

T-Shirt Profits



The Complete Guide
to Running a
Successful T-Shirt Company

BONUS CONTENT

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Interviews with T-shirt Entrepreneurs

There's a lot to be learned from entrepreneurs who have found success in the t-shirt business. By sharing their successes and their failures, their "secret weapons" and their resources, these entrepreneurs have taken the path to creating a company that fits in with their lifestyle. Read on and I hope you can implement some of their techniques on your way to a successful t-shirt business!

Brad Kaiser – MeDoGood

What inspired you to start your company, [MeDoGood](#)?

I was lying in bed one night about three years ago thinking of a way to remind myself to be more positive, more honest, more understanding, not cuss...the list goes on. At first I thought I would just write these convictions/affirmations on the back of my hand for a constant reminder throughout the day. Then I thought, why not write them on my plain t-shirts...that way, I know I have these convictions right on my shirt, an even better reminder. Also, everyone who reads the message on my shirt instantly becomes my "accountability" partner. For example, if I had a shirt on that said "I WILL NOT talk about others behind their back"...it would be kind of silly to stand around talking to my friends about someone else with a message like that staring them in the face! It would make me look quite foolish. The more I thought about it, the more I began to think about turning it into a t-shirt company. So I began preparation to start the business. The first attempt failed! I was working a full time job and my first partner wasn't pulling his own weight. Last December, I found myself unemployed...with plenty of time on my hands. I found a new partner and began to develop a plan. About four months later, we were testing our website and a month after that, we opened up for business. We are now spreading positive messages on t-shirts to kids and adults all over the country!!

What are some of the things you do to increase your retail sales?

We are currently running an affiliate program for moms who want to make a little extra money. The affiliates basically run their own business. They have their own coupon code that we provide, and they sell the idea/product to friends, family and colleagues. They direct their customer to our website to redeem the coupon code at check out. We also, offer special deals. Currently we are offering buy 3 get one free. This is working well for us.

What are some of the things you do to increase your wholesale sales (if you do wholesale)?

We are focusing most of our efforts in this area. We realized that our product resonated with educators/schools and in order to make these sales more achievable, we needed to offer discounts to schools for bulk orders. We currently have a MeDoGood at School program that is our bread and butter. Send emails and making lots of calls is leading to some very good sales for us.

What's the one thing you wish you knew before starting this business?

This is actually the second business I've started. The first one failed. So I knew what the risks were. I knew that I had a lot of work ahead of me. Starting a business is not for the faint of heart. If I had to say there is one thing I wish I knew before I started the business, I would have to say it would be that, I wish I knew schools would be our number one customer...we could have focused on the education systems from the beginning. Although, finding this out after trying many things along the way has been an incredible learning experience.

What advice would you give to someone who's first starting this business?

Landing a dependable and professional screen printer is key! If you don't get this right, you will experience many headaches. You must sell the screener on your idea in order to get buy in from them. If they don't believe in your idea, they may not be willing to help you through the growing pains of starting a business. And you may not get good pricing! Do not concern yourself with becoming a screen printer...that would be a waste of time and money. Find the right screener (an established one with more than two

employees) and concentrate on what your business does...and do it well. Babysitting your screen printer can be very time consuming.

What are some of your 'secret weapons' - tools that you use to make your business more successful?

Personality!! Dedication!! Never give up!! Listen to your customers! Ask for feedback...then do something about it!! Don't think that your idea is perfect and doesn't need to be changed. You and your company need to change almost on a daily basis, but keep it real too! Don't try to do too much at once. Be likable and talk to as many people about your idea as possible...make sure they are people you trust. Oh, lastly...FACEBOOK...work it!! Social networking is amazing! Old friends are more than willing to help...and spend money!

Nina Frye – LTDChix

What inspired us to start your company, [LTDChix](#)?

Our company is called LTDchix. We were inspired to start our company by our daily lives as moms. We have created a line of funny, cute tee-shirts. Each shirt depicts a mom performing various household tasks, i.e. doing laundry, grocery shopping, driving the kids EVERYWHERE, etc. All shirts have the same tagline of "Living The Dream."

What are some of the things you do to increase retails sales?

At this time, we sell only online. However, to increase online sales we have lowered our prices to keep up with the falling economy. We are also a big hit with the blog community. We provide them a one of a kind t-shirts to review and then we give one away to a lucky winner. They blog about our products and website which, in turn, drives traffic to our site.

What's the one thing you wish you knew before starting this business?

To understand inventory. To purchase Quick Books and keep track of inventory right from the beginning, rather than later.

What advice would you give to someone who's first starting this business?

Go For It! If you have an idea, do something about it. You will be surprised what you are made of.

What are some of your 'secret weapons' - tools that you use to make your business more successful?

