

NATALIE SISSON

*The*  
*Suitcase*  
ENTREPRENEUR

CREATE FREEDOM IN BUSINESS  
AND ADVENTURE IN LIFE



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To my wonderful parents  
Peter and Gina and  
my sister Debbie.  
I'm truly the luckiest  
daughter and sister  
on this planet. Here's to  
many more adventures  
together.

# Introduction

## Choosing your own adventure

*The Universe rewards bravery –  
stop making excuses and get to it.*

~NATALIE SISSON

My friends thought I was mad buying a one-way ticket to Canada, to chase my dreams of working for myself, especially since I'd just got a raise at work and had bought an apartment in London, England.

But quitting that lucrative 9-5 job and jumping on a plane seemed like a completely logical thing to do in order to discover a new way of living.

That was in 2008 and the journey to achieving freedom in my business and adventure in my life since then has been one big unconventional roller-coaster ... and I wouldn't change a minute of it.

Sure, there were plenty of moments of doubt, of fear, of questioning my sanity. But they only showed me that I was living life to the full and pushing my boundaries.

In this book I've set out to prove to you that you can live life exactly how you want to and to show you what's possible.

I believe that there's no better time than right now to live life on your own terms and I'm on a mission to inspire you to build a business and a life that you love, using just a laptop, smartphone and an Internet connection.

It's never been easier and more affordable to build a business from anywhere using online tools, social media, outsourcing and a lot of hustle. What's more, you can choose to do this while living wherever you want in the world, whether that's your hometown, another country or even from your suitcase.

I should know. After 9 years in the corporate world I've built a six-figure global business from nothing with just a blog and close to zero investment. Now I travel the world, living out of my suitcase and teach others how to do the same.

So sit back, return your seatback to the upright position, switch off your mobile phone and prepare for take off.

# Why I wrote this book and who I wrote it for

*Do not follow where the path may lead.  
Go instead where there is no path and leave a trail*  
~ RALPH WALDO EMERSON

Everybody has the right to create freedom in business and live life on their own terms and that's what this book will teach you to do. I'm not expecting you to do exactly what I do and live out of a suitcase, but I am expecting you to want to live life on your own terms.

That's why I wrote this book; to ensure you have the tools and know-how to live the life you dream of, whether that's drinking Mai Tais on a tropical island while creating digital products, or running a horse-training business via Skype and YouTube from your local café.

I built my business and community out of nothing but a blog and a desire and determination to fit my work around my dream lifestyle. Not the other way around.

## **A novel idea**

As you can probably tell, I like to buck convention. I was never good with people telling me I couldn't do something; that just made me more determined to prove them wrong.

So, at first, when I was asked to write a book by a big name' traditional publisher, I couldn't believe it! I jumped up and down like an excited kid! I'd always wanted to write a book and this felt like my permission slip.

I wrote the book proposal using their template, but then they turned it down, saying "*people aren't ready for completely virtual businesses, Natalie.*" I remember laughing out loud, incredulous, and wondering if they'd read the *4-Hour Workweek*, which had come out 5 years earlier.

People all around me were catching on to this virtual business revolution and location-independence was becoming a common phrase. If I waited another year to write this book, it would already be too late.

Then it struck me. Why on earth was I considering going the traditional route, giving away all my control, content rights and the majority of my profits, to a publisher stuck in dying industry model? Especially one that didn't understand me, or likely, where I was coming from.

This was just the same scenario as working in a 9-5 job, for people that gave me no freedom to make an impact on the world, and bring my art to those who needed it most.

So I used the very online tools that helped me build my business in the first place to self-publish this book.

That's right: this book was paid for and supported through a Kickstarter campaign. Close to 200 people pledged their support, essentially saying, '*Natalie we want to see this book written*'.

It's been read and lovingly improved by those who pledged to be on the editorial team, and the three sections that make up the backbone of this book were from generous sponsor level pledges through Kickstarter too.

I think this is the perfect example of how we can do things on our own terms; of how the world is changing, and it proves you can do just about anything you put your mind to, even if you don't have much money.

You can choose your own adventure and make it a reality by harnessing the power of people, online tools, technology and social media to change the way in which we do business.

## **Why you should read this book**

I want this book to challenge your current way of thinking and show you that becoming a digital nomad is within your grasp, if you truly want it.

