

Mompreneur

Julie Cole, co-founder
Mabel's Labels Inc.

By Susanne Hasulo
Photograph by Daniel Banko

IN THE BEGINNING We had this idea that nagged at us, that this product was missing from the market. We did some research, because at first we thought, 'Well, anybody can print labels off their computer,' but you can't. We discovered we had something — a really durable, cute label product that can go on everything from kids' clothes to shoes to drinking cups and lunch bags.

LAUNCHING MABEL We started Mabel's Labels (www.mabel.ca) with our first product five years ago and spent the year-and-a-half prior to that testing and researching materials, technology, creating our business plan. When we started, we were the ones up till 3 a.m. making the labels every night and licking envelopes. We did absolutely everything.

MABEL GROWS UP We think of Mabel as another daughter, we've nurtured her and watched her grow as we've watched our families grow. We now have 10 full-time staff and several part-timers. Mabel's Labels sell all over the world, but most of our business is in Canada and the U.S. All of the partners have left their traditional careers and now work full-time in the business. It's funny — we started this business so we could strike a work/life balance, have some flexibility and be with our kids more. Now it's grown to the extent that we partners need childcare to run the business we started so we could stay home with our kids!

JUGGLING THE WORK/LIFE BALANCE Although we have had to get some care for our children, we all feel that, for us, we're happier for it. Having a Web-based business provides a lot of flexibility — we don't have to dress everyday in business clothes, we don't have to put lipstick on to meet people for lunch.

ALL IN THE FAMILY We've all known each other since university. One of the partners married my brother, one married my young uncle, the other is my sister. We're all linked, it's a sisterhood. A lot of men start businesses because they want to be their own bosses. Women start businesses because they want control over other things, mainly the work/family balance. We have 11 kids between us and share a cottage together. Our relationship goes beyond Mabel. We support each other in many ways.

LIFE WITH FIVE KIDS I guess the one word I use to describe it is uncivilized, but we do manage to have fun. We try not to take ourselves too seriously. Having said that, in some regards we take ourselves very seriously. We take advocating for our children very seriously; anything around developmental or behavioural issues we take very seriously [Julie's oldest son, Mack, has autism]. You know how people say take it one day at a time? I take it 20 minutes at a time. In 20 minutes something's going to be a little bit better — somebody will have been fed; somebody's booboo will be better, that vomit will be cleaned up. We try and take it in manageable chunks.

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