There are four key elements for starting and running a successful business:

- Start each day, not just each fiscal year, with a plan and then work your plan; Be realistic; Stay motivated; Keep on track with your sales.

John Frye – Endgame Clothing

What inspired you to start your company, [Endgame Clothing](#)?

Necessity! I have been a chess player for most of my life and I never found a chess shirt that I would wear in public. So I started making them myself.

What are some of the things you do to increase your retail sales?

Always be promoting the brand!! The Internet is a very cost and time efficient way to promote your t-shirts. In addition, the Internet allows you to target exactly where our potential customers hang out. Specifically, I maintain a presence on chess playing sites, chess blogs and chess social networks.

What are some of the things you do to increase your wholesale sales?

Once again reaching your target market is key. Don't try to wholesale your shirts to just anyone! By making sure that your brand is a good fit for the retailer, you will have a much greater chance of that retailer being successful with your brand...which will increase future orders!!

What's the one thing you wish you knew before starting this business?

The printing process. With printing t-shirts, it is very important to know what effect different printing processes (screen printing, direct to garment, dye sublimation) have on garments, colors and design work. Spend an afternoon or two with a screen printer to learn some firsthand knowledge...I wish I did.

What advice would you give to someone who's first starting this business?

I see two mistakes being made over and over by new t-shirt companies. First, as with any other business, you need to take it slow. Even though you may have the best idea ever, it takes a while for the world to learn about it. Don't quit your day job and sink your life savings into the business expecting it to be an overnight success. A new business is

like a little baby, it needs time to grow before it can support the rest of the family...give the baby some time!!

The second piece of advice would be to learn about basic accounting and taxes. Too many people start businesses not understanding basic pricing models and tax filing requirements. Then one day, you realize you have been working your ass off only to be losing money on every shirt you sold and the IRS has just slapped you with a lien.

What are some of your 'secret weapons' - tools that you use to make your business more successful?

The absolute biggest secret weapon your t-shirt company can have is fans. I mean real fans. These are the people who are promoting your brand every time they talk to or email someone. You cannot buy these type of fans...you must earn them with everything you do. They are the ones that truly make the company grow.

Tanya Primo-Jones – Primo Activewear

What inspired you to create your business, [Primo Activewear](#)?

I have an entrepreneurial spirit, it runs in the family. So while I have been a stay at home mom for 11 years I have always dabbled in different home based businesses in order to challenge myself, make some money, and be able to be home for my kids. Two years ago I lost both my Dad and Uncle to cancer and also learned how to surf; it was truly a fluke when my cousin that taught me to surf suggested (at my uncles funeral) that I start a line of surf wear for moms and kids. After losing 2 loved ones I was feeling strongly about what legacy I would leave behind one day. I took his suggestion very seriously and after some discussion and creative thinking committed myself to moving forward with a business plan. The business has changed and evolved tremendously from the beginning and especially since I gave life to “Primo” by writing the “who is Primo” story (on the website). What started as t-shirts has evolved into an opportunity for me to reach and inspire kids and adults in all areas of their lives.

What are some of the things you do to increase retail sales?

Retail sales in stores are a big challenge as a newer business in a very bad economy. The most important thing for me is building relationships with the buyers of the retail stores. Whether it's a store I'm pursuing or an established account I call or stop in on a regular basis. I have conversations, build trust and build relationships with the buyers as well as the sales associates so they know me, like me and trust me and therefore will promote my t-shirts.

Other ways I increase retail sales is by promoting my website through social networking and search engine optimization. Media such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and blogging are by far the newest ways in promoting business. This allows me to reach large networks or people where I can promote my philosophy and business and therefore draw on new customers. Well thought out and implemented Search Engine

Optimization also helps draw people to my website and increase sales that may otherwise find my competitor.

Lastly, I actively participate in local events. Often these events are held to raise money for a cause therefore I am giving to a good cause, I am meeting my customers and telling my story face to face, I'm turning over inventory, and I'm promoting the business all in one shot.

What is a typical day like for you?

I wear many hats in a day. Typically I start the day off early morning by going to the gym, getting my 3 kids off to school and walking the dog, then I'm ready for business. I cover all areas of the business on a given day including sales calls, social networking, updating the website, researching stores, events, and PR opportunities, dealing with vendors, pressing, tagging and shipping shirts, working with my designer, visiting shops, responding to emails, and everything in between. I take a break for homework, dinner and sports events when my kids get home from school and in the evening my husband and I work on updating sales and inventory, revising the business plan, prepping bank deposits, brain storming ideas or reading something business related. I fall into bed and usually dream about t-shirts.

What is the one thing you wish you knew before starting the business?

That the t-shirt market is ridiculously competitive and just because I think my t-shirt idea is great and unique other people won't feel the same way.

