

# THE **small** BUSINESS BIG **MARKETING**

*show*

INSANELY EFFECTIVE  
MARKETING

## Episode #444

Stay-at-home mum  
turned toy manufacturer  
is winning in an  
over- saturated market



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## **Rini Lombard Interview Transcription**

**Tim**

Describe the beautiful child sized dolls you've created.

**Rini**

Well it was actually starting out you from my daughter who loved ballet so she at that time she was only four and a half and was really busy and she came to me asking Oh Mum can you please dance with me. And I just turn around and I said I can't do it right now. I've got to go and get ready. Why don't you dance with your brother? Of course his brother turned around and he said no you know why don't you play with the broomstick or teddy bear or something like that.

**Tim**

Typical brother.

**Rini**

He is a very supportive brother isn't he. So she just left dropped her face. You know it's before Christmas for sure. Of course I thought well maybe you know I'm going to find her something to dance with and play with. Just know a Christmas gift the thought that she loved dancing and as a dancing partner and her companion I couldn't find it. So that's how this all started so I thought I'll make it. Then I created one and so it was all taken from there.

**Tim**

What a great story. Just describe what these dolls look like before we get stuck into the sort of business end of things.

**Rini**

It surely doesn't look very good. It's disheartening but my daughter was so beautiful she just saw the effort that I put in. And so it was a life size the size of her at the time so she was about less than a metre height and they had no face at the time but she's got a beautiful dress. Louise looked at me that's just gorgeous. Mum I can draw a face on her. So the delight that she express when she received it and hug it. It's actually the expressions of the thought that I want to do for a long time for her. Then when I looked at it I thought well if

that simple thing can brought so much joy to her what would we do if we could do something better. So I actually engaged with a few friends who are a great designer and she was helping me out to translate the look of the face and everything you know put what my thought into drawings and then now she is warm in appearance and of course she's beautiful. A ballerina inspired.

**Tim**

No longer made from a broomstick.

**Rini**

No longer made from the broomstick she's got her tutu. So mainly we have a pink because there are a lot of girls love pink and fuchsia, but we do have other colors now she's got a strap on her hands and also on her feet. So that's what she's now.

**Tim**

And she's got beautiful big eyes that look like something and this is it. I say this respectfully do remember the film Avatar.

**Rini**

Yes.

**Tim**

She's sort of got those big pearly eyes that just stare at you so quite a beautiful creation and she's made from what.

**Rini**

We call it polyester but it's a fabric and so it's a still soft for you to touch. It's a rag doll so she's got woolen hair. So we have basically it's a plush dolls for children.

**Tim**

Well they look amazing I encourage anyone listening and if you wanted to see what they look like as we are speaking about the business side of things surely head over to Ballerina and me doll dot com dot au and you get a sense I mean these are quite a beautiful creation

and I must say Rini pretty reasonably priced at around 90 dollars you know in terms of bang for your buck it looks like it's a wonderful gift. Now what I'm interested in Rini is the fact you've got three beautiful children you live in the wonderful Melbourne regional town of Geelong. You have been a stay at home mum all your life you haven't run a business before.

**Rini**

Never.

**Tim**

So tell us about that decision to go from being a stay at home mom to a now a successful entrepreneur.

**Rini**

It was a big decision but it was the most satisfying decision that I have ever made in my whole entire life. I tell you that the most important decision I made is that I needed to support myself. I needed to support my children. I also would like to inspire them that you can do it and you put your heart in your soul and work hard and you studied to make it happen. It is not an easy to start a business. It's a long journey and I'm still fallen and back up again. So decision is still the most important thing is that for me to be able to work and support my children and an inflexibility.

**Tim**

You've chosen a decision to be not only a role model as a wonderful mother but now a role model as well as a business mum and a mumpreneur that you know your kids can look at I guess at some point and say look at mum she's really really holding her own.

**Rini**

Yeah. My daughter actually took up on that and she was quite happy and I'm very proud that she can say yeah that's my mum. And so I think there are there are a few elements to that apart from it allows me to work but also can be flexible enough in some ways when the kids are sick or something like that. I don't have family in here. I can leave and attend to the children when they really need me during the school hours and things like that.

**Tim**

So you have gone ahead and prototyped ballerina and me doll you were talking about you had a graphic designer friend you had a number of supporting friends and colleagues that just basically helped you pull this business together is that how it worked?

**Rini**

So the design part was one thing and I don't know about business whatsoever I have no idea. But my friend slowly said okay go to the small businesses website. I'd do one thing and then register. Then I came across this. So this is actually I need to thank to one of the manager who actually believe in me because you only need one person. One person apart from yourself to believe in you to make it happen and you go for it. He is the manager for this blog I think his name is Paul Miller and I applied for a niche program at the time and because I was in that low income so I applied for that. I was approved and then from there I started pretty much to set up as you know a soul trading business.

