



Julie Deane, the Woman behind Cambridge Satchel Company

## Description

You may have heard of our next inspirational mother thanks to [Google](#) and it's feature in one of their adverts. It's a pretty special story so it's no wonder the internet giant thought it was worthy of sharing.

Julie Deane was a stay-at-home mother of two in Cambridge, UK. Julie had just found out that her daughter Emily who was eight was being bullied at school. Her first thought was to move the kids to another nearby school, but there was no space. The only other option was to send Max and Emily to a private school, but she needed a way of paying for the school fees.

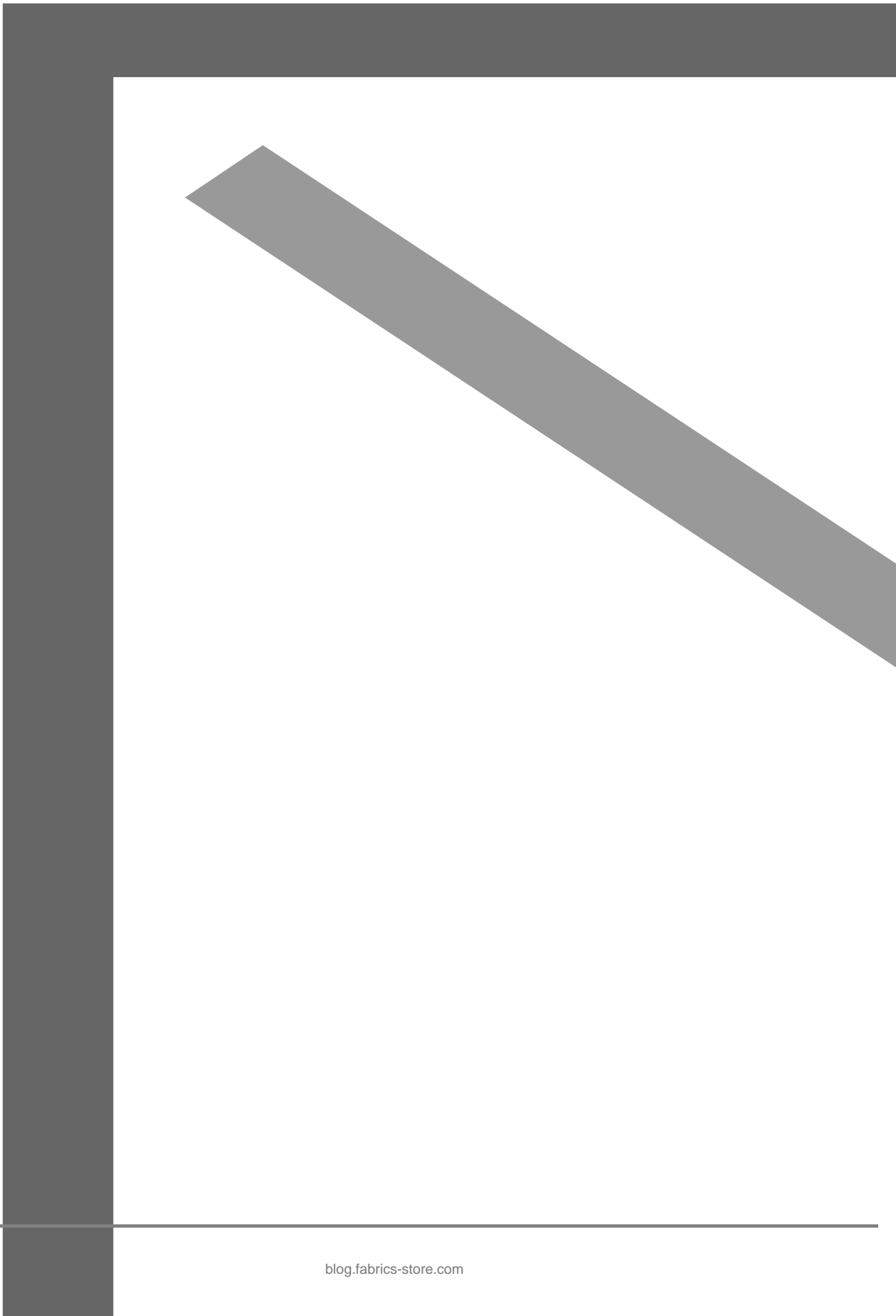
Julie needed a business. She made a list of 10 things she could do that would meet the school fees, ranking them in order of potential growth, funding requirements and speed of return on investment. There was a clear winner, one that was actually inspired by Harry Potter – satchels. Julie wanted to be able to buy her children satchels like Harry and Hermione would have, but found it very difficult to do so.

