

DECEMBER 2020

Onika

UNITING STRONG MINDED BUSINESS PEOPLE



Starting a business
What we learnt

2021 can be your year

A memory in
every mouthful

How to get a
great headshot

Living the dream
From Tauranga
to Pokaka



*Wishing you and
yours happy
and peace-filled
holiday.*



Kiss goodbye To 2020

Well the year that has been all about waiting has suddenly passed really quickly. Everybody seems to be really busy and frantic, so I really hope you do take the time to have a break and to explore this great country. One area of New Zealand that is often overlooked during the summer is the Ruapehu area, however, it offers so much more than snow sports. Have a read of Kylie and Ben's story on page 8, they took the plunge and bought a lodge in Pokapa and are now living the dream with their young family.

Also in this issue are the team at SharperThinker sharing what they learnt in the early days of starting a business. There is loads of great advice here.

And what is Christmas without cake? Pauline shares how Covid affected her small business and how she

overcame the challenges so she can now sell her traditional Christmas cakes around the country.

I implore you to support small businesses in New Zealand this Christmas and for next year. Small business owners really do, do a happy dance when you order from them. Your purchase may mean the difference between dance lessons for a 6 year old or none.

All the businesses featured in this issue would love your support - there is something here for everyone.

Catherine

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A Memory in Every Mouthful



Pauline had a wonderfully successful small business selling homemade fruit cakes made to her Great Grandma's recipe at local markets . . . then along came Covid and the temporary closure of markets.

Grandma Jenkins Fruit Cakes is a small business that I set up from my home in Oratia, West Auckland. The cakes I make are to my Great Grandma's recipe which is an oldie but a goodie. I had been making her recipe for years as Christmas Cake gifts for family and friends and several years ago started making a gluten free cake for a friend at Christmas who always commented that it was the best GF cake she had ever had and one year said that I should sell them. That was my lightbulb moment!

I started very small and made about 12 small cakes and took them to my local Titirangi Market. They let me have a small table spot outside and within a couple of hours all of my cakes were gone. I am still very much a small home-based business however I now bake in a commercial kitchen, especially at Christmas, so I can keep up with the demand. They are still handmade, just no longer homemade!

I have found that people love nostalgia, things that remind them of their childhood or are from a



bygone era and I have created a look and product that I believe fits the bill. In 2019, I felt I needed a catchphrase and after mulling over several options decided on 'A memory in every mouthful'. I have this on a large sign that I have behind my stall at markets and do get quite a few comments about it. My customers also love that there is a story behind my cakes and that I actually knew my Great Grandma whose legacy now lives on through me.


I do believe that throughout the year my customers would generally be 35+ - people who want to remember things from 'back in the day' or to get a gift for someone who appreciates the nostalgia. At Christmas, my customers are pretty much everyone who buys gifts and has definitely become my 'time to shine'.

I mainly sell my cakes by having a stall at regular markets, so 2020 with all the COVID19 limitations has had its challenges. Level 4 lockdown made me realise it was time to set up a website and try and sell my cakes online. With my limited knowledge, I put together the basics of what I wanted in a site, but soon realised I needed expert help and by word of mouth through the most reliable of channels, my local hairdresser suggested I contact Catherine Watson at Documents by Design. With Catherine's

help, my website launched in August this year and has already proved to be a success. The challenge I now face is how to get word of my website out there.

Because of the nostalgic feel of my cakes, I have regular customers from Retirement Villages and also attend many village market days. In 2018 and 2019, I had two Auckland villages purchase cakes off me to give to their residents as Christmas gifts and am communicating with them again for this Christmas. With so many villages now in Auckland and more being built all the time, this is certainly a market that I need to look at as we move out of COVID limitations in 2021.

In September, I received some of my best feedback yet, from Chef Peter Gordon, who received one of my cakes and absolutely loved it. He placed a glowing review on Facebook and Instagram and I immediately started receiving orders from my website. It did make me realise the importance of social media, which I am not particularly good at, and that I must set up an Instagram account for my cakes - another thing to add to my list.

Essentially, I love what I do and enjoy sharing my story - especially over a delicious slice of fruit cake and a hot cup of tea. Making sales is of course the end goal, but you've got to enjoy getting there! 