What advice would you give to someone who is first starting this business?

Expect to have bad days, expect for it to be hard, and expect to be discouraged. Follow your heart and know that you are living the dream of most people. Know that you will only fail if you quit. Be open to change but stay true to yourself and your product/service (this is hard to do). Celebrate every little victory. Your success in life is not measured by the success of the business but by how you conduct yourself in that business. Enjoy the journey. Network and spend time with like-minded people. Walk tradeshow and talk to as many people as you can. You will only grow by facing your

fears and stepping out of your comfort zone...do it daily. Take the time to learn new things. Do or read something each day that gives you renewed motivation. Find a mentor who has been in the t-shirt business before. Print a shirt as soon as you can so you can start wearing it--it makes it real. Don't print too much inventory in the beginning, wait until you've been in the field a while to know what really sells.

What are some of your “secret weapons” to make your business more successful?

I thought my best friends connections with NBA players and Tiger Woods would be my secret weapon, or the fact that other Primo family members have succeeded in business with the greatest of ease would be my secret weapon, but the truth is my secret weapons are my determination, perseverance and hard work; ironically, the exact philosophy that fuels my t-shirt brand. I might add my outgoing and tenacious personality as a secret weapon too!

Randi Vines – STL Style

What inspired you to start your company, [STL Style](#)?

My twin brother, Jeff, and I started this venture in 2001 as really nothing more than a hobby. We always had a profound passion for our hometown of St. Louis and thought it was underappreciated and misunderstood. The St. Louis t-shirts we'd find in the souvenir stores just seemed bland and unoriginal. So we created a few t-shirts that reflected the city the way we saw it-- authentic, quirky, gritty, unique. We felt that by doing this, we were doing our part to instill hometown pride in a city long plagued with poor self-esteem. We felt that T-shirts could actually be a small but effective tool in the overall revitalization of the city's image. We used some iconic neighborhood images, some inside local jokes and some neighborhood references, and they became a big hit with the natives. It snowballed from there. Since we started the business, we've sent orders to all 50 states, and as far away as Korea, Australia, Israel and Iraq.

What are some of the things you do to increase your retail sales?

We do the bulk of our business online with very limited marketing. Word-of-mouth has really been successful for us in creating a "buzz" factor. We could probably spend a lot more on advertising, but that would compromise the authenticity of our brand. We never wanted to become mainstream and still don't. We like that people have to seek us out. We also stock our merchandise in select independent boutiques around the city, which in turn either pay for it up front or sell it on consignment. Of course we also sponsor events and activities that are consistent with our mission to give back to the city. We present music festivals, civic forums and historic preservation fundraisers on a regular basis, which really helps get our name out there to the people who appreciate what we do the most. We also produce a line of products that nobody else is doing, at least not as effectively. Above all, we try to be as accessible as possible-- the power of good customer service cannot be underestimated.

What are some of the things you do to increase your wholesale sales?

We work with and reach out to like-minded civic organizations, neighborhood groups, local universities and bands. If they don't want to order our existing designs in bulk, we can custom design t-shirts and other merchandise for them. We maintain great relationships with local stores that stock our merchandise by delivering quality product in a timely fashion.

What's the one thing you wish you knew before starting this business?

Taxes. At the first sign of turning a profit, get an accountant! We are not business-oriented people as much as we are creative, and there needs to be a balance. It's easy to get excited about getting more exposure, but you can't give the bank away. You have to say no sometimes. We should have really been more organized from the beginning, especially with regard to keeping track of expenses and taxes.

What advice would you give to someone who's first starting this business?

Stay fresh. T-shirts and t-shirt companies are a dime a dozen. Don't compromise quality and originality for the sake of making money or you will be a flash in the pan. There are so many t-shirts out there that look the same. Know your market, don't overextend yourself and stay true to your inspiration. Don't try to be everything to everyone. We never set out to make a fortune doing this, so we don't take it for granted. It's a labor of love and that's the reason we continue to do it; money is secondary.

What are some of your 'secret weapons' - tools that you use to make your business more successful?

In addition to t-shirts, we continue to roll out new St. Louis-centric merchandise: underwear, hats, baby apparel, messenger bags, stickers, posters, etc. We're always looking for the next thing. We also do consulting for other companies, organizations and institutions, helping them with marketing, promotions and image enhancement. This has become a really interesting and rewarding facet of our business. But the ultimate secret weapon is our ability to continue to creatively express the unique character of the City of St. Louis in a way that resonates with others who love it.

Scott Dunseath – Reno eNVy

What inspired you to start your company, [Reno eNVy](#)?

