

THE
LOOK
REPORT

'We Fast-Tracked Our Way To A New Career!'

Fancy a career change? *Look* meets four women who made their job switch a success in record time...



Time to the top: 20 months

'From Waiting Tables To Writing Bestsellers!'

Lucy-Anne Holmes, 32, from London, used to be a waitress – now she's writing her second novel

I'd always dreamt of being an actress, so after uni I did an acting course. When I graduated, I waitressed to pay the bills. But when I landed a role in a West End play, I didn't enjoy it as much as I'd hoped and went back to waitressing.

Broke, long-term single and fed up, I came up with the idea of trying 50 ways to meet men – from speed dating to salsa dancing – thinking it would

make a good newspaper column. But a friend said: "Why not try a blog?" I started my blog in June 2006 at Spinstersquest.com.

Less than six months later, some publishers and an agent got in touch. I met the agent and she suggested I write a novel.

In-between waitressing and seeing my boyfriend – who I met on the 14th date of my quest – I wrote the first 30,000 words and sent it to a publisher in

September 2007. I was thrilled to sign a two-book deal with Pan Macmillan – the advance was what I'd earn in a year waitressing.

By March 2008, it was finished. Seeing my book *50 Ways To Find A Lover* come out last month was brilliant – and a TV company has just bought the rights to it. I'm now writing the sequel, and can't quite believe I'm a published author. I just hope people enjoy my book!"

You can do it too!

Maria Rejt, a commissioning editor for Pan Macmillan, says:

- Most publishers only see manuscripts from agents. Get *The Writers Handbook 2009* (£8.99, Macmillan) to find one.
- Take time over your covering letter – it's your first impression.
- Don't say yes to the first publishing or representation offer you get – meet them first.

Time to the top: 18 months

'From Designing Logos To Styling!'

Chantelle Znideric, 30, from Exeter, decided to risk it all to be a personal stylist

While at college, I always wanted to be a graphic designer, so I got work experience with a design company, which turned into an apprenticeship. Over the next 10 years, I designed logos for brands and corporate brochures. Eventually I was earning nearly £30,000 a year. But secretly, I longed to work in fashion as I love clothes.

In 2005, I started a fashion blog called TopStylista.com. Women posted their style dilemmas and I'd answer them. Wondering if I could make a career out of it, I found a two-week image consultancy training course, and took the time off work as holiday.

The course gave me the confidence to go it alone, so in March 2006, I handed in my notice. My family thought I was mad giving up my job without having huge savings to fall back on, but I was determined.

I started off by attending networking events to find clients and started working with local boutiques, styling their clients. I attracted lots of customers who paid up to £495 for a day's consultation and I set up my own website,

www.personal-stylist.co.uk. I met *Strictly Come Dancing* star Flavia Cacace at a charity do and after finding her a dress for a last-minute event, she became a regular client.

But despite my success, I wanted to make personal styling available to more people. I came up with the idea for www.iStylista.com where women could get personal style advice online. My fiancé, Hayden, became my business partner and we took out a loan to develop the site and hire a PR agency for the launch in September 2007. It now has 10,000 members and receives 500 visitors every day!

Now I combine working as a personal stylist with working on the website and my blog. I don't enjoy doing all the paperwork, but I love seeing someone change when they feel more confident in what they're wearing – plus, I'm earning more than twice what I used to. I now have plans to write a book and do some work on TV. I'm so glad I took a chance – I couldn't be happier."

You can do it too!

Pippa Rees, from The Federation of Image Consultants, says:

- Get some formal training in colour and style analysis – however stylish you are, a grounding in styling theories will add to your skills. Visit www.tfic.org.uk for more information on courses.
- Marketing yourself is your most important task. Don't be afraid to approach anyone who can help, offer to write a column in a local paper, or give a talk at a local gym.
- Be innovative – specialise in one area of styling, so your service is unique.



Strictly's Flavia is a regular client