

ROMANCING THE STONE

A chance meeting on a train led former barrister and mother-of-two, Diana Serle, to franchise her jewellery company, creating a unique business opportunity for other women too.

Alison Ledger reports

It takes guts to quit your job and take a complete U-turn in your career in search of a better lifestyle: it could all go horribly wrong. However, franchisor Diana Serle took the plunge in 2000, and the excitement in her voice during this interview was testament to the success she has created for herself and her franchisees.

After 10 years of working in criminal law, Diana left her profession with the desire of doing something completely different. She says: 'Both my children were grown up and were working overseas, and I wanted a new challenge, a new career and one where I'd also have time for ME for a change!

'I had visited and travelled in many

countries all over the world. I have always loved silver jewellery and by this time I had amassed quite a large collection of beautiful and exotic jewellery from my foreign adventures.' And so, after some careful consideration and research into the jewellery retail sector six years ago, Diana set up Silverdaze.

However, it wasn't until Diana met franchise consultant Michael

Way from Franchise Your Business on a train traveling to a franchise exhibition in Birmingham that Diana started to take actions to franchise her company. She says: 'It was just a stroke of luck that I met Michael and we talked from Coventry to Birmingham. He became my mentor and I followed his advice to the letter throughout the whole process of franchising Silverdaze.

'At first Michael was sceptical about my idea, but when I showed him the figures he was surprised and knew that we could franchise the concept.'

In May 2005 Silverdaze (UK) Ltd was formed. By September Diana had signed up her first franchisee and was ready to start



Diana Serle



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£9,800 incl VAT
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BUSINESS TYPE:
Jewellery retail

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a six-month pilot scheme. By the end of October three more franchisees had signed on the dotted line, including her daughter, and together they began preparing for the busy Christmas period.

Silverdaze jewellery is unique as it is sourced from all around the world:

some pieces are one-offs. Most of the products are hand-made and include semi-precious stones and mother of pearl, and styles are always changing. Current prices range from £3 to £250.

Franchisees mainly gain their sales through selling jewellery at parties, although one franchisee has started operating in a shopping centre and there is always the option to expand the business by taking on more staff. Diana says: 'The parties are a great way for busy women to shop in a stress-free environment where they can have a glass of wine and socialise with their friends, and the hostess receives jewellery to 10 per cent of the value made from sales.'

Craft fairs, offices, libraries, and health

clubs all serve as successful venues for enhancing profits too.

Unlike most franchises and businesses, Diana is adverse to hard selling techniques. She explains: 'We do not want people to feel pressured into buying when they come to parties. We encourage guests to try the jewellery on and wear it during the party. I think the jewellery sells itself.'

Diana is looking for potential franchisees that possess entrepreneurial spirit, and want a tried-and-tested business model they can follow. Diana says: 'The advantage of being a Silverdazer is that you can become a franchisee on a part-time basis. Many start off doing it alongside another job, and the opportunities are there to develop the business as much as you want.'

Diana plans to continue marketing the franchise and hopes to build the business as fast as she can, aiming to have Silverdazers all over the UK in five years time.

Meanwhile, Diana is flying out to India to source some more jewellery to expand her unique collection – not a bad life, huh? If you want a piece of Diana's success, then join this gem of a franchise and create some silver for yourself. ■