



# Organic Success

A LIGHTBULB moment sparked a career PIVOT that's given natural beauty a boost – and shown that PASSION trumps all.

WORDS NICOLE THOMAS

**W**e're living in a world where it is often said that ignorance is bliss. But what happens when that shroud of blissful ignorance is lifted? For Irene Falcone, founder of toxin-free skincare and cosmetic website Nourished Life, it led to a personal revolution which has expanded into a sanctuary for beauty junkies seeking a healthier hit.

Following a career working in the beauty industry with brands including Revlon and Lancôme, Irene defected to the movie industry, working as Universal Pictures' national advertising manager in Australia.

"I started feeling really fatigued and there was this catalyst point where I couldn't walk up the stairs to get to my office any more – I had to stop and rub my legs to see if I could keep going. I put some moisturiser on my legs, as

you do, and I was looking at that cream in my hand and I was thinking, 'What am I putting on myself, what is this?' I just became obsessed," says Irene.

"It was that evening I went home and started looking into all of these products I was using and found out I was applying over 500 chemicals to my body every day. That was it," she says.

Irene threw out every product she owned that was linked to a carcinogen and other chemicals she didn't want on her skin – and found her beauty cabinet looking quite bleak.

"I had nothing left at all. I had six garbage bags and at least AU\$10,000 worth of stuff. Everything was gone. Even my poor husband had no deodorant the next day," laughs Irene.

Then, in 2009, Irene's next step was to start a blog, Living Toxin Free In the City, which followed her journey on how to live a toxin-free life as a working mum of four children.

"I was trying to reach that balance of how to get through life without having



to go to McDonald's. I was blogging about this and which lip balms you can buy if you just want to do something simple like swap over your petrochemical lip balm with something that's natural. I would point people in the right direction to buy these things. But the fundamental problem that I identified in all of this was that there wasn't anywhere to go to get all of these products," explains Irene. "So I had no choice – I had to set one up myself."

Starting with just AU\$100, Irene bought 100 lip balms from the US for AU\$1 and started re-selling them.

"I sold them with the shopping cart plugin off the back of my WordPress blog," says Irene. "And that's how I made my first profit. Then I bought more and more and more and, I don't even know what happened, but suddenly here I am with more than 2000 products and my own warehouse. Something happened between then and now!"

Following a 2012 interview on a breakfast show, Irene was inundated with questions about her blog and the handful of products she was now selling from women across the country – and two weeks after that, she upped and quit her full-time job at Universal.

"It was so phenomenal that it made me realise, 'I have to do this,'" she says. "I sold my house and my car. I quit my job. I rented, bought stock and packed all of these things out of my garage with my mum and my husband after he'd finished work and I got the four kids taping things together."

When Nourished Life began to outgrow her garage, Irene outsourced the logistics to a fulfilment house. While this seemed like a natural step forward, in the end Irene felt it created a distance

between herself and her clients.

"You're taking all of these orders and you have no control over how they're packed, where they're sent, when they're sent – so I lost complete control over my business. So that turned out to be a real challenge for me because my customers wanted next-day delivery, my customers wanted their packages looking beautiful, they wanted everything in one piece and everything to be correct."

So in January 2015 she brought her fulfilment and logistical needs back in-house, with the help of interns ("No interns now, everyone's paid," Irene notes with a laugh) and some key upskilling, like learning to drive a forklift like a pro.

"We found a special type of forklift, known as a 'Pedestrian Operated Forklift', which doesn't require a license or special qualifications. I had the man in the warehouse up the road come and teach me how to

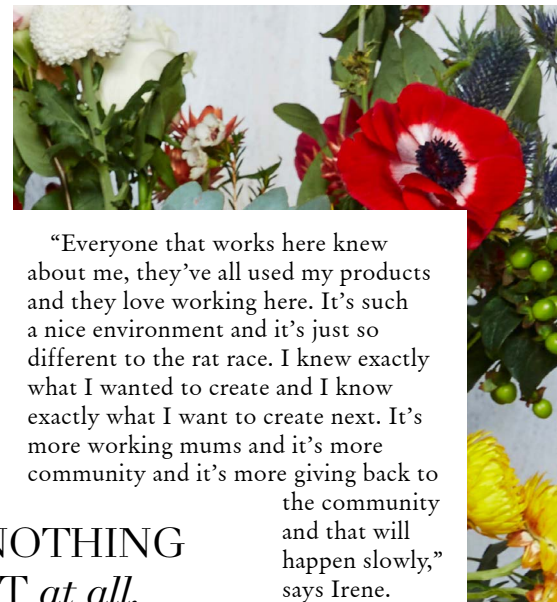
use it," laughs Irene, who mainly uses it to load up the mail trucks each day.

"The key was to listen to my customers and be able to keep control over being able to serve them," she says of the experience.

The team upsized to a warehouse six times bigger in January 2016, and have opened a showroom where customers come in and can try product before buying. Today, Nourished Life has over 30 employees, many of whom are also working mums.

"They drop their kids off at school and they pick and pack like crazy people until 2.30pm and then they stop and they go pick up their kids."

After all, Nourished Life's core market is mums who are trying to provide a healthy lifestyle for themselves and their families.



"Everyone that works here knew about me, they've all used my products and they love working here. It's such a nice environment and it's just so different to the rat race. I knew exactly what I wanted to create and I know exactly what I want to create next. It's more working mums and it's more community and it's more giving back to

the community and that will happen slowly," says Irene.

But Nourished Life's growth has been anything but, becoming a million-dollar beauty empire in just three years. And

while that makes it sound like a dream run, Irene has some sage advice.

"Number one [tip] is identifying the true reason you want to do it. If it's because, 'I want to make money and be a millionaire,' then I don't think this is the easiest way to do it... But if it's, for example, 'To make a strong profit while helping people at the same time', that's a bit more of a goal," she says.

"Then confirm in yourself that you're passionate about wanting to do it. Every single other thing will flow. Nothing will be an obstacle once you agree within yourself that that's what you want to do – then everything else will float." ■

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