By Pauline Gee, Grandma Jenkins Fruit Cakes

Grandma Jenkins Fruit Cakes is a fully registered food business operating out of my verified (A Grade) home kitchen in Oratia, West Auckland.

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2021 can be
your year

It is almost 2021, can you believe it? I don't know about you but 2020 has felt like the longest decade ever while at the same time I feel like I blinked and missed six months. Based on the many very amusing memes going around the internet, I don't think I am the only one!

Now, new year equals new goals right? But I want to talk to you about your bigger vision. Not the few kilograms you want to lose or the bungee jump you want to do, but that thing that you daydream about, like the speech you imagine giving when you're in the shower. Where does your mind wander to when you're watching a boring movie? Or in a dull meeting? Or when you drive? What are the things inside you that you haven't fully owned, even to yourself let alone your inner circle?

I have found that for so many people, we do not allow ourselves to even ponder the possibility that

those dreams within us, those BHAGS (big hairy audacious goals) are there for a reason. We allow these ideas to pop into our head and then we bludgeon them to the ground. We talk ourselves out of what we desire by looking at what is "realistic", and we continue walking down the other path, away from those ideas, those dreams, those things that fire us up. We don't have to do that.

I get it. We are in the land of tall poppy syndrome for a start, but we are also raised to be humble and the fear of what other people would say or think is often enough to completely paralyse us with fear. The thing is though, in order for us to become the people who can bring those dreams to life, it requires tremendous courage. Our ability to truly make our dreams a reality (just like every single person in the world who ever became an actor, an author, a pilot, a marine biologist, a mother, whatever your

dream is) is totally dependent on our ability to have our own backs. Question, do you like yourself? Do you acknowledge your talents, your strengths, the impact you create in the world? Are you aware of your best qualities and do you compliment yourself on them? Do you sit down on a regular basis and celebrate how far you have come and what an incredible human you are?

If you said no, you're not alone. The reason I am so passionate about self-worth is because how we feel about ourselves dictates so much. If we don't think we deserve success, love, happiness, money etc we aren't going to even entertain our big dreams and even if we do, we will sabotage. Why? Because you can't have a life that says I am not worthy, I do not deserve this and then make it happen. Your mind is constantly doing what you tell it. That might be hard to take but think about it. If you have something beautiful on your vision board but then tell yourself all day what a failure you are, how you're so stupid, unattractive, how nothing you ever do is good enough, then those are two opposing ideas aren't they? What we want to create is a reality where your beliefs and your visions are in alignment, that's where the magic happens. When we can fully start to understand that our ability to truly appreciate ourselves and love ourselves is the first step to creating our wildest, biggest most bold dreams, it becomes so much more than just us.

Who could you impact by achieving that dream? Let's say you want to become a world-renowned director. How many people could you mentor? How many beautiful stories could you tell in the world? How many millions of people could you inspire? Or employ? How would your children feel seeing what's possible? With your wealth, how much good could you do with it?

So often, we make our dreams about just us and we can easily let our fear overtake our desire to take action and move forward. It is so easy to let that comment that someone made to you when were a

kid hold you back. That teacher who told you that you were a terrible writer, an awful filmmaker, that you couldn't draw, that you had an awful voice, that you were useless at maths even though it was all you could think about. Do not let other peoples limits in. Only you know what you desire. Only you know what you are capable of and only you know what is meant for you. Those dreams are there for you because you are the one to bring them to life in the world!

So, next time that idea comes into your head. Next time you have a thought about the fashion line you want to create, (or whatever your epic dream is) sit with it. Sure, you might be scared, but you're also excited. Every single person who ever created anything started exactly there, they had an idea, and they chose to move towards it. They chose to grow into the person who could literally make their dreams come true, and in doing so inspire so many others, help so many others, serve so many others!

And before you try and tell me that you're not clever enough, or special enough or that you don't have anything to offer, don't even bother. Firstly, you wouldn't have read to the end if there wasn't a piece of you that knew that you were here for something so much bigger than what you've currently allowed. Secondly, you have a dream and that is how I know that you're more than able to bring it to life (and anything you don't know yet you will learn on the way) and thirdly, the chances of you being born are 1 in 300 trillion. Read that again. You are not here by accident! You are one of a kind, never to be made again, an original and you are in the absolute best company, so I invite you.

