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How a startup flower biz bloomed

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Flowers. You knew that they were big business at Valentine's Day and [Mother's Day](#), but did you ever wonder about their ability to turn profits year-round?

A woman profiled in the *Washington Post* today has not only thought about it, but turned flowers into an entrepreneurial business that seems to be, ahem, in full financial bloom already. We're talking about **Sarah von Pollaro**, a 34-year-old Yale grad who founded a company called [Urban Petals](#) in 2004 and is looking to take it national in a big way. She throws flower-design parties for floral enthusiasts, decorates tables for business events around the Washington, D.C., area, and has a deal with Whole Foods to produce how-to videos and sell flower kits.

Her latest coup is an hour-long show called ***Flower Empowered***, set to air on the city's public TV station, WETA. Here's how writer Thomas Heath [described her](#):

Sarah von Pollaro is a hard-charging Washington entrepreneur who plans to do for flower arranging what Julia Child brought to French cooking and what [Martha Stewart](#) did for gracious living.

Sure, many people would like to be the next domestic queen, but here's a few numbers that suggest that this entrepreneur may have a green thumb, but she's not green at all about running a business.

- Von Pollaro started the business with \$500 in savings which she used to buy a website domain name and vases, and to incorporate as a limited liability corporation. She got a big break the following year when she supplied flowers for 300 tables for a company gala at a convention center at \$145 per table, pulling in more than \$40,000 before expenses for a single event.
- After word of her company spread through word of mouth she garnered \$300,000 in business by 2008, with profits that the writer estimated to be about half.
- The markup on flowers can be more than 500 percent.

What's striking about this startup's story though, is not necessarily the flowers as business, but the applications to other businesses.

Consider this: She stuck to flowers, but brought her knowledge into several different verticals (online products, in-store products, and face-to-face events), branding herself and gathering

word of mouth every step of the way, with write-ups in everything from *Southern Living* to Thrillist. Doing big corporate affairs had to have helped too.

She saved money by keeping things simple (she still works from an in-home studio and found that making identical arrangements rather than different ones saves money because she can buy in bulk from wholesalers.) And, finally, she has passion for flowers that is, apparently, palpable if you hear her.

For more on von Pollaro, check out the [full story in the Post here](#):

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