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How Angela Carillo Started A Soap Company Out Of Her Kitchen



Angela Carillo



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Angela Carillo

Founder, **Alegna Soap**

\$5K

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Hello! Who are you and what business did you start?

My name is Angela Carillo. I've been a soap maker since 2000, and in 2009 I started **Alegna Soap®**. In case you haven't figured it out yet, Alegna is Angela backward. Hey, if it worked for Oprah...

In addition to selling soap online, at fairs and events across Long Island, I produce custom private label soaps for other Bath and Beauty companies. I also teach soap making classes and speak at soap conferences all over the country.





What's your backstory and how did you come up with the idea?

I've always loved soap and scents. One of my first memories is receiving a perfume making kit for Christmas gift. I had so much fun blending scents for my mother and sisters. When my family went on vacation, I was drawn to fancy soaps in the gift shops, picking them up off the shelf to smell them. I wanted to know how they were made.

“ Starting Alegna Soap® boosted my confidence more than anything else I've ever done. I've had to push out of my comfort zone and become comfortable with feeling uncomfortable.

In college, I studied to be a Medical Technologist, took the required Chemistry classes and found out about the process of saponification. Later I went to my local library, took out a book on cold process soap making, and decided I would make my own. The first batch I made using beef fat, rendering into tallow.

I think I envisioned myself as a colonial woman. I have a few bars left and it still smells awful. I started researching different soap making oils and butters, perfecting my recipe. I was a hobbyist for many years, learning the craft while making soap after soap after soap.

The ingredients for soap making are expensive and I had kids to put through college. My thoughts of starting a company went on the back burner. Once they both graduated, I decided it was time for me to invest in myself and do what I loved.

I joined the [Handcrafted Soap and Cosmetic Guild](#) and [Indie Business Network](#) and learned what I needed to do to start a company. I went to a [Small Business Development Center](#) for advice. I started Alegna Soap®.

Describe the process of making this soap

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To me, soap making is like magic, or really, science. Saponification is a chemical reaction. All soap is made with sodium hydroxide or lye. If soap is made correctly, there will be no lye left in the soap.

I love the whole soap making process and I make each and every bar I sell. I calculate the correct amount of lye needed to change those oils and butters into soap, and then I add some extra oils so the soap won't dry your skin.



I take my base oils, heat them up and mix them with lye and water. I use an immersion or stick blender to do this. Once the soap batter reaches "trace" (a thin pudding consistency), I add the essential oil blend for the scent and any additives I want. After a little more mixing the batter gets poured into a block mold. After 24 hours in my mold, the soap is solid, but still on the soft side, like mozzarella cheese. I cut the soap into loaves and then bars, and they sit on my curing racks for 4 weeks.

Once the soap is fully cured, it's time to wrap for me to wrap them. I admit I have a complicated packaging procedure, but I love my labels. They were designed by a local Long Island graphic art company called [Digho](#). Since my soaps are natural I wanted a way to add color and Digho had some really great ideas. I wrap a strip of colorful material around the soap and then attach a see-through vellum label around the bar. I think it makes my soaps look high end. It's time-consuming and I know that I'll need to simplify the process someday. But for now, I take the time to wrap.

The creative part is the personalization of the soap or the decorating and scenting. I think of each of my soaps as being different individuals. What feeling do I want to evoke, what color do

I want the soap to be, which botanicals will work with the scent blend? And the blending of essential oils to get just the right scent is another kind of magic.

Describe the process of launching the online store/business.

I'm a big believer in do what you know, and pay someone to do the rest. Or find some family to help. **My son** put up and takes care of my website. He designs and builds affordable websites for small to medium sized businesses so it worked out well. And besides, I put him through college! I told him what I wanted and I forget about it. It's been redone twice in the past ten years, and he is in the process of another update. I believe he uses **Wordpress** with a **WooCommerce** plugin.

