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## Theresa Cassidy's Passion Translates Into a Fruitful Freelance Career

By Julien R. Fielding  
The Daily Record

Theresa Cassidy never had a desire to do "her own thing." But then, in 2008, she got laid off, twice, leaving the writer, web designer and photographer with no other option than to go freelance and launch Catena Creations.

But even though her business was founded out of necessity, she couldn't be happier. "Everything that happened in '08 was a blessing in disguise," she said. "I just finished my first year in business, and I only made \$3,500 less (than I had at my previous job), and I worked a lot less."

At Catena Creations, Cassidy "connects print and Web communications into a cohesive marketing message." "Catena means 'chain' in Latin and that's what I do," she explained. "I take someone's print and web materials and connect them together. Not many people can do what I can do."

And she can do what she does because of her own extensive

background in both print and web media. Born in Fremont, Neb., Cassidy became interested in journalism because of her older sister. "She did the yearbook in high school, so I thought I would do the newspaper," she said.

After high school, she went to Wayne State College and majored in journalism and broadcasting. She put her skills to work at the *Fremont Tribune*, where she was the lifestyle reporter. Two years later, in 1985, she moved to Wichita Falls, Texas, so she could be the weekend writer at the



Theresa Cassidy took lemons and made a "lemonade career."

*Wichita Falls Times/Record News.* After another two years, she moved back to Nebraska, and got an editor position at the *Bellevue Leader*.

a new direction and went into marketing and public relations. Seven years later, she added Web design and management to her portfolio of skills. In 2001, she was hired by the University of Nebraska Medical Center as an online communications coordinator. Her duties included designing, writing and taking photos for the Public Affairs Department's more than 300 web pages. In addition, during her seven years at UNMC, she obtained grant and proposal writing experience.

When she left in 2007, she said that she

"did a lot of thinking." She knew that she enjoyed building web sites but didn't want to maintain them. "I also wanted to get back into photography," she added.

Next on her plate were two short-lived jobs – both lasted about six months – and some hard decisions about how she was going to earn a living in a very tight job market. The answer came from the most unusual of places. As she tells it, she was

watching an episode of *Tabitha's Salon Takeover* on Bravo TV, and she heard the host ask one of the salon owners "What is your passion?"

"I started thinking about that," Cassidy said. With a 14-year-old son at home, she knew that she wanted to be available for him, and that meant having a job that would allow her to set her own schedule. Her best option was to become self-employed, so, on Sept. 17, 2008, she incorporated Catena Creations. Because she needed health insurance, she joined the National Association for the Self-Employed, an organization that also offers a business development grant program.

Knowing that she needed some additional equipment, including a laptop and software to get everything up and running, she applied for a \$5,000 grant. "I thought because I was new, I might not get it," she said. Being optimistic, she submitted her application at the end of May, and to her

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*Women at Work:*  
A series about the women in our community and where they work, at a variety of jobs, avocations and volunteer positions.

surprise, she was awarded the grant. "I was thrilled and honored to receive it," she said.

Being self-employed has its advantages and disadvantages, Cassidy said. Two of the greatest advantages are setting her own schedule and spending more time with her son.

"I'm a night owl and do my best thinking at night," she said. "I actually get more done in four hours than I used to in eight, because there are fewer distractions. The greatest thing about this is that I was home with my son during the summer. I could go to his sports events or take him to the pool. It's so great to be there for him."

The biggest challenge, she said, is keeping her name "out there."

"I joined the Chamber last spring and have taken advantage of that," she said. "It's a great way to meet people, and they offer great classes and seminars. I just started a Facebook page, and I belong to the Omaha Camera Club, Habitat for Humanity, and am a lifetime member of Weight Watchers. It's important to find a group of people who support you and keep

you going. My rule is that every day I have to leave the house at least once so I can connect with people. It's very easy to become isolated."

Working from home presents other challenges, too, such as trying to keep abreast of current technologies and trends. She accomplishes this by subscribing to various newsletters.

"There's a lot of technology out there, and you have to know how to use what's producing the most value for you. But no one needs to use every tool. A lot of it is just so time consuming."

Another challenge is learning to think about money in a completely different way. "You have to be disciplined," she said. "You have to keep records and notes and put aside money for a rainy day. I've had to change my mind set about how to use cash and credit." She has also had to change how she thinks about work. "There are periods when I work frantically and then times when there isn't much work. I have had to learn to take advantages of those 'down' times and not feel as if I was

wasting my time," she said.

Starting your own business isn't always an easy choice, but Cassidy said she's glad she did it. "I could have gone on unemployment, but I pulled myself up," she said. "And I'm contributing to the economy. There will always be plenty of naysayers who don't like it when you take a risk, and a lot will try to talk you out of it, but you always learn when you try; you never know if you don't. There is something you can learn in anything, and for me, I finally know what I want to be when I grow up! There are a lot of people like me who got out of the business world because they didn't like it, and are now very happy."

If a person decides to take the leap, though, Cassidy has some advice for him or her: "I ended up doing this by accident. If you have some time, take a year to lay the groundwork, so when you are ready to go, you have a safety net. Don't be afraid to start – go for it." For more information, go to [www.catenacreations.com](http://www.catenacreations.com) or call her at 541-5005.