### **You don't need:**

- An office to run your business
- A permanent residential address to live at
- To work traditional business hours – ever

- Your team to be present or even in the same country or time zone
- To meet your clients or customers face to face
- More than \$100 or 24 hours to start your online business
- An excuse to travel or to live in just one place.
- Permission to do what you want when you want and live a full life.

## **Who is this book for?**

It's for you if you want to quit your job and create your own path to freedom, whether from your own home, or some exotic location on the other side of the world.

It's for you, the business owner, who's working hard to build a profitable company that makes an impact, but you want the freedom and flexibility on when and where to run it from.

It's also for you if you're an employee who wants to go traveling, and then come back to sell your services to the very company you left behind.

## **How should you read it?**

If you're just starting out on the road of entrepreneurship or you need the motivation to quit your job, then I suggest you start at the very beginning, and read how others have achieved their ideal lifestyle, including my journey.

If you're already in business, or on the verge of it, and wanting to free up more time and not be bound to one location, then skip to Act 2 to tap into the different business models to make this possible, and the key tools and technology available to you, to make it happen.

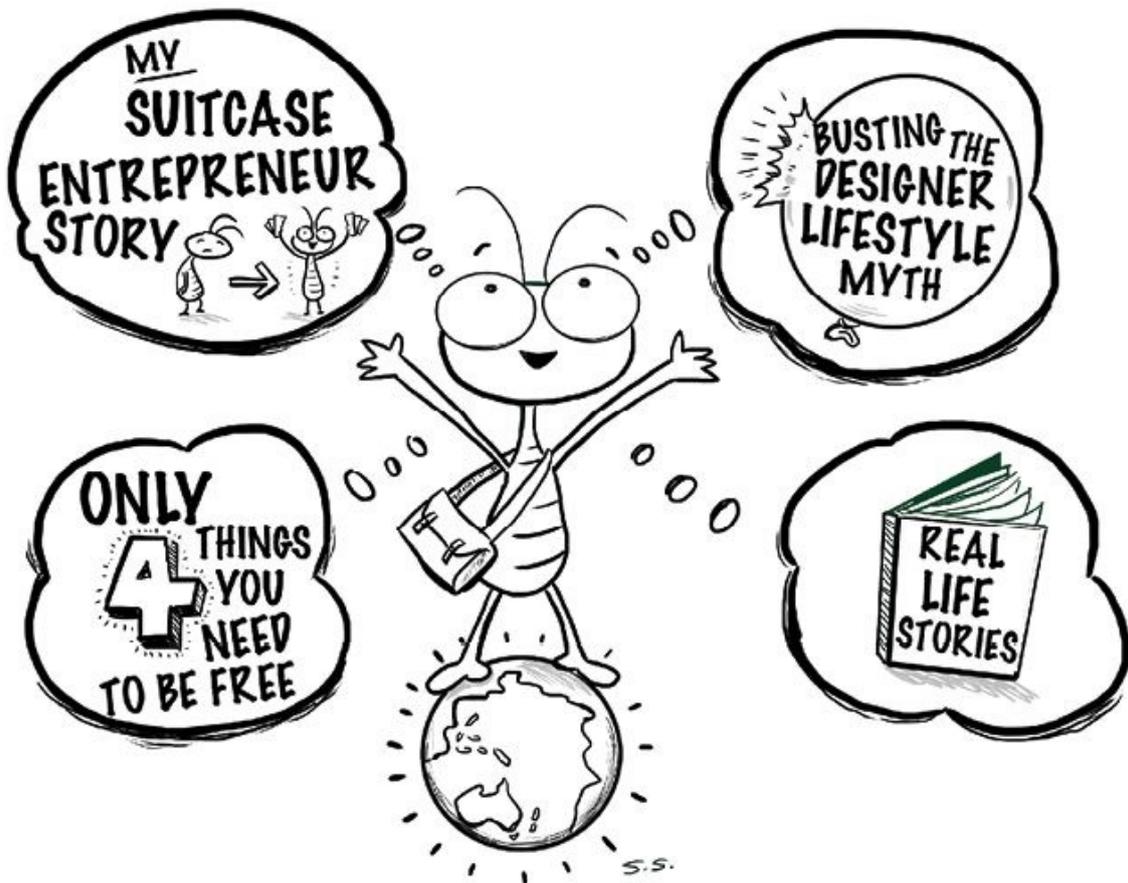
If you're curious about how to pack up your life and business and go jet-setting around the world, or at least on a more regular basis, then jump straight to Act 3.

