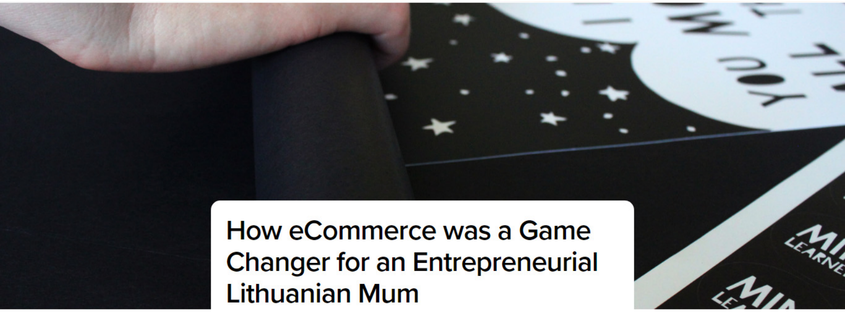


How eCommerce was a Game Changer for an Entrepreneurial Lithuanian Mum

CUSTOMER STORIES WRITTEN BY MARINA PAPE

They say you can't have it all. Between building a career, staying fit, nurturing your family, advancing in knowledge, exploring the world and all of the things the world has to offer, one couldn't be blamed for waving the white flag of surrender.

Mini Learners is a refreshing exception to the adage.

Read on to learn how Egle, an entrepreneurial mother of two, transitioned from a 9-5pm office job and long commute to working from home, and how **eCommerce was the game changer in her pursuit of happiness and starting her own business**.

The entrepreneurial Egle at work on MiniLearners.com.

Technology is breaking open the way we live and work. Changing at a speed that boggles the mind, it is reconfiguring the work-life-home balance as we know it. For a growing clan or remote workers, work can be wherever wifi (and good coffee) can be found.

This manifests in different ways. For WooCommerce, it's our team of eighty being able to work remotely from different corners of the globe, using tools like Slack, Trello, and Google Hangouts. For Egle, it's being able to run her nursery decor business from home on a flexible schedule, and doing something she is passionate about daily without sacrificing family time and wasting precious hours on trains to an office.

Here's how she did it.

Early inspiration in Scandinavia and

watercolor beginnings on Etsy

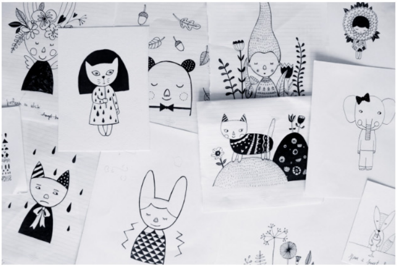
Egle was born in the small, beautiful town of Priekule on the West coast of Lithuania, to this day still "the most beautiful place on earth" in her eyes. Gifted with a wild and creative imagination, nature was her childhood playground, and the beautiful Scandinavia was her earliest inspiration.

Keen on drawing for as long as she can remember, **Egle's career aspirations were always in the direction of something related to art**. After graduating with a BA in Art History, she moved to London where she spent eleven years living and working full time as a graphic designer for an agency in West London. Says Egle:

> ***I loved my job and the people I worked with, but there was always something missing. I love doodling and drawing but most of the work was too corporate to allow for this sort of creativity.***

Yearning for an avenue to express her creativity and seeing a potential opportunity to monetize a hobby, she went ahead and set up an Etsy shop for some of her watercolor designs.

While the feedback was great, it turned out not to be hugely scalable to sell the originals given the time taken to paint and create them. Still, testing the water on Etsy was a very positive (if not lucrative) experience.



Some of Egle's charming sketches that she monetizes online as downloadables and prints.

> ***Etsy was where everything started for me, and where I got the confidence that people out there liked my designs. That is why I can never praise that platform enough.***

Valuable lessons from running an educational apps business

Egle had always had an entrepreneurial streak. During her first pregnancy, and encouraged with her hobbist experimentation on Etsy, **she began thinking seriously about starting her own business**.

