

# Portfolio Career – what to choose when you want everything

Interview by Mary Cummings, [Work Your Way](#)

Many of us who are self-employed have more than one income stream, and have embraced what is commonly referred to as a “Portfolio Career” – a career that is made up of a number of part-time or flexible jobs, including freelancing, franchising, direct selling and self-employment/a micro-business.

For working mums in the Work Your Way Community, the typical combination is freelancing with a direct selling business, but other combinations include freelancing with a temporary job, and part-time employment with a business run during evenings and weekends.

Whatever the combination, the equivalent is a full-time job, so we’re just as busy as before. Yet ask any of us if we’d go back to the traditional “9 to 5” and the answer is likely to be a resounded “No!”

A portfolio career is more flexible, as we tend to choose work that fits around our family and lifestyle.

It’s also quite likely that the different types of work we’re involved in appeals to different facets of our personality. For example, an outgoing person might choose temporary work on a short-term basis (as long as it’s during school hours), or a direct selling business which involves organising meetings and regularly seeing people face to face. To bolster the income, these might then be combined with working remotely on freelance projects from time to time, or running an online business.

And believe it or not, despite the many challenges, a portfolio career happens to be a great deal of fun. The variety of different sectors or types of clients that you are exposed to ensures that you never get bored.

I caught up with Natalie Rogers Wills, a Publishing Consultant who recently set up a health and wellbeing business, to find out a little more about her career, and why she chose to set up two completely different types of business.

**Natalie, Tell me a little about your working career.**

I run two entirely separate businesses and, having always been lucky to have different groups of friends in my life I view my businesses in much the same way. As with my friendships, each business nurtures my character and contributes something different to my life.

I’m reaching an interesting point in my career. Becoming self-employed came about as a direct response to circumstance. To put it simply, my role at work was made redundant and I wasn’t match-fit to attend interviews. My mother had died suddenly and unexpectedly just a few months before. She was my compass in life and my children were just one and four years

old. How on earth was I going to pick myself up again and get back to work, let alone cope with the bigger picture?

A month after finishing work a friend offered me a four-month freelance project. She wanted me to look after an American author whose book she had published, run her American PR campaign and then the British PR campaign. My new more daring self is embarrassed to say my response was rather wet, *'but I'm not a freelancer and I don't have my own business'*.

I was learning, however, that women in business can be great supporters of each other. I'd just left the corporate shackles behind me and was finding life was freer 'on the outside'. My friend encouraged me to the project on. She told me if I couldn't do it then nobody could and she wanted to be clear that she wasn't doing me a favour but needed me. I still remember her words.

Four months turned into six by which time another friend had approached me about doing some work for him. My background had always been International Sales and Marketing within book publishing but because I'd hinted I wanted to write professionally, he asked me to do some copywriting for his aviation business. This evolved into creating and producing his marketing collateral, working with a designer to create bespoke exhibition spaces and (a personal highlight) arranging a photo-shoot of the private jets. But I was in the book world – right?

Two friends in early days showed confidence in me and whilst working for them I started to think that being my own boss was the way forward. My publishing and copywriting business had, just like the jets (excuse the aviation pun), achieved lift-off and I was starting to feel I could achieve a better work-life balance by being master of my own destiny rather than returning to 'work'. Sitting in the cockpit of a multi-million pound jet didn't seem like real work. I took the plunge, told a few people I'd started up in business and another friend called me.

It takes time to build any business and I have acquired so many new skills as a result of running my consulting business. I have been amazed to win business where the people chemistry was right even when I didn't have certain skills for the job. I have two clients who have been prepared to accommodate my learning curve on very niche projects because they felt I was the right person for the job, and someone who would see things through to the end.

I never expected people to show this kind of faith in me but I have embraced it and have done well. I've been open and honest every step of the way and have won new business by recommendation, which has not only endorsed my newly acquired skills but resulted in the most amazing sense of job satisfaction.

### **So why did you start-up a second business, and such a different one at that?**

So why did I start-up a second business? Well, I am well aware that if I can't work for any reason I don't get paid. This was something that bothered me. I also needed more social interaction having hidden myself away for a long while after losing Mum. I was working at home tucked away in the study and it was solitary. That suited me in early days, but I have always been a social person and love getting to know people. I'd hidden away for long

enough. I wanted to branch out and challenge myself in a new area. I come from a largely medical family but, as the squeamish one, I'd veered away from the gory side of life! However, medical-talk had been commonplace growing up and I was always curious to learn.

My Nataloe business has given me the opportunity to meet new people, build a team and help people find natural remedies to aid their health and wellbeing. Building a team not only means I am meeting new people but I also earn an additional income working flexibly around my existing commitments. I am building a business that pays me when I take time off too. Nataloe gives me the flexibility I need and crave at this point in my life. My children have even sat with me in a business presentation and referred to Mummy as an 'aloeverologist'. They like making up new words.

**What do you particularly enjoy about the way you work now and are there any challenges?**

I enjoy working flexibly around my young children. I am able to go to all their nursery and school plays and 'down-tools' when they are unwell and need me. Of course there are crunch times when they need me and I have a pressing deadline, but on the whole clients are very supportive and it's amazing what you can achieve working into the wee small hours after tending to a feverish child all day when you really have to. It's not always easy but it is worth it.

Challenges for me are usually technical! My husband now fills the role of 'tech-support' when systems fail but again my knowledge in this area has greatly improved! Oh, and I am delighted fibre-optic cables have recently been fitted in our village. I am told faster broadband is coming to this part of the rural heartland of West Sussex in three months.

This London girl has waited eight years – note the things that excite me these days!