

PrimeTime Member Spotlight

August 2010

Each month *Connections* talks to a PrimeTime member to find out about who they are, what they do, and their association with PrimeTime.



This month we spotlight

Danielle Bray
Business Owner
Expat Insurance Pte Ltd
(www.expatinsurance.com.sg)

Personal talk ...

Connections: Where are you from originally, and how long have you been in Singapore?

Danielle: I'm from a very small town in the mountains of Pennsylvania, USA. I've lived here for four years.

Connections: Have you lived in other foreign countries?

Danielle: This is my first expat experience and I love it!

Connections: What brought you to Singapore?

Danielle: My partner accepted a job opportunity here, and the adventure of living abroad made my decision to join him a very easy one. The allure of moving to a tropical paradise didn't hurt either!

Connections: What do you enjoy most about living here?

Danielle: The business and social climate here is open and welcoming. This really is the land of opportunity, especially for entrepreneurs and small businesses. I also love the weather and the lifestyle. The friendships we've made here have been very special as well. Singapore is so cosmopolitan and you're constantly meeting new people of all ages and nationalities. The only downside is that it's a transient place, so you are endlessly saying goodbyes, which is not easy. All in all, it's an amazing space for business and leisure.

Connections: What are your interests and hobbies?

Danielle: I am passionate about travelling. The more exotic, the more far-flung, the more adventurous, the better! Travel planning has become a serious hobby and as we go to more remote locales, this can at times be a challenge, but one I always enjoy. Right now, most of my time is spent meeting people, building relationships and focusing on my business.

Connections: Have you had any particularly interesting experiences you would like to share with us?

Danielle: While horse trekking through the Mongolian countryside, my partner and I received a generous offer from our horse-wrangler to stay with his family and attend a local Naadam Festival, held only once a year. The family was racing one of their horses and they had high hopes for their jockey. We agreed and spent a full day riding hard to reach their home. The race was held in an open valley, no marked start or finish. Children aged three to eight years jockey bareback, galloping 5km through the valley. We were the only Westerners and were invited to join in the ceremonially opening of the races. My partner was encouraged to gulp fermented mare's milk from a passing bowl, causing much laughter from the men. We watched snuff boxes being passed around, a sheep being prepared for the fire and found out that the children sing to the horses just before the race to excite their spirits. The entire day was an unbelievable and unforgettable experience.

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Connections: Which are your favourite restaurants/shops/places to go?

Danielle: We are addicted to a restaurant called Khansama on Norris Road in Little India. It's fabulous for people watching, especially on a Sunday evening when the area is full of life, and the restaurant serves authentic Indian dishes.

Connections: What one thing would you like to accomplish in your lifetime?

Danielle: I dream of being able to give back in a big way, with my time or finances, to spirited entrepreneurs in Singapore and overseas.

Professional talk ...

Connections: Please tell us about your business.

Danielle: As I came from the insurance industry in New York, many people asked me about insurance options here and I realised that the expat market was an underserved community. I quickly discovered that many insurers didn't offer appropriate products for expats. Carving this as my niche, I also wanted to provide a high level of customer service, which can be seriously lacking in Singapore. This is where Expat Insurance offers value to clients, as an advisor and intermediary.

Most importantly, expats need to understand what their Medical Insurance covers and evaluate whether that coverage will meet their needs before treatment is required. When pregnancy costs \$12,000 in Singapore and day surgery generally tops \$10,000, most people are shocked to learn their coverage leaves them financially exposed to large bills. As a consequence, I spend a lot of time reviewing expats current policies and offering advice or recommendations if required.

Connections: What did you do before you started your own business?

Danielle: After I graduated in English Literature, I joined AIG in New York. When we relocated to Asia, I got my first job through the Career Resource Centre for Expatriates, working for Swiss Education Group. My next opportunity presented itself in true Singapore-style. Having been clients of Red Sea Gallery, we became friends with the gallery owners who later asked me to join them. The job was a dream, but when the economy stuttered, the art market did as well. It was then that my entrepreneurial spirit had a chance to flourish. It was the right time to do something about the business idea that had been developing for some time and a chance to return to my previous insurance expertise.

Connections: How long have you had your own business?

Danielle: Expat Insurance turns one next month!

Connections: How did you get started?

Danielle: It has been a never-ending learning process. Talking to other business owners has been incredibly valuable for me, as I was from a corporate culture and needed to learn about how to run and manage an entire business.

Connections: What were the toughest challenges you've faced having your own business?

Danielle: I've heard many people say "if only there were more than 24 hours in a day" and now I live and breathe wishing a day would last longer. Hiring my first staff has been an interesting experience. I now have a team of two full-time advisors, one admin and one part-time. Choosing the right office space is the next big decision. Also, you have to realise that you can't do everything yourself if you want to continue to grow. On the business front, understanding how to develop and maintain a budget and learning how to measure ROI is vital. In general, I think that in Singapore there are very few challenges for small business owners compared to other places.

Connections: What do you enjoy most about having your own business?

Danielle: The excitement! I've never been so fulfilled before and I'm learning to do business the karmic way (using *The Diamond Cutter* as a guide).

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Connections: Have any of the PrimeTime programs helped you in starting or growing your business?

Danielle: The Small Business Group has been invaluable: event topics and the openness of everyone to share ideas, network and offer fabulous ideas and referrals for each other's businesses. Joining this group is an absolute necessity for any business owner!

Connections: Any advice for those thinking of starting their own businesses in Singapore?

Danielle: Plan, plan and more planning! Do not start anything without a clear plan. You will have to adapt and change the plan, but having a clear vision for your business and your brand is vital, and your plan serves as proof of what you want to achieve and helps keep you focused on the many goals you have for your business. Know how much you can invest and understand that you can't do everything on your own.

PrimeTime talk ...

Connections: When did you join PrimeTime and how did you find out about it?

Danielle: I only joined in January 2010, far too long after hearing about PrimeTime through friends and other members.

Connections: Which PrimeTime subgroups do you belong to?

Danielle: I'm most active in the Small Business Group, but I would love to join the book group as well.

Connections: What do you personally feel are the benefits of being a PrimeTime member?

Danielle: Networking, meeting like-minded women and sharing ideas with other business owners.

Connections: Which was the most interesting or inspiring PrimeTime event you've attended?

Danielle: The recent SBG event with guest-speakers from Ogilvy stands out. The importance of personal branding, journalist friendships and social media tools all resonated with me. And of course, the ladies that attended, always inspiring. You know an evening has been interesting when it encourages the exchange of research notes about Google-searches the next day!

Thank you, Danielle!