> ***It was something constantly in my head; when I was pregnant, it felt like the right moment to take the plunge. I think what blocks people in general is the fear of failure and losing the security of a 9-5 job. Quite often having a child is the trigger for you to finally get your ideas off of paper. I know a lot of women who started their business after becoming a mom.***

The first business idea she had, together with her husband, was to create educational apps for children using her designs. Her commute of nearly four hours a day created time for sketching app designs on the train, and then late at night she would digitalize them at home. Digitalization, scalable much.

Hard work? For sure. **But the feeling of seeing her creations come to life? Priceless:**

> ***I always wanted to be my own boss, create products with my designs, and live off my art.***

In just three months of work between commutes and home, she and her husband had two apps in the Apple store, both in three different languages and including two distinct games each, a puzzle and quiz. Impressive stuff.

But after the birth of her first boy, running the app business became a little difficult. For a new mum, app development which requires constant updates is a tough choice. The level of investment to make the business profitable went beyond their budget and they called it a day.

> ***The whole thing was a massive learning experience. It taught me that there were no excuses if I really wanted to do something.***

Rethinking what had worked best and been manageable for her in terms of time investment, Egle had the idea to repurpose all the digitized designs she had worked so hard on into downloadable nursery posters. **Mini Learners had been the name for the educational apps, and carried over perfectly to her next business**.

MINI
LEARNERS

Beautiful branding? One of the built-in benefits of a designer creating a product and packaging.

She revisited Etsy and set up a digital download store, which turned out to be a great idea. The designs did well and Egle decided to take the leap and set up her own online store.

What to sell and how to sell it: identifying a niche

A key decision for any aspiring store owner is what to sell. Finding a niche and developing a unique product, then creating an engaging and user-friendly store for customers to shop in, are the basics of any successful eCommerce offering.

The slice of the market Egle set her sights on was nursery decor, a natural fit for her tendency towards quirky, child-friendly drawings. As a lover of kids' books she had long dreamt of being a children's illustrator, and opening Mini Learners made this a reality.

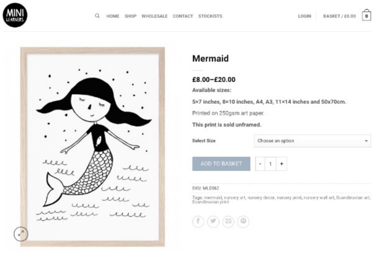
> ***I get inspired by everything, like cartoons, books, old posters, song lyrics, dolls… although I consciously try not to go with what's trendy, as everyone ends up doing the same thing. Being original is important.***

The digital downloads had done well on Etsy, and it was time to set up a store of her own. Familiar with WordPress and WooCommerce, with both she and her husband having worked with the platforms before, it was a no brainer to use them.

Egle listed three reasons for going with Woo for her bespoke Mini Learners store:

1. **Ease of use**. "Both WordPress and WooCommerce are extremely easy to use from a shop owner's point of view," she says, "and easy to maintain."
2. **Well-established with plentiful resources**. Since both platforms are well-established, there are plenty of docs, blog posts, and guides online. She also points at the ability to get support quickly: "For a small business owner this is crucial, as it allows you to focus on growing your business rather than fixing bugs."
3. **Features can be added quickly**. "WordPress has a plugin for basically anything you can think of," Egle says. With a click of a button, you can add a new feature or tap into the power of a new WooCommerce extension.

Payments are processed with Paypal Standard (included free in WooCommerce core) and Egle's experience with them has been flawless. For a small business, Egle says there is no better payments platform — particularly as the close to 95% of her sales are international.



Mermaid

£8.00–£20.00

Available sizes:

5×7 inches, 8×10 inches, A4, A3, 11×14 inches and 50x70cm.

Printed on 250gsm art paper.

This print is sold unframed.

Select Size Choose an option

SKU: ML0062

Tags: mermaid, nursery art, nursery decor, nursery print, nursery wall art, Scandinavian art, Scandinavian print

A peek at one of the product pages on Mini Learners, lovely style and complimentary to the products.