I wanted control over my future and my professional life. My last “real” job ended when, after eight years of hard work, a new manager took over, wiped out the sales team and brought in his own people. I realized then that I would always be at the mercy of someone else unless I did my own thing.

Reno eNVy itself was thought up years ago while I was on the phone. I provided my address to a friend and when getting to the “Reno, NV” part of the address, something clicked. It was then that I knew I had potential for a brand. Of course at the time I didn’t know it would be T-shirts and an iconic trailer logo, but I couldn’t be more pleased with the results.

What are some of the things you do to increase your retail sales?

We participate in a monthly wine walk put on by The Riverwalk District in downtown Reno, where my store Reno eNVy is located. Being involved in this monthly event is great exposure to large amounts of people while showing the diversity of our merchandise along with the new items out on shelves. Plus it’s always a little easier for our customers to spend some money after they have had a glass of wine or two.

To add to that, having the West Street store location is great, but not everyone makes it there so continually marketing to other retail outlets is very important. By building relationships with these retailers, we are able to reach out to a wide range of different customers. We are also expanding beyond the Reno eNVy image to additional brands including Tahoe eNVy and coming soon Vegas eNVy. For instance, with the Tahoe eNVy brand we’re targeting visitors and locals alike and are partnering with the visitors centers at Lake Tahoe for additional retail outreach.

Another opportunity we take advantage of is our collaborations with the different local festivals and events going on throughout the year in the Reno-Tahoe region. We set up

our booth at a number of different events. With our 10x20 branded tent and a trailer, our retail sales increase while reinforcing our brand messaging. In return this helps market our retail location.

What are some of the things you do to increase your wholesale sales?

With a few select shops willing to support the entire breadth of the line, we will do consignment. This is not a blanket policy of ours, and we limit it as much as possible, but if the store has the right customer base or is in a key location we will entertain the idea.

What's the one thing you wish you knew before starting this business?

Personally, I wish I had more graphic art skills – I have none, seriously none. However, I do have a great knack for concepts and designs; in terms of execution I have to rely on other people. Creative products are the heart of our business and it is ultimately frustrating for me to not be able take an idea and express it graphically. This hasn't hindered the product in any way though and through our promotional company, Fuel Screen Printing, we are able to bring on very talented designers who have a flair for creating incredible designs that help us maintain our branding while giving new life to others.

What advice would you give to someone who's first starting this business?

Have an angle. Differentiate yourself somehow. Find your niche. Give your customers what they want. Humor sells; don't take yourself (or your t-shirts) too seriously.

What are some of your 'secret weapons' - tools that you use to make your business more successful?

Secret weapon number one for us has been co-branding. I and two partners own a silk screening business, Fuel Screen Printing, and build a lot of products for local customers. If it is a good match for the Reno eNVy brand, we waive the set up and screen fees in exchange for our logo to be placed on their shirts. Our logo is a little air stream trailer and it has quite a following. The added value to our customers is the

“coolness” factor associated from our trailer and the association with Reno eNVy. We basically get our customers to pay us to advertise our brand. And it works very well for us. I get such a rush to see one of our branded or co-branded shirts out in the real world.

And secret weapon number two is selling these co-branded pieces for our customers. Reno hosts so many events and festivals and we make t-shirts for a lot of them. The challenge for them is that they have no other means for distribution except during the time of the event. We give them a presence both in retail and online for up to a month before and after the event. This gives them a much longer selling window, more exposure to their brand and event and allows us to capture a reasonable profit for our efforts all while reinforcing the Reno eNVy message.

Nadine Curtis – Be Sweet Tees

What inspired you to start your company, [Be Sweet Tees](#)?

My husband and I decided to move to Cape Town for the fun of it and as soon as I settled in there I was inspired by the innovative craft and design movement coupled with clever empowerment and job creation programs so I decided to see if I could be part of it.

How do you use social media (Twitter, Facebook, etc.) to promote your t-shirts?

We have a fan page on Facebook to promote products and events and general buzz about Be Sweet. Also, on my personal Facebook profile I update my status and reference something about Be Sweet at times which can lead to promotion ... but I only do it if it's a real deal event or feature. We also link to our new blog - www.waggledancing.com where we talk about new stuff, things that inspire us, etc...

What's one thing you wish you knew before starting your company?

I wish I knew that it was going to grow from being a hobby biz out of the guest room.

What marketing tactic has worked for you in terms of driving sales to your website?

We use a lot of e-news blasts to our consumer customers and wholesalers who are so loyal and respond quickly with orders or feedback.

What's one of your greatest accomplishments with your business?

Getting into the yarn/knitting industry. Our first (and most successful t-shirt so far) is called "Needle Dudes" and the knitting community loved it!

What advice would you give someone who is just starting out in the t-shirt business?

Deliver a message. Be unique. Start with small runs - grow slow and steady.

