

## **Halebury blog: A diverse supplier base is no longer an option - it is a business imperative**



**"A diverse supplier base is no longer an option - it is a business imperative."**

This was one of the many themes arising out of last week's WEConnect International's annual conference for women-owned businesses, female entrepreneurs and global corporates looking to diversify their supply chain.

This year, I was lucky enough to join the SME Development Programme for Europe the day before the conference. This was a unique, practitioner-led, designed and delivered initiative with multinational corporations such as RBS, Accenture, IBM, GSK, Coca-Cola and Intel presenting on topics from negotiation, social media, marketing, finance, six sigma and strategy. As a small business, there is always a challenge around training. How do you find something which is the right mix of strategic and practical, something "bite-sized" that you can take back to the business and apply straight away? This programme really worked, the content was material the corporate members used in their business and were happy to share and their enthusiasm for their subjects was infectious. A brilliant initiative and hope to see this continue to develop and be of benefit to women-owned businesses for some time to come.

At the conference itself, the keynote speaker was Laura Tenison, Founder and MD of JoJo Maman Bebe. Laura gave a witty and humble account of how she built up JoJo Maman Bebe with initial capital of just £50K to a business with £43 million turnover, 500 staff and 60 stores. She highlighted the need for all businesses to innovate: to ensure innovation in design; work practices, marketing strategies and family life. A firm believer in good values equalling good business, a lot of her messages resonated with us at Halebury. It is also good to know that at heart, Laura still feels like

the young girl starting up her business from the bedroom of a shared house she lived in. Never forget your roots!

Heather White delivered the next session on Smarter Networking. What shone through from both Heather's session, Laura's keynote speech and the SME Development Programme the day before was how key social media now is when it comes to building your brand and your business. Having a social media strategy, using LinkedIn, Twitter and blogging and producing original content is of paramount importance in today's business world. Hence my first foray into the world of blogging (please be gentle).....

The afternoon session involved a series of corporate-led discussion zones on access to finance, differentiating your firm, stakeholders v procurement and what multinational corporations expect of an SME. In particular, I enjoyed my session on differentiating your business led by Nicky Major of Ernst & Young reminding me of the most important thing which is sometimes forgotten – be concise and differentiate your business in the first sentence. So, Halebury is a team of senior in-house lawyers who work with clients on a flexible, cost effective basis....did that do it?

Halebury's very own Denise Nurse led one of the three workshops for the afternoon, on Collaborating for Success: How to succeed at working with others. In this session Denise and the audience discussed the importance of collaboration, the benefits and the results, the challenges and how at Halebury, we created an entirely new business model to ensure successful collaboration between clients and employees. Collaboration, along with innovation, a key conference theme.

This was an incredibly successful two days of connecting women-owned business and female entrepreneurs with global and national corporations. Supplier diversity, working with women-owned businesses and female entrepreneurs is high on the agenda for corporates who recognise the benefits widening access to their supply chains. And long may it continue.

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