

renegade

game changers | thought leaders | rule breakers | style makers

COLLECTIVE

ISSUE 5

**48 RADICAL
ENTREPRENEURS**
FROM ALL OVER THE GLOBE

**WISE
BRAVE +
UNDISCOVERED**

**COFFEE BOY TO
MILLIONAIRE**

HOW TO
CREATE A
DISRUPTIVE
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**WHAT DO
ZUCKERBERG
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HAVE IN COMMON?**

YOKO ONO
COLLETTE DINNIGAN
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MOVEMBER
TROPFEST

*Jessica
Mauboy*
**THE WORLD
IS WATCHING**

SHE'S PERFORMED FOR
OPRAH, ELLEN + OBAMA
+ TOURED WITH **BEYONCÉ**
WHAT'S NEXT?

FASHION / DESIGN / FILM / FOOD / TECH / ART / SOCIAL CHANGE / TRAVEL



COLLECTIVE x UBERKATE

PRECIOUS METTLE

YOU DON'T NEED *a massive* MARKETING BUDGET *or a STAFF of THOUSANDS to make your business a MEGA-HIT. Just ask KATE SUTTON, who is about to take her JEWELLERY design GLOBAL.*

WORDS: EDWINA STORIE

You may not be wearing it right now, but you'll most likely have one. It's that piece of jewellery that, no matter how fine the chain or rare the stone, it outweighs the value of every other piece you own because of its sentiment and meaning. That's because it's attached to a particular moment in time that contributes to who you are today.

Kate Sutton, founder of jewellery business Uberkate, understands how influential pockets of time or life events can shape a person's future. At just 22, while working as a news journalist at Sydney radio station 2GB, doctors discovered a tumour had invaded one third of her brain. It threw her life into chaos: major brain surgery, an uncertain outlook and months of rehabilitation.

It was this period of time in her life that laid the foundations for Uberkate: handmade pieces of silver and gold with the names of wearers' loved ones, the date of their life-changing moments or words weighted with a personal meaning no one but the owner will quite understand, representing how it made her more determined to live on her own terms. This year Kate's business turned over AU\$2 million; her signature

'Ubercircles' now regularly adorn the necks and wrists of Australian celebrities and she's preparing for global growth (even Sting has been snapped wearing her jewellery.) "But it took me a decade to become an overnight success!" she laughs.

The challenges faced on that path to success weren't just of the standard accounting or recruiting variety from most business tales. They included two redundancies, a career change, product imitations, and a completely new dream. (Anything worth having is worth fighting for, right?)

That's because Uberkate wasn't part of the original plan. The delicate chains falling from Kate's décolletage and the layered rings bejewelling her fingers were the goal she didn't know she had.

In fact, before she launched the line, Kate was well on the way to achieving her childhood dream of being a well-known television journalist on *60 Minutes*. She was wearing her self-made pieces as she darted with a cameraman around the country to film stories for shows like *Australia's Most Wanted*, *Survivor Australia*, and *Animal Hospital* to name a few.

Back then, she had already crafted the Ubercircle — an imperfect silver circle imprinted with her then-partner-

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now-husband's name to represent their endless flow of love — unaware it would one day become a signature piece worn by women across the world.

But the seed for business was clearly sown, even if she didn't recognise it at the time, and she started a website to showcase her creations when Australians weren't yet really shopping online. >



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She was simply free-forming with a graphic designer friend, neither of them with a clue about what they were doing.

Yet when the TV show she and her partner were working on was axed while they were supporting a six-month-old baby and saving for a mortgage deposit, they decided to put themselves at an even bigger risk: to try and make Uberkate the breadwinner. With no back-up plan, they withdrew their house deposit and set up the business.

You've got to take the risk to get the reward, Kate says, but it was clear people liked the product. When she was still tinkering around with the project as more of a hobby than a business, she'd make pieces for her friends and fellow TV presenters at work, only to have viewers inundate the TV station asking where the jewellery was from. And once she was fully underway, Kate says one of the best marketing decisions she made was sending gifted pieces to celebrities and bloggers. "I'm not an incredible businesswoman. I wasn't someone who built a brand in 12 months," Kate says modestly.

"In the 10 years we've been in business, the world has changed so much and people do business so differently, but they still want beautiful pieces of jewellery that make them feel connected to their world or family or personal mantra. And that's one of the great things we can do after a decade — it's all because of the design."

Yet the challenge with design and jewellery is that your mistakes are tangible, says Kate. You can hold them in your hands with disappointment for what they were meant to be, but you can also redesign them.

Just a few years in, when the business

was building and Christmas had brought an influx of orders she could no longer manage herself, she taught a guy how to make the silver Ubercircles and contracted him for 200. She received the pieces days before they were to be shipped to customers and discovered they were three times too big.

"We had 200 worthless circles, had already taken payments, and now needed to make another 200 before Christmas," she says. Kate and her family worked throughout the night while all profit, if any, was tied up in this box of circles. But perhaps when others would have just tossed them in the rubbish, Kate looked at them with resentment and reassured herself she'd one day turn them into something that would outdo their original profit potential.

"I started playing with them, twisting and hammering them, and the bestselling 'Infinity' pendant was born. I still hand-twist each one and think of the story every time," she smiles.

Like most businesses (and designers), Kate's had to deal with copycats and imitations in the market, admitting she was heartbroken to see cheaper, poor-quality versions of her beloved pieces.

"It's like taking a piece of your heart and recycling it," she says. "But now I channel that feeling into a new design and ask myself, 'What can I design that's so clever and beautiful they won't even be able to manufacture it?'"

Watching the rise of the fashion blogger and perhaps in a move of marketing genius, Kate has recently collaborated with six bloggers she is creatively connected to and designed each of them a unique pendant. The six pieces make up the new Uberfine brand, designed to

capture a younger market. Each pendant has personal, symbolic meaning to its blogger and can be purchased by their loyal followers via social media. It's a clever marriage between the love of the designer to create, and the passion of the blogger to share.

"We didn't know what the outcomes were going to be, but launching a brand through these networks and allowing young women to decide what they want to wear and how it's designed is incredibly exciting," Kate says.

"I have an image in my imagination that my customer will end up this gorgeous, grey-haired woman dripping in memories." ■

FAST TRACK. KATE'S TIPS FOR SUCCESS



- > Get your friends to road test your products — they will become your best critics and ambassadors
- > Constantly revisit your business and gratitude goals
- > Patent your most unique designs to avoid imitations, if possible
- > Nurture your relationships as much as you do your business
- > When you can't advertise, gift
- > Don't be afraid to hire staff when the business starts to grow
- > Follow your gut instinct