

Blo Blow Dry Bar



If you can't find what you need, create a business to fill that market niche yourself – and create an amazing brand and culture while you're at it.

That's what Judy Brooks of Blo Blow Dry Bar did, after realizing that sometimes a girl's just got to have great hair.

In 2007, as an active participant in Vancouver's business community and an owner of two small businesses, Judy was attending a lot of networking events after work. She saw lots of nail salons offering an after-work pick-me-up – but she didn't see what she really wanted: somewhere to get a fast, fabulous hairstyle to perk up her confidence before walking into an event.

Chatting on the phone with her daughter, Devon, who was at university in London, Judy wondered aloud about this problem. Then, Devon set about crafting a business plan for Vancouver's first blow dry bar as a university project.

Neither Judy nor Devon had any experience in the hair industry, but Judy did know how to build a successful service business from scratch, and Devon had a keen sense of how to create a brand that would be dynamic and fun. They surrounded themselves with people who did know hair, and who fit the brand image. In June 2007, the first Blo location opened in Yaletown, and was cash-flow positive within three days.

Then, things got a little crazy. Excited about the business and seeing the incredible early success, Judy opened two more Blo locations within the first year – a move she now describes as a little "wild."

"I never stopped writing cheques," Judy says. "I couldn't tell if we were really making money because of the expansion costs."

By August 2008, though, the incredible pace had calmed down, all three locations were open, and Judy was thrilled with what she and Devon had created. That's of critical importance for a business that's all about user experience and brand impact.

"The fact that our clients have great hair doesn't matter if the brand interface doesn't work," Judy says. "If they don't have a great brand experience, they won't feel anything."

Judy no longer has to guess about profitability. Revenues for 2008 were just shy of \$1 million. Blo has further expanded through franchises in Vancouver and Toronto, and several more locations are set to open within the next six months. Judy's now often asked to speak on the topics of brand and culture, and Devon's living in Toronto, working as Blo's franchise manager and being the "essence" of the brand.

With the craziness of the first year behind her, Judy now gets a kick out of attending networking events, where Blo often comes up unprompted in dinner-table conversation. Looking back on it all, here are her top five tips for new entrepreneurs:

1. Be very clear whether owning a business is just a dream, or if it's what you really want to do.
2. Make sure your values align with owning your own company.
3. Decide on your exit plan. Are you building a company to sell it, or to be your own boss? You have to decide what you're doing, because it will impact the way you grow.
4. Recognize upfront that you'll need to spend more time and money than you ever thought possible on intellectual property and systems, especially if you plan to sell.
5. Get a controller as soon as you can afford to. Having an expert to give you financial forecasting and models is critical, especially if you plan to sell.

And one last word of wisdom from this entrepreneur who's now built three successful businesses from scratch:

"Small business is all about what you can stomach. If you did everything they told you to do in business books, you'd never get started, you'd run out of money before you ever opened your doors, and you'd be so afraid. It's all about taking the leap."

Blo Blow Dry Bar has three locations in Vancouver. You can find them online at www.BloMeDry.com.

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