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GAMBIT®

WOMEN IN BUSINESS

GEN X FILES

THE SECRET'S OUT:
THE SO-CALLED
'SLACKER'
GENERATION HAS

ALEXA PULITZER, OWNER
AND CREATOR OF LA
CARTOLERIA.



because of me.

Fedele was rejected flatly by "eight or 10" local lending institutions before she found one willing to finance the project. First Bidco of Baton Rouge, after a friendly introduction from an ally in banking, ultimately financed Fedele's dream. Her persistence paid off.

Today, the business is thriving. The notes and rent are paid, as are payroll and benefits for five employees — including herself — and it feels great.

How does she keep it all going?

"I don't know how to fail," she says. "If a

being young or female stop me from doing anything; it's just a non-issue. I may have to go back and try again and again, but I really don't think that if I were a man that I could have done any more than I already have."

Although she considers herself a product of MTV and confesses to a certain cynicism, Fedele also believes that cynicism made her try harder. "Remember," she says, "we are the most educated generation in this country to date. So if we stayed in school longer, that probably has delayed our generational blossoming a bit."

Alexa Pulitzer

CREATOR AND OWNER,
LA CARTOLERIA

"I love this business because it is 100 percent me," says 24-year-old Alexa Pulitzer, who comes from a long line of artists, designers and business people. Indeed, it would have been simple enough for her just to work at the family business, WEMCO, the world's largest tie manufacturer. Although she has a full-time position there, her

passion is a line of stationery products which she designs and markets on her own time.

The seminal period for Pulitzer's "second career" was the time she spent in Italy, where she completed a challenging apprenticeship at Ratti SpA, arguably the foremost silk mill in the world. Sr. Ratti is famed for his ability to develop entire collections of fabrics, which he has done for Ungaro, Chanel, Versace and Valentino.

"You go to Ratti to learn color, concept and how to coordinate an entire collection," Pulitzer says. While there, she designed fabrics for everything from neckties and scarves to interior design materials. She returned to the States to work at WEMCO, fulfilling an obligation to the company for financing her apprenticeship. At WEMCO, she is not only the youngest person in upper-level meetings, but also the only female in merchandising.

Pulitzer describes the beginning of La Cartoleria as "a fluke." Her first project was a series of 18 photographs she shot in Italy and later reproduced as postcards. They were presented in a beautiful and unusual folder of her own design. She created the postcard portfolio as a "thank you" gift to the designers and mill owners she met and worked with in Europe.

She happened to show the portfolio to friends, who insisted that she show it to RSVP Stationers. RSVP looked at the prototype, which was still in the early stages of development, and immediately placed an order. "I was stunned," she says. "That first order made me realize just how big the potential market could be. RSVP really encouraged and pushed me, suggesting



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an entire product line. At the time, I felt my abilities were being underutilized at WEMCO, so in a very real way, my line was born out of frustration and isolation.”

Pulitzer’s line of stationery includes post-cards, note cards, writing papers, gift enclosures, stickers and place cards. Her products can be found at RSVP, Scriptura and the New Orleans Museum of Art. Pulitzer believes that the line has been successful because “people want beauty at an affordable price.” It was important to her that “younger people be able to afford it.” She voices a desire to “give back to the people who had style and taste even if they didn’t have a lot of money to spend.”

Pulitzer also feels that she is a product of her times. “Most of my instructors in art school were relatively young, and they were very business-oriented. I had one in particular who concentrated on how to survive as an artist. I was 21 at the time, and those lessons really hit home.”

Now 24, she feels that Generation Xers have been taught that while you can always be replaced in the marketplace if the work isn’t good enough, it is also true that “a nurtured talent can excel.” As far as working and competing with men, she was “taught, at every level, to have every responsibility that a man has and to be responsible for my own destiny.”

Like others in her generation, she feels an urgency about her life, that the time for accomplishment may be limited, so she “packs it in” by being highly organized and working long hours.

Her advice to other entrepreneurs? “Work hard, do your research, be a sponge, learn everything you can from everyone. Develop a healthy self-image and believe in yourself. With a strong, honest feeling, the rest will fall into place.”