There are many links provided throughout this book to references, tools and services that you will find as invaluable as I have. I've also created an entire online resource section for readers that you can access anytime and will be constantly updated with the latest and greatest at [suitcaseentrepreneur.com/book/resources](https://suitcaseentrepreneur.com/book/resources).

Let the journey begin.

## Act 1

# Welcome to the new world of digital nomads



*A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step.*

~ LAO TZU

Life as we know it has fundamentally changed, and anything and everything you think is normal will be challenged in upcoming years. Freedom is the new currency, and by that I mean, if you can monetize yourself, your skills, or those of others, you can be both fulfilled and financially free.

The future is bright and it belongs to the digital nomads, online marketers and

knowledge providers who make valuable content accessible in numerous formats and available any time from almost any device. That's the kind of person I am. And it's the kind of person you can be, too.

“The decision to become a Lifestyle Entrepreneur flows directly from the first and most important decision — to become an Entrepreneur. Fourteen years ago I had an idea for the world's first accurate, strapless, heart rate watch. What a terrific idea!

No more sweaty, uncomfortable chest straps! I thought my watch — the MIO — would change the world. I left a comfortable corporate career with visions of early retirement — sailboats, beaches and most importantly — time for myself and my family.

I thought I would quickly get to the end of the road. But, soon it became very clear; the end was a long way away. Fast forward to today and I'm still on that road. It's taken more than a few turns; some directly backward — but I'm loving every minute of it.

An idea is just that, an idea. Turning an idea into a thriving business is typically one of those twenty year “overnight” success stories. So, before jumping straight in, make sure your business is connected intimately with your passion. A study of successful entrepreneurs found three key traits:

- Responding positively to all challenges and learning from mistakes
- Taking personal initiative.
- Having great perseverance.

What this tells you is the road is hard, long and bumpy. You and the business necessarily become inseparable. To preserve your mental health you have to absolutely love your work. Then, your work becomes your play, and you never tire of it.

The “lifestyle” part for me is having the discipline not to overwork. Be sure to set boundaries for yourself and your family so they respect and expect that you have to work, but live up to your commitment that when it's time to play — you will play!

Being an Entrepreneur has allowed me more freedom than a regular job. I go on great, long family vacations; run my dog 5km/day; usually say goodbye to my son in the morning before school, and hello when he gets home again, all while inventing and selling serious products, like [MIO ALPHA](#), that have profoundly impacted fitness training. I have never been healthier or had a better lifestyle — and I have never worked harder in my life.”

Before we dive in I'd like to thank my sponsor for this section of my book from my

Kickstarter Liz Dickinson Founder of MIO Global, and proud sponsor of Act 1.

## Chapter 1

# **My story – from broke to \$15,000 in one month**

*Life is either a daring adventure or nothing.*

~HELEN KELLER

My working day is a little ... different.

I don't go to an office. I rarely – if ever – go to meetings. Although I run my own business that allows me to travel all over the world, my schedule is mine to do with as I choose.

And I don't choose boardrooms, clock-watching, time-stamping or those endless grey meetings in grey boardrooms with grey, desperately unhappy people.

Since you are reading this, then I bet that's not the life for you, either.

Instead, you want to spend your days like I do: cycling through Africa, throwing yourself off the Victoria Falls Bridge, Zambia, riding a motorbike through the hills of Thailand or hiking the famous W Trail in Patagonia.

That's what I do, and all while my business works for me.. The good news is: you can do the same. You can run a thriving online business from your laptop, from anywhere in the world, on your own schedule.

Let me show you how.

### **Here's my secret**

I choose **freedom** as my highest value in life. I do everything in my power to have more of it. This means that every single decision I make is based upon staying true to this value. If it doesn't fit, I don't do it.

In pursuit of freedom I have become a homeless vagabond (or world citizen) and live out of my suitcase full-time. I have no address and no home base, but I do have the ability to truly live life on my own terms.

### **There are two types of reactions when I tell people what I do.**

The first is “Wow! That sounds amazing. I’d love to be able to do that one day.”

The second is “Are you crazy?” followed by “Don’t you have an actual home? How on earth do you manage that?”

