutsch had left her job as a teacher before giving birth but soon discovered that, to her surprise, full-time motherhood wasn’t for her. “I needed something of my own to do,” she says, but going back to full-time teaching would have meant spending more on a nanny than she was earning on the job. Now she’s turning a profit, babysitter funds included.



BABY TALK: Deutsch and pals

The first dot-com boom, which took place soon after most thirtysomething moms entered the work force, also had a profound effect. Suddenly, all these young people were becoming instant millionaires armed with little more than ambition and a good idea. “It really changed the mental barriers around what kind of person you have to be to start your own business,” says Gigi Lee Chang, founder of Plum Organics, a line of frozen food for babies and toddlers. The technological innovations the boom left behind have made it easier and less expensive for entrepreneurs to market their products. Mompreneuronline.com, the company that trademarked the term, is one of many businesses that help women do just that.

Not that Mompreneurs think they’ve magically solved all their

work/life problems. “People come up to me all the time and say, ‘You’re so lucky you don’t have to deal with that because you work for yourself,’” says Cali Williams Yost, founder and president of Work + Life Fit, Inc., a New Jersey-based career consulting company. “The truth is I have to deal with it more than they do.” Women who start their own businesses find it easy to get sucked into checking their e-mail and phone messages around the clock. “There is no boundary between work and life unless I put it there,” says Yost. She recommends women keep their day jobs unless they have a business idea they’re truly passionate about. That’s where my idea falls short: after surviving months with a newborn, there’s no chance I’d take care of an infant at night—unless she was my own.