Dave Radparvar – Holstee

What inspired you to start your company, [Holstee](#)?

My brother, Michael and I, founded Holstee in New York City in May 2008. We wanted more than our corporate jobs could offer and so we decided to quit our jobs to pursue our dream. We wanted to design eco-friendly and stylish apparel that gives back through micro-lending. Our concept began with a functional holster-positioned pocket ("holster" + "t shirt" = holstee). With some help from our Grandma the first Holstee prototype shirt was designed in the spring of 2008. The first round of production of Holstee's t-shirts were met with an overwhelmingly positive response and sold out that summer.

We started our company also because we wanted to unite and inspire people to pursue their passion. We were enlightened by the concept of micro-lending, and decided to incorporate it into our business model; lending 10% of our revenue to entrepreneurs in developing countries. We wanted to help empower those in extreme poverty to live their dreams and to help lift their local communities out of poverty.

How do you use social media (Twitter, Facebook, etc.) to promote your t-shirts?

We use social media for expressing our values, goals and ideals as much as we do for our own products. This is how we stay active, fresh and relevant to our fans and community. We do a lot of research in identifying innovative and eco-friendly approaches for our production and distribution and we always share our findings with our community.

What's one thing you wish you knew before starting your company?

We knew that production will cost twice as much and take twice you long as you think (at least early on).

What marketing tactic has worked for you in terms of driving sales to your website?

Using video has helped us tremendously in creating an identity for Holstee, generating buzz ultimately led to new sales.

What's one of your greatest accomplishments with your business?

Our greatest accomplishment to date is the number of people we have been able to inform about the power of micro loans to the developing world. Through explaining Holstee's vision and our values we have been able to explain the potential positive and negative impact of consumer purchases.

What advice would you give someone who is just starting out in the t-shirt business?

Understand your customers and connect with them in meaningful ways and they will reward you!

Alyssa Dinowitz – Chewylou Designs

What inspired you to start your company, [Chewylou Designs](#)?

One day as I was thinking about the qualities in myself that I would like to enhance, I came up with enthusiasm, gratitude and optimism - or the acronym EGO! As a yoga instructor, I decided to share this idea with my students and told them to make it their new mantra -- go ahead -- and have a big EGO, it's okay. Then, several students came back the following week saying how they couldn't stop thinking about how powerful that message was.

I thought it would be fantastic if people could wear those words and inspire others, so I created my first tee shirt and Chewylou Designs was born! Later, I sat at my computer and created several other "blessing" acronyms that struck a chord in my life; qualities that we could all develop or enhance in ourselves: FAITH, HOPE, DREAM, BREATHE, PEACE, LIVE, GRACE... were just the beginning. I was inspired to create the LIVE – Love, Imagine, Value, Embrace – shirt for my mother, Marriann, who was courageously battling breast cancer for the 3rd time (she has recently passed) and it was a big hit. Pretty soon I was creating custom tee shirts for nonprofits, church youth groups, local schools and other organizations. We now have dozens of styles for men, women, kids and even dogs and sales are growing at a steady pace each year.

What are some of the things you do to increase your retail sales?

I go to tradeshow and expos (MAGIC is a big one). I look for opportunities to host booths at various events. I market via subscription-based email blasts. I've hired a public relations person to help me secure media coverage, manage my online reputation and build buzz around my brand.

What are some of the things you do to increase your wholesale sales?

I send catalogues to targeted spas and yoga studios – my products do very well in boutiques and studio retail shops. I've hired two sales representatives to help me find

potential wholesale buyers and close deals. I often walk into stores wearing my own shirts and sell them on-the-spot!

What's the one thing you wish you knew before starting this business?

I wish I realized just how much money I'd be spending initially and how much of a time commitment it would be. On a positive note, I had no idea how many great people I'd meet!

What advice would you give to someone who's first starting this business?

Don't give up. Love what you do. Don't do it with money in mind; do it with passion and keep your joy. Surround yourself with people who believe in your dreams. Read, read, read and always be learning. Be creative in your approach. Don't be afraid to meet people and talk to everyone! Be willing to send out samples and give your product away to get noticed. Don't be afraid to try.

What are some of your 'secret weapons' - tools that you use to make your business more successful?

I'm always honest. I make customer service the highest priority. Kindness wins! I network constantly and research companies I admire.

Michelle Hamman – MotherTongues

What inspired you to start your company. [Mother Tongues](#)?

I live between my mother tongue, Afrikaans, and American English. As someone born and raised in South Africa, I brought to the United States values of community and being that are very different from North American culture. Fourteen years after leaving South Africa, however, I am more convinced than ever that one culture can educate another. And so MotherTongues, my small t-shirt company, was born.

