Crystal Etienne: CEO and Founder, Ruby Love

This mom and businesswoman launched a personal care line to help women and girls stay active and confident during their time of the month.

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Women are more physically active today than ever. So why are there so few effective and discreet hygiene products to meet their needs during their menstrual cycle? Entrepreneur Crystal Etienne stepped in to help fill the void with a line of specially designed underwear, sleepwear and activewear to relieve stressing about periods during work or play—or any other time.

What was your motivation for creating Ruby Love?

Ruby Love grew out of my frustration dealing with sanitary pads. I didn't like how they felt. Every month, I would struggle with these products leaking. In addition, the shape is so bulky because of the material used to make them. Also, the wings on them stick out between your thighs and cause a lot of problems with the shaping.

Briefly describe your creative process from initial idea to formulating a business plan for the product line.

The idea I had to propose was nothing fancy. I envisioned a panty with a hole [a space in the crotch area of the underwear] to hold a sanitary pad in place. Since I live in New York City, I went down to the Garment District to find a manufacturer to make it. During a six-month period, I did a lot of reiterations and figuring out what the best fabric would be to use, the best angle and the best technology to put into the product. Then I thought about a collection of things that you can wear every day, which provided the concept of creating an entire line of clothing worn during one's period: swimwear, underwear, sleepwear, those types of garments. I wanted the brand and the company to offer clothing that we use on a regular basis.

Crystal Etienne and Ruby Love modelsCourtesy of Ruby Love

What challenges did you encounter along the way?

The biggest challenge was teaching myself everything from scratch because I don’t have experience producing these types of products at all. My background is as a financial comptroller, so, as you can see, there is a big difference there. Another huge challenge was researching and finding information to make sure that everything was done correctly. But I’m someone who loves to do research and testing, so everything that I did was done out of my own curiosity and my need to know what would work. I didn’t do anything just to make a profit or thinking about how successful the line could be. I literally did everything based on my own experiences.

How do you envision your product line’s ability to affect the stigma that surrounds menstruation?

I think that the taboo around menstruation really needs to change. This issue is something that women and young girls just keep to themselves, and it's something that we deal with for almost five decades of our lives. I think the stigma around this biological process is because of the association of the menstrual cycle with bleeding and the color of blood. But I think that opening up communication around the topic would lessen the negativity.

That's what we're trying to do as far as stopping the stigma; we want to make it OK to speak about this natural function of women's bodies. The discussion doesn't have to entail a full-blown conversation, but knowing and learning about the process should be OK without women being made to feel a particular type of way when they're menstruating.

What role do you think fear plays in women and girls' concerns about menstruation?

This is a feeling that a lot of people don't know or consider. Any woman or girl knows that feeling every time their period comes. The embarrassment and worry stay with them all day long. It's an anxiety that no one realizes is there.

How do you think your products might fuel the changes—socially and otherwise—for women and girls?

I think my product line gives people options. For years, we've only had one or two choices: pads or tampons and the menstrual cup from a few years back. Now with products that perform based on our natural body functions, I think having those options are just amazing. A good option for me is anything that can solve a problem and make me feel better.

Have you seen or been able to tell in any way how the product line will affect girls in particular in the future?

Again, it's options. In that space where there are sanitary pads, tampons and menstrual cups, now there is another option that you are able to use and just go on with your life. Our mantra is that you should be able to just go about your business and live your life without having to worry about menstruating. I think just that alone is a lot. It's monstrous not to be able to do what you want and to be afraid of getting up from a chair and experiencing that embarrassment connected with having your menstrual cycle, which is very big, especially for young girls. It's a very big social issue.

Yes, even as grown women we go through that.

That's true. Concerns about menstruating never stop. From the time you're 9 or 11 or whenever your period starts, those anxieties never stop. You get that same feeling every month, and it can interfere with whatever activity you're doing. I just wanted to put a stop to those worries.

What are your short-term and long-term goals?

The short-term goal is to create more brand awareness around the products we have now. Our

long-term goal is to make sure that we get the products in people's hands and to let them know that there is another option available. As far as our products, there's something happening that I can't speak about right now. But I can say that we're going into another sector in the industry that is going to be amazing.

What role do you see media playing in helping to shape the image of girls going through puberty in more positive ways?

I think right now is a great time for women, but there is not that much focusing on teen and tween health and hygiene, which obviously encompasses puberty. I think the media can do a better job, and that's what we're trying to do with Ruby Love.

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