I remember thinking once my website was up, the orders would start pouring in. Wrong! My launch was pretty quiet, but I do remember the first online customer I had. There was a celebration in my house that day, I'm pretty sure the dinner out cost more than the online order, but it was so worth it.

I had two lines of soap back then, my Classic Line and the Laney Line. The Laney Line was a line of colorful soaps my daughter Elaine helped me design and name. The Laney Line never really took off, but because it was something my daughter and I did together, I was reluctant to let it go. I'm more of a naturalist and love the creamy natural color of soap.

I made the tough decision to discontinue the line about four years ago. I was afraid Elaine would be upset about "her" soaps, but it turns out, she didn't care. Lesson learned? Trust myself, I know what's right for me.

Since launch, what has worked to attract and retain customers?

I'm grateful for the customers I have now and I let them know it. I don't worry about attracting more. My customers spread the word.

Twice a year I host an Open House and invite them to my home studio. I have food out for snacking, they can tour my soap studio and talk to other soap lovers. I have plenty of time to get to know them. Since this is my party, everyone goes home with a goodie bag filled with soap and products. For a VIP customer birthday, I mail a card and a package with a birthday soap. I like the idea of my customers getting a physical gift on their birthday instead of a coupon.

I write a weekly **blog to focus on the keywords I want.**

Adding new content each week helps with SEO. I've probably written almost 500 blogs. Looking back, the first ones were awful. I struggle with writing, it's not my favorite thing to do. I've gotten better and those first blogs were important because, without them, I wouldn't have. I listened to a mentor who told me to start writing. Just do it. The more you do something uncomfortable, the more comfortable it becomes, and the better you are at it. She was right.

I post on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram daily.

Coming up with good content can be challenging. I try to put myself in my customer's shoes and ask what I'd want to see and hear.

To me, the things I do to make soap are ordinary, but my customers love to see behind the scenes. Pictures of me in Haiti teaching soap making to the women living in tent camps, pictures of my soap making equipment, a video of me putting the finishing touches on a batch, my empty soap pot, you name it, people are interested.

I'm getting better at telling the stories behind my business. I show the soap racks my dad made and talk about him. I talk about the spa that was the inspiration for my [Lavender Lemongrass](#) soap. I post pictures of the products my elementary students make at an afternoon skin care class and my husband helping me set up my tent. I stopped overthinking and post about my daily soap making life.

I send out a monthly newsletter.

In it, I talk about what happened at my last event, where my next event will be, or new products that I'm working on. I'll share a skin care tip I've heard about. I love asking my customers to help me test new soap recipes and essential oil blends. They are always so willing to give their thoughts. I have a section where I post a link to all my weekly blogs and another area listing what soaps are on my curing racks.

I always carry soap samples with my business card in my pocketbook. I leave them on the table with the tip in restaurants and give them to the people I chat with on trains, grocery lines and anywhere else I go.

How are you doing today and what does the future look like?

I'm proud of the fact that I never took out a loan for Alegna Soap®. I self-financed and kept my day job.

I needed to put money into the company for the first two years. I was able to do this because I was growing slowly. By the end of the third year, I was breaking even and I was absolutely ecstatic. I plan on leaving my day job so I can focus solely on Alegna Soap® and take it further than I already have.

I have three legs of Alegna Soap®. Retail, private label and teaching/speaking. Each leg contributes approximately the same income. I want to continue to build on each leg to keep the balance.

Most Bath and Body businesses have a slow period after the holidays, but my teaching/speaking schedule compensates for this.

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

Starting Alegna Soap® boosted my confidence more than anything else I've ever done. I've had to push out of my comfort zone and become comfortable with feeling uncomfortable.

I learned to trust my gut and only do things I felt were right for me. I'm a natural introvert who is learning to become more outgoing. Selling is hard for me, but talking about soap is easy.

What platform/tools do you use for your business?

I use [Mailchimp](#) for my newsletter, [WordPress](#) for my blog, and [Ipiccy](#) for my pictures. I love [Hootsuite](#) for scheduling social media posts.