How do you use social media (Twitter, Facebook, etc.) to promote your t-shirts?

I use both Twitter and Facebook to let people know about new t-shirts and promotions. But probably the more important use of Twitter for me is to make business contacts.

What's one thing you wish you knew before starting your company?

I wish I knew how to find good sales reps!

What marketing tactic has worked for you in terms of driving sales to your website?

Good media exposure (papers, websites) definitely makes a big difference in website traffic. The trick is to find media with the demographic that would love MotherTongues t-shirts.

What's one of your greatest accomplishments with your business?

I'm proud of the way MotherTongues' ethos has evolved and grown over the years. I'm proud that MotherTongues is well known in my hometown and area. I'm proud of the fact that MotherTongues has given \$1 per t-shirt sold to the Center for Women in Transition in Holland, MI for the last 3 years.

What advice would you give someone who is just starting out in the t-shirt business?

Do your homework and make sure you have an original idea – there are a lot of t-shirt businesses around! Find a mentor(s) to help you with business advice. Join a good business network where people will give you constructive criticism, for instance <http://www.t-shirtforums.com>.

Donna Taylor – Lucky Bucky Clothing

What inspired you to start your company, [Lucky Bucky Clothing](#)?

I was fortunate to work in an advertising agency where I was allowed creative opportunities, such as copywriting. It also gave me an opportunity to work with some very creative designers and learn more about design and composition. As a horse lover I couldn't find anything cute that said "I am a horse lover" that I thought was appropriate for me to wear. So I thought why couldn't I concept a few pieces and see how it goes. Combining my love of marketing and horses seemed like the perfect world for me.

What are some of the things you do to increase your retail sales?

We are constantly reevaluating our marketing and advertising plan, online and with more of the conventional, traditional advertising. The more exposure your brand has the more your sales should increase if you have the right product and marketing mix.

Tracking your response is even more important when your funds are limited. You can't afford to waste a dime so you really need to make sure each investment pays off. We also participate in product giveaways to local equine themed charity events. Not only is it a good thing to do but it helps us reach out to a lot of horse lovers on a local level in the right way.

What are some of the things you do to increase your wholesale sales?

Research wholesale shows that specialize in your industry and attend as many as you can afford in time and money. I kept hearing you have to put your time in and I couldn't really appreciate that until I did. You need that constant exposure at the shows where the buyers are shopping. Unfortunately buyers know that now all businesses will make it and or won't be able to deliver. So they are hesitant to try brand new companies, so you have to invest some time. Look for publications or online venues that specialize in your industry that reach out to your potential customers, advertising in those offers you targeted exposure. You can also submit your products to them for any PR opportunities

they may have on the editorial side. Your sales efforts may vary, but the more reps you have the more sales you will get. Experienced and good reps are worth their weight in gold. We are still small enough where we utilize reps and I try to fill in the areas that are not covered. That is very labor intensive but does help establish a good rapport with customers.

What's the one thing you wish you knew before starting this business?

I wish I had researched my customers and vendors better in the beginning. That would have saved us a huge learning curve, but hindsight is 20/20. Sizing and pricing were our two biggest areas to improve on.

What advice would you give to someone who's first starting this business?

I tell customers we are about the passion, not the fashion and that doesn't go out of style. I felt so passionate about Lucky Bucky that I could not see myself doing anything else. No matter how down I got, somehow I would get a wonderful email or call that kept telling me I was on the right track. If you don't have the passion to get you past the ups and downs, it would be very hard to hang in there and go the distance.

What are some of your 'secret weapons' - tools that you use to make your business more successful?

Is anything secret today? Everything is so well published and out there for anyone who has the drive to stay informed. The latest success story is in the news, online, and out there for the world to learn from. My secret weapon is my husband, who is my partner in work and marriage. He has always been well read, well informed, and stays on top of the latest trends and useful strategic information. Also keep your business unique compared to the competition. So many ideas are built on one out there and the thought is you can improve on it. Well maybe, or maybe you just share a portion of their market share and really never develop as a brand of your own and end up fading away. Be original and connect.

Jennifer Moran – Solidarity Clothing

What inspired you to start your company, [Solidarity Clothing](#)?

In my young 27 years I have traveled to many great places including: Thailand, Slovakia, Austria, Czech Republic, France, Ireland, England and my most recent, Peru, and Bolivia. One could say I caught the "travel bug" early. On these trips I have experienced many cultures, food (and stomachaches), communities, and saw much poverty. My trips to South America initiated my move back to Chicago, as I suddenly became aware of my life's calling. I knew I wanted to start a business that would not only fuel my own passion and creativity, but would contribute to a better world and help alleviate the poverty I saw firsthand.