As you set your 2021 goals (and why wait until then?) Ask yourself, what do you really desire? What kind of life do you dream of? What are you doing everyday? What makes your eyes fill up with tears and your heart overflow with gratitude at the thought of creating and experiencing?

You got this! Go get 'em. 



By Monica Ferguson, Monica Ferguson Coaching

Monica is a Coach specialising in self-worth and mindset. She helps visionary women get out of their own way and claim their dreams. Monica works alongside her clients in a very intuitive way, and no session is ever the same. It's all about you and what is most going to serve you.

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Living the dream



Kylie and Ben moved from Tauranga to Pokaka in the heart of Ruapehu District, to run their first business – Taylor Lodge. The lodge that was originally established in 1981 as Taylor Memorial Lodge in memory of two teachers from Petone College – Hugh and Alice Taylor. It is purpose built with groups in mind – hosting families, schools, and community groups over the years. This is Kylie and Ben’s story about moving their young family from the city to rural life and the beginning of a new adventure.



Just over two years ago we started to think what our next plan could be. Ben was working long hours including some weekends and the kids were going to daycare 50 hours a week, while my 5km commute used to take 40-50mins one way in Tauranga.

We had already thought about the possibility of building new in the Ruapehu area, but on a second visit we stumbled across Taylor Memorial Lodge at Pokaka, near Horopito that had just come up on the market. Most people would have looked at it and thought it was in the too hard basket, but for us all we saw was the potential of what it could become, and our ideas were racing. The area was secluded, yet close to amenities and the nature and wildlife that surrounded it was beautiful. We saw flocks of Kereru feasting in the trees when we visited the property.

We placed our house on the market in Tauranga and put in an offer on the lodge. Telling all our friends and family of this grand plan we had that some thought was just plain crazy. Our house that we had spent four years landscaping and adding our personal touches to in the suburbs of Pyes Pa, did not sell at auction and we withdrew our offer on the lodge.

Eventually we did get the sale we wanted, just before we went away on a family holiday with our delayed honeymoon tagged on. We sold it, not knowing exactly what our next move was. I had given up

on the lodge then. But not Ben, he had still been in contact with the real estate agent and was even taking phone calls from him on our honeymoon.

The day we moved out of our first home, we put in another offer to the lodge - and this time told no one.

For 3 months we had all our stuff in storage and lived in the caravan right next to the beach in Mt Maunganui, all while trying to wrangle the bank to be in our favour with our lodge dream plus also coming up with plans B, C and D as backup options. All I knew is that I wanted to be settled somewhere with plenty of lead up time before our eldest was meant to start school.

The day we found out we had finally been approved by the bank and the deposit had been paid I was heading away for a girl's weekend with my besties. "I've quit my job!" I said as I walked through the doors to the batch in Whangamata - "And brought a lodge!". They were just as excited about it as we were.

That's one big comment we have had from a lot of our friends as they have seen our journey unfold on facebook with our progress we are making on the lodge and they are so proud of us for just giving it a go and 'living the dream'.

It was scary quitting the usual 9-5 job with regular



good pay but living here in Pokaka is more than about that. The kids have so much space now to be free range - climbing trees, riding bikes, checking the possum and ferret traps with Dad. The smaller community means that everyone says hi to you when they see you in the supermarket. We see so much more of our friends from Auckland and Tauranga too as they love to travel to visit us.

When we took over the lodge it came with a winter full of group bookings, families and schools. Some had been coming year after year and they brought stories with them of how the place used to be, and their connection to the Taylors. We slowly started to make improvements between bookings. You can tell which rooms we started on by the improvement in our painting skills. Our goal is to give the place a new lease of life so that it can continue to accommodate those groups for years to come, and for new families to make it their regular holiday destination. It might not ever be a restored Ponsonby Villa, just clean tidy and warm. It's always been a popular winter location, and like many other operators we are showing that the Ruapehu region is a year round destination with biking, hiking and the river also available for outdoor adventures. We have been excited to hear that the Provincial Growth Fund has been able to provide the funding needed to complete the 'Missing Link' mountain bike trail, which is set to go right past the lodge - and thus bring more opportunities for growth for us. We are also putting together packages for those on a tight budget wanting to have a wedding at the lodge.