Realizing there was a gap in the market, her business idea was born and the [Cambridge Satchel Company](#) started with just '£600 (\$950) in savings at her kitchen table in Cambridge. The rest is history – Julie found a manufacturer to outsource to, made a website, read books on guerrilla marketing and

realized that the internet was her biggest ally in getting the satchels out there. Julie sent hundreds of emails to fashion editors and bloggers – an area she admits she had “œno idea” about. These bloggers were her first champions, and she’s worked with over the years to create an organic buzz, sponsoring giveaways and gifting them to influential people.



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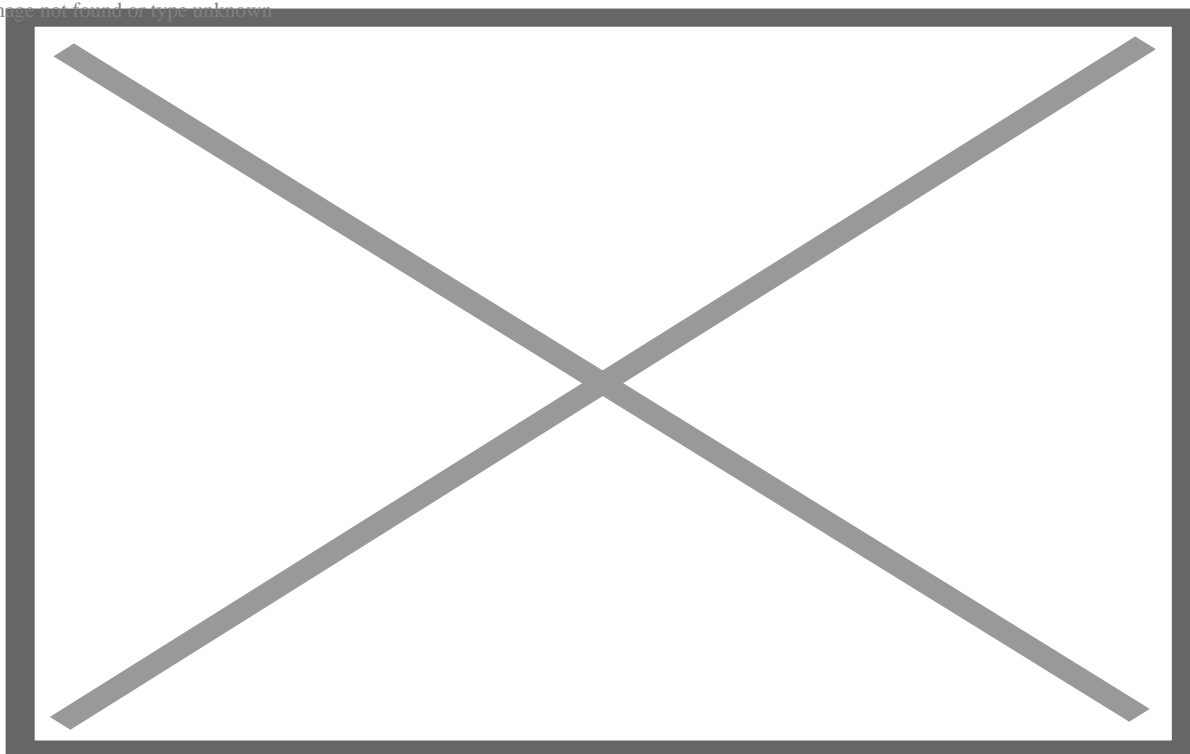


