

Teen Entrepreneur: Leanna Archer Grows a Business Out of Natural Hair Products

by Susan Johnston



Leanna Archer, a high school student in Long Island, New York, says she first had the idea to launch her business when she was eight or nine years old. “People kept asking me about products that I use in my hair and where they can get them,” she says, “but they were only available in our family. My great-grandmother came up with it, and she distributed [the pomade] to the family.”

Leanna’s parents were skeptical about her launching a business at such a young age, but Leanna shared extra pomade with some of her classmates. Soon people came to the family’s house asking to buy more.

“At first I approached [my parents] and they told me, ‘you can start it when you’re in college,’” she explains. “I knew that I had to get it out there, so I did research on what it takes to run a company and where I could get a business license as a minor.”

After winning over her parents, she started selling the pomade through her website and eventually through salons and phone orders. Now 14, Leanna has expanded into other hair, face, and body care products, which she and her family make at home. “The basement is basically my working space,” she explains. “There’s a corner for me to do paperwork, make the products, bottle the products, and there’s a packing corner.”

Big-Time Biz

Sales for Leanna’s Hair hit the six figures in 2007, and Leanna’s Dad left his job around the same time to help her grow the business. “It’s crazy,” she admits. “People ask me all the time ‘do you boss your Dad around?’ And yes, I’m the CEO of my company. But once we leave the basement area, it’s back to Dad being the parent.”

Even though Leanna is CEO of her own company, she still makes time for being a kid. “At first, it was really complicated but then I figured out a schedule for myself,” she says. “It works out 90% of the time. I have some time for business. I have time for school. And at the end of the day, I have time to kick back and relax and play sports. My main sports are basketball and soccer.”

Leanna hopes to attend Harvard Law School someday, so she puts about 40% of her earnings into a college trust fund. She also reinvests roughly half of her earnings back into her company and puts the other 10% into the Leanna Archer Foundation, which benefits kids in Haiti, where her parents are from.

“I went to Haiti for the first time in November,” Leanna recalls. “It was a really big adjustment for me. They don’t always have electricity going. But, I became really amazed by how people take care of themselves and their natural talents. I was so upset seeing little kids begging for money, so we’re sending things down there for them.”

She sends supplies to her grandfather in Haiti, then she flies down to distribute clothes, notebooks, food, pens, sneakers, and other items.

Busy Businesswoman

In addition to starting a charitable foundation, Leanna has several other projects in the works. She has already created social networking web sites (TeenCEO.tv and TeenCEO.us) to help other teen entrepreneurs connect and share resources, and she’s planning to launch a magazine called *Thriving Thirteen*.

Leanna says her vision for the new magazine is “for teens by teens. I thought it would be great to have a magazine from a teen’s perspective so that teens could relate to it a little more. And it doesn’t have to revolve around teen celebrities. It will have school survival tricks, fashion, and etiquette tips. I’ve been trying to get it off the ground, and I’m hoping to have it out by May of 2010.”

On top of all her other projects, Leanna is helping her older brother launch a business designing leather shoes and sandals. “My older brother is very supportive,” she says, “but when things started getting crazy, he felt left out. I was like ‘you have no excuse, you have talent, do something with it.’ He’s been drawing since he was five or six, so the next day he came to me with a full notebook [with sketches] of leather shoes and handbags. I’m using my company to help him get it off the ground.”

Thanks to her entrepreneurial success, Leanna often gets invited to share her story as a motivational speaker. When she’s talking to her peers, Leanna says she “[tries] to stress to kids that no matter what kind of obstacles, there’s always a way to get the company off the ground if they have a positive state of mind.”

