Naughty or Knotty

You'd think that a twenty-something man selling women's "unmentionables" wouldn't necessarily be a ticket to success.



But tell that to Samson Daniels. He's the co-founder and CEO of Knotty Knickers, a Toronto, Canada-based company he founded with his girlfriend Kristi Laurelle in 2017.

"Kristi and I were both university students at the time and we were talking one day about how inconvenient it is to shop for underwear," Daniels says. "In most stores, you literally have to reach into bins to find the size and style you want. It's like digging through garbage."

What's more, quality women's undergarments can be expensive -- even from mass-market purveyors

For the price of a tall latte, Knotty Knickers mails subscribers a new pair of underwear every month.

like Pink, Victoria's Secret and American Eagle. In fact, they can cost upwards of $10 a pair, even on sale.

Daniels and Laurelle decided there had to be a better way. Noting the popularity of subscription boxes for everything from pet food to shaving products, the duo -- who are still partners in life as well as in business -- set about building a subscription-based lingerie company from the ground up.

Sounds straightorward, right? Not so fast. There is nothing easy about launching an apparel brand. First you need designs. *Then* you need to find the right fabrics, and the manufacturers who can make products in bulk.

You have to rely on services like Alibaba to help you find these resources; *then* you need to get all the product shipped to North American from overseas and hope you don't get scammed. *Then* you need to package and ship to customers. The list goes on.

"I was always a hustler, selling iPhones and iPads in high school," Daniels says. But Knotty Knickers was something else entirely. After considerable research, and learning as they went, Daniels and Laurelle were able to get product in hand, and start marketing.

The first eight months they worked out of Laurelle's parents' basement, receiving the product and then packaging to ship to customers. "Pretty quickly we got to a point where we were literally climbing over boxes of products and had to find our own space," Daniels says.

Pandemic Challenges

The pandemic has presented its own set of challenges -- mostly related to issues stemming from delivery delays from couriers -- but the company has managed to grow nearly 10x in the last year.

"In January of 2020 we had around 20,000 subscribers," Daniels says. "As we close out the year, that number has jumped closer to 200,000."

Monthly subscriptions start at $3.99 for a single pair of knickers and subscribers can choose what styles they prefer (i.e., thong, bikini, briefs, cheeky, hipster, etc.). Customers can also state their color preferences. The company also has popular seasonal designs, for, say, Halloween or Christmas.

Knotty Knickers has offices in Toronto, Ontario and Buffalo, New York and has 35 employees.

Underwear for All

Facebook and Instagram have played a big role in Knotty Knickers' marketing efforts.

"We're able to both advertise and tell our brand story, which is intriguing to people," Daniels says.

One of the things he and Laurelle are most satisfied about is that they decided to offer underwear in sizes XS to 3XL. "Some companies make sure





their product looks best for people who are a size zero or two, whereas want women of all sizes to be able to look and feel their best in our products," Daniels says. What's more, "we want our customers to look and feel their best no matter what race, colour, body type or financial background they come from."

What does Daniels wish he had known when he started three years ago? "That I had done more research on selecting a website platform. I was 21. I didn't know about Shopify," he laughs. "I only knew about the traditional ways of trying to find a developer and coding a website from scratch."

By the way, Daniels is a huge fan of Shopify for anyone who is interested in getting into the ecommerce space. They make it so easy, "And they don't pay me to say that," he says.

Another tip for budding e-comm entrepreneurs: "Double down on advertising," he says. "I wish I had taken more time to learn more about Facebook and Instagram advertising because it's not like you learn this in school."

Knotty Knickers is bootstrapped. "It's better to take on debt than give away equity," Daniels says. "Hard to believe when we started we didn't even know how to make a shipping label," he says.

By mid 2021, Knotty Knickers is on track to be printing labels for one million subscribers. — By Dana Sullivan, California Business Journal

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