### *Julie at one of her stores*

Suddenly the Deanes' house was filled with boxes – it was time to scale up the business in terms of storage so Julie went to look at sheds. While she was there her phone pinged constantly, which Julie thought meant there was a problem with her website, but it was actually hundreds and hundreds of orders coming in. [The Guardian](#) newspaper had put their red 14-inch satchel in their Christmas gift guide and her fledging business was booming. As the sales started to come in, Deane made sure that her DIY approach continued, with the satchels initially dispatched in frozen sprout boxes or tulip bulb boxes from the garden centre. “œI would handwrite every tag. People absolutely loved the authenticity of it,” she says.

The real core at her business, however was her family. For Julie, “œmotivation was absolutely key. It would never have been enough to say “œI want a nice car or to be a bit flash’, because it’s really hard work”. The need to provide for her children was enough to make it a success and her own mother has been a huge part of the business also, something Julie describes as “œone of the best decisions” she ever made. Her family is a passionate about the Satchel Company as Julie is, with the kids acting as models for the first product shots and Emily even helping out with customer service in the early days when they couldn’t produce bags fast enough.

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### *A Cambridge Satchel in ‘Ochre’*

Julie remembers her own satchel from when she was a girl, which lasted her entire school life. She has carried one of the original 15-inch dark brown satchels since 2008, which she proudly shows is “œstill going strong.” The quality of the bags is testament to Julie’s business acumen – she trusted her instincts and stuck with what she knew, using suppliers and craftsmen she trusted in the UK. It’s still this way today as for Julie, “œconstant communication and commitment to the community are more important than making cheaply and in bulk”.

That’s not to say Julie hasn’t scaled back where it was possible to do so. Her company was built during the recession, without bank loans or going overdrawn. Until 2014, The Cambridge Satchel Company was still operating from her kitchen table so overheads were kept to a minimum (it wasn’t until [Saks Fifth Avenue](#) buyers wanted to visit their “~showrooms’ that she realized she had to expand). The head office has now moved to a business park in Cambridge, but Julie is keen to advise aspiring entrepreneurs not to

get ahead of themselves. Her DIY approach meant she could remain focused and creative as well as authentic.

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*The lounge specifically created for bloggers only at the Covent Garden store*

Her next piece of advice is to use the internet to your full advantage, “œwith a good product, determination and integrity – people will help you to go viral!” The Cambridge Satchel Company grew thanks to this, with social media and

word of mouth doing their marketing for them. Julie's passionate about the internet, calling it the "œlifeblood" for small businesses and would love to see everybody being able to be found on the internet even if they don't have their own website – it's no surprise that Google love her.

Keen to push creative and technological boundaries, Julie used her blogging community to experiment with colors after her core was in place in order to keep the look fresh, taking their advice on trends and what she could do with the manufacturers in terms of leather treatments. It's forward thinking like this that means the company has grown to have four of its own stores in the UK as well as product in [Harrods](#) and [Bloomingdales](#).

Until 2014 Julie had expanded the business without private investment, but now Index Ventures are helping her continue her overseas expansion with an incredible '£14m injection. Despite the ever-growing business, Julie and her mom are still very much involved – there isn't a single job Julie hasn't done herself and she likes to know what's happening in all the different areas – "œI'll suddenly appear on the Facebook page or the Twitter page, I'll answer the phones, I'll respond to emails and I still do the embossing."

This, of course, means that her work life blends with her family life and she balances it by "œenjoying the moment" – she takes the children to school and collects them, then catches up on emails while they do homework. Cambridge Satchel has made so many things possible for the Deane family, and for Julie, "œshowing the children what can be done with determination and hard work is important".





## *The Cambridge Satchel Company*

Business is still booming and Julie's story is an inspiration to mothers, and everyone else, around the world. She did what it took to keep her promise to her children – her proudest moment. She now has an OBE for her services to entrepreneurship. Her lasting piece of advise in starting your own

business:

“œMake sure your road will reach your goal.”

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