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I Started A Preppy Clothing Brand That Makes \$21K/Month



Miriam Zelinsky



Published: March 20th, 2018

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Miriam Zelinsky

Founder, **Lazyjack Press**

\$21K

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Hello! Who are you and what are you working on?

Hi guys! My name is Miriam Zelinsky and I'm the founder of **Lazyjack Press**. I started the company more than five years ago in order to create a better quality prep brand.

I design the goods here in New York, but I have them made with the finest Italian silk in Italy. Besides the excellent quality, I've named each and every one of my designs so it's not just another boring tie collecting dust in your closet.

I focus primarily on luxury men's accessories like ties, bow ties, pocket squares, and socks (which are the best sellers) but there are also a smattering of other products like boys' bow ties and ladies' scarves, for example.

My flagship design is the red party cup that I've named "The Re-Rack." It's on a tie, bow tie, socks, even the rim around my fleece vest and keychain, but even more popular is the

socks, even the rim around my fleece vest and keychains – but even more popular, is the “Mullet tie: Business in the Front, Party in the Back.” It is gorgeous Italian woven silk on one side and then has our signature Re-Rack design on the inside lining so you can wear it to a more conservative office but not sacrifice any of the fun!

When I first started Lazyjack Press, I was convinced that my audience was going to be primarily high school and college-aged students. I couldn’t have been more wrong! As we’re growing and as I do more pop-ups and trade shows and people see the names, the audience actually skews more from young professional through to seniors! The designs aren’t skewed only to frat guys anymore. We now have conservative as well as more cheeky ties for people to choose from! Actually, one of my best bow tie customers is a gentleman in his late 70s. For the record, his favorite bow tie is the “Chick Magnet.”

Customers will regularly tell me how well my ties physically tie and how they’re better than, not only the other prep brands but the bigger European players in the game, which was shocking to me! I never intended to compete with the big designers – I just wanted to create a fun and better quality brand. It’s not only the monetary success, but the positive feedback and seeing people’s reactions when they learn the name of a tie makes it all extremely worth it!



TIES	BOW TIES	POCKET SQUARES	SCARVES	ACCESSORIES	SOCKS	BOYS	CUSTOM	ABOUT US
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What's your backstory and how did you come up with the idea?

I started Lazyjack Press when I had just graduated from law school. During law school, I went back to my alma mater, Dickinson College, for my five-year reunion. While there, I reminisced with my sorority sisters and pretended I was back in college for the weekend. That’s where most of the ideas of my first designs came from like: Beer Goggles, Sweet Shades Bro, and Irish Carbomb (Boilermakers).

During that weekend, my college roommate and I decided to go to the nicer hotel about an hour away for brunch. I saw, quite possibly, the tackiest, most plastic-looking tie I had ever seen and pointed it out to my friend and laughed. When I turned the tie over and saw who designed it, I was shocked. It was a very well-known (and popular, might I add) prep brand.

“ I went to the mill and had a little trouble (to say the least) because of their religious beliefs - they did not think a woman should be in this business.

Once I was back in New York, I started doing a little more research. All of the prep brands were no longer making their goods in the US, using pretty good silk. They were all made in Asia and the silk that they used was probably the lowest grade that existed.

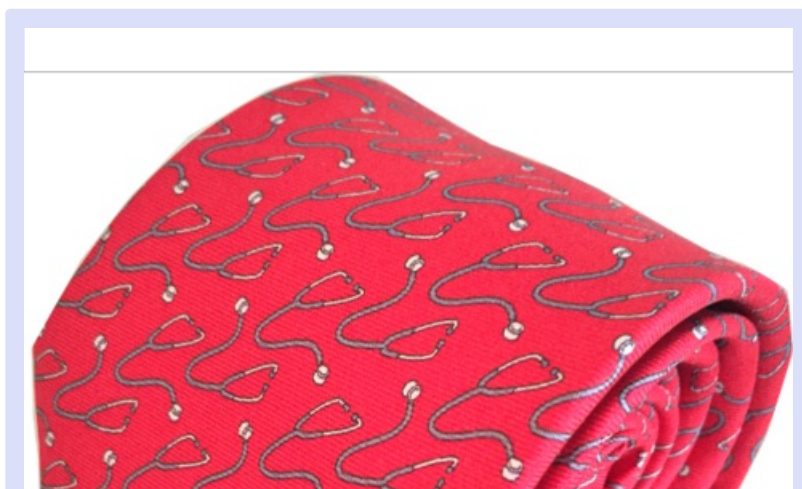
I always knew I didn't want to be a practicing lawyer and as law school came to a close, I knew I had to figure something else out. I was literally answering Bar exam multiple choice questions in my practice book when I knew I wanted to make a better quality tie for the young professional. I had no experience in design or art or fashion – I just knew I always loved fashion and helping my dad pick out his Hermès ties every morning growing up. I also had no financial backing to make this idea even seem like a remotely good idea, but I believed in the idea and knew I had to at least try.

