

WMB presents V.I. Businesswoman

fantastic and influential

businesswomen of 2008

from across the globe.

## » V.I.B. businesswoman

V.I. Businesswoman  
**HOT**  
**FEATURE**



# Julia Ross RECRUITING

Julia Ross has to be one of the most recognisable businesswomen in Australia. The blonde beauty is not only distinctive in appearance but she has experienced a formidable amount of success for a little girl who came from a middle class family in England. To date Julia is most famous for her recruitment company 'Julia Ross' becoming the only female-owned business and largest sole-owner business ever to list on the Australian Stock Exchange in 2000.

» For more on Julia go to page 52

## BEENY THERE, DONE THAT WEBSITE

We've all turned into a bunch of penny pinchers forgoing turning on the heat for another month in order to smack the recession fearlessly in the face! Take that!! So the idea of a property website that could protect the value of our property in this climate while still making lower-priced property available to first time buyers seems too good to be true? Yes but maybe not! Anyone who is already on the property ladder or has been swotting up on getting on one will know the pain and misery it can cause when a deal falls through. So TV Presenter Sarah Beeny may have come up with a solution. Sarah who is known for not mincing her words when doling out advice to amateur developers on the Channel 4 series Property Ladder has ventured from her on-screen life to the online world. She's created Completingchains.com. Basically, property chains are the way in which most properties are bought and sold. With no chains the market has become stagnant. Completingchains.com captures all the details about the property one is selling and the type of property they want to buy. It then matches these people with the properties and creates chains amongst them. People can actually start moving. Hip hip hooray for Sarah!!

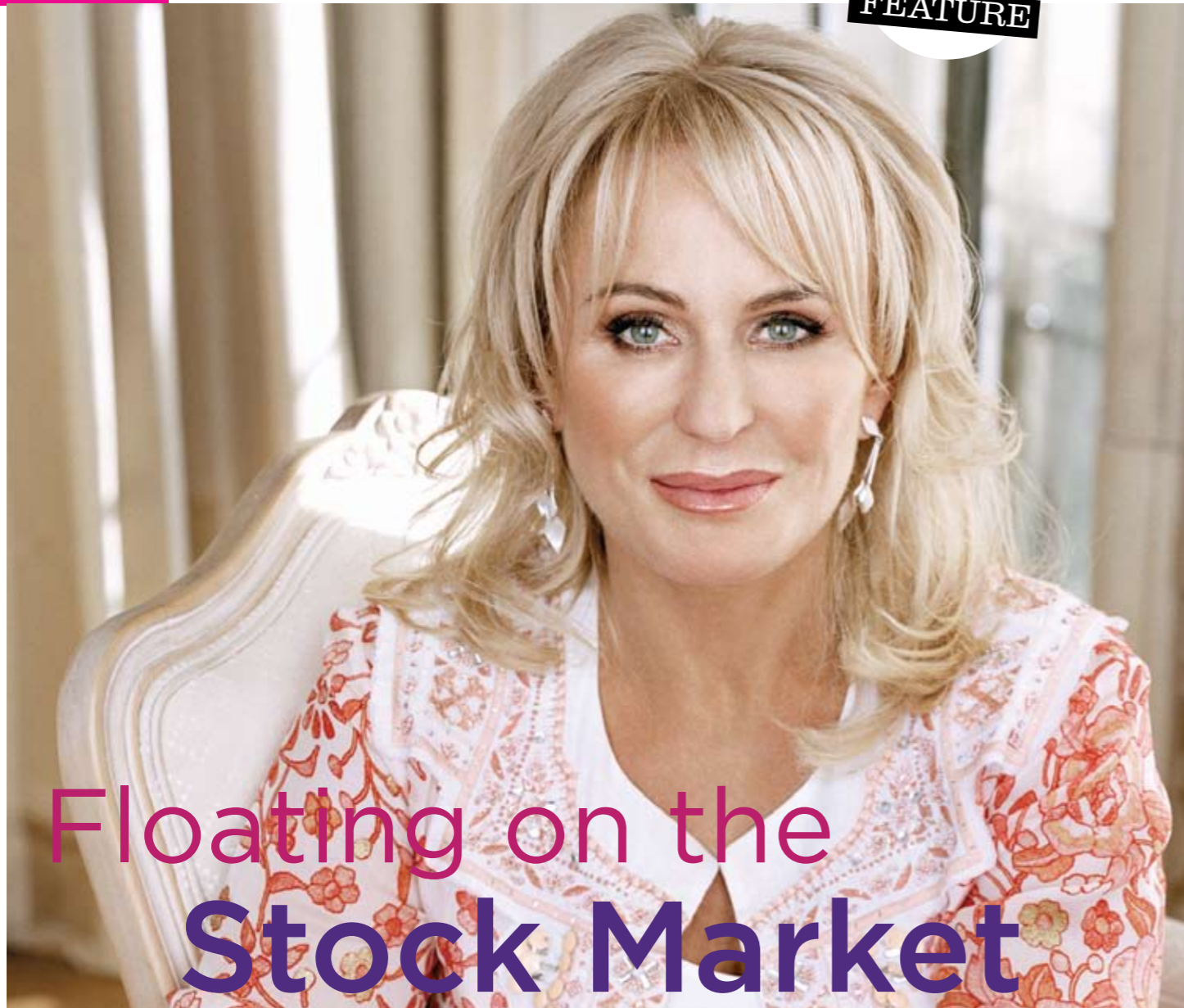
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## Floating on the Stock Market

WORDS: LIV MORGAN

Julia Ross recruitment has evolved to become Ross Human Directions over the years and is no longer just a recruitment agency. In Julia's words it's a 'holistic people provider' answering all the employer's needs throughout an employee's

lifecycle. With an annual turnover of over \$400 million, offices in every city in Australia and in Dublin, London, Edinburgh, New Zealand, Singapore and Hong Kong, it's safe to say Julia is surfing a golden wave.