We are forever coming up with new ideas and plans for the lodge and which direction we will head in next. For us we go with the flow depending on what opportunities life throws at us. Ben's just completed a winter season up on Mt Ruapehu for the experience,



and I've also had the opportunity to have a part time office job in Ohakune doing payroll for another great local company (although I am currently on maternity leave)

Taking the leap from city life to a rural outlook, and becoming business owners can be a scary jump, especially if you have kids to add to the juggle also. If you asked me 5 years ago if this is where I thought I would be in my life, I might have laughed at you. But taking this journey together as a young family has seen us grow and appreciate each other's differences and what we can each bring to the operation of our busy but rewarding lifestyle. It's also rewarding to know what we can do and how much we have already learnt in such a short time. We are also grateful for the support given to us from our family and friends too - either through industry knowledge, or helping out painting, cleaning or doing alterations the lodge for us. I'm so glad of Ben's persistent enthusiasm for the lodge that saw us make the initial move, and for his constant drive he brings to the table. [U](#)



By Kylie Tuck, Taylor Lodge

Kylie is a busy mum of 3 and part of the husband and wife duo that runs Taylor Lodge in Pokaka, Ruapehu. Taylor Lodge caters for large groups, families or schools - sleeping 46 in 11 rooms. It is open all year round for all your snow, hike or bike adventures - or just to get all the family together.

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I thought I was getting into
business with my eyes open.

I had already bought and sold one small
business and learned so much, that I
thought designing and selling our own
products here in New Zealand would be
the same – hey, I knew what I was doing.

Boy, was I wrong.

People said to me; “What’s the advice from your accountant?” But we were starting a business from the ground up - so zero dollars for accountants I’m afraid.

I would be embarrassed about my naivety if I didn’t realise that so many “Mums and Dads” businesses start this way. Here’s some things I’ve learned in the last three years of business.

What We Did ‘Right’

We didn’t go into debt. We contributed \$1000 each to get going and that’s all.

Another business owner said in her first business she ordered 10,000 units of packaging - taking advantage of a US deal. She offered to show me the thousands of boxes she still had many years later (the business is closed). What a generous person to share this with me so I didn’t make the same mistake!

Of course there’s a time to get a bank loan, but I wouldn’t if you’ve never been in business before, nor without a solid Accountant. We all need an impartial and expert person to crunch those numbers when we’re excited about our new idea!

We’re not paying ourselves yet and I’ve come to understand we’re still a “side hustle”. But I had to come to that learning and am very happy that we can both sleep at night knowing we don’t have any debt.

We did everything ourselves. There are so many experts either subtly or overtly telling you that your image is miserably unprofessional and you’re doing

it all wrong. That’s their job - they need your work.

Advice I clung to was; “Try everything yourself because when you do source it out to a professional, you understand more about what you need”.

For example, we started out with our own logo done in a very basic photo editing software. Once we had firmed up our name and our message, we went to Catherine who helped us pick our colours and gave us our more professional logo.

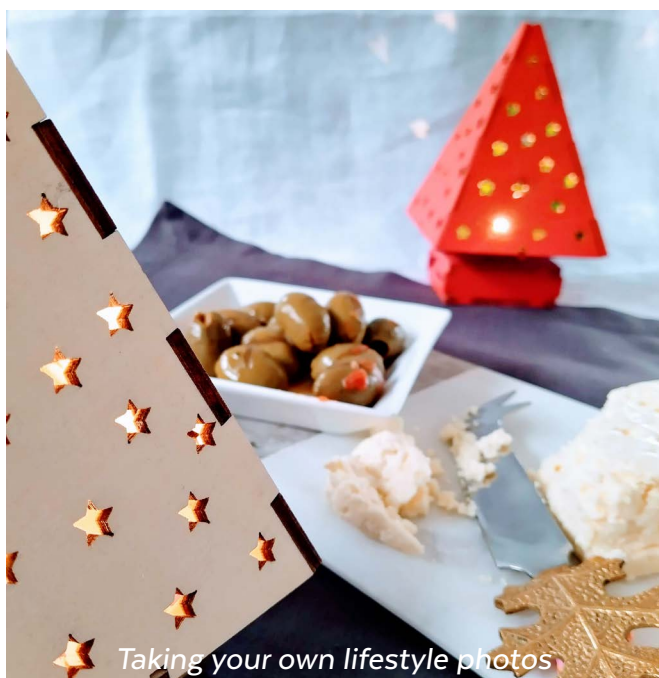
Ditto with our website - I learned on the job. After a year a friend said to me; “I’m no longer embarrassed to give people your website address - your website is heaps better!”