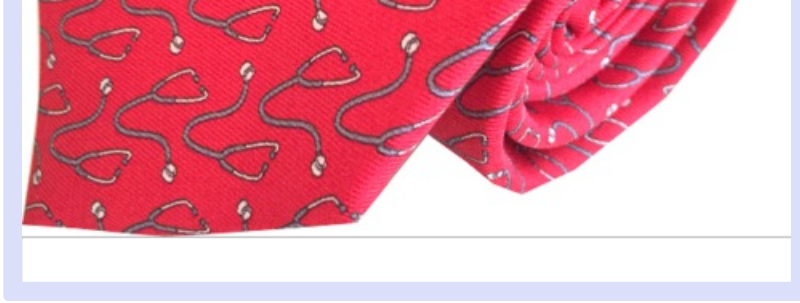
Describe the process of designing, prototyping, and manufacturing the product.

I was lucky enough to find the manufacturer through a friend of a friend of a friend.

I originally wanted to manufacture the ties in New York. I went to the mill and had a little trouble (to say the least) because of their religious beliefs - they did not think a woman should be in this business. Besides that, the 18-ounce silk I was using for the prototypes, which is considered quite good by the way, didn't feel like a luxury product.

My mom even said when I showed her the first sample that it was “atrocious” and that I could do better. I was so enraged with that interaction I had with that mill that I spoke to the agent of the mill and he told me to try a different mill in Italy. I'm still not quite sure how they agreed to take me on with no background or a big name (they manufacture for a lot of the big guys), but I'm so grateful every day that they did.





I emailed Italy the design for the red party cup tie – a little red party cup that I had gotten from a Google image search and then positioned it in a classic repeat pattern and waited to get the CAD back.

It was perfect! For the selection of the grade of silk, I told them I wanted the best – 21 momme twill. When I got the physical sample of the silk with the party cup design on it, I knew I had something. The silk was so soft and luxurious, not "plastic-y" and stiff like the previous sample had been. What's more, the pattern actually looked elegant. You had to really look hard to make out that it was a red party cup – the whole point of the tie and the idea behind it.

My second design was "Kegs & Eggs." I was drinking at a cocktail bar when I came up with the idea for that one. I quickly sketched the idea on a cocktail napkin and took a snapshot to send to Italy. It wasn't the most precise and professional way to do it, but it did the trick.

Once I had a few designs, I began the intellectual property portion. I did the trademarks and copyrights myself thanks to law school. I definitely tripped up a few times. I went back and forth with the commissioner one time until he finally called me and laughed and said, "Please – just write this and we're done!" That definitely saved a good week of back and forth!

Describe the process of launching the online store/business.

Shopify made it really easy to launch a website and get the store up and running. I'm not a technical person so having to code was definitely out of the question. That hardest part, only because it was the most time consuming, was taking pictures of the all of the products.

I was in Atlantic City when I launched the website. I was so excited when I heard that tell-tale **Shopify** "cha-ching" when a few orders came in – all from friends. I'd get an order very sporadically – sometimes a few times a week, and then sometimes only a few times a month. I always did the same thing in regards to social media so I couldn't quite figure out the rhyme or reason why I had an order one day versus another. I still don't know!

I approached Barney's in New York before having an actual tie and I couldn't believe it when they said they were interested. They gave me a little time to come up with more designs, but I said I'd launch there exclusively. That helped things a bit.

The other thing that helped was doing trade shows. I did the **MR show** at the Javits Center. I had a partner at the time and we bumped heads over what the booth needed to look like etc. He wanted to go out and buy cool vintage furniture for the booth, which looked cool, but no one knew what we were selling, especially when the other brands utilized the sleek, simple furniture and shelves provided by the show that really made their products pop.

“ [Spending money on loads of ads] is such a big risk, especially when that money pays for one month at a holiday market where I know I will make good sales and forge great new relationships with customers.

I think the first show we did was too early in the process. We had eight designs and I only had them in ties, but told buyers they could get them in bow ties and pocket squares. Do I have a sample of that at all? Nope. It was a great learning curve, though. Even though Lazyjack Press wasn't completely ready, the beginning stages when we were not even on the outskirts of the radar let me make mistakes and learn from them before other people even noticed.

I honestly still don't know the rhyme or reason behind getting a lot of customers. Since Barney's, I'm in Nordstrom, which helps, but the thing that helps the most is pop-ups. Being there, although it's tedious and extra long hours every single day, you form connections with customers and they then come to you saying, "I have almost all of the designs. What's next?" They also get to know you a little more and it forms a really important connection that hopefully will last for a long time.

