This Nashville Mom Started a Flexible Side Hustle on Facebook — Then Grew It From $1,000 to $275,000 a Month: ‘Like a Scavenger Hunt’

This Side Hustle Spotlight Q&A features Katy Allen, 38, of Nashville, Tennessee. Allen is the founder and CEO of Artful Agenda, which pairs “the best of paper planning with digital convenience,” providing a customizable experience across devices. Responses have been edited for length and clarity.

Image Credit: Courtesy of Artful Agenda. Katy Allen.

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What was your day job or primary occupation when you started your side hustle?

I was in direct sales with Usborne Books and More (now PaperPie) and led a sales team of over 2,000 consultants.

When did you start your side hustle, and where did you find the inspiration for it?

I started working on Artful Agenda in 2017. I came up with the idea for it when talking to a close friend at my daughter's

baby shower in 2016. I always loved paper planners, but I needed something digital that synced with Google Calendar. I couldn't find anything that did that while also focusing on being aesthetically pleasing and fun to use.

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What were some of the first steps you took to get your side hustle off the ground?

I hired a business coach. At the time, her coaching business was fairly new, so I was able to get a very affordable rate. She was a manager of a co-working space here in Nashville and was well-connected because of the business owners she met there. She was able to set me up with meetings with people who had experience with UI design, app development, etc.

The other thing I did that was super important was create a private Facebook group where I posted all of my mockups and ideas. At first, it was just friends whose opinions I trusted, but the group soon grew to include other people who bought into the concept of Artful Agenda. This group gave me incredible insight into what type of product I needed to make. I posted pricing surveys, asked for feedback on mockups and more.

Image Credit: Courtesy of Artful Agenda

Are there any free or paid resources that have been especially helpful for you in starting and running this business?

The thing that really allowed my business to take off was investing in paid online advertising. I would say my ad agency, Foxtail Growth, was a huge part of my early and continued success. My advice would be to find an agency that can offer strategic growth consulting along with actually running your marketing.

If you could go back in your business journey and change one process or approach, what would it be, and how do you wish you'd done it differently?

The first development company I used was not a good fit. I wish I had been more hands-on in picking out the company I

went with, and I wish that I had found a company willing to do a fixed price build of my initial product — it's hard to find, but it does exist. This would have protected me from a runaway budget with no workable app to show for it! I ended up switching development companies after the bad experience with my first, but it was a tough and expensive mistake.

When it comes to this specific business, what is something you've found particularly challenging and/or surprising that people who get into this type of work should be prepared for, but likely aren't?

It doesn't matter how awesome your app or software is — you are most likely not going to grow your business successfully without a significant marketing budget. It's easy to be a little naive at first and assume that if something you make is great, it will just organically spread. I think a lot of apps struggle because all of their budget goes into developing the app, but then they don't have enough of a user base to become profitable.

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Can you recall a specific instance when something went very wrong? How did you fix it?

The first development company I went with blew through my budget and only had half of the app developed. I paid what I owed them to get my code, and I found someone here in Nashville who was able to help me interview new developers. He was a UI designer who was relatively well-connected. He was able to introduce me to my current development company and helped me negotiate a fixed price deal to take the code I had and make it ready for release.

How long did it take you to see consistent monthly revenue? How much did the side hustle earn?

I started earning modest yet consistent monthly revenue right

away because I had built up a large group of beta testers in my private Facebook group. Once I launched, they were excited to become paying customers. I made $1,000 to $2,000 a month, but I wasn’t profitable because I had overhead costs for things like tech support. It wasn’t until I ran ads for six months that I started to become profitable.

Image Credit: Courtesy of Artful Agenda

What does growth and revenue look like now?

Our annual gross revenue is right around $3.5 million now, and our average monthly gross is around $275,000. We are positioned to grow 10% year over year in the second half of 2025. In our earlier years, growth was pretty rapid — over 100% growth year over year.

How much time do you spend working on your business? What does a typical day or week of work look like for you?

Artful Agenda is now my full-time job. I don't sell books anymore because this took off so much. I am usually available during typical business hours, but I am someone who loves to have side quests, so I'm not always working on Artful Agenda the whole day. I have three young kids and a 100-year-old house that we are remodeling, so the amount I work each day varies greatly. If we have a big initiative or internal project, I may get hyper-focused and work the entire day and into the evening. But I also have days when I'm just checking in, answering some messages and focusing on other things in my life.

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What do you enjoy most about running this business?

The flexibility it has afforded me and the fact that it's not repetitive or mundane. The fact that I get to tap into my strengths, strategy, problem-solving and creativity makes it more fulfilling.

What is your best piece of specific, actionable business advice?

Treat getting started like a scavenger hunt. Think of one person you could reach out to for advice or to pick their brain. They will likely be able to point you in a direction, and where they point you is the next stop on your scavenger hunt. It took a lot of meetings and being pointed to the next person who might be able to help me to figure out how to actually take action and make it happen. Be willing to ask a lot of questions and go in the direction you are pointed. Every person you talk to is another clue on your journey.

This article is part of our ongoing Women Entrepreneur® series highlighting the stories, challenges and triumphs of running a

business as a woman.

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