Honestly, it’s still not great - but the benefit of doing it ourselves is that it’s always up-to-date. When we do eventually employ a professional, I know exactly our areas of weakness and where to spend our money.

I joined a support network. Chatting about business with women from market stall owners to owners of large companies - has given me so much support. I’ve also enjoyed being able to encourage others. I highly recommend networks such as the She Owns It community on Facebook.

What We Learnt

Buying a business and selling a pre-made product is entirely different to designing, making and attempting to sell your products here in NZ. If you also want to sell online rather than retail, that’s different again.



I learned that if you make products here, you're instantly in the premium market. This is because of the cost of labour. It appears to me that many small market businesses are counting the cost of their materials but won't factor in their labour. But labour cost is vital - if you ever decide to employ someone else, you do need to pay them!

I'll get specific. We have two of us in the business. Our materials for a product might cost \$10. We have agreed that our labour per product each is \$6 - so that's another \$12. So our product cost is immediately \$22. Don't forget labour includes all those extra things we do such as social media posts, customer enquiries, writing instructions, buying supplies and meetings - not to mention actually making and packing up our kits.

Even though we have retail owners interested, we explain that our product would have to wholesale at \$44 (by the traditional doubling rule). They then multiply this by 2.4 to get their retail price; \$105.60 - and usually back away at this point. After understanding that not everyone buys on price, I've realised that we could sell our product for this, but we'd have to go for the high end (probably international) market. This may yet be our future.

Early on we decided we would be an online retailer and I'm still unsure of this decision. I didn't exactly think that if I built a website "they would come" - but I had no idea of the depths of SEO, Google Analytics, Mailing lists, blogs and advertising required to reach


anyone, let alone the best way to lead my customer toward a sale.

We learned that we shouldn't try to compete on price. Our products are made entirely differently to Kmart and their customers are not our customers. Our product is more values based - people buy it because they share our values of sustainability, hands-on learning and "real" life.

We learned that we need to ask people to buy - not assume they won't. For example, early on we agreed that schools wouldn't be able to afford us and we never reached out to them. That was until a class ordered a class set of our most expensive kit - the DIY Bluetooth Speaker. The teacher explained he didn't have time to source the bits and trusted our product.

We also learned to be grateful and reward our customer's loyalty. It is so hard to gain a customer, do everything you can to love them. One business coach said to me early; "Forget advertising, you just need 10 raving fans".

We learned we aren't selling a product. We're selling hands-on no screen learning, a way for families to connect, the joy of crafting, an eco-friendly gift alternative!

2020 was going to be "our year" - but it turns out it was Covid's instead. Like everyone, we're unsure of the future but wish you all the best for Christmas and 2021. Kia kaha New Zealand! 



By Sophia Sharpe, Sharper Thinker

Sophia and Stefan are in-laws who love making things and started up SharperThinker to help others do the same. With our own kids we realised that our 'quick fix', 'instant gratification' culture has led to a reduction in our kid's skill levels. Things we did that we take for granted - how to glue, use a screwdriver, twist a wire, patiently wind things together - we see today's kids struggling with.

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Get organised for next year with a **WALL PLANNER**

One of the ways I stay organised and plan ahead around my business commitments, goals and events together with organising a busy family is to have a big wall planner with a whole year calendar on the office wall. I use mine to keep track of the big things – school holidays, gymnastic competitions, guide camps and dance shows along with business events such as networking meetings, client deadlines, conferences and workshops. And most importantly, my holidays.

Having the whole year available at a glance helps me to visualise how busy upcoming months are going to be, planning around public holidays and how long before the next school holidays. It is also a helpful tool in letting everyone in the family see how busy we all are.

My tips for using a wall planner:

- Hang it where you can easily see it and reach it to write on. Consider where you spend most of your planning/working/thinking time and have it close by.
- Colour code your entries – eg green for family, blue for business. For me I narrow it down even further – each family member has a different colour, as do different business activities. By the end of the year it is very colourful.
- Add items to your wall planner as soon as you

become aware of them, leaving them to memory to add later takes up too much mental space and of course you could forget altogether.

