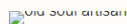


BRAND SPOTLIGHT

Old Soul Artisan – Brand Spotlight



BY ROBIN HIGGINS
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In our brand spotlight, we feature *About* brands who are ready for retail. This week we sat down with Harmony Todd, the founder of [Old Soul Artisan](#). Old Soul Artisan sells candles, is based in Trenton, New Jersey, and has been in business for six years. [Shop candles here](#).



Harmony Todd, the founder of [Old Soul Artisan](#).

About: [Why did you decide to start this business?](#) Why this business and not a different one?

Harmony: Old Soul Artisan was established in 2014 and has slowly evolved into what it is today by taking inspiration from dark literature and fairytales. The sense of smell is strongly associated with memory. Many of us have had nostalgic memories triggered when presented with a particular scent. I noticed this happening to me time and again in relation to my favorite books or stories.

I had been making candles as a hobby for about six years by the time I had my first thought about starting a business. I had just finished graduate school with a master's degree in international peace and conflict resolution and had a variety of possible paths open to me. After much soul searching it was the route of entrepreneurship that won. It was the power of fragrance that sparked my passion to share the enchanting experience of storytelling united with flame and fragrance.

Each scent I create is inspired by a literary character or folkloric theme that resonates on a deep, and sometimes dark and visceral, level. It is within this sphere of dark literature and folklore that my creativity thrives. It is also within this sphere that I've grown a following of customers who love folklore as much as

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Together, we can build something.

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I do. My products, quite literally, have stories behind them and I wake up every day thrilled that I get to share these fragrant story experiences with the world.

Abound: How did you make your first prototype? What changes have you made to your product since then?

Harmony: My first candles were made in my kitchen. I had a little booth at the local farmers' market that enabled me to communicate with customers firsthand to learn what they did and did not like in terms of fragrance notes. Over the years, the business has outgrown the little table in my kitchen. However, I still hand pour each candle myself.

Many of the initial raw materials I started out with are the same- just purchased in a much larger bulk. I used to design and print my own labels but have since outsourced all that. The biggest change to my products is the look. In 2014, my candles were very obviously homemade in my kitchen with labels printed from my home printer. Thankfully, enough people gave my products a try and as my customer base grew so did my investment into my branding and product labels.

Another huge change is in my personal skill of scent development. I'm now aware of many more scent profiles than when I started and have a much better 'nose' at creating unique blends of scents that may not initially seem like they would go well together, yet they blend wonderfully. I've grown a much deeper understanding of scent blending and candlemaking just due to experience with my craft.



Abound: How do you make your product? Yourself? A manufacturer? What's your process like?

Harmony: All my products are manufactured in-house in my small workshop. I develop each scent and choose the raw materials and oils that will go into it. At this time, I still make every product myself.

Thankfully, these days I do have a workshop assistant to help with labeling. We do outsource the printing of our labels which has helped immensely with saving time and also the special paper stock used for the labels gives them a high-quality texture. However, the labels are all hand applied and so is the wax seal on the candle lids.

Abound: What's your day to day like? Do you have any favorite and least favorite parts?

Harmony: Every day is different for me. My company is quite small with me being the only full-time employee and having 2 part-time employees. This means I need to find the time to wear almost all the hats for the business. I do this by batching my tasks. One day may be heavily focused on production, another day may be more focused on packing and shipping retail and wholesale orders. I love what I do and find it easy to get up each day and go to work. The downside is that led to me working all the time.

Last year I made a huge change and focused more on the work/life balance that so many of us entrepreneurs struggle with. Surprisingly, limiting myself to regular work hours has enabled me to be more productive during that time. Also having that extra free time to explore other hobbies has caused my

creativity to skyrocket which helps my business in terms of generating new product ideas.



Abound: What was your initial investment? How did you get the money?

Harmony: The initial investment to get my business going was quite small, probably about \$300 for a small amount of supplies. I started small by selling to friends and then at the farmers' market. For the first few years of Old Soul Artisan I had another job and was able to funnel all profits back into the company. This meant my company grew very slowly at the beginning, but it also meant I had no loans to worry about. I'm grateful for that.

Abound: Where was the first place you started selling your product?

Harmony: Farmers' market, craft fairs, and Etsy.

Abound: Where do you sell your product now?

Harmony: My own website, still on Etsy, but now love partnering with retailers across the country to sell our product in their stores.



Abound: Where would you love to sell your products in the future?

Harmony: I love funky retail shops and indie bookstores. There are so many wonderful small retailers across this country. Of course it would be nice to work with a large retailer in the future, but I love dealing with the small shops. It is way more personal.

Abound: Do you have a favorite product? If so, which one?

Harmony: I'm probably most proud of my old book scent "Book of Spells." It took me quite a while to develop this one and it is truly one of the most unique scents you won't find anywhere else.

Abound: What's your marketing like? Is social media an important part of your business? If so, how?

Harmony: My newsletter plays a huge role in my marketing efforts and is where I see the best response. Social media is also important to staying relevant and has been a great way for new customers to find my shop.

Abound: What are some of the most frustrating challenges and/or moments you've had with Old Soul Artisan?

Harmony: When I started my company I knew how to make candles, but not how to run a business. I had to teach myself everything from bookkeeping to marketing and all the million little things you need to know to run a successful business. There were a lot of growing pains and mistakes made along the way. The biggest challenge has been learning how to run a business on a small budget and minimizing the expensive mistakes by carefully planning every new product launch.

Abound: What are some of your greatest achievements and victories you've had with Old Soul Artisan?

Harmony: Last year was the greatest year yet for my business. It was my 5th year in business and I hired my first two employees. It is a great feeling to know I built something from nothing and now can provide employment to others.



Abound: What advice do you have for people who want to sell a product?

Harmony: Start from a mindset of branding. Do your research and make sure you really understand the market for your product. Many makers figure out branding later on and end up wasting a lot of money on new packaging. The more cohesive your branding is the easier it will be to get those early customers.

Abound: Is there any business advice or quotes you've heard that you think about often?

Harmony: The KISS principle: "keep it simple, stupid." I refer back to this constantly for my marketing. It is easy to over complicate things. Keep it simple. People won't buy if your offer is too complicated.

Abound: What's your favorite thing about being a business owner?

Harmony: There are two favorite things. The first is freedom. I built this company and have total creative freedom over its products and marketing. There is no one else I have to answer to besides myself and that is fulfilling. The second is hearing feedback from my customers about what a fragrance I created has meant for them or what memories it reminded them of. Those messages make all this hard work worth it.

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ABOUT ROBIN HIGGINS

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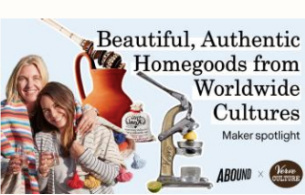
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