Since launch, what has worked to attract new customers?

I've tried it all when it comes to marketing. I'm done AdWords, Google Advertising, Facebook and Instagram ads... I haven't yet seen a meaningful difference there and I know that's something I need to work on.

In order to make money, other companies tell me you **really** have to spend it. I'm not willing nor do I have the resources to put \$10,000 minimum a month for it. It's such a big risk, especially when that money pays for one month at a holiday market where I know I will make good sales and forge great new relationships with customers.

One thing I am committed to is posting on social media every day. I don't just post ties and product shots – that gets boring quickly and I'm sure I'd lose followers. I've made my social media more of a lifestyle page – it sort of represents what the brand is all about and goes into my personal life a little bit, which I think is cool since the brand is me. I do see recently that I'm getting more interactions and sales from social media. Each follower that you gain is another chance to get a sale.

The most advantageous marketing that I did was to participate on season two of the CNBC show [Billion Dollar Buyer](#). Filming and taking a risk on National TV went **way** outside of my comfort zone, but I knew I had a great product and that people had to know about it. I've gotten a lot of great repeat customers and even a few social media fans from it. It was a really great experience!

How is everything going nowadays, and what are your plans for the future?

After my second season of holiday markets and increasing my trade shows outside of New York to Atlanta, things are actually starting to pick up for real.

It's not easy making product on the highest quality silk because then you have people who balk

at the prices. But then you also have people who appreciate the quality and are willing to pay the prices, but it's not for everybody. I have to be okay with that. But the relationships I made at these pop-ups sustain me during the year. The really good customers will order from wherever they live in the US during the year and then come back to me during the holidays and give me a hug and see all of the new stuff.

“ I only want to work with people who love the brand and believe in it. In turn, they also see more turnaround because they're invested in it as well.

I want to keep the momentum going. I feel like once Billion Dollar Buyer aired and I did the second season of holiday markets where I did less explaining of who I am and more greeting returning customers, I can breathe a little bit more.

I am profitable, but every dollar goes back into the company so I can do something else that's exciting. Had a good day at the market? That money can go to a new sock design that I've been wanting to do.

I've been expanding wholesale, which is great! I love the smaller gift and men's boutiques because they get equally excited about the new designs and products. I have some who were skeptical at first who now call me sometimes multiple times a month to order more product for their store. I only want to work with people who love the brand and believe in it. In turn, they also see more turnaround because they're invested in it as well.

Besides wholesale and expanding online sales, I've decided (only last week) to open up a physical brick and mortar store in East Hampton. My neighbor at a pop up I did more than a year ago had approached me about the prospect. She said she'd run it but if I could split the rent.

“ The biggest advice I can give you is to just start. You don't need to have everything figured out – you will figure it out when you begin.

At first, I was nervous because this will be the first time I will not personally be selling my own product, but I have to take chances. She makes really beautiful jewelry so it'll be a really nice one-stop shop for customers. It was going to be for just the summer at first. We then learned the lease at a prime location was only for three years. Neither of us have ever done anything like this before, but I think it's a chance worth taking. It's going to be great marketing and hopefully will bring in a whole new group of amazing customers. We're also next to Ralph Lauren and Brunello Cuccinelli so that can't hurt :)

Besides that, I just want to keep designing new products and designs and keep making everything on the best quality materials available to me. It's a slow (sometimes steady) process, but I'm hoping Lazyjack Press continues to see growth this year and into the future.

Through starting the business, have you learned anything particularly helpful or advantageous?

So far, I've taken every opportunity that's come my way. I never wanted to look back and wonder if I had taken that risk, if that would have made a difference. If something doesn't pan out quite like I hoped, I'm still happy that I tried it and hopefully it taught me something.

I think I'm just extra determined. I work crazy hours (and also play hard when I can). I make old fashioned to do lists during the day and before bed so I can sleep instead of being up at night worrying. This only sometimes works. I try to stay as organized as possible to avoid careless mistakes. If I make a mistake, I'll learn from it and do it even better next time. I just try and do the best I can and have everything come from my heart.

What platform/tools do you use for your business?

The only one I really use is [Shopify](#). I'm still one of those people who write down to-do lists instead of using the handy dandy app on the iPhone.

The [Shopify](#) gurus are amazing! I also love when I have a question because they're so nice and helpful. [Hey Carson](#) is great for when the problem is too technical – it's sort of like a technical Task Rabbit.

What have been the most influential books, podcasts, or other resources?

I'm not sure if I should admit this or not, but I haven't read any! I maybe should get on that :)

Advice for other entrepreneurs who want to get started or are just starting out?