- I also add to my Google calendar online so I have access anytime, anywhere to what's coming up and can check what days are available when out and about. But it's pretty difficult to see more than one month at a time on a phone or computer screen.
- Add stickers or your own doodle art to truly personalise your wall planner.
- Cross out the days as they go – you can really see how far you've come.
- Make sure family members or staff know whether they can add things to the calendar or notify you first to save confusion and misunderstanding over what the event is.

In past years I've gone down to my local office products/stationery store and just grabbed whatever they had. And then spent the year thinking about how ugly it is. Not this year – I've got even more organised and created my own wall planner in three different designs. Even better, you can download a free printable pdf of my wall planner to use in your own home or office. Now nobody has to have a boring, ugly wall planner.



Download your free wall planner here:
www.documentsbydesign.co.nz/freebies



Behind the Smile

Mental health, it is a vast topic and indeed one that needs to be talked about far more. In these Covid times, sadly many people have seen a decline in their mental health. No wonder really, many of our human needs including “certainty” have been taken away. People have lost jobs, income, or have been in isolation for so long that it has really taken its toll on their mental health.

Having just written my book “Behind the Smile” which covers my own experience with depression, alcohol dependency, bulimia, miscarriage and post natal depression, I wanted to share my experiences to help others who may be going through something similar or indeed anyone who is supporting someone who is going through it.

I think in order to have the empathy required with oneself and others it is important to have an understanding that it is impossible to just “snap out of it”. It is also something that comes with a huge

amount of shame. I literally could not tell anyone of my nearest and dearest at the time because I felt the fear so deeply of being judged.

I have, on the surface, everything to be grateful for, so why then was I feeling so down. It made me feel guilty that I couldn’t just be happy with my lot. I was “happy” with my lot and I was grateful, but the depression had nothing to do with that. It was that my head was ill.

Just like any other part of our bodies can get sick, our minds can get sick too. But for some reason, people

think that because we cannot see it, it isn't broken. But it is very broken. And we need to be able to understand how broken it can be in order to fix ourselves.

Oh, and please also understand this. It is not possible to fix anyone who is going through this. They must find ways to heal themselves. It is so hard when we have a loved one who is depressed or in addictions, to see them suffer and it is in our instinct to jump in and try to remove the pain.

Actually that's not our job. Our job is to love that person and hold a very safe space for them. Often a space of silence can be more powerful than a whole bunch of positive words of "oh you will be better soon" or "tomorrow is a new day". Sure, it is important to be positive, but often that will just fall on empty ears. A simple holding of the hands and a hug are far more beneficial. When we are depressed, our hearts feel empty. You can help by filling them up. Little messages to let the person know you are thinking of them. Laughter IS the best medicine and it will help create a quick shift in state. So cracking the odd joke, or sending funny videos, or watching a comedy. These are all good things.

The MOST important thing though is that we lift the lid of shame that is so often associated with depression. I hid beneath my smile for so long because I was so terrified of judgement of being weak. I didn't want the world to know I was broken on the inside. The outside world would see a face with make up on, a smile, a tidy home, and a sense of togetherness. So please watch out for those friends. When you ask how they are, look a little longer in their eyes. You might get a tiny glimpse of the real truth. The shiniest people are often the ones that

are hurting. And they will not want anyone to know, because they won't want to be a burden.

But if this is you, and you are feeling that things are not all that good and you suspect that you have something lingering, please know this. As soon as I started to share my experiences, this lid of shame started to lift. The judgement that I had feared was simply not there. And I no longer have any shame. Talking is literally the start of your healing journey. You will have heard the saying, a problem solved, is a problem halved. It is so true. So how do you open up? Who do you talk to? My first step was to go to my doctor. I then went to see a counsellor. It didn't "cure" me, there is no quick fix. It is a journey of healing and I went on to use many other healing modalities. But that first step was CRUCIAL in my healing. I hate to think where I would be today if I hadn't taken that first step. It might not be the doctor, it might be a good friend who you know is good at listening. But just know that change IS possible. I had an eating disorder for 15 years, alcohol dependency for over 20 years, and on and off depression for most of that duration. I no longer suffer and I am living proof that there is light at the end of the tunnel.

