

# The Misfit method: No business plan

**ORGANIC SUCCESS**

## No marketing, growth strategy or promotions

**Jaclyn Tersigni**

Amber Joliat didn't have a business plan when she started Misfit Studio.

Five years and hundreds of converted "misfits" later, she still doesn't. She's never needed one.

"I didn't even know what that was," Joliat jokes. "I've been asked 'When you opened the studio, how did you know people were going to come to class?' I didn't. I still don't. Every single day I'm like, 'It's so great that you're here!'"

"When there's something based on love and passion and truth, people identify with that. It resonates," the 37-year-old studio owner says. "That being said, the classes here are excellent."

Misfit Studio is, as Joliat describes it, Toronto's most unique movement studio. Sitting atop a converted church, Misfit offers a suite of classes that blend

pilates, yoga and dance for an experience that is challenging, inspiring, meditative and unlike any other group fitness in the city. As Joliat says, it's about "shedding who you are, what you do, and getting back to feeling your heartbeat."

Since it first launched as a small experiment, it's grown into one of Toronto's more foremost studios, occupying a niche entirely its own.

"Every class is unique — it's what I call my 'misfit method,'" says Joliat, a Toronto native and lifelong dancer. "The yoga bleeds into the pilates, the pilates threads into dance, and it's all become this one, constant movement. It doesn't look like what a typical yoga class looks like or what a typical pilates class looks like."

It's true. Misfit Studio has replaced the stock soundtrack of nature sounds with the likes of Leon Bridges, D'Angelo and Miriam Makeba that Joliat confesses to playing a touch too loudly. Students and teachers, many covered in tattoos and breaking all yoga clichés, joke and hug. When you walk the stairs to the studio, you're greeted by a chalkboard bearing Talking Heads' lyrics (This must be the

place). Then there's the name. "The interesting thing about using the word [misfit] is the gravitational pull towards it," Joliat explains. "People who have a slightly more open mind or who are looking for something alternative to do see that word and are encouraged by it, or curious about it. Right away, it magnetizes like-minded people."

Misfit Studio was born in 2010, when Joliat — then a yoga and pilates teacher working at various places across Toronto — felt uninspired by the uniformity of the classes and studios. "I had been teaching all over the city and I was like 'F— this, it's all the same,'" Joliat says. "I felt like I had something different and decided to just try."

She found a 500-square-foot space — "there was only enough room for six yoga mats" — to teach her fusion classes from and was taken back by how quickly business took off.

"It was crazy how fast it happened. It was 15, then 20, then 30 people showing up for class," Joliat recalls. "Then blogTO voted me in their top 10 yoga studios, in the first six months of me being open. Word spread really quickly that I was doing something different. For me, what



**Amber Joliat says if something is passed on passion, it resonates with people.** JESSICA BLAINE SMITH

was validating was that people understood."

The success has been organic. There's been no marketing (unless you count the well-followed Misfit Instagram account, featuring vintage photos of pinups and

celebrities dancing and moving), no elaborate growth strategy and no gimmicky promotions.

"I didn't know what I was getting into," Joliat says. "It's changed my life so much. I run a business now."

"People ask me quite a lot, 'did you dream of being a studio owner?' My dream was to be a painter or a dancer. I never dreamed this. But that's not the way I think. I'm just grateful for today."

## A business model that's temporary

Many great business ideas are born from a problem without a solution.

For Tyler Handley, that problem was temporary tattoos — or lack thereof.

Not quite ready for his dream tattoo, "I wanted to wear tattoos in the meantime that meant something to me but I didn't necessarily want them permanently," says Handley, 28.

Unimpressed with the temporary offerings available — "they were things you used as a kid. They don't look real, they only last a couple days, they flake away" — Handley began looking for a way to create something more authentic looking, with a longer wear time. He recalled a documentary he had seen about indigenous tribes in south and central America who painted their bodies with ink before battle. "I thought — what is that stuff," Handley says.

The answer: jagua gel — and the catalyst for Inkbox, the company behind the world's first two-week temporary tattoo. Since Handley and younger brother Braden launched Inkbox in February, the Toronto-based company has found customers in more than 80 countries, raised



**Be dope, temporarily.** CONTRIBUTED

over \$275,000 on Kickstarter and attracted press attention from the likes of BuzzFeed, Mashable, the Huffington Post and Glamour magazine.

"It's a unique product. It's completely new. Nothing's happened in the tattoo space for decades," Tyler says. "Twenty-three per cent of Americans have a tattoo. When people hear the idea, it's an instant 'Wow, this is an inevitable product.'"

The appeal is obvious. Inkbox tattoos aren't your 90s child "wet-and-stick" variety; they last for two weeks, they look authentic and the designs are on-trend.

After applying the tattoo via the adhesive stencil and supplied ink, the image develops over 12 to 24 hours. The ink works by staining the epidermis, which

constantly regenerates itself. Real tattoos stain the dermis, the deeper layer of skin. "It's not on top of your skin. It's actually a part of your skin for two weeks," says Braden, 25. "It's not henna. This sinks into your skin... It's a slow chemical reaction," Tyler adds.

The rise from idea to a company that has now sold more than 43,000 tattoos was quick. In the summer and fall of 2014, the brothers began experimenting with the ink formulation and creating stencils with adhesive materials and a die-cutter. Braden left his job with a marketing company and Tyler stepped away from his web startup to pursue Inkbox full-time. They launched on Feb. 2 and generated about \$500 in sales on day one.

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