**Heart Social Media Design and Management**

**17.9.2018**

XX has 3 children and previously worked as a lawyer. She trained with Digital Mums and then set up digital services business.

CG; So if we start from the beginning, what was it that motivated you to start your business up?

XX: So I was a lawyer in the city and I worked there for approximately 7 years, so I was relatively junior when I left there. I then had 3 children and did even consider going back or doing anything probably for 8 years or so. Then I found with my youngest at school I had time on my hands and needed to do something. I just didn’t want to do all the “mother stuff” any more. I had done it, it wasn’t fulfilling me.

So that was the first thing, was to realise that I wasn’t enjoying it anymore. Then its’ well what can you do? I started asking people what they were doing and narrowing it down, mostly it was rejecting ideas. That was quite a negative process, perhaps because I was quite scared of the next step. At that point I just had absolutely no confidence. I didn’t know that I didn’t, because I was very confident as a mother (class rep etc), suddenly I was going back to square one.

Then I looked at going back into the law, going back to socials. It was terrifying, totally out of place, just a mother, so self-conscious. It was such a big step. But I pushed myself and started to reconnect. I’m not normally social uncomfortable, but I remember the terror so vividly. It was in an environment that I was no longer a part of; an outsider.

I had to think about how I could go back, I couldn’t do full time. I explored lots of options, but the logistics proved insurmountable. Then someone recommended Digital Mums, for training on social media; how to be active and run accounts for businesses on twitter, instagram, facebook . It’s working a freelancer from home with in demand skills.

I just didn’t appeal; I didn’t want to work from home. But then after a few months it dawned on me that I really didn’t have many other choices and that this was a good fit. It was doable, otherwise I would have had to get a nanny in and commute up to London which I just wasn’t ready to do.

So I completed a 6 month course with Digital Mums, they support you afterwards as once you have competed the course there is another one to help you set up and run your own business and how to get clients. Then you are also included in a huge facebook community where people share knowledge and hints and tips and some stories too.

So it wasn’t really that I had a driving desire to set up and run a social media business, it was because it gave me something to work with and build. That was over a 15 months ago when I finished the course and set up my business and got my first client. That was the first big step, they were a great client and they are doing a lots of stuff outside social media that I am also getting involved with. Since then it has snowballed.

I am constantly looking out for me opportunities and some come to fruition, some are delayed and some never happen. So it ebbs and flows when I can secure them. I’m never sure about the momentum, lots of enquiries, but pinning them down and keeping them, that’s the challenge.

CG; Has it fulfilled you initial aspirations?

XX: Well I wasn’t looking to set up my own business, but that I have found massively empowering. It opens up a whole world, accessing this network of women who have set up their businesses too. It might be a confidence thing, I don’t know why, but I am so drawn to other women who have set up their business and I gain so much for being part of that network. I love the vibrancy and even though we have nothing in common apart from setting up a business I find it fascinating that they have done it in, and how. It is just so interesting to me. I love what they do, they are out there trying to sell their ideas, engaging with the world. That inspires me and motivates me. It is part of you having to sell yourself, it takes confidence, keeping going and planning and thinking through your strategy.

I wasn’t setting off to establish a business; I think I was setting off, just to find something fulfilling to do. As simple as that. To get myself out of a rut. It was about personal fulfilment. I was scared of being on my own at home with nothing to do. I needed to be challenged and I stretched. I looked at myself and I though you’ve had an education and a good job, you can do things, you can succeed. I am very lucky that I can afford to be very choosy, and I just thought, you can do better than this.

I was also looking at other peers who hadn’t left their jobs, they had continued up the career ladder. Then you question why didn’t you do that. There was a period of a couple of years where I wondered about the decisions, I had made that got me here. I thought for a couple of years that I had made all the wrong decisions; I should have kept working. I didn’t like being at home, I didn’t enjoy being a mother, I felt trapped. Motherhood just didn’t fulfil me, it can be very boring, monotonous. You get lumbered as the dogsbody, the bottom of the pile and you of course loose all your confidence. You are constantly doing very menial things.

CG; Has it changed your relationship with your children?

XX: The older two not so much as they are away at school so much. They noticed me working a weekends when I first started. I was actually quite cagey with them. I think I was embarrassed, because it didn’t feel like me …. I was the mother, the giver and not a business woman. My husband would say, my wife has set up a business, she’s a business owner and I would say no, no , no , no I am not, no I am not. And I still don’t think that yet, but I am getting there. I am getting closer to it. I do now say I run a business, whereas before I would say, well I am sort of doing social media and then I would change the conversation. I was just embarrassed, I just didn’t feel confident in saying this is who I and this is what I do.

