

By Amy Lucas

Quite a Passion

After spending 30 years working as a computer engineer, Geri Finio gave up her day job and pursued her dream of starting an embroidery business.

About Studio 187 LLC

Owner: Geri Finio

Located: Moorestown, NJ

Founded: February 2007

Customer base: Corporate and private clients

E-mail: insidestudio187@comcast.net;
<http://studio187.net>



“Computers just came easy to me,” says Geri Finio. “I was very good at it, it was a job, and it paid my bills. But, I wasn’t doing what I loved to do, which was embroidery.” So, after she attended a sewing trade show and saw computerized embroidery machines creating what she was doing by hand, she said it was then that she found her motivation to turn her hobby into a career. Now, a year and a half later, she’s the owner of Studio 187 LLC, she has two Melco Amaya XT machines, and she’s doing well. But, she’d like some advice. How does she sell her services without “bragging” about her talent? How can she gain more corporate accounts without losing her small, diverse client base? And, how can she appeal to clients who aren’t interested in low-priced, mass-production embroidery?

Editor’s Note: In this section, we’d like to feature new embroiderers who’ve got the talent and the drive, but need help taking their business to the next level of success. If you’d like to be featured in this section, please send an e-mail to Nicole Rollender, editor, at nrollender@asicentral.com.

Stitches: How did you get into embroidery?

Geri Finio: I started hand embroidering as soon as I could thread a needle, and I’ve been doing hand embroidery, sewing and quilting since then.

Stitches: Are you happy with your new career move?

GF: I absolutely love what I do.

Stitches: Do you specialize in a particular niche?

GF: Actually, no. I have customers that range from large advertising firms and home designers to landscapers and individual customers, so my client base is really diverse.

Stitches: Any plans of moving outside your home?

GF: No, I really like my home studio and I like the personal one-on-one experience I can give to customers – as do they.

Stitches: Does Studio 187 have a Web site?

GF: Yes, <http://studio187.net>, and it’s worked very well for me. Initially, I walk my clients through the site, but once they’re familiar with everything, they can shop at their leisure and let me know exactly what they want. I always try to



This pillow Finio created during an heirloom embroidery class she attended at the Martha Pullen School of Art Fashion earlier this year.



Finio prefers using wool thread rather than standard polyester. This rose design is created with wool thread on a silk/cotton fabric. She used a medium-weight tear-away to stabilize.



Finio often does embroidery for interior decorators and designers. The Roman shade (as pictured here) features polyester thread on 100% loosely woven silk. It’s stabilized with no-show mesh.

keep everything live and up-to-date.

Stitches: How have you acquired your current customers?

GF: I joined two networking groups when I first started and I’ve also acquired a lot of business from friends and previous business relations. This year, I put an ad in the local paper and I’ll be listed in the local business directory and on its Web site. I also spent a week doing nothing but cold calling. But, word-of-mouth is my biggest advertiser. I could use some more help with growing my client base.

Stitches: What are some of your other challenges?

What the Experts Say

"Finally, someone who understands the value of a quality business," says Linda Rainwater, national training manager for the sewing divisions for Tacony Corp.

With Geri Finio's passion, Rainwater says her challenges will basically solve themselves. "Her quote: 'Embroidery shouldn't be cheap. It represents status,' is the biggest struggle that most home or new embroiderers have," she says. "That is, how to value what they do enough so that they aren't giving their work away."

Shameless self-promotion

So, because Finio clearly understands the quality of her work and what it's truly worth, she's overcome the biggest challenge of all. Now, she must take her passion and understanding and be bold. "Geri needs to do a little shameless self-promotion," Rainwater says. "That's what it's all about." And the best way to do that?

Get back into cold calling, says Anna Johnson, owner of Super Embroidery and Screen Printing Inc. While it may be time-consuming, she's got the dialog down pat to bring in the right kinds of clients. "When you have some down time, pick up the phone," she says. If she does it once a week or every

other week, it will pay off.

