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## New program aims to help women business owners reach, cross the elusive \$1M milestone

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[Susan Brooks](#), co-founder and former owner of Tempe-based Cookies From Home, is one of a very small percentage of women in this country who took her company from a startup to a multimillion-dollar operation — and she's determined to make that number grow through her "Million Dollar BreakThrough" program.

According to the nonprofit research institute Center for Women's Business Research, women in the U.S. own or have a stake in more 10 million firms, but fewer than 3 percent of those women-owned businesses grow to generate \$1 million or more.



Susan Brooks, high performance coach, Business Solutions for Women Business Owners

"That's just not good enough," Brooks said. "We have plenty of women who are innovative and creative, but something happens between the startup and that \$1 million mark. When we made our first million I was absolutely exhilarated, but I was also exhausted. For companies that are in the growth spurt or figuring out how to grow, there are not a lot of places that can serve in that way."

Brooks said that when she first came to the Valley more than 30 years ago, business owner groups were created by and for men, so the challenges facing women entrepreneurs went unanswered.

"Sometimes I would be the only woman in these meetings," she said. "I made cookies, so they didn't take me seriously. Then I made my first million and they became my customers."

Based on her struggles to defy the odds and grow her business into a multimillion-dollar corporation, Brooks has launched her "Million Dollar BreakThrough" program through the Phoenix chapter of the National Association of Women Business Owners, which she co-founded. The program is for women business owners at the \$250,000 level and above who are looking to cross the \$1 million mark.

The "Million Dollar BreakThrough" program aims to fill the gap between resources that help startups and those that assist in selling successful companies.

Brooks' 12-month program offers access, connections, coaching, exclusive workshops and activities, professionally facilitated small "Mastermind" groups, receptions with sponsors and NAWBO board of directors, and a one-day retreat. The first six months focus on evaluating costs and expenses in order to strengthen a company's financial foundation.

Brooks said she hopes the program, which needs 30-40 participants to get fully off the ground, will be adopted by other NAWBO groups across the country. She also is asking women business owners in the Valley who have crossed the \$1 million threshold to not only offer their expertise, but also contribute \$1,000 each to partially fund the program, which is also supported by an almost \$2,000 fee for participants.

"This program fits with our mission to serve women in all stages of business, and we feel very fortunate to be able to offer this in the Phoenix market," stated Phaedra Earhart, NAWBO Phoenix president, in a press release.

Even before launching her new program, Brooks was coaching other women business owners who were on the brink of making it big — an effort that accelerated when she sold Cookies From Home seven years ago.

"I decided to take my 30 years in the trenches and use it to move that needle from 3 percent and help those women business owners who have momentum, but they don't know how to grow their products," she said.

As Brooks discovered first-hand, moving a business past the \$1 million mark requires having clear eyes and making tough choices. She recalled that when her company was in its fourth year, an attorney told her it was time to make the business profitable.

"I put up a time clock and three people walked out," Brooks said. "They didn't like the structure; they liked the family feeling, the mission, the cookies, the fun, but when it came to running the business where I had to be accountable for every dollar, it wasn't OK that people were late. It wasn't OK that other employees were working longer."

Brooks realizes that the women her course aims to help will rightly say they simply don't have the time to take part in the program. Brooks counters that with just a three-and-a-half-hour monthly commitment, they can't afford not to take part.

"Women are good multitaskers," she said. "Sometimes that's our downfall because we really think we can do it all — and we can't. I call that the Lone Ranger syndrome."

She recalled working around the clock with her husband Barry to run Cookies From Home while raising two children.

"If I could have done it differently, I would have," Brooks said. "I know these women are struggling and they don't have a life and they're not making as much money as they could be. I believe this program can give them back their life."

For information on "Million Dollar BreakThrough," visit [milliondollarbreakthroughblog.wordpress.com](http://milliondollarbreakthroughblog.wordpress.com).