Some of the steps I took to recover are in my book, but ultimately it comes down to this. It is the relationship we have with ourselves. If we are not our own best friend, or at worst, are enemies with ourselves, years of beating ourselves up will leave us feeling weak and depressed. If we can develop a nurturing and loving relationship with ourselves then we can heal. Learning to love and accept ourselves exactly as we are is everything. It is the key to peace and the key to transformation. That self love is the heart of change.

By Amy McAuley, Amy Being Amy, Powerhoop NZ

Amy McAuley is a natural leader, inspiring hundreds of women worldwide with her inspirational programme, fitness courses, online presence and life coaching work. She is passionate about empowering women to overcome adversities, self-limiting beliefs and emotional pain, in order to become the best version of themselves and lead happy, fulfilled lives.

As a mother of three, a wife, a successful businesswoman and author, Amy appreciates the pressures of life and the demands of juggling multiple roles. Having personally faced many challenges - including post-natal depression, reliance on alcohol and cigarettes, and leaving family and friends behind when migrating to the other side of the world - Amy is open and non-judgemental. She teaches and demonstrates how positivity, drive and self-love can lead to profound personal improvement.

After training as a life coach and discovering Powerhoop - an innovative exercise opportunity - Amy successfully overcame her previously poor body image, long term battle with bulimia and negative mindset. Bubbly, open and committed, she leads by example, through community involvement, authenticity, ongoing self-development and a genuine interest in and desire to help her clients.

To purchase the ebook: www.amazon.com/Behind-Smile-Amy-McAuley-ebook

Or for a hard copy: www.powerhoopnz.co.nz/product/behind-the-smile

How to get a great authentic headshot of yourself



Do you have a current head shot of yourself that is the best version of you? Or is it from ten years ago, maybe a few kilos lighter with more hair or longer hair or with red hair? Is it a selfie with a lot of filters? Would you be easily recognised from this photograph or do people look surprised when they meet you in person or on a Zoom meeting?

In today's digital world it's crucial to have an authentic profile pic. We are often working with clients that we may or may not ever meet in person so we do judge others on what images they present to us online. This is polarized in the dating game, a few girlfriends have told me that their dates have looked more like the Dad of the person they thought they would be meeting. I photograph a lot of actors for talent agencies and they have update their profile pics yearly to be as accurate and authentic as possible for castings.

I know I make it sound easy, but I have been told that being photographed is psychologically like going to the dentist, you put it off until it hurts.

"I will do it when I lose weight, get a tan, get my hair cut, in summer". The excuse list is long. A good photographer will be able to position you so that you look longer and leaner, shoot from above to diffuse a double chin or fix blemishes in Photoshop. That is their job, you just have to show up.

Once you have made the decision to update your headshots, research other people in your field of work or check out their websites so you know what look you're after, what you like and what you don't like. Then find a photographer you feel comfortable with, let them know what you're looking for, call a couple, compare prices and see what they are offering. Does the package include make-up and hair? Will they shoot in a studio or an outside location or both? Is editing and retouching included in the price?

Choose the photographer that puts you at ease when you make that first phone call. A huge part of capturing a great shot is rapport, if the photographer

is experienced they will get you laughing and make you feel happy and relaxed, then half the battle is won.

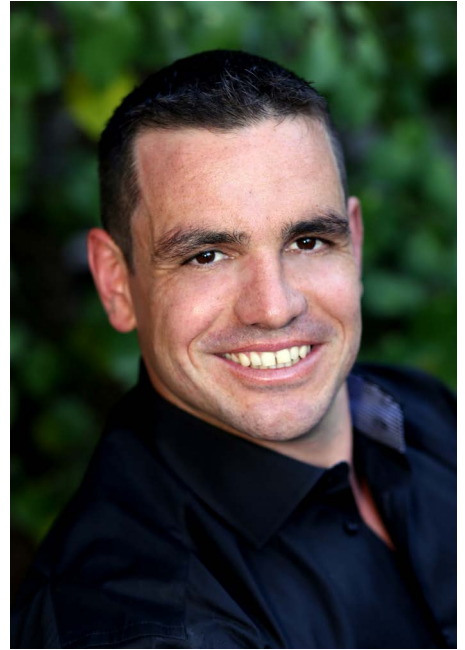
I always recommend doing a few different looks/backgrounds to get your money's worth. I shoot studio on light/dark background and on location for variety in a natural environment, either beach or trees for a relaxed look. You will be wanting a different vibe for LinkedIn than for Facebook or a website or a press release. It's a good idea to get different shots for different platforms.