Or, try getting testimonials from current clients. "I'm sure there are many people who've had great experiences and would be willing to put them in writing," Rainwater says. Then, once Finio has a selection of testimonials, she can pick the best ones. "I'd suggest she put together a brochure that could 'speak' for her and talks about the exclusivity of her business, and how she 'hand selects' the organizations with which she becomes affiliated," she says.

For an extra edge, Finio could add that she's accepting new customers, much like a doctor's office accepts new patients. "Once she's got the clients, she can draw the line at any time she feels she's maxed out her ability to well-serve the customers she has fought hard to retain," Rainwater says.

Build a portfolio

Now, as far as earning corporate accounts like advertising agencies, Fred Lebow, key accounts manager for Cotswold Industries, says to first seek them out. "The local phone book and Google are useful tools for identifying the agencies in your area," he says. Once located, find out the name of the president/owner or whoever is in charge of making decisions about purchasing embroidered apparel. "Also find out the size of the company, by looking at its annual sales and number of employees,"

he says. "This way, you'll know a little bit about the company and who its clients are, so you have clues as to what styles of shirts to present and what the company's budget may be."

Next, put together a portfolio. Include an introductory letter, printed literature that shows examples of your work, a list of the services you provide, pricing information and perhaps a digital art guide. Assuming you're sending these packets to a handful or even two handfuls of companies, it would be worth the time to customize each kit. "Include a sew-out of the client's logo, or maybe even sew it on a shirt if you're really interested in a particular company," Lebow says.

Then, the final step is to put it in a package. A low-budget tactic is to buy pocket folders that contain a compartment for a business card. And, don't be afraid to spend the extra money to have folders custom designed with your company name and contact info, as they're great for sales and marketing efforts, the media and brand-new clients. "Don't flinch at the cost," he says. "You might pay for the entire order of folders with one or two jobs from a national advertising agency."

Get the appointment

After Finio has delivered the packages, she should wait a week and then begin follow-up calls.

And if possible, she should try to set up a one-on-one meeting with the client. "The secret to getting an appointment is to avoid telling a customer what a great deal you can give them," Lebow says. Instead, develop your business image through professional-looking apparel and behavior.

In the event the client already has an embroiderer, Finio can tell her to keep her in mind if she's in a pinch, the regular embroiderer is overbooked or on vacation or the company's needs are growing. "And sometimes you're just calling at a bad time, and you'll find if you call later that second call nets you results," Lebow says. "It does work and will get you started on your goal of acquiring more advertising agency customers."

While it's difficult, no doubt, to cold call, Rainwater says Finio owes it to herself and to the industry to push past her discomfort. "I know that individuals with talent, integrity, intelligence and drive don't come along every day," she says.

Share Your Thoughts

Want to throw in your two cents? Feel free to e-mail our new embroiderers because they'd love to hear from you! Do you have what it takes to be an expert? E-mail Nicole Rollender, editor, at nrollender@asicentral.com with your expertise and we'll contact you to help with an upcoming issue.

GF: I'd really like to get more clients, but specifically large corporate accounts with marketing and advertising firms. But, at the same time, I'd like to maintain all my current accounts. Where's the balance and how do I target these corporate clients?

By far, my biggest challenge is selling myself and my services. It's just walking up

and saying, 'Hi, this is who I am and this is what I do.' I know I'm really good at what I do and pretty much every time I do a job for a new customer, they come back. That's a great sign, but I just don't like 'bragging' about myself.

Last, I'd like to get myself out there as a more specialized custom embroiderer, not the mass-production kind. I just don't

feel mass-production embroidery gives the art credit. It shouldn't be cheap and my prices aren't cheap. I think embroidery represents status and should be treated as something special. So, how can I appeal to that market – quality versus quantity – and do well? ●

AMY LUCAS is a PA-based contributing writer.