But my youngest was a bit upset as there was less time for her. My mind was often thinking about what I needed to do, writing my lists. I was absent from her mentally for quite a long time and she didn’t like that. But I have got a lot better now, I just feel much more in control.

The household was all going wrong at one point. I need all that to be fine and then I can settle into work. I was all over the place.

CG; There are two identities going on here; the business owner and the mother and they are often in conflict. How have you experience that? As a man you can naturally step into the business owner identity because it is quite a male identity. For a mother than feels like a huge step / transition into something that might be more alien, or it might be a relief.

XX: A lot of imposter syndrome, I suffer from that a lot… a lot. I am better but it would happen again if my situation changed again. Starting a business when you become a mother works around your constraints but I think a mother is the opposite to a business owner. They are just not compatible…they are just not and that’s the difficulty in how we get over the struggle at the beginning. I read that you do have to get men more involved in the domestic side, and I think that’s true. I think that is slowly happening, but I think that being a mother is simply different from being a father, they are very different relationships and different experiences. So it’s partly a mindset, there is a lot of mindset, I think we could better. But then at the end of the day, when you have children, everything changes. It’s not gradual, it’s immediate and overwhelming. You can’t eliminate the emotional side of things, you just can’t. It’s a very difficult conundrum.

CG: So you are getting there, how have you managed that , what strategies have you used to try and reconcile the two roles?

XX: The thing that mattered most to me was to keep the house going. It doesn’t matter if it’s not perfect now, I have let go a lot, I mean a lot recently. The biggest thing is having food on the table, so my husband suggested I got someone to help me cook. So I was very lucky I could do that and I had a supportive husband who really wanted me to keep going. Some people, they do have husbands who don’t want them to keep the business going…he’s been pushing me, so he was happy to help facilitate me. He didn’t want to actually do it, but he was happy to help get someone in.

So I don’t have to think as much about the “kitchen shit” …that’s what I call it! There is someone who can do that. But when I started out I didn’t have that help. I think that was my biggest hurdle, just getting some domestic help. Once that was sorted out and we changed my daughters school to get longer hours. I felt I could focus on my business and I had the capacity to still manage the children…go to matches. I felt so much more control. I am working a lot less in the evenings now and I feel I give a much more focused service to my clients too.

CG; That’s the challenge is managing the cycle whilst juggling the family. There isn’t consistent demand, there are peaks and troughs that can be unexpected.

XX: It is a lot of pressure, I never feel I am doing enough for the business. I always need to be out there, networking chasing business, but it’s difficult to fit it all in. So many networking opportunities I wasn’t committing to, you always should be pushing harder and yourself further and I think now I am better at it and managing it. I think I have slightly changed my strategy, I don’t do a lot of the really big networking groups. I work better in smaller groups, a closer connection, I’ll remember you and you’ll remember me.

CG: So having organised the domestics, you now have freedom to find that single minded time to focus.

XX: My mind is less cluttered. I try not to ever mix the two. So when I am with a client I don’t ever say that I have to go pick up now, or just back from school run … some people do that, it’s part of their identity that they are a working mother, but I don’t do that. When I was at work I didn’t want to know about other people’s children, I didn’t think it was professional. I don’t want to muddle the two, because I want them to take me seriously. I want them to see me as a business owner and not a mother and always that they can call and not think is she cooking tea now? And if I am cooking tea I won’t tell them that I will simply ask to call them back.

I hate the term mompreneur and term working mum. I didn’t like the name Digital Mums. I find it demeaning, you don’t have working dad or dadpreneur.

Anyway I just don’t talk about my family. Sometimes with female clients who I have built a relationship with, but to begin with I avoid it all so I can appear purely professional.

CG: how do you value your success, had that changed since you started?

XX: It’s just so many things. Certainly my confidence has come back, which has been so positive for me and the family. It’s a big thing. Confidence comes a lot from clients because they are validating you, they reinforce that what you are doing is valuable. That’s important.

Well…. the fact that I am actually doing it and I made it happen. What I am finding fulfilling and nourishing is the connecting with people; they are so interesting and sustaining. I really feel that I am part of something else which is much bigger - Digital Mums retraining and going back to work and the local Hampshire womens business community, and that is a wonderful feeling, totally unexpected.

