Tamara Littleton taught herself to code and started her successful social media agency long before the days of Facebook. Now she supports and inspires other women.

Forward facing: Tamara Littleton mentors female entrepreneurs

are less likely than men to know other entrepreneurs or to have access to sponsors, mentors or professional support networks. Even though 11 per cent of women surveyed highlighted the importance of networking as a business skill, compared with 21 per cent of men, only 30 per cent of women said they knew an entrepreneur, versus 38 per cent for men.

Littleton discovered that networks started opening up only once her business was turning over £1 million — "That’s when the help comes." She joined The Supper Club, a members’ club for founders and chief executives. “It’s a group of around 500 entrepreneurs and it’s incredibly peer support — sharing successes and failures, helping each other,” she says. Mentors who open up their little black books and can solve your problem with a phone number “are just gold dust”, says Littleton, “and that’s what you don’t have when learning from scratch. Having a trusted network makes you move faster.”

With DWN, she has been able to forge these lasting connections on a global scale. “I find that really great. I met in Singapore last year and we’ve stayed in contact,” she says. Ingrid Devin, DWN’s global leader, believes a lack of mentors can be a barrier to growing a business because “you need a strong team, and personal and business mentors play a critical role in feedback and guidance.”

Connecting with other female entrepreneurs is vital in a number of ways, says Devin, such as access to a community of peers who understand the challenges, and advice and support from credible experts. Meeting those further ahead in terms of scale is crucial too. “As one member said, ‘I have £1 million in revenue but I want to get to £5 million so I need to meet with others who are at £5 million and find out how they did it’.”

Social media research conducted by social intelligence agency Storyful found that popular events for female entrepreneurs included informational and networking sessions. The Storyful report, commissioned by Dell in February, also found that social media posts about awards ceremonies, personal milestones and accomplishments were often an inspiration, and that regional stories resonated online, amplified by local communities and support groups.

“Having the right tools is key too,” says Rachel Wilkins, Dell UK’s marketing director. “From laptops to workstations to award-winning monitors — before even getting into servers and storage solutions — Dell is there for every business owner,” she says. “We have tech advisers available on chat or on the phone for advice on products but also offer 24-hour aftercare so your business doesn’t stop running.”

Support can help you to focus on what you do best

Enterprise Nation is a UK-wide network of small businesses. Its founder Emma Jones says: "Starting and growing a business can be tough. So it’s vital to surround yourself with support. This could be psychological scaffolding from a partner or spouse on challenging days, expert advice from specialists such as accountants or marketing professionals or peer support from fellow founders. "You can build this network by attending events and through gathering a group of online supporters. The ideal scenario is that your support group includes cementers — who better to cheer you on than the community that buys from you? "Women, by nature, tend to be multi-taskers, which is a great asset when running a business but can be a limiting factor as you are growing. “Focus on what you do best and outsource the rest. This is where a strong support network comes into its own.”