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Writing Code for Websites is Fun

by Suzanne Boles |



The owner of Better Than Chocolate web design, and founder and CEO of Girls Guide To Web Design (GG2WD), has a totally unique business model – Jetsetter – that’s really taking off.

She’s been named to Forbes’ list of “20 Inspiring Young Female Founders to Follow on Twitter” and ranked third place in Ali Brown’s “Entrepreneurs Who Thrive” contest. Interviewed by CBC, profiled in the *Montreal Gazette* and quoted by numerous online e-zines and popular blogs, Western’s MIT grad, Amanda Aitken, BA’05, 31, has a

way with words, a flair for design, and gets a thrill out of “empowering women.”

From her apartment in Montreal, Aitken created GG2WD to help women become “empowered” and to “unleash your inner designer and create an awe-inspiring WordPress blog or website.”

“It really is filling a gap,” Aitken says. Up until GG2WD the “only place to learn (WordPress) web design, and to have this support and handholding, would be to go to school.”

To date, more than 600 women have purchased the 35-hour video-training course, launched in July 2011. With a reasonable price tag of \$397 US, this has catapulted her over the \$200,000 gross income mark. She also offers an add-on, one-hour “website therapy” session for \$200 with a business coach she’s teamed up with.

Her sales approach – chatty, ‘hey girlfriend’ style - is appealing and the offer to learn HTML and CSS code without any prior knowledge, enticing. Support for learners comes from her Facebook page, monitored by three former students.

Born in Montreal, her family moved to Toronto when she was 8. At 13, they moved to Ottawa and she taught herself code and began designing websites for clients. She attended the prestigious Lisgar Collegiate Institute’s full-time high school, gifted students’ program.

With a voracious creative appetite she wasn’t about to be pinned down to any specific specialty. Knowing her next move was university, Aitken chose Western’s (then new) MIT program “because I saw it’s a degree of possibilities.” Her final year was an exchange at McGill University. She graduated in 2005 adding the certificate in writing to her credentials and stayed in Montreal.

Her resumé is impressive including copywriter for a marketing company – something she says she really enjoyed, and allowed her to expand on the tools she learned from both the MIT and writing certificate programs - to indulging her passion for fashion via entrepreneurial forays as The Stylish Copywriter and her onlinefashion website and magazine, Lady Licorice. Also bilingual, at one point she did fashion and beauty translation for LouLou Magazine that, she says, was “an easy add-on to a full-time job.”

She finally decided to take the leap of faith and launched her Better than Chocolate web design company, with the focus on creating a website in a day, now marketing it as a “branding studio.” “What I’m doing now is offering a much more rich, totally customized immersive experience...designing brands for websites for women entrepreneurs really based on who they are.”

Less than a year since their wedding Aitken and husband, Justin Verrall, headed out on a six-month adventure

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in November 2012, traveling to Hawaii, New Zealand, Australia, Thailand, Hong Kong and beyond. Aitken will remain hands on with her businesses throughout the journey, and plans to grow GG2WD, adding level 2.0 and, rolling out a Guy's Guide to Web Design, with Justin jumping on board, and likely the voice behind the videos for this new enterprise. Reflecting back she says "I didn't ever see myself doing this.

When I was at Western I hadn't yet fully woken up to the fact that I was an entrepreneur at heart, but looking back I can see that my decision to go to Western specifically to enroll in the MIT – which is such a flexible interdisciplinary program – was definitely an important stepping stone for me."

More information at: girlsguidetowebdesign.com

This article appeared in the Winter 2013 edition of Alumni Gazette

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