



A model business

ENTREPRENEURSHIP How one creative Californian turned dummies into dollars

Judi Henderson-Townsend had never worked in retail. She had done no market research on the demand for mannequins. In fact, she had never actually touched a mannequin prior to getting into the business ten years ago. All she wanted was a creative art project – to mosaic a mannequin for her California garden. But, instead of buying a single mannequin, she impulsively bought 50 from a vendor closing his rental business. The cost of the startup was \$2,500.

MODEL CONCERN

Though it didn't cost an arm and a leg for Henderson-Townsend to get into business, she next had to figure out the rest of the equation. After explaining to her husband, Jay, that they would have 50 unusual guests in their basement, she went about creating the market. Using what she did know – online marketing – she attracted customers including trade-show vendors, small retailers, artists, eBayers and event planners. To meet demand, she acquired 500 mannequins from a retail chain that was doing a refit.

GOOD COMPANY

Her hard work has now taken on a life of its own. Henderson-Townsend started running her firm, Mannequin Madness (mannequinmadness.com),



full time at the end of 2001. Today, she gets between \$100-\$350 for a used mannequin based on its condition and style, and she handles roughly 5,000 mannequins a year. She sources most of her inventory from retailers that close or refit and discard existing mannequins to bring in the latest styles. Mannequin Madness also repairs mannequins and last year became a distributor for new mannequins.

GREEN BUSINESS

Having created a firm from an initial investment of \$2,500, Henderson-Townsend clearly has a head for business. But she has another persona – one that's remarkably green.

Great figures

Judi Henderson-Townsend with the tools of her trade

Mannequins are bulky and typically made of materials that do not easily biodegrade. Her business recycles more than 100,000 pounds of heads, limbs and torsos every year that would otherwise be waste. So, in addition to a good living, she has earned a special achievement award from the United States' Environmental Protection Agency.

She has also earned something else, something less tangible, but perhaps more important – the right to do what she wants. She works

with her husband, who joined the business once it had grown, and while she has not mastered the "four-hour work week", she has a flexible work schedule.

And she works where she wants to work, even though her business now has an international dimension. Thanks to the British Airways Face-to-Face programme in the US, Henderson-Townsend was given a free flight to London for a meeting with Mannakin Ltd, which offers a similar service and was looking for a US-based distribution partner. "It made an international connection possible," she says.

WHAT IT MEANS

Henderson-Townsend's story teaches us where valuable novelty originates in the business world: from the actions of the individual. Had a seasoned retailer, a technology engineer or a performance artist got hold of 50 used mannequins, Mannequin Madness might have been something entirely different – and perhaps even more profitable. But Mannequin Madness is a true reflection of the unique character of its founder, and that is what makes it successful. ●

details

By Stuart Read, professor of marketing at IMD, Lausanne, and Nick Dew, associate professor at the Naval Postgraduate School.