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The bond between sisters is made of memories



romantic revenues

Wedding invitation kits carried designer Anna Griffin over the threshold of success—and the honeymoon is just beginning



ANNA'S ADVICE FOR TURNING ART TO BUSINESS

- Decide what you love to do, then hone your skills in design or business and look for help to complement them.
- Trust yourself. Take the risk instead of just talking about it. It's better to try than to wish you had done it.
- Find the right banking relationship. Beyond the thrill of the start-up, you'll need funding for inventory, salary, rent, and other expenses you don't always consider.
- Expect to work harder, longer, and for less—but nothing beats the satisfaction of doing it yourself. >



PHOTOGRAPH BY TINA SIEG

TOP With scalloped edges and soft colors, Anna Griffin's business cards look like special gifts. ABOVE The Evelyn collection is distinguished by oversized florals, small tonal prints, and stripes. LEFT "I love to make a visual difference," Anna says.



UBTLE TEXTURES AND SENSUAL CURVES, LIKE THE ones found in Grandma's wallpaper or fragile heirloom lace, are trademarks of Anna Griffin's designs. Inspired by patterns from the past, Anna is reinventing romance.

Beginning in 1995 with ribbon-clad wedding invitation kits (inspired by an early job with a New York wedding gown designer), she was a pioneer of print-it-yourself stationery. "I became a manufacturer overnight," she says, defining her start-up experience as "grassroots." After exhibiting her designs at the Atlanta Gift Show, she came home with \$70,000 in wholesale orders. Her father loaned her the money to begin production.

Now her patterns can be found on stationery and linens as well as dinnerware by Lenox and quilting fabrics by Windham Textiles. Her products walk down the aisles of more than 3,000 retail stores nationwide, and are distributed in eight other countries. Though many companies have copied her style, she always comes up with fresh ideas. "If you're abundant with your designs and your ideas," she says, "they keep coming to you. If you trust that, there's enough for everyone."



WHAT WAS THE DEFINING 'AHA' MOMENT THAT STEERED YOU INTO A MONEY-MAKING BUSINESS?

I divided the hours I was working by the money I charged and realized I was making less than minimum wage. I needed to figure out how to reach more people, while preserving something that felt and looked special.

TOP: Anna's luxuriously patterned, coordinated scrapbooking papers add a touch of old-fashioned charm to craft projects. ABOVE: Anna applies her talents to creating original invitations like this pretty pocketed proposal. ABOVE RIGHT: In a 40,000-square-foot space in west Atlanta, she oversees a staff of 40. ▶



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the art of business



ABOVE: Anna with art director Holley Silirie. LEFT: A colleague's daughter stars in this "Cutie Pie" scrapbook page, part of the MacKenzie collection. A company daycare facility helps management balance home and work. BOTTOM RIGHT: "People connect through the written word," Anna says. Her company's stationery segment, including this Maime pattern, has grown 10 percent in the last year.



HOUGH GROWTH WAS FAST, ANNA ADMITS she's made her share of mistakes. In one case, she sold a complete line to a company in Australia. The company copied every product in the line and began selling them overseas. The lesson? Know your customer. She also has learned to hire cautiously, being sure the right people are doing the right jobs. "With each failure, I trust I'm being groomed for something bigger. Mistakes remind you to pay attention."

She prefers to focus on the positive, constantly exploring possibilities. "I want lots of texture, surprises, and dimension," she explains. "The challenge is to keep it simple." Using herself as the litmus test, she assesses every pattern for its visual appeal. In her worldwide travels, she actively seeks antique objects or prints that become the foundation for her pattern collections. Then she and her team, including vice president and right hand Tracey Flammer, develop products, packaging, and embellishments. Finally, they build stories around the collections to showcase them for licensing.



The key to continued success, she says, is reinvention. "The philosophy of taking the old and making it new applies to everything." ☺

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