So am I crazy? Perhaps a little – I’ll let you be the judge.

## **Who is Natalie Sisson?**

I grew up in New Zealand, one of the most beautiful countries in the world, where my European parents had settled after a world tour honeymoon.

I spent my childhood outdoors, playing sport. Dad worked hard so we could enjoy as many vacations as his job – as an insurance salesman – would allow.

I started to travel with the family at the age of two. By the time I turned six, I ended up having to repeat a school year due to our family having taken too much time off to travel!

Fast forward to age 27 and I was still struck with the travel bug. In fact, I found myself with a strong urge to leave New Zealand ... possibly indefinitely. I packed my bags in February 2006 and spent the next 300 days living out of a suitcase.

In fact, I’ve been in a permanent state of pack ever since.

I started by traveling across South East Asia and ended up arriving in London, England on my 27th birthday where I stayed for 2.5 years. Since then I’ve also called Vancouver, Buenos Aires, Los Angeles, Amsterdam and Berlin home (even if just for a few months).

On top of all of these nomadic pursuits I have managed to build a successful online business and a movement of Suitcase Entrepreneurs that I’m privileged to lead.

## **Leaving traditional work behind**

If you're wondering how on earth I achieved this, then know that it all comes down to one simple philosophy:

***A true desire to live my life the way I want to, no matter what.***

This true desire is what people are missing as they detail all the reasons they can't possibly live the life they want.

My way of living hasn't always been like this. I spent close to nine years of my life chasing the corporate dream, working my way up through high-paying jobs in marketing, brand management and business development across a diverse range of industries in both New Zealand and Europe.

Working for someone else really taught me important lessons about what works and what doesn't, especially from an operations and management perspective.

Looking back, I always chose roles where I was offered a lot of scope and flexibility to work on my own initiatives, and where I was able to take charge of making them happen. This was a good thing because I hate authority. Most managers realized this quickly, but not before they had hired me.

I am a self-motivated person and often started in a defined role only to turn it upside down. A 9-month contract with a global pharmaceutical company saw me travel all over Europe, working with key opinion leaders and local sales teams, but also saw me reinvent its entire brand positioning including the core message, marketing collateral and communication strategy. This 'take the bull by the horns' approach earned me a lot of respect and a big bonus.

By June 2008 though, I had had enough of the 9-to-5. My high-level job in London, where I was at the time, pushed me over the edge. On paper it looked amazing: great pay, head of a brand new department, the ability to build my own team ...

... but it was with an old school firm which was archaic in its thinking, smothered in bureaucracy and drowning in office politics. My lack of progress was slowly killing me. I was battling against the very people who had hired me to do the job!

So less than a year after starting that particular job just after having received a raise and a solid performance review, I quit.

My friends thought I was crazy as I'd just bought a house in London too. But I was sick and tired of working in organizations where I had no freedom to make a real impact or to influence the outcome.

## Fixing my entrepreneurial wings

Less than two weeks after quitting in London, I bought a one-way plane ticket to Vancouver (Canada), represented New Zealand at the Ultimate Frisbee Championships and started a new life.

I had invested most of my final salary payout and pension plan into my property but had enough money left in the bank for just a few months living costs in Vancouver – one of the most expensive cities in the world.

### ***Lesson 1: To make a real change you need to get uncomfortable***

If you're going to make a significant change in your life, consider making a big move like taking a trip to a different part of the world, or at least to a new location within your country. This helps you to get out of your comfort zone and take a different perspective. After all, "if you do what you've always done, you'll get what you've always got."

After my 9-5 experiences in the corporate world, I was determined to start my own business in my own way and so was hitting up every networking event available in order to make strong connections. As luck would have it, I met my future business partner — Daryl Hatton — at one of these events.

Our respective loves of marketing and technology brought us together two days later when we discussed his idea to build a social fundraising platform. He told me that when I said "I'm a homeless unemployed bum and I want to start my own business" that he was sold! (Well, that, and my solid background in marketing and business development, which complemented his technology background perfectly.)

### ***Lesson 2: Know your Special Sauce***

When I ask people what it is that they do better than anyone else, I often see them pause and think. If you want to take advantage of all the opportunities available to you, you have to know what it is that sets you apart: your 'Special Sauce'.

