



Featured Mom Interview Questions



We know your time is precious. Thank you in advance for your valuable contribution to Mom Inventors, Inc. and to all the mom inventors who will be inspired by your story. Please answer the following questions and email them to info@mominventors.com along with your name, e-mail and phone number. There is no limit to the length of your responses. We appreciate detailed answers with specific examples.

About Your Company

- Describe your company and your product (or product line).

My company is called Kidsack, www.kidzsack.com. The Kidsack is an eco friendly, creative backpack for kids ages 4 and up. The fabric is made from 100% recycled cotton and soda bottles. The front is screenprinted with my original artwork and there are 8 washable markers included in the packaging. Kids color, mom/dad washes, and kids recolor. It's a fun reusable activity that is perfect for sports, beach, and vacation fun.

- Why did you start this company and when?

I started my company in October 2007 for a number of reasons. I have four kids and wanted to contribute financially to the family. Also, I'm an extremely creative person and had been a fashion designer prior to children. I have been a stay at home mom full time for about 10 years and had a desire to do something for me...I really had the need to be sketching and drawing again.

- What were your initial goals?

My goals were to make a million dollars my first year of business! Not very reasonable I know...but they say to dream big! I really felt that if I was going to start a business and give it my all then I better be making money. Not having a business background though, there was a lot to learn about...like start up costs, my labor costs, office supplies, shipping costs. These were all things that I hadn't considered.

About You

- Describe yourself and your family. What is your background and how does it relate to your company?

I am a 44 mother of four. I am a kid at heart and love my children. I went to secretarial school out of high school and worked in different offices for about 3 years. I was completely miserable and a horrible secretary! I then decided to pursue my dreams and apply to FIT (Fashion Institute of Technology) in NYC. I graduated with an associate degree and worked in the fashion industry for about 12 years. It was a great experience that TOTALLY prepared me for everything that I'm going through now. In school, I perfected my sewing and drawing skills. On the job, I worked with store buyers. I developed contacts in the piece goods and trims markets and learned about manufacturing and have travelled overseas to my company's factory facility in India where I worked a 10 hour day 6 days a week for 21 days straight! So, you can say that I learned how to work hard! I am extremely fortunate to have had these experiences. And most important, working in the garment center for so long gave me thick skin.

- Have you ever experienced an epiphany that changed the direction of your life?

Starting this company has changed my life. I created something from concept to completion. It's hard to believe that I'm actually doing all that I am. I'm amazed that it started with a few homemade samples and now is something real and legitimate. The experience that changed my life was when back in June 2007, I was walking my kids to the bus stop, and noticed a neighbor wearing a nylon Nike sportsack. All of a sudden the idea for a backpack that kids could color on hit me like a ton of bricks. That was my great epiphany.

Development

- What process did you follow to develop a prototype?



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I got a few sportsack samples in hand and sewed up my own sample. I looked up piece goods companies in my old rolodex along with trim companies for the drawcord and started making phone calls. I also went to Thomasnet.com to look up additional resources including a marker distributor. I found everything that I was looking for...everything fell into place.

- What process did you follow to determine your product's marketability (is there a need, would people buy it?)

I decided to do my kids school craft fair in November 2007 to see if my Kidsacks were marketable and to also get feedback. I got the help from two other moms to help me sew and all together we probably made up a little over a 100 Kidsacks. I sold out of them at the craft fair. I decided then that I did have a good product and to go forward with my idea.

- What process did you follow to find a manufacturer for your product?

Finding a manufacturer was quite the challenge. I went to Thomasnet.com and called on a bunch of sewing contractors and even mailed out a bunch of samples for pricing all over the US. Everyone came back too high. I really thought I was doomed. But, the strangest coincidence happened. On an old page in my notes I had penned in to call Andrew LeBlanc company in the Fall (that had been marked over the summer) because at that point, they were too busy to even talk to me. I called them and they said to come on in and meet with them...the irony...is that they are 15 minutes from my house! They looked at my sample and said they would be willing to do it at a fair price. I was very lucky!!

- Were there any setbacks in product development that had to be overcome?

There are always setbacks! I had made mistakes on my screenprinting films, on the actual sketches. I didn't realize that every film that is done costs \$\$\$. I had to learn to be very careful about my artwork and to really make sure that it was 100% correct before making a screenprint film. I also changed the size of my bag and went to a smaller and more age appropriate size. My original bags were a little big and eventually decided to make them smaller (which affected my screenprint size too). All new artwork had to then be done.

- What was the biggest learning curve in terms of developing your product?

The biggest learning curve I would say is the challenge of financing. I started my company with only \$200 but if I had had a couple of thousand to start with, I would have been able to order more fabric and order more inventory. All of this would have saved me more money in the long run. Biggest learning...Cash is King.

Marketing

- Through what markets are you selling (retail, wholesale, internet, specialty sales)?

I sell to retailers in the specialty toy market and resorts, museums, aquariums, and zoos. I list all my retailers and online catalogs on my website.

- What secrets have you learned in terms of publicity and marketing your product?

Well, the secret that I have learned is, "It isn't what you know but who you know." I have really worked hard at marketing my product and have e-mailed magazines, newspapers, and news channels but networking with friends has paid off the most. A couple of friends of mine put me in direct contact with different news people at major networks. That was huge. Networking with friends is the best kept secret. Everyone knows someone that might be able to help



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you, and will want to. It makes people happy when they know they've helped someone out...people are good and everyone likes to think they've made a difference. Don't be afraid to ask!