With Solidarity Clothing, I work alongside a team of women and men entrepreneurs in Cochabamba, Bolivia. I feel so blessed to be working with these women and men who are not given the opportunities we have so freely here in the US. Together we empower ourselves to create sustainable lifestyles that provide for our families and contribute to our communities. I travel to Bolivia 3-5 times a year to meet with our producers, work on new designs, and discuss business opportunities.

What are some of the things you do to increase your retail sales?

To increase our retail sales I do a lot of educating on Fair Trade Principles and the "story" behind our products. By doing this, I am creating greater value for our customer and differentiating us from our competition. I speak to lots of students, faith organizations, non-profits, and companies who are looking for a way to increase their social responsibility. I also am very active at local fairs and craft shows. At these events I am able to connect with consumers, make sales, and collect email addresses. I do a monthly email newsletter highlighting producers, blogging on my visits to Bolivia, having sales, and providing resources for responsible living. Currently our customers are

unable to purchase items directly through our website. We are working to create this option; this will increase our sales.

What are some of the things you do to increase your wholesale sales?

We treat our wholesale sales very similar as retail sales. We offer custom embroidering and environmentally friendly (water-based, non-toxic inks) screen printing. This service has been key to our wholesale sales.

What's the one thing you wish you knew before starting this business?

Not everyone is as socially minded as I am. Even though your mission and story are captivating, your price point needs to compete with your competition. You have to spend money to make money. Never would I have imagined that starting a business would be so expensive!

What advice would you give to someone who's first starting this business?

Follow your passion, the money will follow. It will be hard at times; remember to take care of yourself along the way; exercise, eat right, sleep, take time off from your business. You need LOTS of energy to run your own business.

What are some of your 'secret weapons' - tools that you use to make your business more successful?

I work with The Coleman Entrepreneur Center at my school, DePaul University. They offer consulting services, networking events, mentoring, etc. This center has been key to making my business more successful. I have met great resources, and mentors through their program. I am also able to get the thoughts inside my head out on the table as they help me strategically work through them.

Anthony You – Good Tease

What inspired you to start your company, [Good Tease](#)?

I basically I wanted a creative outlet for myself. Corporate American really doesn't help you if you have other things that you enjoy doing. I also wanted to start something on my own. This way I could also test myself and see if what I really learned in life would help me make a successful business. So far it has been a rewarding development. I can say that I have made my mistakes but I like the fact that I can only blame myself....no boss to blame or corporate mishaps to blame. Everything I do is a result of my own actions.

How do you use social media (Twitter, Facebook, etc.) to promote your t-shirts?

Right now I am using all social media sites to promote and blog. I use Twitter, Facebook, Myspace, Trendmill, photobucket, flickr, and link to whatever I can to get a hit. The t-shirt business is extremely competitive....and what I know is that it is ALL about the marketing. You could design a brilliant shirt....but if no one knows about it then it is useless for a business.

What's one thing you wish you knew before starting your company?

The one thing I wish I knew before I started this company is the amount of work and money it actually takes to run and maintain a business. I kind of laugh when people tell me they have started a t-shirt company because most of the time it is a great dream....but to make it reality takes 10 times more work than a lot of people are willing to give. Most of those people that I have met that have said they have a –t-shirt company have gone bust or just couldn't put in the time it takes to work on it. It is a great business....but a lot of people don't know how to actually calculate business expenses and how much they should actually charge for their work. Because of this many people fail. Not because they didn't have a great t-shirt....but because they didn't know how to actually make money on it. This is something I am still learning....and I

have yet to get into wholesale....which is my next step. But I have had years of experience selling...so I am thinking this is just going to be figuring out logistics and seeing if I can meet demand when big orders come in.

What marketing tactic has worked for you in terms of driving sales to your website?

The best marketing tactic by far is getting my t-shirts on TV. The amount of traffic to the site increased 500% when I had my shirts on the TV. So if you are lucky enough to have a friend that can get on TV...do whatever it takes to get them to wear it! I use to be in IT and I can see how competitive it is and how many things go up and down with trends and fade really quickly. My next plan is to make my own social network and media channel with the GoodTease Brand. This I hope will drive even more traffic. I have to find something to go viral. I think that is the key.

What's one of your greatest accomplishments with your business?

Sticking it out this far! It is hard. It isn't glamorous and it is very challenging. But I do get a lot of satisfaction being able to see my stuff on TV and to see it starting to sell. This is something I created...and no one else can take credit for that.

What advice would you give someone who is just starting out in the t-shirt business?

Make sure you do your research. Try and figure out how you are going to be different. My shirts are all designed using Vinyl. Most other companies use silk screening. So I have fine tuned focus. And also make sure you are in reality. In order to make money....you have to spend money. But spend wisely. Take classes... use groups like SCORE network to help you to set up your business. Also it helps to be tech savvy. This can save you a lot of money... but nowadays you can build a website with ecommerce built in very quickly. But also know how to build the site so it is tagged properly. And I guess most of all...enjoy the challenge. This is the only way you will be able to stick with it.

