



Ashley Richards is the owner and founder of E Squared Marketing, a comprehensive agency with an entire team of work-from-home moms. CLAUDIA JOHNSTONE WITH DASFOTOHAUS

# Phoenix marketing firm a work-from-home pioneer

**Georgann Yara** Special to Arizona Republic  
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After Ashley Richards gave birth to her first child and maternity leave ended, she was faced with a decision: Go back to the office for the 8 to 5, Monday to Friday grind and drop her baby off at daycare; or be a stay-at-home mother and say good-bye to the professional working world.

It was her choice, but in reality it felt like an unspoken ultimatum that most moms know well. Richards started thinking — why be forced to choose?

“I felt strongly that I could have both if I worked hard enough,” said Richards, a 15-year marketing executive veteran who worked with Fortune 500 companies, fitness facilities, physical therapy offices and commercial real estate.

Richards pursued that. She started

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Many of E Squared Marketing owner Ashley Richards' staff left successful careers behind to stay at home and care for their children.

HANNAH LORSCH PHOTOGRAPHY

consulting for friends' businesses and past employers. She continued to get referrals and work grew. She also had her second baby. In 2018, she took her solo gig to a more official level and launched E Squared Marketing.

In the span of three years, she birthed and raised two babies — and a business. She named her company after her two children, daughter Ellie and son Eli.

Not having to choose between being a mother or career woman is something she would share through her Phoenix-based marketing company. Her first employee was a good friend, a stay-at-home mom who quit her career to raise her children. Richards told her how busy she was and her friend offered to help as long as Richards was fine with her working from home.

Richards knew getting the job done in the realm of digital marketing is nearly impossible from the confines of the traditional 40-hour business day workweek. But, it was a schedule that stay-at-home mothers with the experience and skills could handle. It clicked.

"I had kids and decided I wanted to be more in control of my schedule. I'm advocating for the working mom and providing mothers that work-life harmony," Richards said. "My focus is encouraging women who feel strongly about working that there are opportunities out there to do so."

She is not alone. According to a survey by job searching website FlexJobs, 65% of stay-at-home moms both need and want to work. Also, 43% of women

quit their jobs when they have children, and although 70% of them return to work, only 40% come back full-time.

Today, stay-at-home mothers comprise Richards' entire team. It has since she started E Squared, pre-pandemic — before the occasional crying, sibling argument and orange tabby sauntering in front of the camera during a virtual meeting became routine.

## A working mom's perspective

Richards remembers the years as a solo contractor when working from home had a slightly negative perception.

"I'd give snacks to my kids and put on a movie, hoping I could make it through a business call, hoping my client didn't know I was home with kids ... I felt they wouldn't think I was serious," she said.

But with E Squared, Richards took the opposite approach. From the start, clients know the deal. On some days sick kids are the priority, and work and clients take precedence on others.

Delivering on promises and making clients happy with results that exceed expectations eliminate any doubts about performance.

"My clients know I'm good for it. They know we are moms and they're going to have to be OK with calling me at night at hearing my kiddos in the background," Richards said. "It has been so well received. The majority (of clients) are moms and dads and they love it."

Richards has a brick and mortar office that team members can use for a change of scenery or a meeting. But most, especially since the pandemic hit, work from their homes.

E Squared has doubled its clientele

since it opened, Richards said. They include restaurants, small- to medium-sized businesses and shopping centers in 11 states.

Macerich, a real estate investment trust that is the third-largest owner and operator of shopping centers in the United States, is among them. For the last three years, the Santa Monica-based company has used Richards and E Squared in various capacities, like assisting shopping centers with coverage, social media and digital efforts, said Summer Oliver, assistant vice president of corporate marketing.

E Squared's performance during the pandemic last year was so impressive, Macerich asked Richards to lend her expertise to its entire portfolio of 47 centers across the country in areas like programming, influencer programs and general content creation.

When Oliver first met Richards, she was impressed with her process and organization. She appreciates that Richards' team puts the effort and time into knowing individual centers and the demographics of the shoppers, which are quite diverse, Oliver said.

"She had a very well thought out process on how to work with local teams, as well as with corporate. That combined with her creativity, her ability to tap into local influencers in different markets ... these things continue to impress us," Oliver said.

Oliver also likes the foundation upon which E Squared was built.

"As a mom, I think that it's admirable that she has built this agency with working moms. And I love that. They bring this certain perspective because they are our shoppers. I think that's fantastic," Oliver said.

## Lessons on working from home

When the pandemic hit and forced many into a work-from-home situation, most were blindsided by this sharp learning curve. However, it was a culture Richards and her team knew well. Over the past year, Richards' clients have asked her advice on navigating this environment for their employees, especially working moms who needed to do their jobs at home with their kids nearby all day.

"We were able to teach clients how to work remotely and how to do it successfully," Richards said.

Feeding kids lunch, keeping them entertained on their laps, changing diapers and breastfeeding are not unusual while Richards' employees are on audio-only calls. They are pros at multitasking and things often go so smoothly that clients have no clue about what's going on behind the scenes.

Every employee comes to Richards with experience in marketing or an adjacent field. They have children of all ages. One has a son with special needs and is able to have a career she loves while being able to properly care for him.

Most left successful careers behind to raise their children. Many tell Richards that it feels good to have an identity all their own besides being a mom.

"This is a forgotten pool of talent because of the sacrifices they made. They have so much knowledge that I feel like I found this pot of gold," Richards said.

"You see these great women with so much talent wanting to get going again. It's fun to empower them ... You can have it all if you really want it."