Q&A with Karina Kino on How to start a Fashion Brand

Description

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Karina Kino and Tim featuring Karina Kino dress / Photo by Olga Jadan

I came acrossâ?? Karino Kino, a Moscow based kids and womenâ??s apparel brand, as it usually happens, through a friend who on her return from Moscow, proudly showed me her crispâ?? whiteâ?? shirt inhabited by fun watercolour forest creatures. Clean cut,â?? simple shirts with quirky drawingsâ?? are my weakness, so I decided to investigate what Karina Kinoâ?? was allâ?? about. It turns out Karina Rybushkina, mother, artist and founder of Karina Kino does alot more than justâ?? sell limited edition, drawn with love,â?? good looking printed shirts and dresses. I started following her on Instagram and apart from being biasedly drawn to soviet era inspired cartoon characters and botanical florals I was intrigued on how she makes her business work. Karina Kino is an example of a business born out of passion for art, comfortably translated onto clothes from babywear to womenswear and even toys, with strong rooted principles, like only using natural fabrics and printing with ecologically certified dyes, or consciously producing everything in Russia and above all not selling out. It is a refreshingly modern brand in the sense of how it is run. Karina talks about what itâ??s been like to go from illustration to being in charge of a rising brand, how motherhood has expanded her business and

whyâ?? Instagramâ?? should be your number one advertising space.

What made you start your own clothing brand?â??

First of all, I want to say that I am not a businesswoman. I am an artist and a graphic designer who used to be a graffiti street artist in the past. So, there was never a plan to sell something or to create a company. For more than seven years I was working for the mass market clothing brands as a print designer and was not satisfied with my art realisation and quality of printing. The idea of commercial brands is to make maximum cheap prints, so they usually use screen printing. I was very tired of vector graphics and being limited to 7 colors that I could use with this technology. I do love patterns and always wanted to make clothing with all over prints. When I discovered digital printing which you can use to print on natural textiles I was super happy, as it meant I could print my patterns and art and get the results I need. My husband invested in my first clothing collection and the big journey began.

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Fall 2014 look book / Photo by Maxim Ejevikin /â?? Summer 2015 look book / Photo by Artem Agafonov

Talk us a little about the creation process- from idea to final product. How big is your team?

First I look for inspiration around me: nature, forests, botanical books, Russian fairytales and all other things I love. When an idea of print comes to me, I draw the pattern, usually using watercolors. I then scan the paintings and combine them into a pattern. At this point we choose items to produce with these patterns â?? sweatshirts or some baby clothes. I then post the new product to myâ?? Instagramâ?? account and see how my followers respond to it. Shops that stock our product always check my Instagram account, so we calculate orders with different new patterns for us and our stockists to sell. Once we have our order, we take photos of individual pieces at our studio and finally start to sell them in ourâ?? online shop.

About the team: at first I did everything by myself, my only helper was my husband. I even worked as a courier as I couldnâ??t effort to pay a salary to anyone. But when I became pregnant I realised that I wouldnâ??t be able to manage by myself so I employed an assistant and wholesale manager-Masha. By employing her the company rose to a new level. We started working with shops. Today many shops across Russia and other countries work with us. We very much appreciate their interest in us. Our team now consists of our own courier, a product manager, and an accountant and I am planning to make our team even bigger as this is the only way to develop a business.

What do you love most about running your own business?

For me my own business means freedom in art. I am an art director to myself so nobody tells me what to do or draw. I also have nightmares of having to make prints for the regular illustrator salary. When you start to earn money on a business level and make business deals it is super different.

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Summer 2015 look book / Photo by Artem Agafonov /â?? Kids Collection Winter 2015 look book / Photo by Artem Agafonov

What has been most challenging?

The most challenging for me is that the world of sales is very cynical and to cheat is normal. I am a very emotional person and always trust people. My mother is a top manager at Procter & Gamble and she always tells me that I must not trust people I work with. To count every rubl. This is very hard for me. Every time someone behaves insincerely I feel pain in my heart.

Do you have a mentor or a muse?

I am an Orthodox Christian. My mentor is my priest â?? a monk in the Georgian mountains. I always ask him if my business doesnâ??t reflect badly on my soul. He tells me to produce the power of love and good energy with my prints. This is what I try to do, to make the world a little bit more beautiful

with my art. My husband and my little baby boy Tim are my muses. I always try to make my husband proud of me. And the babywear I make is mostly for my baby as I donâ??t like whatâ??s available in the mass market brands.

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Hand Embroidery detail on shirt from 2014 Collection / Photo by Karina Kino

What business books/ resources would you recommend someone starting a creative business of their own?

I donâ??t read business books. I was only inspired by two films: â??Å?The assistantâ?•Â• and â??Å?Joyâ?•Â• about modern business women.â?? I buy myself books about Russian art, childrenâ??s books with traditional Russian illustrations and scientific botanical books.â?? My assistant and managers read the business books, they are too boring for me.

What are the 3 important lessons you would advise someone starting their own clothing brand?

The first lesson is donâ??t think that it is easy to run your own brand. It is very hard. The problems you are not prepared for will appear. The manufactures will make a lot of mistakes. So you need to be professional, have control over everything, it is hard work. We work 24 hours with my team to get a result.

The second lesson is be a good person and good people will appear around you. If you will cheat people, they will cheat you.

And the third lesson is be unique. Donâ??t copy already existing stuff. Create something really fresh.

You are very vocal and active on Instagram. How important is social media to your business?

All our sales come fromâ?? Instagram, so I think now it is the most important platform for us. It helps to get immediate reaction from customers, helps to

communicate with them. All shops we work with found us throughâ?? Instagram.

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Summer 2016 look book. Photo by Artem Agafonov

What are your top 3 tips on how to use social media to enhance your business?

Firstly, I produce original content. We donâ??t repost pics from Pinterest or something like this. I am an artist so I always try to make my account as my little personal art solo show.

Secondly, we donâ??t buy followers. All our followers are real people who buy our product.

Thirdly â?? we love to make giveaways and give presents. I always try to make different masterclasses and be friendly and open to people. I think they feel it and all of them are our friends and not just customers we want to sell something to.

Youâ??ve recently become a mum. Congrats and wow! How has motherhood changed the way you work?

Thank you. It is really awesome. As I already wrote, it stimulated me to hire a professional team. I also started to organise my time better and have become more productive. So now I appreciate my time more than ever. And on top of that we are running a baby clothing line as now I know everything about it.

What does success mean to you?

Success for me means an opportunity to help other people. To pay a salary, to give work places to people. Also it is a freedom not to work in an office and have an opportunity to spend all the time with my family and work at the same time. And to show my art to people.

What is next?

World domination of course! (joke) More shops all over the world to work with. More models in kids and adult collections. Better quality. And many things we want to make. For example we want to start working with franchise.

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