

# the three tomatoes

The NYC Insiders Guide for women who aren't kids

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## Liz Hamburg

Liz Hamburg is a "serial entrepreneur" with extensive experience as an entrepreneur, angel investor and mentor to entrepreneurs and small businesses. She is the founder and President of [Upstart Ventures](#), where she has consulted to and incubated many start-ups including her latest venture, [ApplyWise](#), an online college admissions counseling company.

She is the co-host on WOR radio (WOR 710AM) of "New York Uncovered" and "Launchpad". She also blogs about small business for the [Huffington Post](#). She is New York's SBA Small Business Journalist of the Year.

Liz was one of the founding managers and Director of the Board of [Vimpel Communications](#) (NYSE:VIP), the leading cellular company in Russia. She has launched new products for [Reuters Tokyo](#) and [Fuji-sankei Communications](#), where she worked on the first international television home shopping show and played a leading role in the introduction of [Fuji's Nintendo game software](#) into the U.S.

Liz received an MBA from Northwestern's Kellogg Graduate School of Management and a B.A. from Brown University. She is a Director of the

## The Entrepreneur's Corner with Liz Hamburg

Advice for women who own their businesses, or would like to. It's never too late for a second or third act.

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"I am not falling apart. I am unfolding." Those were the words of Deborah Olivo after she escaped from a very public divorce and was laid off from her corporate job. She was single and 53 at the time.

In addition to her corporate job, Deborah had been trained as a Neuromuscular Therapist and had been seeing clients on the side for over 10 years. When she needed something to sanitize and refresh her treatment rooms and couldn't find anything without harsh chemicals and fake smells, she did lots of research, mixed up her own concoction of environmentally friendly natural oils and put it in a spray bottle. As she says, ten years ago, "green was just a color, not a lifestyle."

For years, she used the spray and clients would ask her where she got it and how they could get hold of it. After ten years of using the spray with her patients, she was "at a cross road in my life. Everything was changing. The economy had pushed me out of my job. Personally, things were evolving." One of her best friends said "Just do it." So, [VidaAire](#) was born.

But, she still lacked the confidence to think that anyone beyond her patients would be interested. "I didn't think that anyone would want my little bottle of spray. I didn't think there was any value in it outside the realm of my practice." She reached out to her community for help and found some great resources in her home state of New Jersey. One of the most important was the New Jersey Women's Business Center (recently renamed The Women's Center for Entrepreneurship Corp.) The [NJ Women's Business Center](#) "helped me to see that there was a real demand for it."

The Women's Center worked with the [New Jersey Micro Credit Business Program](#) to help her get a \$5,000 microloan which was enough to launch her business. She was able to repay it quickly because "monthly payments were something like \$89 a month."

Two of the most important things that entrepreneurs need are access to capital and mentors. Deborah got both: the Women's Business Center introduced her to several mentors including Mary Repke another successful New Jersey entrepreneur who launched Coakley Bags.

Like so many entrepreneurs, Deborah started out with a home-based business, but expanded quickly. At first, she was making the spray in her mother's kitchen, but today she has expanded and is working together with a chemist from NJ Institute of Technology in Newark.

Her mentors encouraged her to expand the product use beyond her original concept. Now customers are using it as a hand sanitizer and as a way to protect themselves against air-borne germs. "I started using it on the plane around the time that the swine flu was taking over. I would spray it on my plane seat, my neighbors started buying it from me right off the plane." It's also striking a nerve among people dealing with the latest epidemic of bedbugs! Lemongrass is what's used in citronella which is a natural repellent. Bed bugs also don't like the smell of tea tree oil. "Those of the two main components of this formulation." So people are also starting to spray it on clothing or even sheets. Now, they are even using it to prevent head lice.

One of her big breakthroughs was distribution in Whole Foods. "Everything is in the timing", Deborah says. "I was not knowledgeable about manufacturing,

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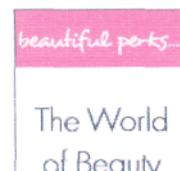
## Launchpad

Launchpad is heard live every Monday at 12:40 pm. on WOR News Talk Radio 710 AM.

"Serial entrepreneur" Liz Hamburg and her mother Joan Hamburg bring you inspiring stories from small business owners and entrepreneurs. Launchpad also offers expert advice on how to finance your business, how to market it, how to deal with employees, health insurance and lots of other important topics. Winner 2009 New York SBA Small Business Journalist of the Year.

Listen live on Mondays at 12:40 PM E.S.T., or [listen on demand](#)

Liz Hamburg's Upcoming Appearances



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 Panel of the Columbia  
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[Fitz](#) Entrepreneur  
 Initiative Fund. She is a  
 frequent lecturer on topics  
 concerning entrepreneurs  
 and women-owned  
 businesses.

distribution, hitting the pavement and going into retail venues." But, she had guts. "I walked right into Whole Foods and I went into the department where I thought would be best. I spoke to a team leader in charge of the regional office. I got home at 5:30 on a Friday and decided to call. The man picks up the phone. I tell him what I've done and what VidaAire can do." He told her to send in samples. Within a couple of weeks, he gave me a call and said, "ok, you're in". Now VidaAire is in 5 Whole Foods in NJ. So far, [Share](#) re-orders have been coming in. It is also in 50 stores around the country.

Deborah and I met at the [Entrepreneur Expose](#) in Basking Ridge NJ. It was a wonderful conference for women entrepreneurs in New Jersey with a day of seminars, a "Sharkette Tank" where women were pitching their businesses to potential investors and even an opportunity to get in front of buyers at department stores and agents representing QVC. A great opportunity for entrepreneurs to network and learn from other successful women entrepreneurs.

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