The biggest advice I can give you is to just start. You don't need to have everything figured out – you will figure it out when you begin.

I talk to so many people who have ideas for such great things and when I see them a year or two later, they still haven't done anything because they're scared of failure and the unknown.

It's natural once you start to run into roadblocks – if you believe in what you're doing, keep going. I was going to give up **so** many times and each time, something promising happened and I was so happy I hadn't thrown in the towel.

Be prepared to work hard and work every. single. day. Make sure it's something you absolutely love because otherwise, the times when you don't get a day off in a few months, you're going to hate your life! The other thing I would advise is don't take shortcuts on the quality of the goods. People notice and care. I love being able to look people in the eye when they ask about the quality of a tie and telling them, it's made on (literally) the finest quality Italian silk.

There are no easy answers. Just believe in your idea, work hard and don't give up!

Where can we go to learn more?

- Website: www.lazyjackpress.com
- Instagram: [@Lazyjackpress](#)

- Twitter: [@Lazyjackpress](#)
- Facebook: [@Lazyjackpress](#)



Miriam Zelinsky, Founder of Lazyjack Press


Lazyjack Press has provided an update on their business!

About 2 years ago, we followed up with Lazyjack Press to see [how they've been doing](#) since we published this article.



Pat Walls, Founder of Starter Story

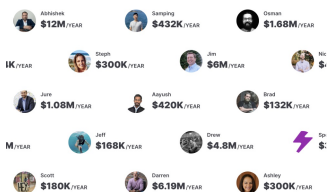
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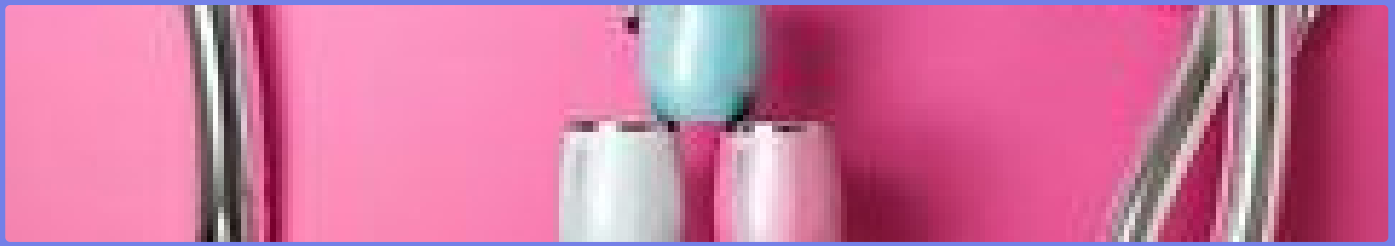
You'll realize these people are just like you - and that, deep down, you can do it too.



Dylan

I Grew A Drinkware Brand To \$11M/Month At 23 Years Old

Grew A Drinkware Brand To \$1.1M/Month At 25 Years Old



Drinkware brand

\$12M / month



Chris

How I Started An SEO Agency For Lawyers Generating \$3.6M/Year



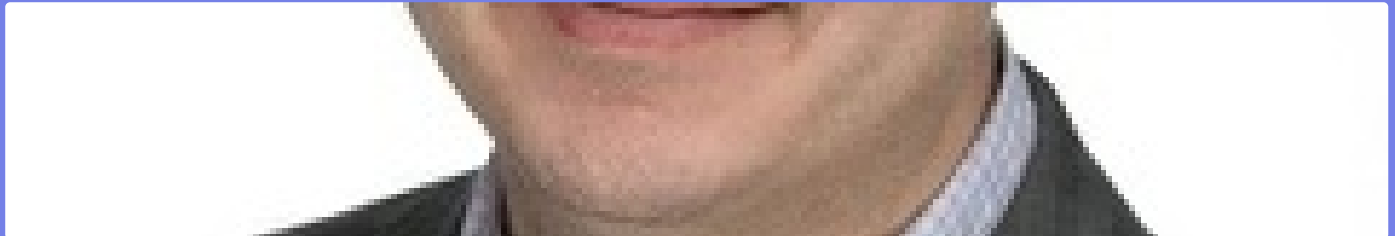
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Matt

How I Started An \$8M/Year Stock Market Research Website



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Chad

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Osman

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Sam Parr

My First Million

I love this website.



Rand Fishkin

Moz / SparkToro

Love Starter Story's transparency.



Johne Vang

Be The Match

You can't find this information anywhere else.



Trent Baren

Instagram

So much valuable information.



Bilal Budhani

Entrepreneur

I was hooked on Starter Story as soon as I discovered it. Resonated with me right off the bat.



Jenn Leach

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Jamie

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