

General Business Questions

What year was your business established?

2004

How would you describe the focus of your business?

It has evolved over the years. When I started, it was to provide machine quilting services. But now it has expanded to include promoting the art of machine quilting.

What services and/or goods does your business provide?

There are a few: my machine quilting services, classes, fabric, books and machine quilting supplies.

What technology do you utilize? (quilting machine, computer software, etc.)

I use Adobe Illustrator for designing fabric, scrivener for writing my books and blog posts, and of course, my quilting machine.

Please describe your target customer.

I actually have two target customers. The first is a quilter that loves to make quilt tops but not the quilting process. The second is a quilter that wants to learn how to quilt their own quilts.

How do you communicate with your customers and how often do you communicate with them?

I mostly communicate through email. It's a great way to have a record of our conversations.

Background Questions

What education did you have prior to starting your business?

I worked in fast food, so I joke that I have a degree in French fries. All kidding aside, my education is limited to community college.

What was your previous occupation before you started your own business?

I was a manager of a fast food restaurant....would you like fries with that??

Does your family have any background as entrepreneurs?

This is my one advantage, my husband is an entrepreneur as well. I have learned so much from him and have benefited from his experiences.

Do you have any business role models?

Besides my husband, my business role model would be Mark Cuban. I am in awe of what he has done.

What human resources did you utilize in starting your business? (Accountant, Lawyer, Graphic Designer, Realtor, etc.)

I used my husband's accountant for the setup of my business.

Start-up

How did you identify the opportunity for you to turn your quilting into a business?

It was more of whim than anything. I had bought my machine with the idea of only quilting my quilts. I started taking customer quilts because I really liked the quilting process.

What was your motivation for starting your own business?

I wanted to quilt as much as possible and I couldn't make quilts fast enough 😊

Did you have any goals when you were just starting out?

I have always been very goal oriented. My first one was to have just one person pay me to quilt their quilt for them.....I achieved it.

How did you fund your business in the beginning?

Since I already had the machine, I didn't need a lot of funds. I am a huge believer in starting small and building as you go. Having the stress of debt makes it hard to be creative.

Did you consider having any partners?

Nope, I subscribe to Dave Ramsey's theory, "the only ship that won't float is a partnership" I do have a great support group around me though and that has made all the difference.

In your blog you've mentioned that you kind of just fell into this business without a plan, but have you at any point sat down and prepared a more traditional business plan?

Not in traditional sense. I have more of a "future plan", what I want to accomplish in the next few years.

Does your family affect/influence/contribute to any of your business decisions?

Definitely. I love to travel and teach, but with a husband and young kids, I have to be choosy about the trips I take.

Business Growth

Did you set any business growth stages?

I guess not since I am not sure what that means. You can be sure I will google it later though.

How do you measure your success?

That is the hardest thing for me. I don't like to think about the money side of it, I love what I do and just want to be the best at what I do. However, the revenue that I bring in is the best gauge of the health of my business. I am trying to focus on that side a little more.

Have you had any employees?

I do have two employees. One hands all my travel, events and scheduling. One handles invoicing, shipping and general assistant duties.

If so, how have you handled hiring, training, and firing?

It's been a process. Since I wasn't really sure what I was doing, I probably didn't do the best job of training. I haven't had to fire anyone, but I know that can be a tough situation.

How have your business goals changed over the years?

In the beginning, I just wanted to pull in as many customers as possible. But now my goals have changed to scaling my business through additional products.

Can you describe any risks that you have taken in your journey to success?

All the risks that I have taken have been more of a pride thing. I haven't taken any financial risks, I don't like to be in debt. The biggest risk was probably when I set out to design a fabric line. I was putting myself out there and hoping I didn't fail. It was a long, hard process full of rejections, but that made me getting a fabric collection all the more sweeter.

How has the economic or political environment impacted your business decisions?

It has impacted me at all. I am huge believer that you can't worry about things you can't control. I just focus on what I am doing and where I am going.

How has your business expanded?

Physically, it hasn't expanded. I am still working out of my house. But the scope of my business has expanded dramatically. I have added products and well as additional services (teaching and lecturing etc)

Do you work with any business advisors?

Besides my husband, no. But I have been considering meeting with a consultant.

How do you network within your market?

I do a lot of blogging and social media stuff. I use these venues to prove that I am knowledgeable on the subject.

What would you consider to be your major business successes?

Hmmm, that's tough. I am proud of all my successes. I guess I would have to say that I am proud that I have evolved from a "hobby business" focus to business focus. My growth as a business person is amazine to me.....although I do have a lot left to learn.

Have you faced any major challenges or problems?

My biggest challenge is learning how to have a healthy life/work balance.

If so, how have you solved these?

I haven't solved it yet.....still working on it.

Do you work with any key partners, suppliers, or sponsors?

I have set up my business so that my products are royalty based. It's great for me since the individual companies handle the distribution. My key partners include: C&T Publishing (for my books), Art Gallery Fabrics (for my fabric collections),HandiQuilter (sponsorship) and Craftsy (online classes)

Future

How do you plan to expand your business in the future?

I want to expand into the business consulting side of quilting. I have made so mistakes over the years, I would love to help others be successful and avoid my mistakes.

What are your long-term goals?

- *Move to a location outside of my house*
- *Continue to develop the Business of Machine Quilting website*
- *Add more co-branded products to my business*

Do you have a future plan for succession or retirement from your business?

Since I am the brand and the business, I don't really see a succession working out. Besides, I want to do this until I can't do it any more!

Insights and Conclusions

Can you share any advantages or disadvantages in running your own business?

It can be overwhelming and lonely at time, but I am highly self-motivated and love the flexibility that it gives me.

What trade-offs have you experienced from owning your own business?

Being a business owner means that my mind is never fully off of my work. I can't just go on a vacation and forget about it. But I think that's not necessarily a bad thing.

How does your family interplay with the demands of your business?

It's been hard to juggling the demands of raising kids and running a business. But I love that I am able to show my kids that you can have a career that you love and makes you happy!

What has been the hardest part of owning and operating your own business?

The hardest part for me is having realistic expectations for myself. I feel like I should always do more.....

What advice would you give someone who is planning to open their own business in the quilt world?

Start small and grow it as you go. I would also say, go for it!! It's so rewarding.

What would you do differently if you had a chance to start all over?

I would have treated this as a business from the beginning.

What has been your greatest joy in your experience as a business owner?

I love meeting a goal that I wasn't sure I could make. Getting my first fabric line picked up and getting a copy of my first book are two of my favorite moments.

If you could add anything to your business what would it be?

I want to start adding more self-published products. That's what I am working on now.

What trends have you noticed in your market?

I feel that having a blog isn't as important as it used to be. Social media, especially Instagram, seems to be more popular. I still think it's possible to be a successful blogger, but you have to have good content.

How do you foresee the market changing?

I think that technology has changed the way we learn things, it will be interesting to see how that applies to quilting