**Tim**

That's really interesting Rini that you talk about that one person who believes in you did you feel at the outset that you needed that or did that fellow Paul just literally fall into your lap and at that point you realized you know we all need one of those people in our business lives in our personal lives too really.

**Rini**

Yes here's the thing I brought up this idea and I said well because when the prototype coming to realisations and then becomes samples I had about a dozen sell samples which I took to market to sell basically to see how people react. They loved it and that's when I came across this program and someone like Paul and so when I applied that I was talking to one of somebody I won't disclose it and they just look and they thought how silly is that. There's so many pushed doll out there how can you even make it and not really. I kid you not. I was crying. I just felt myself and I've pretty much put that on the store for a couple days. And then of course I've got a phone call and say hey are you coming to class and I say yeah I'm coming to class. But he was saying to me there so many think about coffee and cafe.

**Tim**

What a great piece of advice so what he's saying is don't listen to the naysayers. There are plenty of cafes. I mean what industry really Rini isn't overly populated isn't so competitive that you would look at it and go. I'm not going to enter that but so what was it in you. You

must have had this deep belief in your idea with the support of Paul to say no no no. Thanks for your negativity but I'm going to do this.

### **Rini**

Because I believe that the purpose why I created these at the first place is to brought joy and to bring warmth and happiness. And when I did my little market research at the market I saw little children were drawn to it and give it a hug and so much loved actually exude from that children. And I can see there's so much love from great parents actually affected by it. If I can bring one joy through what I'm creating I've feel accomplished and I know that is the most important essence in anything that you created.

### **Tim**

I think you have articulated something that many many business owners listening would love to articulate and that is the why do you do what you do and you are very very clear on that whether you know it or not but clearly and I'm sure there have been hard times when I want to talk to you about them but when you are confronted by an issue or a blockage or a problem the business you just go back to the fact that I am doing this to bring joy to other people's lives.

### **Rini**

Yeah and having compassion. And if somebody got works with you walked out feeling great about being around your product or yourself and your mission is accomplished and be kind. Because everybody has to have things behind them you don't know you come across an angry customer you don't know what happened before that. So listening and be kind and have a good purpose on creating what you do. You cannot be wrong.

### **Tim**

That's beautiful and I imagine that philosophy and attitude that you have translates across all aspects of your business the way you treat your staff your customers your suppliers I'm looking at the home page of your website now it's got this beautiful picture of a ballerina and me doll with a beautiful young girl who I'm guessing is your daughter with just a wonderful glowing smile on her face so that's a great example Rini and again I don't know whether you know this being a relatively new entrepreneur but what you have done is created a brand and then been consistent in the way you portray that brand across all aspects of your business.

**Rini**

I hope so.

**Tim**

Here's the thing let's talk a bit about marketing. No one as far as I know is searching on Google for child size dancing ballerina dolls. So I am fascinated. How did you get the name out there?

**Rini**

Initially we just did local market. Then we opened up. Well I'm still learning at that time a social media. But we also have been very fortunate to be captured by some of the editorials and then that's starting going up. We also now in the past three years we have attended a trade show just to get the name out there to get us stockist.

**Tim**

So let's break those things down because they roll off the tongue very easily right. But I imagine all of them have required some hard work. So did you start off and you wouldn't be the first guest on this show. I can tell you to start off in a local market is that where you started?

**Rini**

Yeah. So I literally started off from the local market and it was my goal. That time of course the first step was just to get the products actually good enough to be out there then to be even accepted to be in the market as a desirable items and things like. So yes it's starting off from the market.

**Tim**

Okay so you've hustled on the street you've done markets you talked about social media what role has social media played in ballerina and me doll success?

**Rini**

It's a good role in the way of getting your name out there and being recognized and people can see what you do. It was actually quite a big role in our brand recognition.

**Tim**

Have you done all that yourself or have you handed the social media over to someone?

**Rini**

Only the last three weeks frankly that I have somebody who helped me out because I've got a lot bigger now than just a ballerina and me doll. So we also have other new creation comes into town. So I needed some sort of extra hands to take care of them.

**Tim**

So Rini another aspect of your marketing has been the publicity and free editorial that you've got so have you gone about doing that?

**Rini**

So we engage with one of our PR agent who's been absolutely wonderful and he gets to know me as a person and also the business and understanding the core and the reason why I started the business which were really helpful and so he help us to get in touch with the few different media outlets out there and share the story with them. Basically we show the story and that's actually helped a lot for us in terms of getting our name out there to the next level.

