Story Corp Project

Interview Transcript

Interviewer: Ola Noureldin
Narrator: Maria Yassa
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Maria Sami Interview

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Persons present: Ola Noureldin- I

Maria Sami-S

Ola: Today we will shed the light on one of our AUC alumni that has a special journey that people could always learn from. Good evening Maria, I am happy to be with you. First of all may you introduce yourself?

Maria: My name is Maria Sami Yassa. I’m 22 years old. I graduated Fall 2010 with a bachelor degree in Economics with high honors and a GPA of 3.67.

Ola: Hmm, that’s interesting! So you are working now on “Maria’s Jewelry” How did thinking about owning a private business really start?

Maria: Well, it started partly when I was unemployed and being unemployed for a long time drove me crazy and the feeling of being unproductive and useless was really a bad thing for me and in the same time a friend wanted to earn some extra cash so we decided to do this business together but then she backed down.

Ola: When did you feel passion for accessories and when did it start and why jewelry in particular?
Maria: Well, I was always interested in buying jewelry, of course. But then as a child I was interested in making friendship bracelets, but actually my passion grew when I got myself in it, in the business itself and invested money and I pushed myself to learn and experiment and when I started producing successful final products I became even more passionate.

Ola: Did it take you long or how long did it take you to become professional?

Maria: Well, there are several areas of professionalism. One of them is how I buy a material and the quality of material, also the production quality and quantity, the marketing strategies and selling skills. So, in the beginning I was buying material from places that didn’t have very good quality and then I wasn’t producing that much and the quality wasn’t that good but with experiment I ..it was better and the marketing strategies was when I started I was just using word of mouth and then I expanded to Facebook ads and Facebook pages and so on and all of these took me about 2 to 3 weeks.

Ola: What about the capital involved and the start up costs. Are you making any profits?

Maria: Well the start-up costs were about 600 Egyptian Pounds and then it grew a lot more. Actually my capital involved is kind of confidential. However, my profits are covering 70,about 70 percent of my costs till now, but I make profits on the piece. I know that you would think that it’s not very profitable but I enjoy it so it is more of a hobby than an actual business

Ola : That’s great ! What are the types of material you usually use?
Maria: I use metal charms, semi-precious stones, crystals and plastic beads for lower quality.

Ola: Aha, you mentioned that you went to other places where you usually buy your material from, what are the other places?

Maria: Well, my bulk purchases like if I want to buy a lot of material, a lot of stones in very good quality, I go to Khan El Khalili, there is a three floors shop there, only for semi-precious stones and for crystals and then, for the small purchases like if something is missing or I need something very fast, I go to two shops such as “Kol Shee” and “Fatla W Ebra” so there are two main, these are the two main places I go to.

Ola: Hmm, where do you usually present or display your products and your accessories or jewelry?

Maria: Well, I went to two bazars, one of them in the Intercontinental and the other I can’t really remember the name cause it wasn’t very successful and was really badly. Badly planned. And I also made an open day at home for friends and friends of friends which was of course cheaper because I don’t pay table rent or I don’t go to anywhere, actually people come to me. So this one was even more successful. Also, I display my accessories on Facebook and maybe, I also displayed my accessories in Sahel El-Shamaly where I had friends I mean family and their friends looking at my things and buying.
Ola: How do you usually aim at being different in this project? I mean there a lot of accessory or jewelry. What do you think you have that is different that nobody else has?

Maria: Well, first of all I’m very creative. I don’t do mass production so it’s just 2 or 3 pieces per design and my slogan is “Be Unique”.

Ola: What about the support of the people around you? Did they support your idea once you started?

Maria: Yes, very much. My family and friends encouraged me once they found out I was talented and that, it could be successful. So they advised me and sometimes even bought from me.

Ola: And how did you manage all this by yourself? Did any of your friends or relatives help you achieve it in any way?

Maria: First, I was all alone, I was still experimenting alone and then, when I started marketing my friends helped me through words of mouth and adding people to the Facebook page, they also supported me by being with me in the bazars and they also bought a lot of accessories from me.

Ola: Is Facebook the only place where you display your finished designs along with the bazars and the open days and the Sahel El Shamaly as you said?
Maria: Mainly Facebook but also BBM group. I was planning, I had this idea of having a website but I heard that it’s very hard to create it and it’s very costly so if I ever decided to really expand, it could be a good plan for it.

Ola: What’s your next vision, the next vision or the next step? How do you plan on going ahead with the project in terms of either material or on a broader scale?

Maria: Well, right now am still growing professionally and design wise, customer base and so on, I need someone to assist me but I’m still growing, I don’t really have a very direct plan.

Ola: Did studying at AUC help you to reach what you are now? In terms of skills or creativity?

Maria: Well, not really, but in terms of marketing, analysis and strategies maybe a little bit.

Ola: Do you think that working with ..would bring you ..working with your bachelor degree would bring more benefit than doing something you really enjoy?

Maria: Probably yes, financially and career wise, I would have a stable income. Unless I can take my business to a higher level like Azza fahmy’s business.

Ola: What if you were offered a good job, would you keep the business going?

Maria: I will try as much as possible.
Ola: And what do you advice for the newly graduates?

Maria: Well, this is an advice from experience, when you graduate start searching for a job or apply for masters but make sure that you are discovering or looking for both and if you don’t find a job right away, don’t be scared to initiate a project and be passionate about it because anything adds to you and your value and to your experience, so whenever after that you get a job, it is going to be useful.

Ola: Is there anything else you would like to add

Maria: No. Thank you.

Ola: Thank you