

Ladies who launch!

'My business is built on people having fun on the dance floor'

Nikki Spencer, 55, from Hither Green, south-east London, was looking for somewhere to go dancing when she decided to put on a night of her own.

Standing at the back of the stage looking out at a sea of happy faces is the best feeling in the world. The venue is filled with people celebrating birthdays and hen dos. They're having the time of their lives – and all because I had an idea.

Back in the 1970s, I was often the first one on the dance floor, and years later, after having my children, I still wanted to go out and have a good time without feeling like I was gate-crashing one of their parties! I realised young people had their pick of the clubs in town, but for forty and fiftysomething women like me, there was nothing.

One evening, I was listening to the radio when *Haven't Stopped Dancing Yet*, the 1977 Gonzalez hit, came on and the idea of putting on my own 1970s

disco night started to take hold. As a single parent with two teenage girls, and not much money to spare from my job as a writing tutor, I knew I'd have to launch it on a shoestring.

But when I told my brother, who owns his own business, he loved the idea so much, he agreed to lend me the £500 I needed for the deposit for an event space and a website.

Next, I needed to find a venue. When I picked my 13-year-old daughter up from a party at a ballroom in Greenwich overlooking the Thames, I fell in love with it. It was a grand room with a chandelier – huge for a first event, but the events manager agreed to give me a good deal. They'd run the bar and provide bar staff while I organised everything else. I persuaded

a friend to DJ for the night, enlisted my children's dance teacher to lead some routines, and a designer mate made some flyers, saving me around £200.

The local paper also agreed to run a story about my idea and, when the article was published, the phone didn't stop ringing.

Still, in the lead-up to the event, the nerves kicked in and I was terrified of losing money. But 250 people filed through the door, and the party took off.

The night was a huge success. I paid my

brother back and ploughed the rest of the money into my next event, followed by another and another. It hasn't all been plain sailing. At one do, the DJ got stuck in traffic! Luckily, the sound engineer had a good selection of CDs that we played until he arrived with his vinyl.

These days, I run events at venues around the UK for around 400-800 people. Putting on a quality night can cost anything from £1,000 to £5,000. I sell tickets for £10 to £15 and, thankfully, I've nearly always managed to cover the costs and make a profit. I also give 10% of ticket sales to Cancer Research.

Some nights feel pretty emotional. A group of women once came along to dance in memory of their friend who'd died of cancer. I cherish the fact that I can help people mark those moments, as sometimes, all you can do is dance.' haventstoppeddancingyet.co.uk

NIKKI'S BUSINESS TIPS

- Network! I know other local business owners and we help each other out.
- The personal touch is vital. We greet people as they arrive and say goodbye as they leave.
- Remember teamwork. I have a fab team of DJs, dancers and tech support.



MC Nikki loves seeing everyone having a good time at her events



Dancing is what it's all about