

# Queen of her domain

*With a bit of know-how and a lot of backbone, an ageless tech-savvy entrepreneur shuns retirement*



Felicity Wood

**A**t an age when many women are retiring or babysitting the grandkids, Felicity Wood has reinvented herself as a dot-com entrepreneur in an environment traditionally the domain of the young and tech-savvy.

Seven years ago, Felicity was looking for alternatives to relieving her chronic back pain. She identified a gap in the market for products to combat back pain, and started the online resource badbacks.com.au. This site offers products, objective specialist information and research from healthcare professionals – both traditional and holistic.

What started in her daughter's vacated bedroom is now the number one site for back pain relief in Australia. Felicity has now expanded operations with Melbourne and Sydney retail outlets, and the recent launch of the US site, badbackstore.com. At the age of 59, Felicity has embraced the possibilities of online sales with a gusto and fearlessness more typical of a twenty or thirty-something entrepreneur.

"For years I'd wanted to start my own business, but could not come up with the elusive idea until the advent of online shopping. I then came up with the idea for 'bad backs' and the Internet seemed the perfect vehicle," states Felicity. "I had little or no prior experience in the health industry or e-commerce, but was pretty good at touch typing and marketing skills. I am continually excited by new technological developments, particularly those that work towards simplifying and enhancing online shopping and access of information."

"I've always really enjoyed my working life.

I spent more than 25 years as a 'suit' in the crazy world of advertising, followed by consulting work," recalls Felicity. "I was not always an overly confident person, but in recent years I have developed better people skills, better business and networking skills and the patience to be persistent in resolving issues. 'Can't do' is not in my vocabulary."

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While many of her friends have retired, Felicity has no intention of slowing down, despite protestations from her husband. "My husband, a former CEO in the advertising industry, has worked long hours for most of his life. However, he is now in semi-retirement, and it's he who is calling me at the office and asking when I'm coming home", laughs Felicity. "And my adult daughters warn friends not to ask about the business, because my enthusiasm borders on non-stop verbal diarrhoea."

Three years ago Jonathan Hulme joined badbacks.com.au as director and much younger business partner. Jonathan brings complementary skills and experience in the medical device

industry of international manufacturing, distribution and sales.

"Most of my long-time friends and colleagues discouraged me from entering into a partnership at this stage of my life. And I certainly frustrated Jonathan with my hesitation to make that partnership decision. However, with similar business ethics, and complementary skills and personalities, he has made an enormous contribution to our annual growth, and I highly value his counsel."

Badbacks.com.au has now grown to a team of 8, with all the staff considerably younger than Felicity. "I feel incredibly energised by them and value their own unique contributions to the business. I do have high expectations for my team, and they rarely fail to deliver. They do however, enjoy ribbing me with the generational language difference", laughs Felicity.

"Starting my first business at 52 was more difficult than I envisaged. Without the passion, persistence and a super-supportive family, I doubt that I could have weathered the storms. My first website seems so archaic now, and the rate of change and improvements accelerates each year. It seems more realistic to me to only plan for the next one to two years, since the possibilities five years forward are yet to evolve. And when will I retire? - probably when the body, rather than the mind gives up".

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Felicity Wood is managing director of [www.badbacks.com.au](http://www.badbacks.com.au), Australia's number one online destination for back pain relief resources and products.