Eight years on from that stock market milestone you would think that Julia would have settled into

her new wealthy environs. Not so, in fact Julia is uneasy speaking of her wealth and describes her relationship with money as "disconnected." "It's not really me. I've never done anything for the money and people say 'that's okay for you to say now' but I don't feel like that. People saying that I'm the most successful

self-made woman is great but it's the whole relationship back to money and being the woman that earned x, y and z. It sort of trivialises what your life has been about!"

**"You have to keep reinventing your organisation to keep great people. If you stand still you just can't keep the best people with you."**

Far from the affluence she can experience now, growing up as the youngest of eight in the North of England was "tough". When you're growing up in that environment Julia says it's natural to aspire to making life better. "I lived in a sort of house that you scrape the ice off the inside of the windows. We huddled around the fire at night dreaming about how we were going to make life better when we grew up. It was a desire from an early age. So I always did want to be and I did always feel I would be something big. I sort of convinced myself somehow!!"

It was her brothers' influence that first started Julia off in the male dominated construction industry. As the youngest she would sit with her brothers talking, about what they would be when they grew up, while her older sisters helped with the cooking. Soon after joining the Taylor Woodrow Group Julia progressed to a senior level position and was listed for the Business Woman of the Year Awards presented by The Times and Veuve Clicquot at the young age of 21. Despite making headway she found the industry debilitating. "It was a boy's industry and eventually I got sick of trying to make progress. It was crushing."

Gender has consistently been a factor in Julia's business life. Although comfortable in her skin now there have been times when she's gone out of her way to lose the burden of being stereotyped; When she listed

on the Stock Exchange she dyed her hair brown. "I have long blonde hair and typically you get very stereotyped like that. It was important to me that the float was a success so I felt like if I cut my hair a bit shorter into a bob and became a brunette people would take me a bit more seriously." She is fascinated by how she is still expected to play the 'female part' regularly.

Julia's first taste of recruitment was in the UK with an international group that offered her the opportunity to manage their operations in Asia, Australia and New Zealand. Twenty odd years later and she's still enjoying life and business down under. The progression from being an employee to an employer and founder of her own company wasn't a calculated step. "I had an argument with my boss and being the impulsive person that I am I put my keys on the table and told him what to do with his job. At the time I was living in the company house and driving the company car so I was in quite a lot of difficulty having made that rash decision. So I didn't go into business with any great masterplan I just wanted to earn some money and I thought I could do it."

Financially unstable, Julia had no other choice but to sell all her possessions. This raised enough to rent a little office, a couple of phones and a few employees. Julia Ross Recruitment was established in 1988. After that things just evolved as time went on. "My second branch was opened because I thought one of my people had grown to a level where I had to give her more to do. So I went from there. You have to keep reinventing your organisation to keep great people. If you stand still you just can't keep the best people with you."

The original brand, Julia Ross, has since transformed from a single service-line business into an all-encompassing human resources service, Ross Human Directions. Now the company provides professional, specialist, executive and IT recruitment alongside HR consulting services such as outsourcing, payroll services and managed training services. The acquisition of Spherion in Asia Pacific — a technology, human resource outsourcing and top-tier recruitment company — doubled the company's revenue to approximately \$350 million per year in 2004.

**Status:** Single with a fantastic 19yr old son.

**Personality traits:** I'm not the hard businesswoman, I'm quite a soft individual. I'm a simple person out of work; I have friends over and I cook dinner and I walk my dog.

**Mentor:** I read a lot about Queen Elizabeth I. I'm fascinated by her strength of character against all odds; A female ruling a man's world. But I don't really have a business mentor, most of them don't have the same values as me.

**Something nobody knows:** I can only put a little bit of water in the bath! I think too much about the energy and the cost of hot water which is quite bizarre.

**Motto:** Be true to yourself. Life's always tough, there's lots of challenges and I think being able to sit back and say 'I did the right thing' is important.

**"I didn't go into business with any great masterplan. I just wanted to earn some money and I thought I could do it."**

By far the Spherion deal was the most notable of its kind for Ross Human Directions. But in October 2007, Aurion, a leading Australian developer of Human Resources Management software, was acquired. Now Julia feels like she has all the components to build her empire. "We're always trying to expand the company but our prime push at the



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moment is to take all services to all markets. We'd like to do this in the next 12 months but with the climate as it is we have to be sensible and achieve what we can." She adds that she has no fears for her Dublin office in the downturn. "We've quite a diverse group in quite diverse countries so even though Ireland might be having a tough time, we'd hope our Asian business and others are still doing well."

"People saying that I'm the most successful self-made woman is great but it's the whole relationship back to money and being the woman that earned x, y and z. It sort of trivialises what your life has been about!"

For now Julia says she has no intention of retiring. Eight years on from her stock exchange moment and she still finds it strange being recognised. "It's a peculiar thing that people know who I am but I don't know who they are. It's sort of an unfair advantage!" Staying out of the limelight is important for the businesswoman who believes you should always be true to yourself. "I used to have a Bentley but I didn't like it. You aspire to things all your life and I aspired to owning a Bentley. Then I bought one and I thought it was really obscene. I felt ashamed to be seen in it. I felt I had gone too far. I just didn't feel comfortable being seen in an extremely flashy car. It wasn't who I am." The little girl who started off in humble beginnings has gone full circle and is finding herself again.