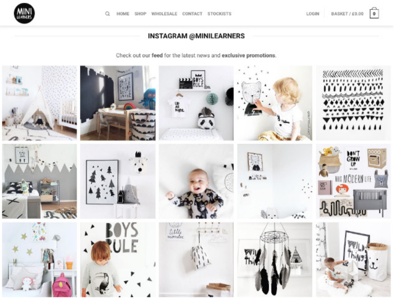
A few other plugins and extensions in use on the store:

- Woo Sidebars
- YITH WooCommerce Ajax Search
- Ninja Forms
- WooCommerce Google Analytics
- WooCommerce Instagram

Social media, email, PR, and the power of beautiful product photography

Mini Learners has a strong presence on social media, something Egle manages herself on top of running the business. **Instagram is her main advertisement channel, and since launching her website has proven to be a strong inroad for new customers**.

She currently uses the WooCommerce Instagram extension to display posts on her site and encourage new follows.



INSTAGRAM @MINILEARNERS

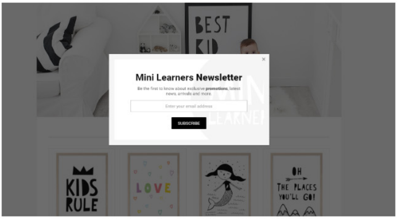
Check out our **feed** for the latest news and **exclusive promotions**.

The Instagram feed extension display all of the latest images beautifully, and they spread across on the hompage of MiniLearners.com.

> ***Having good exposure on social media really delivers. Social media in general is awesome for small businesses.***

With such a visual product, Instagram suits her business model best, but other store owners might find more success on Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter or another channel depending on their offering. Egle recommends sticking to the one or two you feel most confident about, and work hard on them.

As well as including links to all of her social media accounts, there is a clear call to action to sign up to the Mini Learners email newsletter on the homepage, immediately giving customers and fans a way to stay in the loop.



Mini Learners Newsletter

Be the first to know about exclusive **promotions**, latest news, arrivals and more.

The Mini Learners newsletter is sent quarterly using MailChimp, alongside episodic sale mailers with discounts and treats for her subscribers.

PR has been another wonderful way to get exposure. In the beginning Egle did the reaching out, but now many companies actually get in touch first.

> ***There's a snowball effect: the more people talk about your products, the more interest will be generated towards your brand.***

Something that helps products gets picked up for PR is having high quality images, also a rather vital aspect of a high quality eCommerce experience. In fact Egle spent her first $100 on marketing on a photoshoot, and **this commitment to beautifully capturing her products in situ really sets her website apart**.

little
monster

Beautiful product photos set Mini Learners apart in a big way.

Egle shoots some of these beautiful product shots herself, but also works with brand reps who provide her with amazing shoots for her designs.

With regards to the importance of these marketing activities compared to your store, Egle's advice is this:

> ***I'd say focus on getting your product right first, then really concentrate into getting the word out there — try to get people to talk about and share your products.***

Following the footsteps of an entrepreneur mother of two

When you run your own business, managing time is challenging, especially at the beginning. Keeping sane hours is not easy and requires concerted effort. Even when she steps out of the house, Egle can continue working and run her store on her phone!

> ***I don't really have the usual 9-5 routine, which means I work way longer hours than before, including weekends. But I have a lot of pleasure doing what I am doing, so work doesn't feel like work, if that makes any sense.***

Taking breaks is important, particularly for those working from home. If she has an uninspired day, Egle takes a power walk to the beach, makes a delicious dinner, or works out to shift her thoughts and emotions. Her family remains her top priority, so she schedules time with them as well as time for herself.

> ***I was often told that after you have your own child you wouldn't have time for anything. I later found out that this was far from the truth, and you can indeed make time for anything you want (kids or not), as long as it's truly important to you.***

Egle offers this valuable tip for entrepreneurs, either with or without children:

> ***Consider eCommerce. You can set up a site with a fraction of the investment needed for a physical store. Of course there is much more to business than that, but the convenience of an online store is indisputable.***
>
> ***It's not easy trying to run things while having kids but if this is something you really want to do you will make it happen. The most important thing is to stay focused and don't lose the motivation.***

A lovely family headed up by a smart, hardworking entrepreneur.

They say you can't have it all. But wonderfully, and certainly for this dynamic and hardworking designer mum, they were wrong.