In a past life I was a make up/hair artist for film and TV and cannot stress the importance of good make/hair styling, grooming. I usually do my clients' makeup/hair in a natural style, so it often doesn't look like they are wearing a lot. However clear eyes, flawless skin and clean, styled hair will make your photos look professional and polished.

You may want to think about your brand, what message do you want to portray? I love to mix it up, and get a variety of expressions; smiling, serious, relaxed, laughing and professional. I incorporate different backgrounds and a couple of clothing changes too.

Think about clothing, wear clothes you feel comfortable in bearing in mind that plain colours photograph best.

Keep away from too much pattern, spots, stripes anything that is too overbearing. Remember that light attracts and dark recedes. So if you have put on a few kilos over the lockdowns don't wear a fitting white or light top as it will draw attention to




the problem, a darker one will instantly make you slimmer. You may want shots actually doing your job in your place of work. Or incorporate a uniform or prop. If you work from home a shot of you in good light at a desk with a laptop can work or if you teach yoga doing a yoga pose at the beach.

A picture does paint a thousand words. I had a man call me recently who was a landscape gardener, he was adamant that he only wanted a couple of head shots and that he was not at all photogenic and would rather pull his own teeth out than have his picture taken. On the day he was so awkward he could barely look at the camera let alone smile, I suggested he have a couple of shots outside in the garden for a more relaxed look. He dropped his shoulders and literally breathed out as soon as we got outside into some green space. He looked like a completely different person, a confident, successful, happy person. We went back and did the headshots

again at the end and he was laughing and telling me funny work stories. He thanked me and told me that was the first time he had ever enjoyed having his photo taken.

I have photographed many different people; builders, ballet dancers, lawyers, life coaches, yoga teachers, writers, actors, pilates instructors and prison guards to name a few. What I have found is that absolutely everyone needs and wants the same thing, a great photograph of themselves that authentically represents them.

I believe being photogenic just means how relaxed you are in front of the camera. That's my job, well it's the photographer's job to relax you so we can capture the best version of you and more often than not have a laugh and make the process enjoyable so you don't leave it another 10 years to get the job done. 



By Ruthie Stoffels, Ruthie Stoffels Photography

Ruthie is an award winning photographer also with over 15 years' experience as a make-up artist working in film and tv both in NZ and the UK. She has enjoyed working with actors, artists, celebrities, politicians... and next door neighbours.

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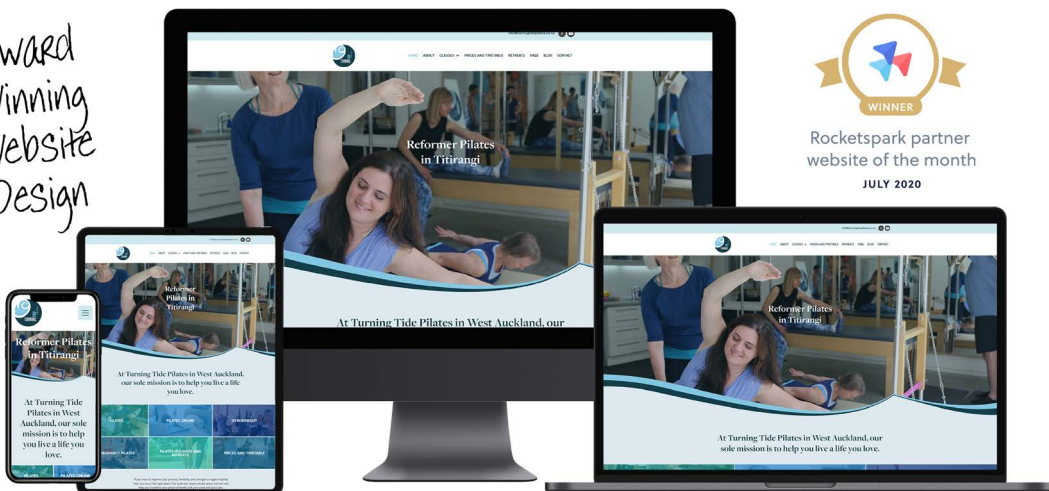
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