

## OFF CAMPUS

# What it takes to run an online handmade jewellery business AS A YOUNG ENTREPRENEUR

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Contrary to what many may presume, running an online handmade jewellery business requires consistent effort and commitment. In Bangladesh, the online jewellery scene is thriving with the growing popularity of social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram, where handmade jewellery is being sold and promoted. And behind every well-crafted jewellery page is a story that incorporates courage to begin, a painstaking creative process, survival in a competitive market, and a desire to leave a footprint in the field of online business.

A natural question that propels the curious mind is how the artisans behind these wonderful creations found the inspiration to start their journey. Syeda Tithila Manjur, owner of Layes Fita, says that the initial idea behind the business stemmed from her childhood game of decorating her dolls. She states, "Back in my childhood, I used to make dolls' jewellery from beads, and that is where I got my first inspiration to make handmade jewellery. Since then, I have wanted to work in this field."

Similar to Tithila, Afrin Parvez, owner of the page Little Creations by Afrin, has harboured an interest in this work since her early days, but she could only translate her interest into reality during the COVID-19 lockdown.

It is important to emphasise that for both individuals, starting their journey was not a sudden decision.



PHOTOS: ORCHID CHAKMA



Rather, it was the realisation of a long-nurtured dream, characterised by passion and a genuine love for the craft, that manifested into reality only when it felt right.

When asked about what made them open their business in a virtual space instead of a physical one, different entrepreneurs had different reasons. For Tithila it was pure coincidence. She shares, "Once I just uploaded some pictures of my work to share with my friends. Surprisingly, I got some orders from those works, and thus I started my journey."

In contrast to Tithila, Afrin felt it was the manageability of the online platforms that made her start her business online instead of in a physical store. She states, "An online page is easy to manage from any place." One thing to observe is that, unlike a physical business, an online business requires comparatively less investment. The flexibility, in terms of time

commitment, of the online medium is also note-worthy. These aspects have made the online platform an attractive opportunity for many hesitant entrepreneurs who might have a different primary commitment but want to manage a successful business.

With more and more handmade jewellery shops cropping up on our feeds every day, securing quality materials can make or break an online handmade jewellery business, especially when designs are unique and intricate. Sadia shares, "Sourcing from the right places was quite challenging. Sometimes we source raw materials from abroad through importers and some materials are sourced domestically. Mirpur 1, for example, is a good place for buying wholesale. Using my own design and aesthetic, I transform these materials into jewellery in my unique style."

Mownita Ahmed, owner of the online page Mownita's, relies on accessible resources, choosing art and craft stores for sourcing. This reflects the determination of small-scale entrepreneurs who must maximize what is available to them. Local stores are a simple solution for sourcing raw materials, especially for those who don't have access to large suppliers.

Mownita's journey also highlights the hurdles that come with starting a business with limited resources. "Having little to no money to invest in a business as a student and also having no basic knowledge of art was the real problem for me. I used my pocket money, which was only BDT 10 to 20 at that time, as an investment, bought some raw materials, and instantly started my business with only one hand-painted designer jewellery piece," she shares. For new entrepreneurs like her,

starting with minimal capital and learning on the go is often the only option. However, this entrepreneurial spirit of making do with what's available can serve as an inspiration for others who have limited capital and experience but a strong desire to create.

Marketing is an added hurdle that small online businesses face. "Facebook was actually my first platform for marketing. Now, I also work with several local initiative-based organisations for marketing," explains Sadia.

Mownita takes a different approach and relies on customer trust and loyalty. She says, "I think trust can be the biggest marketing strategy nowadays. Every one of my loyal clients market my products." This organic form of marketing shows the importance of small-scale online businesses building genuine relationships with customers, especially in an industry where word-of-mouth can influence sales.

Every creative job is draining due to the pressure of maintaining novelty. Upon being asked how she deals with this challenge, Afrin says she frequently explores different media of art, which allows her to gain new insight. She says, "Working with different media and changing media help me diversify my designs."

Speaking on how to overcome creative challenges and keep moving forward as a new business owner, Mownita shares, "Art needs persistence, not perfection. Use your imagination and authentically express yourself. The right client will love you for your work. It will be difficult in the beginning, but stay resourceful, and eventually, you will have a fulfilling and successful business."