

For Immediate Release
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SMALL OFFICE/HOME OFFICE SUCCESS STORY

After fifteen years of managing major start-up projects for multi-national firms in the financial services and publishing industries, Margot Tohn decided to create and start up a project of her own making. Calling on her experience of managing large and complex projects, creating strong brands, overseeing budgets, and developing marketing campaigns, she dove head first into a traditionally opaque and male-dominated industry....

THE WORLD OF PARKING GARAGES

Tuning out all the naysayers, Tohn enmeshed herself in the topic for well over a year and went on to write and successfully publish **Park It! NYC** - a Zagat-esque guide to the 1,090 off-street garages and open lots in Manhattan.

She took to the streets, personally visited every garage and collected information that had never been aggregated and analyzed. The result is a hands-on, reliable and comprehensive guide to parking in a city notorious for being difficult to find parking.

The book contains a wealth of information from signage visibility, clearance heights and discounts, to hours of operation and number of spaces in an integrated design that shows readers at a glance all the information they need to know to find the best parking space nearest to their destination and within their price range.

In an effort to secure distribution, Tohn took to the streets again visiting bookstores and pitching the product to buyers. Very quickly, Barnes & Noble as well as nine independent bookstores in the NY-metro area came on board. As soon as the book hit the shelves, Tohn was able to pay her day-to-day expenses from revenues. Within three months she had placed the book in an additional 20 retail stores including museum gift shops, high-end fashion stores and stationery retailers.

The 2nd Edition, published October 2007, will be carried by all the major booksellers, numerous retailers, as well as B&N.com and Amazon.com. A distributor has contracted with Tohn to handle all her sales and shipping to

booksellers and three commission sales reps are also on board to get the book into specialty stores.

Word of mouth and high-profile features in the *New York Times* and *AAA-NY*, enabled Tohn to market her services beyond traditional bookstore venues. "Once I had the content and data in a usable format," says Tohn, "it afforded me different opportunities to reconfigure the application of that data to different business sectors."

Knowing that some consumers just want to find the nearest garage and are not concerned with cost, she produced a laminated foldout map of all the garages and lots, that fits conveniently in a glove compartment or car door pocket.

Tohn also produces Custom Editions for companies looking for a unique and creative client gift or promotional item for approximately \$15. Printed with the company's logo and contact information on the cover, the real estate brokers, financial advisors, and other small businesses that she supplies see the Custom Edition as a way of reinforcing their company's brand as innovative and resourceful.

Tohn is now being pursued by several firms in the real estate and investment sectors looking for advice and consulting services related to the parking garage industry on matters ranging from marketing and acquisition to general trends. A real estate developer and owner has approached her about partnering on a consumer oriented Web site and she's been hired by other self-published authors to advise and assist them about the publishing and distribution process. She is also working with a real estate firm to develop an electronic delivery of the data.

Another outlet Tohn found useful is exhibiting at year-end gift shows sponsored by charitable organizations. A percentage of proceeds from sales at these shows is donated back to the host-charity so there is an additional incentive for attendees to make purchases. The word of mouth and exposure generated from the shows coupled with the relatively low vendor costs have made them staples in Tohn's non-traditional bookstore sales outreach.

Working alone at home does have its challenges. To fend off isolation and to keep her business sense in tune with the marketplace, Tohn meets regularly with a small group of women who are all running one or more businesses. They meet to share ideas and resources on topics such as outsourcing, branding, using distributors, finding interns, working with retailers, marketing strategies, and hiring sales reps. The meeting is loosely structured around one theme that is relevant to the majority of the group and other issues are selected for group discussion.

“The day after our first meeting I was prompted by the group to call a major company and inquire about a possible distribution deal. Within 3 weeks there was an offer on the table and we are currently in discussions.”

Tohn certainly faced challenges along the way. Drowning in and editing data for eight months, constantly having to explain what she was doing to pretty much everyone, and finding a printer to take her seriously were all reasons to give up. But once the book was completed the response was so positive, she knew she had a winning idea. The challenges she faces now are broadening the sales channels, learning to bring on help for market research, and finding new ways to deliver the valuable and much-needed data she owns.