You may be excellent at building relationships, or founding teams, or making the complex seem simple, or breaking large projects down into manageable chunks. You may 'just' be really good at listening, talking or socializing. All of these talents can be your strategic advantage. But more than that, you need to be able to

communicate this clearly and effectively to everyone you meet, in a heartbeat. The better you can define what your unique ingredient is and how it can be applied in the situation you're in, the more opportunities will come your way.

Daryl and I joined forces in September 2008 and formed ConnectionPoint Systems. At about this time I was starting to get a little desperate for funds, having been in Vancouver for a few months already and burning through my savings.

We set to work creating [FundRazr](#), which — due in no part to me — is now the number one fundraising application on Facebook with more than a million users.

While Daryl was a seasoned entrepreneur, I was thrown into the deep end. My time was spent getting to grips with the world of alpha and beta releases, speaking the language of developers, figuring out how to make money when freemium' was all the rage and understanding the world of angel investors so that we could actually survive on our current burn rate (how much cash you spend each month when building a company from scratch).

My way of dealing with being in the male-dominated technology industry, and understanding the entire spectrum of being involved in a startup, was to blog about it. It was a cathartic experience for me to write about all that I was learning, on a weekly basis.

I set up a WordPress site, bought the domain name WomanzWorld.com and set about learning all I could about blogging.

Meanwhile, our team worked on the standard startup diet of little sleep, long hours and too much caffeine. We were strapped financially, which meant the pressure was on to ship our product to market as soon as we could.

After an intense period of building our application and finding investors, both Daryl and I started to realize that I was more into my blog than our startup. Eighteen months after starting this company, and with Daryl's blessing, I left to pursue my *own thing*.

The trouble was I had no idea what that *thing* was.

### ***Lesson 3: Don't wait for the Right Time***

Even if you're naturally risk-averse, throw yourself in the deep end if you really want to change your current circumstances. Nothing makes you move heaven and earth to get what you really want more than being forced into it. Don't be afraid to

quit your job or your current business, even if there are a million reasons (aka excuses) to put it off until next month. Each day you do that, you lose another day of your ideal life.

Also, don't have an attractive back-up plan. As Seth Godin states, if you have a back-up plan, you'll always defer to it. So simply focus on the outcome you want, not the alternatives (which may look far more appealing, like real income and job security).

## **From broke to \$15,000 in one month**

So there I was. I had a blog that was only read by my Mum and two friends, and a strong desire to work for myself. I also had very little money to my name, so I managed to set up my new Canadian company for under \$100.

The next six months were the toughest – and most formative — of my life. I went without any income and on two occasions could barely pay my rent. I was terrified.

When a friend came to visit from New Zealand, I broke down in tears. I was so relieved to see someone who understood me and what I was going through.

My friend believed in me. He'd seen me progress up through the ranks of my corporate career and had witnessed my persistence and dedication to training for the body sculpting competition. I needed someone to have faith in me at this tough time, as I wasn't sure I had enough in myself.

Around this time my parents invited me to fly home and live with them, or to consider getting a job again. The mere mention of that second option made me more determined than ever to make a real go of building my business.

Then, one day, a friend in Vancouver threw me a lifeline. She'd seen what I'd achieved in the time I'd lived there and gave me some social media work for one of her clients.

They were a Groupon-like startup that needed a social media strategist. We had several meetings to discuss how my experience in building FundRazr using social media would help them build their platform.

I'd sent them a proposal for \$2,000. I'd never charged that much in my life, but I aimed high for two reasons. One reason was that I've always enjoyed the process of negotiation and was adept at punching way above my weight back in the corporate world; the second was that I only had \$18 left in my bank account. There was no way I couldn't win this opportunity.

#### ***Lesson 4: Know your Worth***

One thing you have to get a handle on when starting any business is charging what you're worth; based on the value you deliver to your client. This is one of the most challenging areas for entrepreneurs, especially when they're starting out and in need of money. But trust me, if you start off lowballing your prices it becomes very hard to raise them. You also have to factor in your own overheads, admin and running costs.

In my third meeting with my potential clients, I decided it was crunch time. I had to clinch the deal by restating why I was exactly what they were looking for. They agreed.

They wrote me a check for 50% upfront and I ran across the road to bank it right after we shook hands. My rent was paid, and I could sleep another night with a roof over my head.

