

BUILDING A BUSINESS



A FREE PRESS SERIES

GOING IT ALONE IN MICHIGAN'S ECONOMY

RealKidz Inc.

Her challenges are just starting



TONY DING/Special to the Free Press

IN A FEW WEEKS, first-time entrepreneur Merrill Guerra of Ypsilanti Township will open RealKidz Inc., a company that makes and sells plus-size clothing for young girls.

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Boomdash LLC

The next Internet success story?



REGINA H. BOONE/Detroit Free Press

FOR CESAR NERYS OF DEXTER, the next few months will prove whether the former AT&T executive has what it takes to get online advertising company Boomdash LLC off to a good start.

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New entrepreneurs set out on a brave journey

Over the next few months, Merrill Guerra and Cesar Nerys will take their first steps into the unknown. They are about to launch their own businesses, an experience filled with challenges and joy.

They reflect a new reality in Michigan, where thousands of former autoworkers and others are starting their own companies.

Michigan had 849,500 small businesses in 2006, up 14% from 2003.

Most of those businesses don't make it. One third of them fail within the first two years, according to the U.S. Small Business Administration.

Today, we begin to follow two of the state's newest entrepreneurs. Both are smart, focused and friendly, but that's where the similarities end.

— Katherine Yung



■ **ON FREEP.COM:** Entrepreneurs talk about their businesses
 ■ **PLUS:** Reporter Katherine Yung discusses the series