Q&A with Kate Kuzminova on How to Run a Kidswear Online Store

Description

portrait

There is a fascinatingâ?? wave of new businesses flourishingâ?? within theâ?? industry catered for and around children and motherhood, from fabulous recipes on how to cook a dinner in 30 minutes, miniature â??Mamaâ?? pendants and â??Motherâ?? sweatshirts to celebrate motherhood, great independent kids fashion brands and of course online shops that sell you everything you want your offspring to own and wear. What is ratherâ?? interesting about these businesses however,â?? is to know who is behind the brand. The small enterprisesâ?? we are talking about areâ?? started byâ?? women, who by they time their first borns arrive have already taken a reign at the forefront of their careersâ?? andâ?? secured a place in the world. These women are choosing to have babies in their mid 30s and 40s, and with their newborns, a new set of priorities are also born, instead of striving to be the top of their career game, they now want to be both mothers to their childrenâ?? and startâ?? a business that would keep their sanity levels sane, their financial independence secure, their dreams alive. It is interesting as by this stage, they are enriched with prominent experience in different sectors, be it PR, photography, design, marketing, sales, etc which they can now utilise within their businesses, they also come with a thick book of contacts which enables them to start to weave their future

into the life they want to live.

The woman behind her very sweet and elegant boutique kids fashion onlineâ?? store *Lublue* Kate Kuzminova is a wonderful example of such a career transformation. I met Kate at one of the manyâ?? *Mothers Meeting* eventsâ?? we happen to have attended together.â?? It turned out she was also from Russia and that she had a kids online store that I should check out. We linked on Instagram and eventually Kate invited me to hold a kids craft workshop at one of her pop ups. Her story is inspiring, it gives hope and the idea that with focus, determination and a skill to evolve, anyone can do this.

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Tell us a bit about who you are and what made you start a business?

Hi, Iâ??m Kate, mama of a little girl, photographer and a shop owner.â?? Long story short â?? I, like many other mums wanted to stay with my child as long as I could,â?? and spend as much time with her as I could afford. I also needed my creative and professionalâ?? skills to be in use to stay sane and be fully happy. I used all my previous experiences to createâ?? something new and it worked.

You were a photographer in the past, quite a handy skill as now you donâ??t need to hire aâ?? photographer for your photoshoots. What other skills from your previous careerâ?? have you beenâ?? able to utilise for your business?

You are right, Iâ??ve been practicing photography most of my life. That skill is so handy in theâ?? age of social media and good visual content ruling businesses. Photographyâ??s been my trueâ?? passion throughout my life, even when I was studying MA in Civil Law â?? which was my first Masters. Afterâ?? graduating I worked with children in my local cultural centre, traveling and workingâ?? with theatres and musicians â?? organizing festivals, concerts and parties.â?? After moving toâ?? England one of my first jobs was in retail with a luxury cashmere label â?? I learnt the process ofâ?? producing and selling clothes, I worked directly with production and the

designer. I believe allâ?? my experiences came together very well to let me start *Lublue*. Thereâ??s a bit of everything inâ?? running the business. Since I was a little girl I always remember having fashion magazines inâ?? the house â?? German *Burda Moden, Elle, Vogue*â?¦ No wonder my little sister is a professionalâ?? fashion stylist and I ended up opening a fashion related business.

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How do you choose the brands you work with? Can you talk usâ?? through of the journey how aâ?? dress or a toy ends up in your online shop?

When I started *Lublue*, my idea was (and still is) to break stereotypes in how children should beâ?? dressed. Thatâ??s why initially we started to work with Korean brands â?? Iâ??ve been admiring theirâ?? shapes, colours, outfit styling â?? quirky, fun and with a hint of cuteness (not over the top). Iâ?? loved the culottes worn by boys and girls, super wide dresses, unusual accessories and details -â?? something high street doesnâ??t offer. When choosing the brands I try to follow the idea ofâ?? finding something interesting, unusual, but also good quality is never a compromise. I try toâ?? find something new â?? even the independent boutiques market is rather saturated with some well knownâ?? brands (they are great, but there are some other, less known alternatives too). Weâ??re updatingâ?? the collection throughout the season â?? thatâ??s how the Korean market works â?? and weâ??re constantlyâ?? searching for new brands. Most of the brands we sell are not well known, but have been chosen with greatâ?? love â?? they are what Iâ??d love my daughter to wear/play in/ live in.â?? Twice a year I travel to *Playtime* â?? kidswear trade show in Paris (I have also been to New York showâ?? last spring). Thereâ??s also *Dot to Dot* show in London â?? you donâ??t need to go too far â?? with a beautifulâ?? selection of independent companies. We search for new brands at tradeshows, as well as the Internet -â?? everything is online now. We contact the companies we like directly and sometimes greatâ?? companies contact *Lublue* wanting to work with us.