- What was the biggest learning curve in terms of marketing your product?

I don't have a marketing background so I had to really think about the best way to reach out to people. I e-mail and call on newspapers, magazines, news channels, and cold call buyers daily. I've even sat at the mall on Earth Day with a table full of Kidzsacks and talked about my product. I say, get your product out there. Let people know about it.

Time Management

- How long did it take to get your product from idea to market (conception to product launch)?

I came up with the idea in June 2007 and was so excited and then in the same breath thought, "Oh my gosh, school is out in 2 weeks!" It was kind of cruel. I had this great idea and would have no time to develop it...but that's just life. A test I suppose. I spent the summer sewing samples whenever I could get a chance. By September, I got the help of two other moms and they helped me sew up a bunch more. I walked into my first store, Eureka, in October and got an order for 12. I was completely pumped! I loved talking to the owner of the store...I loved talking about my product and selling it!

- How have you managed to juggle the roles of business owner and mom? What falls by the wayside (laundry, work-out, etc. etc.)?

This is the biggest challenge!! I really try to work between 8:10am and 3:00pm. When the kids go to bed, I go on my computer and work till 12 midnight. It's a constant challenge. I really love what I'm doing but need to turn it off. I do struggle with that. And being a natural night owl doesn't help. My laundry situation is a mess. As soon as I am making a million dollars, I'm hiring a laundry lady! And because I'm sitting at a desk for most of the day, I've put on 8 pounds that I now have to find time to lose. So, there are things that I need to work on. My husband is really supportive but I do think he gets annoyed at the amount of time that I put into Kidzsack. There are things that I definitely need to work on!

- What kind of support system do you have in place personally and professionally?

I have a great support system. My husband is really my biggest fan. He helps me with the computer stuff and helps me understand the business stuff too. My girlfriends are also extremely supportive and even help with the packing of big orders. I'm really lucky because I'm surrounded by family and friends that believe in me.

Finances

- How did you finance your business (personal contributions, loans from friends & family, loans from bank, credit cards, outside investors?)

I am a big believer in taking baby steps. I started with \$200 and grew slowly. As I made more money, I would order more fabric and trim. I definitely didn't bite off more than I could chew. I know a lot of people borrow from family and friends but that's just not me and I'm willing to let success/profit happen...eventually.

- How much money have you invested so far? How do you feel about that?

I broke even my first year of business with expenses at about \$26,000 and my sales at \$30,000...roughly.

- What is your company's current financial picture and what are your projections?

My projections are to make money this year. It's great that I broke even my first year, but I really want a profit my 2nd year in business. I have four kids and don't need a hobby...this is about making money and providing for my kids future. College is right around the corner!



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Success

- What has been your greatest success or “high point” in the process?

My first resort order with the Atlantis in the Bahamas was a huge high point. After that happened, I decided to focus on resorts and realized that I really love doing custom artwork. Since then, I’ve done business with Beaches and Sandals resorts, The Ritz Carlton, and am working on custom orders for other top resorts currently.

- Have you experienced a “low point” and if so, how did you rally yourself to get back on track?

Just recently, my screenprinter told me they had extensive water damage and that some of the computers and machinery were damaged and terror went through me. All I could think of was Oh My God!! First, my heart really went out to my screenprinters...my friends. I know them well and they are good and honest people who didn’t deserve this to happen! Second, I thought...I do all my screenprinting and custom artwork here...now what! That same week, my fabric company told me that after 100 years of business, they were closing their doors. Again, terror as I thought...who will I get my special recycled fabric from? I’m back on track and have a note on my desk that says, “Obstacles are what you see when you take your mind off your goals.” “Obstacles make you stronger.” I have to stay focused and deal with the situations at hand.

Support

- Who has been your biggest source of inspiration? What keeps you going?

My children and my husband, Dave, and Mommy Millionaire author Kim Lavine have been my biggest sources of inspiration. What keeps me going is the thought that I really do have a great money making idea...and if this darn economy would just turn around, I could actually start making money! I know I have a product that is perfect for resorts, I just need to hold on tight.

- Did anyone in particular help you along the way?

My husband has helped me with understanding the computer...I absolutely repel technology! He has helped me with my website and really given me the moral support that I need. I’m very lucky.

- What advice would you offer other moms developing their products/ideas?

Get it going! Get your prototype made and bring it to a store and ask them what they think. At the same time though, guard your idea with your life. I know, a bit of a contradiction but the store owners aren’t going to steal your ideas. No worries there. You don’t want to look back in 20 years saying what if. No what ifs! Read inspiring books from other mom entrepreneurs that will get you motivated to start and make your dreams happen.

- Is there a resource that proved to be invaluable that you would like to share with other moms?

I would say that www.Thomasnet.com is a great resource that a lot of moms might not know about, I didn’t. My husband told me about it. I was able to find my drawcord supplier and markers supplier there. Also, join a mom entrepreneur social network. Women love helping other women out. I’ve made great friends and contacts through www.mommymillionaire.com. I’ve gotten tips on packaging, product liability insurance, and even the Start Up Nation contest that I wouldn’t have known about if it hadn’t been for Mommy Millionaire.

Other

- What surprised you about this process?

Oohhhh, a lot of questions!



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- Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you for having this awesome website and giving moms a voice!!! Go moms!