Tim Uomoto – F-Rock Clothing

What inspired you to start your company, [F-Rock Clothing](#)?

Some friends and I started a break-dancing group by the name of Fraggie Rock Crew. At shows and competitions we were often looking to boost our revenue, and t-shirts seemed to sell fairly well. We did our first run of shirts: a b-boy sketch center on the shirt, and put F-Rock instead of Fraggie Rock, to avoid copyright issues. We've been printing shirts ever since.

What are some of the things you do to increase your retail sales?

We do a lot of online promotions. We have found that trying to get into retail stores is a pain in the butt, and the owners of those stores have huge egos. At the moment we post a lot on forums and blog on a daily basis in an attempt to direct people to our website. We have also built up our email list, and shoot emails off to our customers about sales and offering we have on our site.

What are some of the things you do to increase your wholesale sales?

Networking is big on increasing wholesale. A lot of the time we will just wholesale to people we know have a demand for our product. We will call them on the phone, let them know what we are promoting and ask if they would like to place an order.

What's the one thing you wish you knew before starting this business?

I wish we had a mentor that had made all of the mistakes that we had. Here are a couple: printing our own clothes right from the start would have saved us tons of money. Having a good website right from the start. Creating a memorable image for our brand would have saved us a lot of time trying to re-brand ourselves. Following the trends is easy, but creating a memorable brand will help us outlast our competitors.

What advice would you give to someone who's first starting this business?

Find a mentor, listen to their advice.

What are some of your 'secret weapons' - tools that you use to make your business more successful?

We are in the process of starting a street campaign, it will be virtually a fraction of the cost of a mass media campaign, be more memorable, and get people extremely curious about the image that we will plaster the city with. That will be our biggest secret weapon to date.

Lizz Egan – Minstrel Cycles

What inspired you to start your company, [Minstrel Cycles](#)?

My best friend Becky and I met "while riding." Both us being new to motorcycling and, I suppose you'd say, experiencing our midlife crises. We both had day jobs we liked but wanted to figure out...somehow...how to combine our love for riding into a money producing opportunity. We tried to think of all kinds of things...all kinds of products or things we could do to earn some money. Meanwhile...as "ladylike, cute" bikers neither one of us had the propensity to wear lewd shirts favored by most the women in the MC community...nor did either of us appreciate the "beefy-t" t-shirt style. We both enjoyed a nice, cotton, fashionable, flattering cut shirt. And so...one day...as we were riding on I-95 north, and I was deep in thought about a mutual friend of ours who was having some "girly problems"... it just came to me: Minstrel Cycles! a fictitious motorcycle company... with some great tag lines on the CUTE shirts... "Minstrel Cycles: Go with the flow!" "Minstrel Cycles: Blood, Sweat and Gears" "Minstrel Cycles: The best ride. Period." We have many more "in the can" so to speak. Becky and I share creative credit... but she's been the money-backer since day one!

How do you use social media (Twitter, Facebook, etc.) to promote your t-shirts?

We started a few years back on Facebook to build community. Recently we've moved to twitter to continue to build community to also to just get the word out. We used Twitter to also drive special sales and see immediate results.

What's one thing you wish you knew before starting your company?

There are so many things! I think that we both wish we knew more about the clothing industry. And even though we're not really IN the industry...if we had knowledge of distribution channels and overseas production, it would have been helpful.

What marketing tactic has worked for you in terms of driving sales to your website?

On the "acoustic" side, being visible at biker events has helped tremendously. And on the "virtual" side creating community and forwarding the conversation, being amongst peers and people with similar interests has been a big help!

What's one of your greatest accomplishments with your business?

Just the launch of it was tremendous! Neither one of us knew what we were doing but we did it anyway...with passion and perseverance...and love and laughter! We gained more national attention when we exhibited at the Women In Motorcycling Conference in Athens, GA a few years ago and got some industry press. We also created some oddball events: for instance... here in South Florida there's a big Biker Run every September to Key West. We wanted to be able to show and sell shirts in conjunction with this event but really, there were no vending opportunities. Becky came up with the idea to hold a party...on the bigger night of the Run... at a Drag Show Bar. So she came up with the theme "Minstrel Cycles: Come See our Drag Pipes!" and we built the event on that. We did it for 3 consecutive years...the drag show was PACKED with bikers from all walks of life....some of which you'd never dream would set foot in a place like that... but the party became a local legend!

What advice would you give someone who is just starting out in the t-shirt business?

Find a niche...make your product different. Know your target market.