

Background: What inspired you to start your business? Tell us about your inspiration, your idea and how it became a reality.

I started my business when I was 13 and had just received a box of fabric paints from my parents for Christmas. I started painting designs on t-shirts for my brothers and friends and found I had a passion for designing clothing and seeing the joy my pieces brought to others. I opened a shop on Etsy (an online handmade marketplace), listed some of my first clothing items, and had my first sale in March of 2014. I was hooked on entrepreneurship from then on, and I began to love the process of planning, working hard, and finding new ways to push myself as a designer in order to work for myself and see ideas in my head become a reality.

Overview: Describe your business. For example, describe your product/service, purpose/goals, features/benefits, or unique selling point. How do you market or promote your business?

Shallocat is a clothing brand specializing in embroidered t-shirts, hats, and crewneck sweatshirts. All of the designs I use are based off of my art, drawings, or ideas. Part of my artistic style is taking an ordinary object and putting a twist on it that makes it interesting and eye catching, and this has allowed me to create a signature quirky and colorful feel around my brand. My most popular designs range from an avocado cut in half with a globe as the pit to an embroidery of Saturn with cars driving around its ring as if it were a highway. Every season of the year I draw out 10-15 designs and release 20-40 new pieces in a "collection." The collection model helps me expand my item selection and keep my store fresh, and the release of a new collection attracts traffic to items from older collections thus increasing my total exposure. I mainly market my business through social media, which is a huge part of my target market of 12-24 year olds' lives. I post pictures and interact with other accounts on Instagram and Twitter to direct traffic to my store and build a community around my brand. I also recruit social media brand sponsors who receive a free Shallocat item in exchange for posts on their account redirecting their followers to my store. This technique has allowed me to reach my target market through the influence of popular accounts who gel with my brand identity. Through a combination of these strategies and years of trial and error, I have built my social media following from 30 followers to over 6,000 across platforms.

Personal Qualities: Tell us about yourself and how you make your business succeed. Demonstrate your ability to make your business succeed; your skills and strengths; your drive and motivation. How do you demonstrate commitment, vision, and calculated risk-tasking? Give examples of any successes, achievements or obstacles overcome.

Being an entrepreneur has allowed me to make my passion into my work, and that alone encourages me push myself everyday to be the best at what I do. I believe that a passion is something you can work on for hours straight and have it feel like only ten minutes have passed. It is something you are so consumed by to the point that time no longer exists, only the goal in front of you. For me, that thing is drawing and designing. It is extremely humbling to have my passion and my "job" be synonymous. My business is my creative outlet where I can take risks and make something that is completely my own. It can be stressful packing orders for shipping at 11PM trying not to wake up my parents, sacrificing free time for work, and agonizing

over every detail as any business owner does, but in the end it is completely worth it because I am doing what I love. In my experience, the most stressful and intimidating tasks have always paid dividends in success and learning opportunities. Releasing my first collection of original designs was terrifying to me as I didn't know how people would respond to them. Negativity crept in and I started to doubt every idea I had, thinking my customers wouldn't like what I released. I went on and released the collection anyway and was immediately glad I did. My sales rose and I received tons of positive feedback about the uniqueness of my designs. I started to become confident in myself and my abilities as a designer; I learned that I should follow my instincts and know that my ideas are valuable and worth sharing. Learning this lesson changed the way I did business. I pursued ideas with an open mind and let my creativity flow without second guessing. Over and over again I found that the ideas I doubted the most ended up selling the best and becoming customer favorites. As an entrepreneur I have learned to welcome adversity knowing that if I can endure it I will emerge a more capable business owner and person.

The Future: What are your future goals and vision for your business? How do you propose to develop your business? What are your goals and vision in terms of market share, product range, recruitment, and employment, and how are you going to make this happen?

My short term goal is to keep up with my collection schedule to expand my product range. The more items I have in my store, the more opportunities there are to reach different kinds of customers through Etsy's keyword search. By monitoring trends throughout my past year of business I have found that a new collection is often the push my business needs to catalyze more web traffic and sales. An overarching goal of mine is to continue pushing my social media marketing by recruiting more brand sponsors. Sponsorships can result in hundreds of new followers overnight, and relative to the amount of traffic they bring in they are extremely cost effective. I want to grow Shallocat in 2017 by building my social media presence and reaching out to new potential customers worldwide through the power of the Internet. A long term goal I keep in the back of my mind is to be selling enough product that I can gradually switch from a made-to-order system to an inventory system. As of right now my business depends on me keeping a small inventory of blank product and machine embroidering blank pieces according to the customers' choices as orders arrive. This system has been suitable for my small business so far, but sometimes it can stretch me too thin as the sole manufacturer (especially in a month like December where the Christmas rush brought in 133 orders in just under 4 weeks). Once my business reaches 200-300 monthly sales I want to outsource manufacturing so my time can be put toward managing the business and marketing instead. Central Wisconsin has been an excellent place to run my business with so much support coming from my community, so I will definitely outsource to a local manufacturer rather than out of state or overseas. Through business expos I have already made some contacts with t-shirt printers and professional embroiderers in the area. With this system I will be able to purchase a sum of inventory right away and appeal to more customers with a reduced handling time. This long term goal will include calculated risk when buying the initial sum of product from my manufacturer, but it is

something I work towards every day because it will open up huge slots of time for me to design and advertise.