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## CHANGE @ WORK

### Putting mom back in business

#### New opportunities help stay-at-home mothers sharpen skills, prepare for workforce return

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It was not so long ago that professional women who chose to stay home to raise their kids were a forgotten lot. But now all kinds of resources are popping up - many created by at-home moms themselves - to help these women stay connected to the professional world and position themselves for returning to the for-pay work world.

Heck, these moms even have their own buzzwords - "opt-out moms," "off-ramping" for when they leave a career, "on-ramping" for when they return, "sequencing careers" for those in and out of the workforce, "kid gaps" for the spaces on their resumes between professional jobs.

The on-ramping certainly can be tough and even downright frustrating, said half of 130 female executives who had left the workforce and returned, or were trying to. Eighteen percent said the experience was depressing, according to research from the Wharton business school at the University of Pennsylvania.

So, with an eye to creating a re-entry strategy - including getting and staying up-to-date and experimenting with new lines of work - here's a roundup of a few of those resources.

**Books:** After she opted to stay home with her two children, Monica Samuels, an attorney in Austin, Texas, encountered friends on similar tracks at grocery and toy stores. She asked if they intended to return to their careers and, if so, how they planned to do it. Yes, they expected to return, they told her - but they had no plans. And that's how Samuels came to co-author "Comeback Moms: How to Leave Work, Raise Children, and Jump-Start Your Career Even If You Haven't Had a Job in Years" (Morgan Road, \$23.95).

Two moms who are freelance writers, Mary W. Quigley and Loretta E. Kaufman, wrote "Going Back to Work: A Survival Guide for Comeback Moms" (St. Martin's, \$13.95). It's a handbook that touches on networking, salary and benefits negotiating, changing careers, starting a home-based business. The two interviewed hundreds of women and found their biggest worry was finding jobs that offer flexibility.

**Flexible gigs:** Moms-for-Profit.com was started in December by Stacey Smith, 30, of St. James, and Linda Shapiro, 35, of Kings Park. It's a matchmaking service for two types of moms - those who have started small businesses or who want to, and those who provide small-business support services, such as marketing, writing and graphic design. The business owners hire the service providers, with fees kept low and flexibility high, says Smith, mother of two. "We are a connector," she says. Moms-for-Profit also helps women keep their skills honed and provides a nice resume entry for what is otherwise that "kid gap."

Jobsandmoms.com provides career advice for returning moms as well as a smattering of jobs from employers who are actually seeking out potential employees who are looking for flexibility. Of course, when I looked, there were only 102

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The Ultimate  
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The Bride-to-Be  
In Long Island



such gigs - but just looking at that list may help moms - and increasingly dads who opt to stay home - identify family-friendly employers and generate further ideas. The site is run by Nancy Collamer, a career coach in Old Greenwich, Conn.

Those in the legal profession can check out Flextime lawyers.com for support, career guidance and networking opportunities, as well as monthly lunches for those already in flexible arrangements and those looking for them. Started in Philadelphia by Deborah Epstein Henry, the group also has a Manhattan chapter.

Updating skills: Higher education is getting into the game by developing executive education programs for professionals who have hopped off the fast career track and are ready to hop back on. The Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth is running an 11-day program in the fall (Price tag? \$6,000!) to help women and men get updated in changes in their fields, as well as learn job-search techniques. They'll also get mentoring from executives at Citigroup, which is helping to underwrite the program. Harvard University has piloted a similar program, and both Babson College in Wellesley, Mass., and Baruch College in Manhattan are developing such sessions.

Need to get updated on issues related to phenomena that have developed since you left the office - blogs, social networking, podcasting? Downtown WomensClub.com will be offering classes by telephone starting in the fall as well as a social-networking feature called Facebook, which the group's founder, Diane K. Danielson, says can be particularly helpful for returning moms.

Further support: Flexibility alliance.org is a San Mateo, Calif.-based resources site and online community that promotes "flexible work for highly skilled mothers." It links to resources that identify family-friendly employers, provides research and pertinent articles as well as templates on how to propose flexible work arrangements to an employer.

As part of National Breast Feeding at Work Week in early September, WorldWIT.org, an online and off-line community of women in business and technology, is planning a seminar by telephone for new moms looking to return to the for-pay work world, says Liz Ryan, that group's founder and chief executive.

What's more, she says that she's seeing a small number of advanced-thinking employers who are looking to stay in touch with highly skilled employees who opt to stay home for a few years. It's just like cultivating college interns early on so they can be snagged when they graduate. As she says, "Why let 'em get away? ... Who better to grab than a mom who's dying to jump back into the workforce and show her stuff?"

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#### Success – in the meantime

Stay-at-home moms can position themselves for their next career step by considering the following suggestions from the book "Comeback Moms," by Monica Samuels and J.C. Conklin:

Want to test out a new career? Through Vocation Vacations.com, you can work with a mentor to learn about anything - whether it's being a chocolatier or a white-water-rafting outfitter.

Get involved with a volunteer activity that "gives you face time with business and community leaders."

Get in touch with teachers or programs at a local university to volunteer your help. The authors tell of a journalist-mom who advised the student newspaper and ended up a full-fledged professor. And a lawyer-mom who coached the mock trial team and taught a class, which gave her nice resumé fodder.

For more resources and tips to help stay-at-home parents re-enter the for-pay workplace, check out our blog at [www.newsday.com/workplace](http://www.newsday.com/workplace). Parents are invited to share their own advice and experiences.

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