

Success Story

PUBLISHING,  
PRESALES, AND  
PARTNERSHIPS:  
EXPLORING

# ILLUSIA

MESSENGER'S

JOURNEY TO **SUCCESS**

Fourteen years ago, Lisa Messenger had what she calls a “tantrum” at her corporate job, when a newbie was hired as her superior.

Messenger left the world of traditional employment and never looked back. Her marketing and sponsorship experience from booking deals for massive acts like The Wiggles and Cirque du Soleil, and her insatiable entrepreneurialism, have shaped her business ventures, and she now sits atop a growing publishing empire.





Like many new entrepreneurs, Lisa Messenger's first endeavor was to take her corporate skillset and make it work for her own business. She started a sponsorship agency and further honed her deal-brokering chops. However, the timing was off—in October of 2001 the world was reeling from the September 11th terrorism attacks, and although she successfully found clients, it was difficult to convince companies to part with their money.

Thus began her journey down the road of changing, pivoting, morphing, adapting, and iterating to create a business that would not just survive but thrive. Through the ups and downs that naturally followed, she learned to become detached from outcomes and instead to tie the idea of success to flexibility. As a result, Messenger has made strides in PR, marketing, investing, and especially publishing, having written 16 books of her own and cultivated the international media brand The Collective.

# Happiness Is Presales

After a stab at developing an integrated marketing company, Messenger decided to write a book. Her debut, *Happiness Is*, created a game-changing publishing model by applying a sponsorship mentality to book sales to ensure a hit release. Instead of writing a book and waiting for sales, she used her skills as a negotiator to presell copies of the book to corporate partners like Mercedes-Benz and Clinique. As a result, the book sold more than 36,000 copies the first year of its release and skyrocketed to the bestseller list.

To date, all of her ventures—including lifestyle magazine *The Collective*—have been built on a foundation of presales. It all starts with a short indicative sales document that concisely provides a synopsis, a differentiator, the market, and the use case. She then gets in front of as many decision-makers as it takes to land on the right deal. With *The Collective*, she held more than 80 different corporate meetings before the one that led to CommBank pre-ordering several thousand copies of the first issues to give to staff, customers, and stakeholders.

This strategy can work with any product, not just content. The crux is to identify the saleable, tangible asset and then gain alignment with a potential buyer—after that, all that is left is to actually produce.



# Unleashing *Creatives* on the World

Until three years ago, Messenger was primarily developing books as marketing tools. Her company published more than 400 titles but she discovered that while she was immersed in this wild and wonderful world of creative professionals, most of the rest of us were not gaining the same access.

Fed up with the focus of media outlets on gossip and negativity, Messenger decided to bring the beauty she saw in her book world to a more mainstream, multi-dimensional audience, and *The Collective* magazine was born.

After just two-and-a-half years, the magazine has seen explosive growth and is currently available in 37 markets, boasting more than 50 articles in each issue. Supported by 23 full-time employees and 80 freelancers, publishing a magazine is significantly more complex than publishing in the book world.

A naïve promise not to syndicate content has become a cornerstone of the business that is now a “content machine,” pumping out exceptional, inspirational, honest stories of vulnerability and triumph. Known as the Collective Hub community, the brand has expanded to multiple platforms, including print, online, video, events, and film.



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# No to Funding Yes to Relationships

So far, Messenger has managed to build her empire without a drop of investor funding. Instead, she establishes partnerships with non-competing brands that are based on exchanges of value – which could be brand exposure just as easily as money.

She warns against being trapped in the mindset that cash is the only currency. The Collective employs three full-time employees dedicated to developing zero-cash deals. Messenger finds that there are no barriers as to what is possible as long as the companies share similar audiences and values.

However, she is not entirely opposed to the idea of investor funding. The key is to do what it takes to continue to experience amazing growth. Right now that means getting her “freaking hustle on every day.” In the future, that may mean bringing on a partner. “I would rather own 51% of a \$100 million company than 100% of a \$10 million company.”

# Words of Advice from the Queen of the Content Machine

From her days of book publishing to her current magazine world, Messenger has been surrounded by and created piles of amazing content. Along the way she has learned a few things about giving the readers what they want—and it is not some generic press release or sensationalized surface-level information.

Instead, it is the story behind the story, the one that explores passion and dives deep into the whys and hows of creating something from scratch. Readers want the nitty-gritty, honest truth, and they want it to be full of real emotion and insight.

While The Collective may be this “big, expensive, unwieldy, out-of-control thing,” it has allowed Messenger to branch into other products, so she is now running what feels like multiple startups simultaneously, while promoting her newest book *Money and Mindfulness*. The insatiable entrepreneur is loving every minute of it.



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Avi Valentine is a freelance writer who thrives on creating epic pieces for businesses looking to make their mark in a content-driven world. A recipient of the Charles F. Brooks Award for Excellence in Technical Writing, Avi enjoys telling the world about exciting people, products and businesses.