For a mum of two boys, Iâ??m always curious where to find quirky, good looking, well made andâ?? affordable clothes for them, as even with *Lublue*, most stock is aimed at girls. What brands areâ?? great for boys?

I agree, in general thereâ??s much less on offer for boys than for girls. But some of our bestâ?? customers are families with boys. At *Lublue* we are always in search for great boys clothes, andâ?? although the selection is smaller, I think we have some great brands and designs.
Weâ??veâ?? recently introduced two amazing European brands for boys we love â?? *Papu Stories* and *One weâ?? like*â?? collaboration with *Acne Jr* â?? beautiful organic clothes with great prints.

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How important are Pop up shops and markets for an online business?

Selling online can become a little lonely, so having a pop up shop or a market stall allows youâ?? to meet customers in person, both existing and new ones â?? I enjoy that bit the most. For meâ?? itâ??s also paramount because the brands Iâ??m selling arenâ??t well known, so itâ??s a great way toâ?? show how great the quality is and introduce new brands.

What do you love most about having your own business?

I love the flexibility and the fact that I havenâ??t missed my daughterâ??s milestones. Iâ??ve beenâ?? there for her when she needed me. I also love the control over creative side of the business. Iâ?? might have found the perfect balance between my role as a mum (which I love) and my desireâ?? for creativity and being not just-a- mum, but also being myself, living outâ?? my desire to create and work.

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Can you talk us through a failure within your career and how you dealt with it?

Making mistakes is part of a process, there are only two ways to learn your way through whatâ?? you do â?? success and failure, and the second probably teaches you more. When you realizeâ?? that, it makes it easier to move on. My biggest cure in failure is knowing that my family isâ?? there for me â?? in the end of the day your personal life (your family and friends) is the mostâ?? important thing in the world. But also Iâ??ve accepted failure to be a part of the process andâ?? great way to learn. It took me some time, but itâ??s much easier now to face it.

What is the best piece of business advice you have received?

Cherish your current customers and newsletter subscribersâ?? database â?? these are the peopleâ?? genuinely interested in your brand. Customer service and staying in touch with them are theâ?? most important things.

How important is social media to your business?

Social media, as I said earlier, is very important. I still havenâ??t mastered it yet, I think. Whatâ?? you should bear in mind, people arenâ??t buying just your products, more than anything they areâ?? buying â??Å?youâ?•Â• â?? your lifestyle, the kind of person you are. So you have to be social and interactâ?? in social media. This is relevant to all small businesses I think. It can be fun, if youâ??re anâ?? extravert willing to share, or it can be a challenge if you arenâ??t. The most difficult part is toâ?? find the balance you feel comfortable with â?? sharing your product and your personal life. If youâ?? do it well, you have a wonderful â??Å?freeâ?•Â• (but very time consuming) way to support and developâ?? your business, increase your sales etc. Social Media is also a good way to find support of like-â?? minded people. I have a few Instagram â??Å?crushesâ?•Â• â?? people Iâ??ve never met in real life, but whomâ?? I find inspirational and supportive, and whom I love following very much.

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What are the 3 important lessons you would advise someoneâ?? thinking of working within theâ?? fashion industry?

1. Trust in your vision and follow it, but donâ??t be afraid of change, when the environmentâ?? changes.

2. More general advice: when you canâ??t do something very well â?? delegate, hire a professionalâ?? to help you. But also, always learn to be able to talk the same â??Å?languageâ?•Â• with professionalsâ?? and deliver your idea to them.

3. Do not expect your business to become profitable within a relatively short time. In the fashionâ?? industry itâ??s all about building a brand and strong social media image.

What does success mean to you?

Success means be able to do what you love to do and get the results you want â?? whatever theyâ?? are for you â?? financial independence, ability to fulfil your creative ambitions or somethingâ?? else.

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1. INTERVIEWS

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