

A FIGHTING CHANCE

How Hasina Rahman used her passion for martial arts to start her own business, with the aim of empowering other women

Throughout her teens, Hasina Rahman was bullied. Her secondary-school experience wasn't the best time of her life, but it did lead to her discovering karate at the age of 15. Fast forward to now and she's a successful businesswoman, running Pink Diamond Martial Arts in Luton, to empower like-minded women with self-defence skills, improved fitness and, most importantly, confidence.

'I had quite a tough childhood and I completely lost my self-belief,' Hasina says. 'Martial arts brought me back to life.' After achieving a black belt in karate, she went on to do the same in kickboxing, before turning to teaching Muay Thai and eventually, at 31, becoming a qualified Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) coach. Her aim? To open her own women-only combat club.

'It's something I realised the community really needed,' she says. 'I'd grown up practising martial arts and I wanted to bring it to my local area because

FINDING HER USP

Hasina built a sisterhood of women looking to build confidence through martial arts, but it wasn't until she focused on her own skills and passions that her business truly took off.



I know how much of a positive impact it had on me.'

But starting her own business, especially as a woman, wasn't without its challenges. 'Martial arts is such a male-dominated sport and, as someone who wears a hijab, I don't look like a typical combat sports instructor,' Hasina says. 'The reaction I'd get would be: "Well, you don't look like a martial artist," and I'd just think, "How is a martial artist supposed to look?"'

As a new mum embarking on a business journey that centred on herself and her passions, Hasina admits it was a rocky start. At first, she tried to establish Pink Diamond as an all-round fitness studio, but soon found it wasn't drawing in many clients. She realised that she needed to put her specific insight and skills first rather than trying to cater to everyone, leading to her

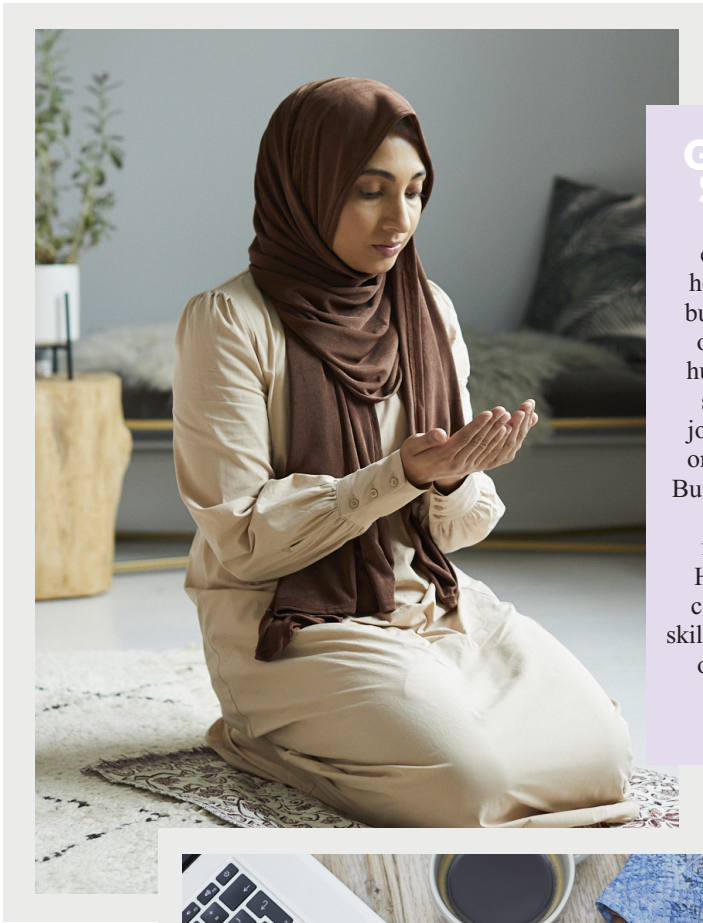
JUGGLING DEMANDS

As a mum of two, finding the time to focus on marketing was something Hasina struggled with, and she's not alone: women are 17% more likely than men to struggle balancing business demands with family life*.



GETTING SAVVY

NatWest is committed to helping women business owners overcome any hurdles at every stage of their journey. Its free online Business Builder course can help start-up founders like Hasina to gain confidence and skills, with modules on marketing, mindset and finance.



SEEKING SUPPORT

Hasina didn't seek out professional mentorship schemes when starting on her journey to building Pink Diamond Martial Arts, but she did get advice from other gym owners. 'A lot of them said that the first five years would be tough. They advised me to focus on getting regular customers through the door,' she says. 'But what works for one business might not work for everyone.'



PROMOTING EQUALITY

‘You’re not always going to be seen as on the same level as a man,’ says Hasina. ‘But that’s why we’ve got to show them that we should be.’

rebranding the gym as Pink Diamond Martial Arts. Business instantly picked up.

Her USP nailed, Hasina still struggled with how to market the studio to potential new customers. Without any formal business training, she had to work things out as she went along. ‘I would have loved to have known the most effective ways of marketing instead of just doing what I could on social media,’ she says.

‘That’s where a scheme like NatWest Business Builder could’ve been a big support. It’s a free online course that focuses on breaking down the barriers that many women in business like myself face, from

DRAWING ON HER OWN EXPERIENCE

As a Muslim woman in martial arts, Hasina knew how beneficial her gym could be to her local community. ‘It’s quite a Muslim area and a lot of Muslim women wouldn’t ever consider taking up martial arts,’ she says. ‘But it was something that I’d grown up doing, and I wanted to bring it to Luton because I know how much of a positive impact it had on me.’

UPLIFTING OTHERS

For Hasina, the best thing about owning a business is helping her clients progress from nervous to self-assured. ‘I feel so blessed that I can support them on that journey,’ she says.



*THE ALISON ROSE REVIEW OF FEMALE ENTREPRENEURSHIP WORDS: ELIA GLOVER. EDITED BY: ISABELLA SILVERS. PHOTOGRAPHY: VICTORIA ADAMSON. STYLING: CHLOE KING. HAIR & MAKEUP: XXXXXXXX. ART DIRECTION: DALJIT KAUR BABBER



FIGHTING BACK

‘I think self-defence is definitely something that all women and girls should learn, especially girls at school who are dealing with bullying,’ Hasina says. ‘It’s just really good to feel empowered.’

how to reach new customers to the best way to handle your finances.’

Despite the challenges, it didn’t take long for Hasina to receive recognition. She won the Best Fitness prize at the Sisters in Business Awards 2020, the Love Luton Sporting Inspiration Award earlier this year, and the opportunity to be part of NatWest’s #BeTheRoleModel campaign.

Her top tip for women looking to start their own business is also the best piece of advice she received when starting out. ‘There was one person who told me, “If you have passion, if you believe in what you’re doing, then don’t give up. Because at the end of failure, there is success,”’ she says.

‘It’s never going to be easy when it’s your own business, but you just have to keep going. Don’t be afraid to work hard; put in the hours because it will pay off.’

Are you ready to start your own business? Search NatWest Business Builder to sign up

SHARING SKILLS

Hasina has seen an increase in customers recently, since violence against women came under the spotlight again. Her studio promotes martial arts as a way for women to learn practical self-defence



SETTING A GOAL

Hasina says: ‘The main thing for me is to help as many people as I can to find the confidence to be themselves; just to be yourself, be strong, and walk down the street and feel safe, no matter who you are.’