

Turn Your Passion into Profit



Have you ever considered turning your passion for creativity into a business, but aren't sure how to begin? As founder and President of ScrapYourTrip.com, Julie Swatek shares how her great idea and determination evolved into a personally rewarding career. She offers advice and inspiration for others who want to earn a living doing what they love most.

Q What inspired you to turn your creative ideas into a business?

My parents were entrepreneurs and always had some sort of business when I was growing up. I knew that if I could find the right idea, I could make it into a successful business.

Q What inspired you to start ScrapYourTrip.com?

I first got into scrapbooking after my daughter was born. While on a vacation in Utah a few years later, it occurred to me that there wasn't anywhere that I could go to purchase scrapbooking supplies related to travel. I had what Oprah would call an "Aha! Moment" and thought that this would be a great idea for an online store.

Q How is ScrapYourTrip.com unique?

Most scrapbook stores carry a little bit of everything, but usually do not specialize in any one particular area. At ScrapYourTrip, we carry a lot of supplies related to one thing — travel. These range from USA and international travel to honeymoons, military deployment, and even traveling with your child's sports team. This alone sets us apart from most other scrapbooking retailers, but I think it's our approach to doing business that really makes us unique. I spent many years working for corporate America and I always knew that if I had the chance to run my own business, things would be different. At ScrapYourTrip, we try to foster a sense of family and community. We treat our customers as friends and our staff as family. We try to be conscious of the world around us by contributing to charities and donating to crops. We ship free to the APO/FPO addresses and recently two of our employees completed a walk to fund cancer research. In addition, we like to put a personal touch on each order; so we send a handwritten thank-you on each invoice. Last year, we even sent out handmade Christmas cards to our top 500 customers.

Q What are your most helpful resources?

I seek inspiration everywhere. I am constantly reading books, articles, blogs, and newsletters specifically related to the scrapbooking trade and business in general looking for ideas and inspiration to carry us into the future. I have also been fortunate enough to have assembled a phenomenal staff that have embraced my vision as their own and have added their own creative touches to our design and growth. Without a doubt, however, my most helpful resources are my customers. The ScrapYourTrip customers let us know what they like (and what they don't). They inform us if there are any errors or omissions on the site, they suggest new products

and services and they let us know which vendor has come out with new travel supplies sometimes before we even know ourselves.

Q Do you have any mentors or role models who've helped you?

I would say that I greatly admire Brad Fallon and Andy Jenkins for their vision and success. They have been a great source of information and support. Oprah would be my personal role model for the way in which she uses her influence and success to better the lives of others. I also admire how she is constantly striving to better herself and to understand the world around us. Recently, I have been given the great honor of being chosen by the Athena Group as their inaugural entrepreneur which has given me access to my very own business advisory panel for the next year. Although my year has barely started, their help has already been enlightening and invaluable and I only hope that I can one day meet their success.

Q What advice would you give someone who wants to turn their creative idea into a business, but doesn't know where to start?

Online businesses are fairly easy to launch. Most major companies such as Yahoo and MSN have templates set up so that all you have to do is add the specifics. Practically, you need to have some basic financial knowledge. You can't build a house without a foundation and a business is the same. Start with an outline of what you would like to accomplish with your business. Draw up a budget. Research how other companies in your field do business. Join the associations and groups related to your specialty and attend industry trade shows (these are a great way to get tips from those who have had some success and to meet others in your field). Establish good relationships with your vendors and, if you plan to ship orders out, familiarize yourself with the postal rules and regulations.

Q What's been your greatest challenge?

I think that my greatest challenge has been trying to balance my home life and my work life. I am sure that every working Mom understands that feeling that there just isn't enough of you to go around. I have recently had to make myself a sticker chart to encourage me to get out of the office on time (if I can accumulate 10 stickers, I get a massage!).

Q What's been your greatest accomplishment?

I knew that I wanted to concentrate my efforts on customer service and I believed that if I took care of my customers, that the business would take care of itself. But what I didn't know, what I couldn't know, is how my way of doing business would affect people. I never considered that I would be helping people to preserve their memories or that they would begin to consider me a friend. We get dozens of e-mails from

our customers everyday telling us about their lives. We hear of their weddings and vacations, their children and grandchildren, the soldiers that they are hoping will come home safely, and the family members who are no longer with them. We get e-mail forwards and thank you notes and every now and then, even though we are an online site, we have a customer drop by to visit just because they are in the area.

Q What is the most important thing you've learned during this process?

I think that starting my own business has taught me a lot. I have learned to be more patient and that "knee jerk" reactions are not always the best course. I have learned to listen to the little voice inside and to trust what my gut is telling me. I am a big believer that things happen for a reason and that people come into your life for a reason. I guess that the most important thing that I have learned is that you choose the path you are on and you are the one responsible

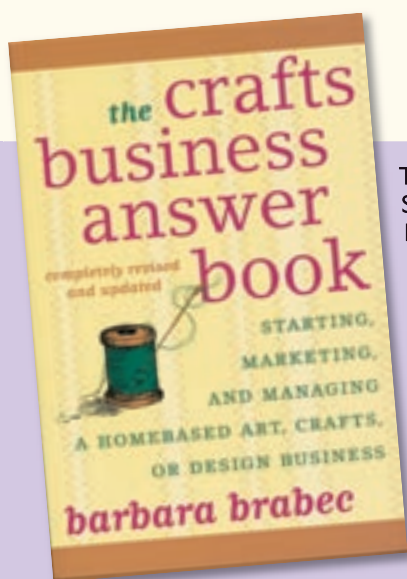
for sticking to that path, straying from it or choosing a new path entirely.

Q What are your short-term and long-term goals?

In the short-term, I would like to get moved into the new space so that we can stop running our chairs into each other a tripping all over each other. We have LOTS of plans for the future including expanding on our SYT line and launching new sites. Unfortunately, I can't let you in on too much; you just have to stay tuned!

Q If you had it to do all over again, what would you do differently?

You know, it's funny, I was asked this question recently and honestly, I wouldn't do anything differently. It has been a crazy, exhilarating, wild and occasionally painful ride, but it has gotten me where I am today and made me who I am today. Nope, I wouldn't change a thing.



The Crafts Business Answer Book: Starting, Marketing, and Managing a Homebased Art, Crafts, or Design Business by Barbara Brabec (M. Evans, an imprint of The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.). Let's face it — the thought of starting a business is downright intimidating! If you've ever wanted to earn money doing what you love, but are overwhelmed, start here. As a savvy crafts business expert who's been there, Brabec provides the answers to every question a creative person might have about the business side of crafting — from pricing and

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