

Case 10

EasyLunchboxes

How Should an Entrepreneur Use Social Media to Market Her Home-Based Business that Sells Lunch Boxes?

Kelly Lester is a talented singer, actress, wife, mother to three daughters, and entrepreneur. Lester started her first company, a business that sold decorative light switch covers, in 1996 when the Web was in its infancy. Even then, Lester saw the power and the marketing potential that the Web provided businesses, particularly small businesses that lack the massive marketing budgets that their larger rivals have. In addition to selling switch plates through retail shops and museum gift stores, she built a Web site, www.switchplates.com, and began selling online. In those days, competition in e-commerce was slim; when users typed the phrase “switch plate” into a search engine, Lester’s Web site was listed first, a benefit that generated significant online sales for her company.

Lester sold the business, and in 2009, with growing daughters, she was inspired to start a second company. “I’m sad when I see what a lot of kids bring to school for lunch,” she says. “I’m even sadder when I see what school districts offer our kids for ‘school lunch.’” All three of her daughters were in school, and Lester always packed healthy lunches for them but found herself spending too much time preparing and packing lunches. “I’m very concerned about my family’s health and nutrition, but as a busy mom, I like to spend as little time as possible in the kitchen,” says Lester. “I’m all about fresh, healthy, and fast.”

When Lester was in school herself, she often packed lunches for her brothers, but that involved tossing a few cheese sandwiches, potato chips, and Oreo cookies into brown paper bags. Lester wanted something better for her children and to pack the same lunch for all three girls “so I didn’t have to think so hard,” she says. She soon found that washing, filling, and packing nine separate containers (three for each girl) with food every weekday was driving her “absolutely insane.” She began searching store shelves for lunchboxes that made organizing easy but found nothing. Web searches proved no more fruitful. “That’s why I created the EasyLunchbox System,” she says.

She began calling plastics manufacturers in the United States, none of whom showed much interest in her idea. Finally, one manufacturer told her that his company could produce a single-lid bento-style (with compartments) plastic lunchbox, but he would first have to create a mold, which would cost \$75,000. Lester formed a company, EasyLunchboxes, and found an international broker, who began contacting plastic manufacturers in China. There she found a company that would produce the lunchbox she had designed for far less than any of the domestic companies could. “I’m a thrifty shopper,” she explains.

Transactions with the foreign supplier did not always go smoothly, however. Lester had to send one of the first shipments back three times because of quality issues and failure to meet

the Food and Drug Administration’s standards. Today, Lester has an independent company test samples of every shipment to make sure they meet all safety standards. The polypropylene plastic used to manufacture the EasyLunchboxes are BPA free, and the cooler bags that keep items in the lunchboxes cold are tested for lead. Because of the time required to ship products from China and unpredictable interruptions in the supply chain, Lester has learned to keep a large inventory of EasyLunchboxes in a warehouse in the United States. On one occasion, the company that manufactures the lunchboxes was closed for three months. “They just shut the power grid off,” says Lester. No one knew when the power would come back on so that the factory could get finish her order. “It was very stressful,” she says.

Lester decided to use the Web as the primary marketing tool for her company. When Lester launched the Web site for EasyLunchboxes, she quickly discovered that the world of e-commerce had changed dramatically. Her company’s Web site did not appear near the top of any of the major search engines. “If computers had crickets,” she says, “we had crickets.” If you’re not on page one of search engines, you don’t exist. Lester, who bills herself as “Mom and CEO” on the site, is determined to generate “buzz” for her company and believes that social media is one of the best tools for accomplishing that. Her primary target customer is a busy mom with children who are in school. She also wants to build a recognizable brand for EasyLunchboxes. The question in her mind is “How do I go about doing that?”

Questions

- C10-1. Do you believe that Kelly Lester’s business is a candidate for reshoring? Explain.
- C10-2. Develop a social media marketing plan for EasyLunchboxes. On which social media should Lester focus her efforts? Why? What specific tactics should she employ in each one of the social media that you recommend?
- C10-3. What steps should she take to transform EasyLunchboxes into a recognizable brand name?
- C10-4. What bootstrap marketing techniques should Lester use to promote her company?

Sources: Based on Sarah Maraniss Vander Schaaf, “How Do You Become #1 on Amazon? Ask the Mother of Reinvention,” *Lunch Box Mom*, July 10, 2011, <http://lunchboxmom.blogspot.com/2011/07/how-do-you-become-1-on-amazon-ask.html>; Phil Mershon, “9 Small Business Social Media Success Stories,” *Social Media Examiner*, January 18, 2012, www.socialmediaexaminer.com/9-small-business-social-media-success-stories/; Juan Felix, “Discover ‘Social Secrets’ While Having Lunch with Kelly Lester,” *Mirror Yourself*, September 8, 2011, www.mirroryourself.nl/social-media-secrets-of-lunch-with-kelly-lester/; Ellyn Davidson, “How Social Media Helped a Little Lunch Box Hit the Big Time,” *Brogan Partners*, September 5, 2012, www.brogan.com/blog/how-social-media-helped-little-lunch-box-hit-big-time/; Connie Bensen, “Social Success Story: EasyLunchboxes Lessons in Branding, Content Creation, and Community,” *Dell Social Business Connection*, December 9, 2012, <http://en.community.dell.com/dell-groups/sbc/b/weblog/archive/2012/12/09/social-success-story-easylunchboxes-lessons-in-branding-content-creation-and-community.aspx>