



Vanessa Garrard

Fiona Neale

Monica Liebenow

She was always a self-confessed “girlie” girl, became a beauty therapist in London and then opened two salons before moving back to Brisbane in 2002.

Today, Issada is a favoured brand among many of the world’s leading makeup artists, graces the faces of Jolie, Brad Pitt, Gwyneth Paltrow, Kate Moss, Kylie Minogue, Oprah Winfrey and many other Hollywood A-listers, and is used on movie sets and television networks around the world. Issada is also stocked in salons in South Africa, and Japan could be next in the worldwide network with potential stockists showing a great deal of interest.

“We went from 398 to 318 in the Q400 [Queensland’s 400 largest private businesses listed by *Queensland Business Review*] last year. That’s a big leap up the ladder, I’m really proud of that,” says Neale.

The company’s main business is done through its wholesale division, with over 120 salons, spas and cosmetic clinics in Australia stocking the Issada brand.

“Issada is all self-funded. There are no investors, it’s grown organically, but I have to pace myself! It’s easy to grow too fast, we’re only five years old but there is limitless potential,” says Neale.

“We poured our entire life savings into the business when we started with just me, my laptop and a few products, but then it grew very, very quickly. Once I got a few key clients and salons it went from there; they took it on because of the relationships I had built with them and that’s crucial for success,” explains Neale.

“I’ve never worked nine to five, which is out the window anyway when you have your own business, but I love it. The work/life balance is tricky though, it’s something I’ve really had to work at because I do love my work.”

Three-year-old son Blake has had a big hand in changing that for Neale. “I’ve never been away from him for longer than one night and if I am away for more than one night, I’ll put him to bed and then fly out,” says Neale.

Neale advises potential business owners to do their research. “Give yourself a job interview. Be really thorough with your research and business plan and be prepared to work very hard.”

Monica Liebenow

Unless you’re a Martian you won’t have escaped the My Family stickers juggernaut. Monica Liebenow, 44, and husband Philip own and operate the business that started in 2009 at school fêtes and weekend markets. By last year they had sold two million stickers which now are sold at nearly 800 outlets around Australia and in New Zealand, Japan, South Africa, Singapore, Canada, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Israel and the United Kingdom.

Liebenow began her career as a graphic designer and had her own business at 23, which she sold to concentrate on the worldwide success of My Family stickers.

“Running an international business from here is surprisingly easy. We do a lot of business on Skype and then, once that’s up and running, we meet people face to face,” says Liebenow.

With a staff of 10 in Australia and agents in various countries, additional projects are already in the works and fridge magnet versions of the stickers have just been launched.

“It’s taken on a life of its own. We’re already looking at innovative ways of using the images. I’ve had enquiries about illustrating a book,” says Liebenow. But she is already bracing for when their popularity wanes.

“It’s definitely got a shelf life, but in each different country we roll it out in it remains popular for a period of time, and with so many other countries embracing it, this thing will go on for a while,” she says.

Liebenow advises further study before diving in to a project or business. “There are so many good, affordable courses for small business owners and business coaching. If you don’t have the skill-set you need, get them before you start anything. And be prepared to refine your ideas too, because where you end up doesn’t always look the way you think it will.”

With a turnover “heading towards the millions”, she is good humoured about the copycats. “You can’t stop people from copying you to an extent; some of them are pretty funny. We’re enjoying success all over the world so good luck to anyone trying to find their own success.”

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