



Up & Coming

Lara Solomon is a young entrepreneur who was frustrated with the limitations of working within large corporate structures.

In 2004, she left a promising marketing career to start her own business and launch an unknown product in to the local market place. Lara called her new business LaRoo and in just five years the company that brought Australia and the world the original mobile phone sock or “Mock”, is now an iconic brand with over a million Mocks already sold worldwide in Australia, New Zealand, UK and US. But wait, there’s more. Lara has social networking on her radar now and has already written a book, *Brand New Day: the highs and lows of starting a small business*, about her travails and triumphs.

What is your professional background?

I have a BA Hons in Business from the University of the West of England in the UK. In my final year I specialised in marketing as I realised that was what I loved doing. My first role was at Reckitt Benckiser in marketing in the UK, where I was for 18 months. I moved to Australia in 2001 and worked for SC Johnson as the brand manager for Windex and Mr Muscle, from there I moved to Conair and I launched the Cusinart brand into Australia.

When did you first ‘launch into’ your first business?

I started looking for ideas in 2003, and when I was in Thailand in 2003 I saw women selling sock covers for mobile phones on the streets, I loved the idea that one size fitted all phones and brought the idea back to Australia. The Mocks brand was launched in August 2004 and created the market in Australia for phone sock covers.



What propelled you?

I found it hard working for big corporate companies, and being told “no we don’t do that” for example in reference to PR. The lack of willingness of large companies to try new things frustrated me. I knew that there were other ways to promote a brand and I wanted to have the freedom to try different things, plus I wanted more autonomy.

Who did you turn to for advice?

My Dad, he had run his own business for about 15 years and I grew up helping in it. I also attended a number of free courses around running your own business. I have also had mentors along the way, for me having a sounding board is really important as I work out problems by talking about them.

What obstacles did you encounter?

There were people who said why don’t you just sell normal socks it will be much easier, those who didn’t understand why I would want to give up a job to take such a risk, supplier issues and getting retailers onboard. Finding a supplier initially was easy, but after the first order he said the volumes were too small, so I had to find another supplier and he ended up letting me down so I had to find a third one. It was hard initially to get into retail stores, people don’t want to take a chance on a new product in a new segment, mostly because they have been burnt before.

How did you tackle them?

The obstacles I just tackled as I went along, I never believed that the brand wouldn’t succeed, looking back I think that is a bit naive, but it worked! To get into retail stores I ended up calling every mobile phone store in the yellow pages in Australia! It’s about persistence, which came from a strong belief that it would work.

What about capital – how did you generate that?

I got backing from my parents, I wrote a business plan and they lent me the cash based on that. Initially it was \$12,000, but later I borrowed an additional \$18,000 which was paid back in full. I also was lucky in that I was married at the time and my husband agreed to support me financially for 1 year, and if I didn’t pay myself in the first year I would have to get a “proper job”.

What businesses do you have on the boil today?

In 2010 I launched Social Rabbit a social media consulting and training business, this was after I had huge success with the Mocks brand on Facebook – getting 12,000 people to the page in under three months and doubling online sales. Social Rabbit encompasses a new passion of mine – social media, I blog regularly and love the fact that it changes so often! Finally in February this year I launched Steps which is online Facebook training for businesses, this came out of the training I’ve done on Facebook with businesses and the realisation that most businesses really have no idea how to best use social media. www.socialrabb.it