Despite this small win, things didn't get immediately better. I was still worried I'd have to give in and get a job. There was nothing consistent about my revenue and I had no idea about my long-term plan.

Yet I had learned something invaluable for the first time in my life – I could charge people for my existing knowledge.

#### **I could monetize ME.**

So I pushed through that tough period, with several sleepless nights, and instead of giving in I relied heavily upon my growing reputation in Vancouver as a social media “expert” – which simply meant I knew just enough more than others to charge for it.

#### ***Lesson 5: Find your sweet spot***

People tell me all the time that they don't feel good enough at something to make a business out of it, that they're not expert enough, and they have no real skill-set that they can monetize. It's a load of crap.

Everyone on this earth has a sweet spot – the intersection between what you're good (or great) at, what you enjoy – or better yet — love doing, and what people will pay you for. This doesn't mean you have to be an expert. You just need to know a little more than the person who needs, and is willing to pay for, your help.

Next I decided to host a Social Media Bootcamp workshop. I tapped heavily into my existing networks and to my surprise, I managed to sellout not one, but three workshops in a row!

I charged \$1500 for a two-day course and made over \$15,000 in less than a month!

So what did I do once I'd established myself in this industry? I promptly left town.

I left everything I'd built up in Vancouver to live in Argentina for five months.

Once again my friends thought I was nuts.

But the thing is, like many world travellers, I have trouble staying in one place. Once I feel I've established myself somewhere, once I've made the right contacts, experienced the culture and feel like a local, I tend to want to move on to the next adventure.

After a two-month stint in Los Angeles, staying rent-free at my friends' grand house in Manhattan Beach (it helps to have true friends in high places), I was flying to Buenos Aires and the land of empanadas and tango.

Here's the thing though, I did capitalize on what I'd learned by turning the content from those three workshops into my first-ever digital online program, which launched in November 2010.

I did as much active learning as possible to come up to speed with how to launch a product online, including marketing, membership sites, sales pages, launch sequences and webinars.

Despite losing my voice and being just able to speak on my first-ever webinar, I managed to make one sale of \$297 with the 30 people who attended live, and several more after.

Looking back that was a lousy result, but in my mind I'd officially done it. I'd launched a product that people actually wanted to buy, and had made my first few thousand dollars online. That was all I needed to prove to myself that I could turn my *own thing* into a business.

### ***Lesson 6: Maximize what you've got and Never Stop Testing.***

It's crucial that you maximize your existing capital and repurpose what you've already got to create further profits. Be resourceful and hustle. Take what you're already doing and turn it into a number of spin-off products or services. You're a

writer? Great! What about writing guides for wannabe writers and selling them on Amazon? Or holding in-person writing workshops, recording those, and packaging those audios into an online self-study course?

## The Suitcase Entrepreneur is born

One fine evening in 2010, in a hotel in Las Vegas, The Suitcase Entrepreneur brand was born. I'd been at a conference where I'd spent the entire day answering the same questions:

*What's your name? What do you do? Where do you live?*

Naturally people were fascinated that I lived nowhere. A few people labeled me the "traveling entrepreneur" until Matthew Goldberg, now a good friend, said "*Oh so you're a kind of Suitcase Entrepreneur.*"

My face lit up, and I knew he was bang on. That's exactly what I was and he suggested I go and buy the domain name straight away.

Once I had that name, my brand was born and I was able to get clear on what I was doing, whom I was helping and what I could offer.

I wrote my best selling [BYOB Build Your Online Business](#) guide after getting a great response for writing a blog series about building a business online. I updated my social media program and re-launched it.

What's more, I created and launched a high-end mastermind and coaching program for women entrepreneurs with Natalie "*She Takes on the World*" MacNeil.

After our first US\$40,000 launch (more than the entire year's salary I made in my first ever job), we knew we were onto something, and this was the audience we wanted to help the most.

During this period I'd become a contributing author for *Forbes* when they picked up an article they liked on my own blog. I also wrote several guest posts for huge authority sites (those that get a lot of traffic and people linking to them), and was appointed as a Nike *Make Yourself Movement* ambassador, as well as having my blog posts syndicated directly on Visa Business Network's site.

I started offering coaching on my site in 2011 and doubled my prices in the first few months when I realized there was more demand – and it was harder work – than I thought. I took on my own coach in 2012 to continue to improve on the momentum I