**Tim**

Besides getting coverage on the small business big marketing show would just be the highlight of your morning.

**Rini**

I talked about it to everybody called me I'm going to talk to Tim Reid from small business big marketing.

**Tim**

Good on you. What other coverage have you got?

**Rini**

So we have the coverage with the magazine. It is a toy for girls in 2016. And we also have a coverage from Channel 10 daytime show and we also have a lot of coverage with the magazines and it covers Australia wide.

**Tim**

Well some of the publicity I saw was the ballerina and me doll being talked about on Studio 10 which is quite a popular show. I didn't see you interviewed on and I just saw one of the hosts talk about the ballerina and me doll I and I thought that's pretty good exposure. Did you pay for that?

**Rini**

With the channel 10. We do not pay a penny at all. So this is the role of a P.R. agent who actually allow us to get in touch which otherwise it will be basically for small business like I am almost to the point it's impossible to get there. But the PR agent assist us to share our story. They like it. Then they talked about it.

**Tim**

What kind of return on investment have you got from this PR? Can you measure it?

**Rini**

Oh I won't mentioned a dollar. Exactly. But for a startup it's a little bit more than break even. So that's how you can you know translate so it has been a massive success in the way of a measured kind of goals.

**Tim**

So what I'm understanding there is the cost of employing this publicist you have just broken even in terms of sales? No?

**Rini**

Oh no. So we got more return from having the publicist or publicity like this.

**Tim**

You didn't break even. You made money from it and you would continue to do it I'm guessing as part of your overall marketing strategy. Tell me the trade shows what role have trade shows play and what do you do at trade shows to get exposure?

**Rini**

So the trade show for me was initially just to get an acknowledgement as a business to be in the toy industry. They are quite tough competitions and you would imagine you have to go up against Mattel and they are huge companies seems almost like to is a whale.

**Tim**

So one of the things it's quite fascinating and I read an article only recently in Mattel is a shrinking whale because the Barbie doll she's really under pressure because kids are on screens you operate in an incredibly competitive industry which touched on that earlier. You are competing not only against other dolls and toys but apps and games and consoles and you know that whole online thing. Do you ever consider that or do you just get on with creating joy?

**Rini**

Creating joy in all of aspects so if we can tap in a different way of bringing out joy to other people and inspire Tim also to inspire and encourage their children creativity we will tap into that. So in the future we do open to the idea of you know something not just making plush toys or will tapping into different aspects.

**Tim**

Rini you have got big dreams ahead. I can hear that voice. Scary?

**Rini**

You know I'm always scared every single day but the other part of me was excited whenever I see the visions beyond my dreams. It's crazy. It's crazy I tell you it's crazy.

**Tim**

Rini what is the biggest mistake you've ever made in business so far?

**Rini**

I think the biggest mistake was not engaging the correct legal advice for me as a creator and an inventor. So people copy your ideas pretty much in a heartbeat and you cannot do anything about it until it was way too late. So it's tough but it's important to understand it and just even to get legal advice about what you do to avoid the costly mistake.

**Tim**

So did you have someone in the early stages actually copy the idea and get it to market.

**Rini**

Yes.

**Tim**

That must have been disheartening.

**Rini**

It's not only disheartening I've vomit for three days I was sick for a week and a half. I pretty much thought I'm giving up I cannot do this I cant afford it. There's no way. But then again I just remembered the advice from a very wise man who's helping me out at the start is so well you can make a good coffee and people will choose you and then again. Be kind and be good to your customer and they will come back to you.

**Tim**

What a great advice. Couple of other things. You are already extending the brand. I notice that you are about to launch or have launched boys dolls called surf buddies. So you're entering the boys market?

**Rini**

Yes.

**Tim**

I love it. Can you invent some sort of adult sized ones? I bet you've been asked to?

**Rini**

I've been asked to yes.

**Tim**

Rini I think it's a wonderful story. Three years in you've made fantastic inroads. I can hear it in your voice the passion and joy that this business is bringing you in and may that only grow because I think we need more business owners like you stay at home mum doing amazing things. And to anyone listening. Even if you don't have a young daughter or a young son you've probably got a young niece or nephew or cousin I'd head over at a ballerina and me doll dot com dot au and just send someone a bundle of joy. That's all I need to do right Rini?

**Rini**

Yes and grandparents out there too or you can buy for yourself I won't tell a soul

**Tim**

Well done and thank you for sharing your story on the small business big marketing show.

**Rini**

It's my pleasure. Thank you, Tim, for having me