

ARINA SLABKO: HOW TO START PRODUCTION OF A PERFECT CASE FOR IPHONE

15 years ago Arina Slabko went to visit friends to Paris where she met Marcel Robert a watch specialist and a leather accessories craftsman. In a year they got married, after what Arina persuaded Herve to move to Russia. In Moscow Russian-French couple founded a workshop producing premium watch straps. And not long ago they fulfilled a new unique project – a perfect case for iPhone. In our interview you will find all the details of the new project.

BEFORE THE PROJECT

In the middle of nineties I started my career of a TV journalist in the old team of NTV. In 2007 I founded my own production company that produced successfully documentaries for 8 years for the TV Channel TNT (“Payment for speed”, “Fight girls” – the nominee of the award “Laurel Branch” of 2008, “Have you signed up as a Volunteer?”, “How to earn the first million?” , “ Earning is easy 1, 2, 3” and others).

I got fascinated by the business topic in 2000. At that time I offered to the heads of the TV channels STS and TNT a TV

economic project – series of big journalistic stories on the secrets of business, how it is organized from inside.

Why one and the same thing costs differently, how much, to whom and for what we overpay? But 15 years ago the viewer was not ready for business stories. The producer of the TV channel TNT offered me to produce documentaries making the cycle “Stories of big cities”. I fulfilled my dream several years ago when I produced my first film “Earning is easy” about young people who from scratch, without investors and big investments developed a successful business. The film got on the air with big rating. The viewers liked its positive trait and the main thought: if you want and do, everything is possible and always! Two series of the film “Earning is easy 2 and 3” followed it, and I started a big experiment! Under the control of two successful businessmen within sight of viewers five young active young men had to start a business without acquaintances and investments and get it to the turnover of 1 mln rubles per month in 4 months! The experiment was

successful and I started thinking over my business.



IDEA

At that moment my husband had his own French workshop on customized watch straps production Marcel Robert. The business brought a stable not big income but we were not able to increase sales greatly. The number of clients buying expensive watches is thousands not millions. I was inspired by the idea to increase the turnover of my husband's company. Thanks to the experience I received at TV business projects I understood: to sell the goods successfully it has to be in the first place a mass one and in the second place it has to be perfect, unique.

SUPPLY — DEMAND

At that moment Herve, my husband, presented me an Iphone5. I was strolling around shops searching for a leather case without any success but didn't buy anything. Or the leather was artificial or the case was thick or a cover was uncomfortable and hanging loose during conversation. My creative experience from my TV past helped and I imagined quickly a perfect case – ultra thin, of natural soft leather with flexible cover. The cover of the case had to clear the surface of iPhone perfectly from the footprints and powder but at the same time to be fixed well not bothering while conversation. I offered my husband to design our own model – thin, stylish, produced of the most beautiful and quality leather. What we had to do is to polish our idea and to find a technical solution. Herve was responsible for the selection of precious leather and the sewing technology, a master of lux class accessories of the French school. I didn't doubt that there everything would be perfect. Though for finding a technical solution I needed an additional resource and I addressed to Alexey Noniashvili, the director of “The Factory of Perfect Products”, so started a very interesting and productive common project. Alexey helped me to formulate unique customer qualities of the future case searching thoroughly and removing the disadvantages of existing samples. We needed one more month to find the technical solution. The final sample by Marcel Robert workshop and the Factory of Perfect Products was ready in June 2013. I addressed to the patent agency and submitted a patent application. We settled the production in my husband's workshop in Moscow where we were making hi-tech watch straps.

PRODUCTION

The first lot was made in single quantities. We spent one month for making this model a perfection.

I made a site and had a video filmed – how a thin cover clears the screen, is mounted to the screen and doesn't bother during conversation. The video at the site played a decisive role, unique qualities were obvious.

Already in a month of existence of new model of the case, I received a letter from the manager of the big retail shop re:Store Natalia Ziganshina with collaboration offer. Natalia showed the cases to the directors and at once re:Store ordered 400 cases. For a little French workshop it was a real challenge. We had to pass from single piece production to serial production. So our little workshop turned into a little factory. The main difficulty was that there was a lot of manual work in the production of cases, it was not possible mechanize this job, every sample is sewn manually and demands precise masterfulness from a craftsman. For example, Herve's workshop is the only one in Russia where they make extra fine and precise crimping of leather borders for straps ad cases, the result is beautiful and refined. For re:Store the workshop managed to produce only 250 cases and in October 2014 successful sales started at the shops.

MARKETING

At first we sold cases through the site and through our friends and then the unique project started to sell itself, the clients themselves searched it in the Internet. In spring 2014 we made an agreement with Aeroflot company on sales of unique cases on the board of the famous air company. During the first week sales at federal flight went very active

and in July unique cases will appear in the catalogues of international flights of Aeroflot next to famous world brands of LUX class.

Now almost 50 cases per day are produced at the workshop and practically all cases are sold out a month ahead.



INVESTMENTS

We needed investments at the initial stage. For buying specific equipment Herve took a loan at the bank (more than 300 thousand rubles), and for buying leather and cases I invested out of my income from my TV business – about 1 mln rubles. Current expenses for the workshop were financed at the expense of the existing straps production. The most difficult thing was to adopt the payment system of big companies when you had to wait for real money from 30 to 70 days taking into account that for the workshop Re:store and Aeroflot had worked out favourable terms. We with three children and big difficulties have survived these 3 months until this business has become

permanently profitable Almost all the profit we invest now in future projects.

NEW PRODUCTS

There exists a whole list of high-tech products of leather that we plan to bring to the market the following year. We have already designed a new case for Ipad of natural leather with a flexible cover. But so far there is a problem in specific cases. When their production is settled on the territory of Russia, the cases will get to the Re:store shops.

ADVICES

- Before starting business, think over USP (unique sales proposition). How is this product different from the product of the competitors? Without USP starting business is practically senseless.
- Production is difficult but terribly interesting! Dive in the details and make super quality and your clients will thank you! When clients look for us and thank for a great product my husband and me get more desire and energy to make this world more perfect!
- Before bringing a product into circulation think what kind of problems. “headaches” you will release your clients from? Find these “problems” and take care of them!
- Be a professional in your sphere or become it. You should make your product the most high quality at the market, don’t economize on materials. Do as you would do that for yourself. And China will be no more your competitor.
- Don’t be scared and address to big companies, they will help you to sell quicker and more! Reaching agreement with them with a unique product is very easy!