When I signed up for Digital Mums one of the questions was “would you ever look for support online”, and I though gosh absolutely not. However now I am in the online community and I see mums asking for business support and so many others mums providing it. It is a safe, closed group and they confide all sort so things and I am sure there are others wanting to ask the same question who them benefit from the answer too.

Also I think a sign of success is the amount that I am now comfortable sharing online. I couldn’t even send an email with an attachment before, I was so out of date and left behind. Now I feel I am fully engaged in this new digital world and I feel it is a success because I have progressed so much. I have changed my thinking. For example, when I first set the business up I never referred to myself in the first person, so it was always “we”, to stay anonymous behind my logo because I felt so exposed. Now I use “I” as my confidence grow; I am stepping forward and owning that brand, owning my business I suppose.

One thing I did before was put my branding on everything and someone said you need to put your photo there and not your brand. It was hiding behind the logo, which I though looked more professional. So now my face is on all social media, I’m not hiding anymore.

Those sorts of things, it’s a success in that I am embracing it more.

CG: I suppose it’s overcome the isolation motherhood can bring.

XX: I think it was very important for me to be at home with my children, it’s what my mother did. But then I got stuck in a tremendous rut. It was such a process of beating myself up but then you have friends who come out the other side. I don’t know anyone who has gone back to work in an office. I do know a couple of mums who are just stuck. I can recognise it and they can too, I am so glad to have got past that stage. It was hard, it was isolating, an awful time.

It does take support to find the right path, a supportive husband or family member.

CG: Was a supportive husband critical to you?

XX: Yes definitely. He works hard and I appreciate his pressures. I used to wish it was me getting on that train and going to work, but now I can see the grass is not greener and commuting is hard. I’m not earning money that will change the lifestyle.

CG; What do you aspire for the business in the future, when the children have left to work or go to University?

XX: I think perhaps I might go back into employment, I do keep an eye out. There are times when I am working when it is so exciting and I enjoy it immensely and there are other times when I feel it isn’t and I worry a lot. If you are working for someone else, that shoulder that worry and you get a regular income.

CG; Do you feel having done this, you have more confidence and skills to go back to work?

XX: Yes I am not at that point yet, I’m not good enough yet to see what skills are required. I don’t know where it will end up and I am very happy and comfortable where I have got to now.

CG: If you compare how you would be feel not having the business to how you feel now, what comes to mind?

XX: Incredible empowering, that has been the value for me. It has made me believe in me again. When I worked in London with my corporate mindset, I used to see women working in small cottage industries and be very dismissive about them and their potential. When I realised that I wasn’t able to do that once I had children, I understood how impressive they were. That takes confidence and guts and commitment to step out and do it, above everything else going on in your life. Don’t knock it. There is so much value in it.

CG; Being a mum, do you find you are restricted to the locality with your clients or being digital can they be anywhere?

XX: I have a new client in Somerset, it would be much easier for me to meet and take her through it on screen. So it’s better but not impossible. In fact going forward I want to break into the London market because it is bigger and there is more going on and they pay more. Your location does matter.

CG: Yes it used to be that mothers were restricted to their locality and now with technology it is far less restrictive but it still something that has to be managed. You can’t just jump on a train for the odd meeting with a client you normally provide a service to remotely.

XX: One of things I was jealous of is when my husband says “I have to go to Paris tomorrow”. Gosh I would love that, just love it but I have ti think and plan and arrange. If someone called out of the blue with a client in Paris, I liked to say I would say yes. I don’t have the freedom my husband has to say yes without a thought, I have to plan and there would always be anxiety but I hope I would eventually say yes. It’s just not as straight forward.

That’s what I found this summer holiday. I was beating myself up because I wasn’t doing enough networking and marketing. Then I realised I just couldn’t, on a practical basis I have 3 children and I my choices are constrained. I just realised I have to grow slower than I want, it’s just being realistic.

**Personal Details**

Age: ~~16-29 30-39 40-49~~ 50-59 ~~60+~~

Nationality: British (white)

Country of origin: UK

Mode of working: Full Time: ~~Part time:~~

Children: (1) ~~0-2 3-4~~ 5-11 ~~12-18~~

Children: (2) ~~0-2 3-~~4 5-11 ~~12-18~~

Children: (3) ~~0-2 3-4 5-11~~ 12-18

Children: (4) 0-2 3-4 5-11 12-18

Highest educational qualification: Degree

Location of business: Winchester

Home working: Yes

Last position held in employment: Solicitor

Husband Occupation: Solicitor

Husband highest educational qualification: Degree

Household income: Dual Single X