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Mompreneur is Cooking Up Success with Baking Kits

By Cathy Watters on Dec 06 2010 • Filed under Business

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Elena Duke, president of Toronto-based *Me, Myself and Us*, got the idea for her business last year while planning her son's sixth birthday. She booked a cooking party for the children at a local grocery store and wanted to send the kids home with a cooking-themed loot bag.

After doing some research, she discovered a US company that sold pre-packaged baking kits for kids. These kits contain almost everything you need to bake cookies, cupcakes, or brownies, including the mix, cookies cutters or cupcake holders, and edible decorations. As with most pre-made mixes, you still have to add the eggs, oil or water.

An idea is born

Elena ordered a couple of kits and tried them out. She was impressed, so she ordered more and put them in the loot bags. When mothers started asking where she got them, Elena contacted the manufacturer to find out if they had a Canadian distributor. They did not.

Elena always had a knack for looking at products and deciding whether or not they would sell well, and she had a very good feeling about these kits.

"As soon as I saw this one, I thought, if I could find a way to bring it into Canada, it would be a hit," she says. "The products promote quality bonding time together with family or friends."

She researched the manufacturer and went to the US to meet the president of the company.

"We sat on it a bit because I had never been in business before," she says. She's a certified Ontario teacher and had been a stay-at-home mom for the past ten years. She had substituted and tutored on the side, planning to return to teaching when her youngest started going to school full-time, but then this opportunity presented itself.

"I thought, If I don't take a chance I'll never know, and I might regret it," she says. "So I decided to try it out, and I'm glad I did."



Investing in the business

They acquired the distribution rights at the end of the summer, and she's only been running her company for a few months, but already she's finding her home-based business is growing. She's looking for warehouse space so she can store her inventory.

Starting a business is risky, regardless of how good the idea is, because you have to spend money to set everything up before you even sell your first product. Some costs include incorporating the company, ordering inventory, paying lawyers to get all the legal stuff sorted out, buying the 1-800 number and putting up a website. All told, Elena's start-up costs were in the \$10,000 to \$15,000 range.

Then there's the time and work that goes into it. Elena's husband is an accountant and helps her with the "number crunching" so she can concentrate on rest of it: PR, sales, and running the company.

Promoting the product

After dropping the kids off for school, Elena puts in a full work day, checking email, making calls, and setting up meetings with store owners or managers.

"I often feel like I'm on Dragon's Den," she says, because she's lugging around suitcases filled with kits to these meetings, demonstrating them to potential clients, and answering tonnes of questions.

Meeting in person is one way she promotes her products. She also has a website, a Facebook fan page, and sends out press releases and samples to various blogs and online editorial sites.

She recently promoted on a group buying site, peachybuy.com (which is similar to Groupon and Concept). Group purchasing sites like these send out promotions to their members, encouraging people to buy the product at a discount. People love deals, so the company gets lots of exposure.

She's also applied for booth space at "Canadian Gift and Tableware Association" tradeshow. This tradeshow for Canadian retailers,

About the Author

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Cathy is a journalist with over 20 years experience as a newspaper reporter, freelancer, and copy editor. Her work has appeared in over 40 magazines and newspapers including Canadian Living, Business in Vancouver, Small Business Opportunities Magazine, Retail Connections, The Thompson Citizen and The Halifax-Herald.

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distributors and wholesalers takes place twice a year. If her application is accepted, Elena will introduce her product line to buyers across Canada.

From Mom to Mompreneur

Elena knew starting the business was going to be challenging, and thought she'd prepared herself for the extra work and 'juggling' that was coming up. However, once she started, she discovered it was even more difficult than she'd anticipated.

Wanting her business to impact her family life as little as possible, she works while the kids are in school and after bedtime. Now that she's been at it for a few months, she's finding it easier to focus and prioritize on the important things, and put things aside at the end of the work day. Elena credits motherhood for giving her the skills to multi-task and juggle several projects at a time. And, in spite of the challenges, she's glad she's taken this route.

"During the day, it gives me a purpose that I enjoy and I thrive off of it. I have a sense of accomplishment and pride in what I do."

TIPS

- 1. **Be passionate (and honest) about what you do.** Believe in the product or company you are promoting.
- 2. **Keep the momentum going.** Be persistent; don't get discouraged; follow up on matters quickly; be resourceful; network, network, network.
- 3. **Set aside the time to work on your business.** Put in full work days.
- 4. **Make short- and long-term goals.** Use a to-do list to keep you on track.
- 5. **Take risks.** Don't be afraid to succeed or fail. If you fail, learn from it and move on.

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