

{ ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT }

All that Glitters is Gold (and Silver)

Jessica Lynne Constable, BBA '07, Hits the Entrepreneurial Jackpot



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Jessica Lynne Constable, BBA '07, was an entrepreneur before she was a high school graduate. During the summer when she was just 15, Constable was lounging by her local pool making ankle bracelets when several women took notice and asked if they could order some.

The revelation that people would pay good money for her jewelry designs set the young artist on a course toward turning a profit. "My immediate response was, 'Go into business,'" Constable says.

By the time she collected her high school diploma, Constable also had collected about a dozen outlets that carried her budding jewelry line. But what she really needed was a way to grow her business while learning how to improve it. Ross was that place.

"Being from Michigan and seeing U-M's b-school ranked as highly as it was, it was a no-brainer to apply to Ross," Constable says. "I went to business school because I had a jewelry business already, which is not the traditional way to do it. When I prepared my applications, all my essays were about how to propel my business to something I could do full time."

JESS LC FINDS ITS LEGS Once enrolled at Ross, Constable took advantage of every course, club, and conference that supported her ambition. She graduated from Ross as Entrepreneur of the Year in 2007, and transitioned her business, now operating as Jess LC, from Ann Arbor to Chicago.

Between August and December 2007, Constable lived in her studio, worked solo, and grew Jess LC from about five to 20 active accounts. "A lot of businesspeople claim they need external motivation — the boss or the deadline — but I've never felt that way," she says. "There's lots of motivation when you have bills coming every four weeks."

In 2008, she expanded the operation and moved into an apartment across the street from her studio. Three part-time employees and an intern work for the company, along with various commission and freelance designers who work on a project-by-project basis. Constable estimates they moved more than 5,000 pieces last year. Retail outlets comprise the majority of Jess LC's customer base, and the company supplies wholesale product to about 94 stores. Sales also are

generated through local retail, home, and jewelry shows, as well as trunk shows in the Chicago area. She also sells product via the Jess LC website. Remarkably, each piece of jewelry is still handmade by Constable or her part-time employees.

OPERATING WITH INTENTION As her sales expand and the business grows, Constable keeps a close eye on the corporate culture at Jess LC. She has convinced her staff to put 10 percent of their salary into a charitable cause of their choice, so they essentially are working and volunteering at the same time.

But she didn't stop there. In September 2008, Constable launched Soc Chic, a line of "chic necklaces benefiting social causes." A portion of the sales from pieces in the line go toward such charities as Bright Pink, a national nonprofit that provides education and support to young women at high risk for breast and ovarian cancer, and KEEN (Kids Enjoy Exercise Now), a volunteer-run organization that provides free, one-on-one recreational opportunities to disabled children and young adults.

"The great thing about Soc Chic is that it's a win-win for everyone," explains Constable. "It catches the customer who loves the cause, but also the customer who likes the necklace."

Constable says she will always have a passion for jewelry, but her role as the company's founder has provided a broader picture of the impact she can create as a manager and a corporate citizen. "Jewelry will always be a part of my brand and who I am," she says. "But I'm an entrepreneurial spirit. I would say managing people is more rewarding now than the jewelry, and I always want to operate with an intention." ✨ —Leah Sipher-Mann