

FEATURE ARTICLE – ONE THIMBLE MAGAZINE

## BUSINESS CRUSH : HOLLY FROM TOPKNOT GIRL

By Dayarne Smith

Find your tribe and love them hard.

That's business advice from TopKnot Girl founder Holly Elson - and with more than 64,000 Instagram followers, she knows her stuff.

The mum of two runs TopKnot Girl with husband Nathan, from their home on the NSW Mid North Coast. Holly makes quality headbands and bonnets and is a social media wizard, while Nathan looks after the bookwork, tax, shipping and distribution.

"Nathan came on board full time about 18 months ago," Holly told One Thimble. "He was working in roadwork construction and it's a job where you have to move around a lot. It was either him move away or find another way to stay here. And for me, it was either put Nathan on, or hire someone else to share the load."

When she fell pregnant with son William in 2010, Holly wanted to buy the beautiful handmade things she was seeing online, but there wasn't room in the budget.

"I got out my mum's sewing machine, which was about 20 years old, and started making a few things for myself and for William's nursery."

It wasn't long before Holly's first handmade business was born. Through her Ruby and Mud label, Holly made dolls, appliqued singlets, bunting and earrings.

Then daughter Poppy came along.

"Dolls are very time consuming to make, so I was finding with two children it was hard taking lots of orders for dolls. The business was coming to an end. I was a bit worn out from it and uninspired by it," Holly admits.

"I had made a couple of headbands for myself and put some up for sale through Ruby and Mud. There was a bit of interest and I felt motivated to start something fresh."

Holly ordered fabrics and her sister, a graphic designer, created her logo.

"I had some business cards express posted and literally within a week I was up and running," Holly says. "I was excited about a product I could make more quickly and in greater amounts, that also fit better with my lifestyle."

Now, Holly starts her day like most mums – being woken up by the kids!

"I look at emails, check social media and maybe do a few posts on there," she says. "Then I get up and get the kids organised for the day and get the house in order. I like to know that the beds are made and there's a load of washing on, so when I sit down to work I feel more organised."

Despite TopKnot Girl's success, if she was starting her business now, Holly would do things differently.

“I would probably set myself up with a bit more intent, rather than just winging it,” she laughs.

“If you have an idea, jot down a basic plan and have a few goals in place that you would like to achieve. Especially if you are going into something with the intent for it to be a full-time job.

“For me, with TopKnot Girl, I went into it thinking I’d just make a few headbands and maybe run a market. I didn’t really have a plan for what it has turned into.

“On the other hand, a lot of mums who go into business put a bit too much pressure on themselves to have it all happen quickly. Sometimes it can take quite a while for people to warm up to your brand, or to you as a person – so take the pressure off and enjoy it and if you’re not enjoying it, find something that you do enjoy.

“What’s that saying - If you love what you do, you’ll never work a day in your life. It’s cheesy, but true!”

And what if you’re losing that passion?

“A lot of people invest time, energy and effort, so it’s important to really think before saying I don’t love this anymore. It’s like a relationship - you have to work at it to keep the love there.

“When you are working from home, you’re solo a lot. You’re not talking to people and interacting. It helps to get into some business groups on Facebook, or meet up with local business mums. When you talk to other people who are creative, it can fire you up again.

“It’s important to be around like-minded people.”

When it comes to representing your brand on social media, find a connection and be authentic.

“You have to keep it real,” Holly says. “I work on content that will please my customer, and my customer is a lot like me. They’re often a mum, raising kids, juggling other things.

“One of the things I love to do is cook, so sometimes the kids and I will make muffins and I’ll share that (on Instagram). It doesn’t relate to headbands, but it relates to the people who are following me.

“It’s not about sharing your product all the time. It’s about building that relationship and sharing a story and giving people an insight into the ‘who and why’ behind the ‘what’ that you’re doing.

Of course, the TopKnot Girl ‘who and why’ are Holly, Nathan, William and Poppy and the goal is to make the business work for the family.

Holly says “a lot of people try to nail this thing called balance,” but often that’s not achievable.

“If you’re busy, your house is going to be messy – and I hate that, because I struggle with a messy house, but it’s just reality,” she says. “If you put pressure on yourself to have a balanced world, it’s just never going to work.

“It is a juggle. For us, it might be that Nathan does the school run today and I’ll do the mail run, or sometimes the mail just isn’t going to get out today, because we have a kid here throwing up.

“So, I look at it as a juggle. Not a circus juggle, not where we’re completely disorganised, but where we just have to shift things around to make it work.

“And sometimes at the end of the day you just have to stop and sit on the couch and watch Peppa Pig with a bag of chips and order pizza for dinner, because that’s life.”

You can find TopKnot Girl on Instagram, and at [topknotgirl.com.au](http://topknotgirl.com.au)