To keep myself organized, I'm old school. I like a paper planner and calendar. It gets filled in in pencil, so things can get moved around. Details get filled in each week, and the overview is done monthly.

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

The most influential book I've read is [You are a Badass](#) by Jen Sincero. Seriously. There is a small line in the book where she talks about how we still make mistakes. Instead of beating ourselves up about it (which used to be a favorite pastime of mine) she says to say "I'm just a little bunny, working through my issues".

Now, whenever I screw something up, I think of a bunny and I'm smiling. Problems are much easier to fix when you're smiling.

I love the [Indie Business](#) podcasts by Donna Maria Coles Johnson, and I watch inspirational TED talks. I have a girl crush on [Marie Forleo](#) and [Ash Ambirge](#).

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

Don't wait until you're 100 percent ready, because you'll never be. Trust yourself, you know more than you think you do.

Find an entrepreneur you admire, ask questions and listen. If you can read, you can figure out pretty much everything. If you're struggling with something, ask for help.

Where can we go to learn more?

Website: www.alegnasoap.com

[Instagram](#), [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) @alegnasoap

Blog: www.alegnasoap/blog/



Angela Carillo, Founder of Alegna Soap

Alegna Soap has provided an update on their business!

Over 3 years ago, we followed up with Alegna Soap to see [how they've been doing](#) since we published this article.



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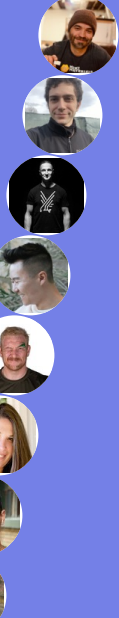


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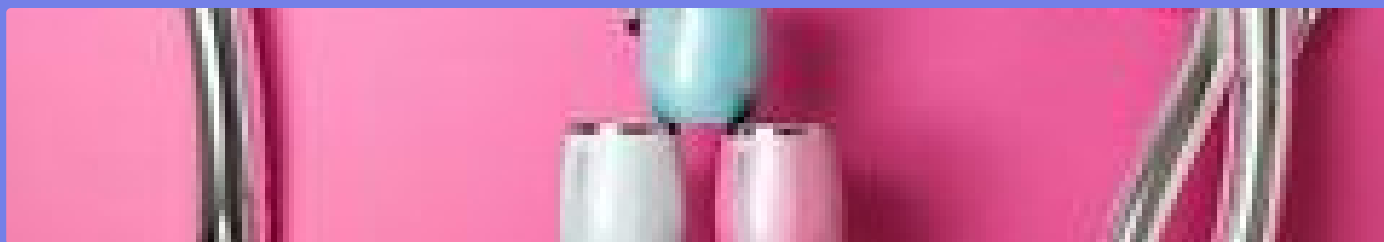
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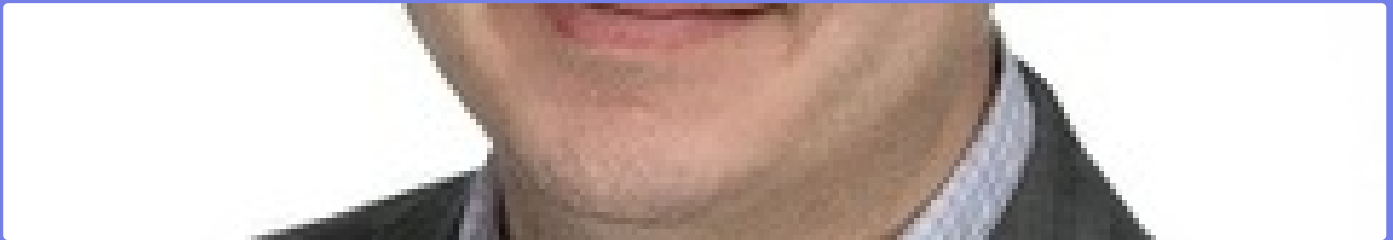
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