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Ruffing It

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Chic, colorful, unique, stylish, comfortable and affordable! No, we're not describing the latest additive to your closet. Instead, these are the adjectives used to describe the oh-so-trendy **Fleabag Bed**.

Sabina Vavra and Chelsea Hernandez are the creators of this gleeful idea making pet lovers pounce. After meeting on an A&E TV reality show these two designers came upon the quirky idea of manufacturing pet beds. Due to the fact that they could never find the right size, shape or color for their furry friends, these ladies decided to craft their own. The business savvy duo shared some of their trials and errors, while reminding us you don't always have to take huge money risks when starting out a company.



When and how did your idea come about?

SV & CH: Sabina and I met when we were cast for an interior design television show. We instantly clicked and worked really well together. We are both dog lovers- Sabina has a golden retriever and I have a german shepard, and one day we were lamenting about how hard it is to find a dog bed that isn't beige and boring and that on top of that they're never big enough. So when Sabina suggested we start a dog bed line, I was all over it.

What were the first 5 major steps you took to open up Flea Bag Bed?

SV & CH: I think there were more than just five steps, but foremost we really had to dig in and find out exactly what was on the market. We then had to establish vendors, do all the paperwork required for a business (which we did ourselves, this can save you a lot of money). Once we had a product, we had to get exposure to the brand, something that is ongoing! We both own our interior design firms, so these are all tasks we had to take on in addition to our daily routine. It's been a lot of work, but so worth it!



Do you ladies sew? If not, how did you start manufacturing them?

SV & CH: I grew up in a family of quilters, so I can actually sew really well. However, we knew from the get go that neither of us had the time nor patience to be sewing dog beds for the rest of our lives. So we pounded the pavement, and asked around. We finally found a sewing contractor that we were pleased with. We've since grown into our own small workroom, but we are still in essence a "garage based business." On average I usually keep 200-300 dog beds in my garage, much to my husband's dismay.

Do you design your own patterns & textiles or do you choose your fabric from your local fabric shop?

SV & CH: To create your own fabrics requires insane quantity amounts, so that wasn't an option for us in the beginning. Our fabrics for our current line were milled and printed in LA; a small carbon footprint for **Fleabag** was important to us. This winter, we are meeting with several manufacturers to begin producing our own fabrics.



What do you look for when choosing the right textiles and material?

SV & CH: All of our fabrics are heavyweight canvas; they have a large zipper so you can remove the insert for easy washing. We wanted to push the envelope on what a dog bed looks like, so most of our colors are very zingy, and we never choose cutesy patterns. Our goal is for it to look like a high-end floor cushion and not a doggie bed.

How is your company different than all other doggy bed companies?

SV & CH: As I said we are local, everything right down to the zippers is produced in Southern California. Made in America is something we are committed to for the long haul! Plus our colors and patterns are bold. They aren't for everyone, but that's who we design for; the dog owner that DOESN'T want the ordinary.

How did you find the right companies to source & manufacture your fabrics?

SV & CH: This was one of the hardest things, and still continues to be! It's not like you can just Google fabric mill and find all your answers. We do buy in bulk at wholesale from companies not open to the public. Most of these companies don't have fancy websites or reps that come to your office or anything fancy like that. It was a LOT of pavement pounding. I would spend days just walking around parts of downtown seeing if anyone would lead me in the right direction.



How much money did it take to start this business and how much have you spent so far?

SV & CH: No loan... dog beds seemed like a gamble. We wanted to make it as low of a risk as possible. We started out by each contributing a thousand dollars. We maximized that investment by doing everything we could do ourselves. We then used the profits from those beds to make more, and so on and so on.

What do you expect your profit will be for 2011?

SV & CH: Yikes! It's anybody's guess at this point. While we are still small we've had a lot of interest in our product. Many boutiques have approached us about carrying Fleabag in their stores. And we've been slated to appear the holiday gift guide of a few major magazines this holiday season. So we are very excited to see what 2011 brings!

Besides your site, where else can we find your dog beds?

SV & CH: At this point it is mainly our online store, before the end of October we will be in a few other online boutiques, and before the end of the year we will be in several stores. Please be watching our website for those announcements.



Give us some great advice for a future woman entrepreneur.

SV & CH: Anything worth doing is worth doing right! Be passionate and confident about what you are doing.... It's infectious.

What do you LOVE the most about having this company?

SV & CH: From the very beginning I have been excited about our product; it's great to now have other people excited too! We love all of the customer photos we get and all of the great feedback.

Edited by: Bridgette

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