
Advice from Aspiring Women Entrepreneurs with Three Very Different Products

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How did you spend your summer? These three U.S.-based teenage innovators studied business fundamentals and learned about managing their money and their time – all through experiences with their own start-up companies. Their very different businesses are helping these young women develop skills for future careers and for life.

Of Backpacks and Backers

Finding a backpack that met her needs and reflected her personal style was a challenge for Emily Laine Miller. That's why she decided to create her own line of ergonomically designed backpacks that can be customized with interchangeable zipper flaps.

Miller, 16, began selling the backpacks to other kids and eventually decided to get other teens to sell them after holding focus groups with some of her friends and their parents.

"I'm always looking for ways to earn money...and pay for college," says Miller, who co-founded Laine Avenue with her mother, Lisa. "Together, my mom and I decided we could solve both problems by creating really cool backpacks and giving teens like me a chance to sell them."

Columbus, Ohio-based Laine Avenue signs up sales reps called "backers" to sell the backpacks through direct sales and earn a 25% commission. Backers also have access to the Laine Avenue Life Academy, which offers video lessons on personal development, financial management and relationships for a monthly fee.

"Emily would come home and share stories of friends not knowing things like the difference between a checking account and a savings account," says Lisa Miller. She adds, "College debt is one of the biggest issues facing teens and their parents today. While we can't solve this problem through backpacks alone, Laine Avenue gives teens the opportunity to earn money on their own time, gain entrepreneurial experience and learn valuable life skills that will set them up for future success, no matter what career path they choose."

"Saving up is extremely important for trying to step into finances and learn about needs vs. wants," says Emily, who will be a junior this fall. She says the mission is to help students to have opportunities to learn important life skills and earn money for college.

Big Lessons from a Teeny Wee

Sasha Worenklein began making YouTube videos about makeup when she was in middle school. After she gained a following giving advice to teens and tweens, the beauty blogger wondered if she could create her own product line.

"I first researched makeup and glosses to see where the gap is because I felt like something was missing. I felt like I should create a tiny lip gloss and that would fill in the gap. I went all over and did a ton of research. I went to stores and looked at products. I tried everything," she says.

The 17-year old high school senior recently launched her Teeny Wee Lip Gloss line in three colors: red, pink and rose gold. The glosses are about the size of a thumb. "I wanted to create a tiny makeup I could take with me everywhere," says Worenklein, of Mamaroneck, N.Y.

Worenklein gave out free samples of the red gloss at school, then directed her customers to the Sashaanne website to purchase the other colors. She launched the site with the help of her mom, Cindy, who says, “I needed to guide her a little bit to make certain she was doing it properly and wasn’t going to attract the wrong people. I am a mentor, but she has a strong sense of self.”

One of the lessons Sasha had to learn is “to ask questions and get help,” says Cindy Worenklein. “She had to learn that it’s not a creative world as much as a world of commerce.”

Sasha Worenklein says her support system is crucial. “My school has put me with this amazing math teacher who has helped me figure out my business and calculate my business plan,” she says. “I needed someone to help me with [money] a lot because math is not my best subject, but it’s obviously an important part of the process...I needed someone I could trust.”

Sasha advises teen entrepreneurs “You need to love what you’re doing in order to get it out there. If you’re not passionate about something, it’s never going to work...and you have to listen to advice.”

Campus Safety

After visiting several colleges in the past few years, Hunter Alves grew concerned about the safety of students walking around campus. Although many campuses have blue light security systems, she felt there should be a better way to protect students from sexual assaults and communicate with their parents.

With the help of her dad, Jeffrey, and other experts, she is developing the HOLT (Hidden Observation Location Tracker), a global tracking device that pairs with an iPhone app to contact help in a dangerous situation.

“It has a three-button system, is easily concealable, can record sound and can connect to campus security and police,” says Alves, 17. “It gives the person wearing it an added sense of security.”

“It also gives parents a sense of security,” says Jeffrey Alves. “The person wearing it can also turn the tracker on and off at their discretion.”

Hunter Alves began developing HOLT through the Spark Tank incubator at the Dwight School in New York City, from which she just graduated. The Spark Tank awarded her \$4,500 to create a prototype.

Alves, who is attending the University of California at Berkeley this fall, took a business planning basics course this summer. “I learned how to use my money and the funding that I received from my school and worked on new strategies for how I want to proceed with my company; how to promote my business and work on the legal aspects as well...I definitely would say [this project] is making me think about how I want to manage my money better...in the future with this project and while I’m in college.”