

Michaela van Es, of HandJobs Media

So far as we know, there's only one marketing professional in the fetish world. Meet the skydiving biker and owner of HandJobs Media, the rather fabulous Michalela van Es...

HandJobs Media is the fetish world's promotions and marketing specialist, helping a host of businesses get their message to customers. Their "baddie bags" of leaflets and newsletters have become a welcome part of the fetish club scene and their client list includes everyone who's anyone in the fetish market. Owner Michaela van Es tells all to Skin Two's Tim Woodward...

Michaela and I first met around 1996, when she came to my house for dinner on her enormous motorbike, dressed in skintight black leather. The bike was impressive enough, but then she moved on to sky-diving. In her day job, Michaela was an experienced sales and marketing executive, but her social life was set for a big change.

"Oh my goodness, that was a hugely important meeting for me. You arranged for me to go to an invitation-only night at *The Gate* and we loved it. After that, my partner and I met the most fabulous people, got invited to the most fabulous parties and just kept going from there."

At what point did Michaela start to think that maybe the fetish market would become a whole new business career?

"In 2005, I had been talking to you and also to David Jackson of *Domination Directory International*. I looked at the market, talked to friends and I thought there was a need for flyers to be distributed. At first, I thought it was just fetish club promoters, but it turned out to be really useful for retail businesses and services. So I did my research, put everything in place and started."

I asked Michaela whether she found that fetish businesses are not generally run by businesspeople. They are generally hobbyists really, without a proper business plan, investment and cashflow. Many don't have enough money to advertise, so they don't get many orders, meaning then they have even less money to advertise, so then they get even fewer orders... and so on.



Micheala van Es

"The purpose of business is to make a profit. You have to have more money coming in than going out. Simple. If you can afford to fund it as a hobby, fine, but that's not a business. Many in the fetish business are tremendously good at what they do. They make fabulous corsets, jewellery, furniture, whatever. Designers come out of art college and they have a passion. On the other side, there are those who run as a business. Doesn't mean they are not creative, of course, but they run as businesses. I'm a salesperson; I couldn't design anything

to save my life. I'm not an accountant; I pay people to do that for me. I think it's important, if you're going to try to make money out of your fabulous creative enterprise, that you recognise where your skills are and where you need to add to them."

"Let's look at what marketing is about. People think that marketing is advertising. In fact, marketing consists of specific activities that make it easier for selling to take place."

Is marketing what I think it is? Not the same thing as sales at all, but the art and science of making sure that you are offering goods or services that customer actually want to buy, at prices they are prepared to pay?

"Yes and no. You can offer a product that customers don't realise they want. But we can position it and sell it to them and tell them that they want it."

Apple are famous for this, aren't they? They produce an iPod or an iPad that nobody had any idea they wanted. But when it's put in front of them, they want it like mad – and they will pay the price. Apple don't do much market research, they just produced something Steve Jobs thought was fantastic and then the public (usually) suddenly discover that they want it badly.

"There is a process which moves customers from 'have I heard of you?' through 'am I interested in you?' to 'do I want more information?' Consider what to do to make them take action, in terms of advertising, public relations, direct sales, sales promotion, exhibitions, etc. Sales is one part of that whole marketing process."

Cont....

I wonder whether most fetish businesses simply don't have the business experience – or the investment necessary – to even start to consider any of this.

"Usually, it's less a question of whether they have the money than a question of whether they can see the benefit that marketing brings them. A lot of creative people don't understand how marketing works and that can be a challenge."

"If I can't help somebody in terms of flyers in our packs, which is our core business, I will try to help them in other ways. I have huge resources and I can say 'Here's where to go for this or that.' That's free advice. and I'm happy to do that. But it's not really a question of your budget. HandJobs Media has everything from a display ad in our newsletter for thirty pounds to a full six-month launch or promotional campaign. We do specific targeted events, like *Skin Two North* in Leeds; there's all kinds of things we can do for businesses."

"A lot of creative people don't understand how marketing works and that can be a challenge"

The goody bags – or baddie bags as HJ Media calls them – are really central, aren't they?

"We're now in our eighth year of business and we hand out around two thousand of these bags each month. They are different each month and we usually hand them out as people are leaving the fetish clubs."

The businesses whose flyers are in the bags are paying you for the service, but there's no charge to the event promoters. Sounds like a useful free extra for the promoters?

"Yes, it's free to the promoters and the clubbers, we add something to the night and we provide our own staff. But we don't want to go to every single club in the London area – there are so many

now and we cover London pretty well already. We're looking to cover more areas around the country now."

I wonder how the rise of digital marketing affects HandJobs Media. It's often said that digital is taking over from print media. In fact, that's nonsense; some content is better suited to digital and some is better suited to print; you just need to make sure you are using the right medium for the right message.

"If you are a business trying to get a targeted message across to serious potential customers, would you rather get lost in the massive online search engine clutter, or would you like to have us go directly to your core audience, meet them personally for you and give them something about your business to take home and keep? If you have a cool flyer, customers will pin in up in the toilet for ages – a lot do that."

What else does HandJobs Media do, apart from handing out baddie bags?

"Assuming that you have a strong creative message, the key measurements of the success of your advertising advertising will be not only how many people see the ad, but also the characteristics of the people viewing the ad, their demographic profile, how much it costs to reach this audience and then what happens next. It's all very well having banners here and there but, you know what – so does everyone else. How will you differentiate yourself?"

"You do need repetition, which is why most professional ads repeat and repeat. It takes just over seven offline impacts to make an impression, but for online that number is probably closer to twenty. When the customer has never heard of you, the response rate is probably about one per cent."

I find that most businesspeople in the fetish world have no appreciation of professional copywriting or ad design. My heart sinks when I hear the words 'My son will do the ad on his PC'. Copywriting is a very specific and demanding skill. To get a handle

on what's involved, buy any book by Drayton Bird. Same applies to ad design – NOT the same as other aspects of graphic design! Does HJ Media employ dedicated pro staff?

"We employ paid supervisors, who are experienced and know what they're doing, They supervise the flyer crew who are volunteers, They get free entry to the clubs, in return for two hours handing out baddie bags and making friends. They can work once a month or

"Some content is better suited to digital and some is better suited to print; make sure you are using the right medium for the message"

once a year or anything in between."

What about the recent rise in burlesque? I thought that was all over years ago, but not really – Heresy n Heelz are doing burlesque events very successfully across the UK now; is that broadening the market?

"Yes. A lot of people want to discover a world beyond the vanilla and they see burlesque, like *Dita von Teese*, or the fetish-influenced outfits worn by celebrities and of course *Fifty Shades of Shit*. All of that encourages people to be a bit more adventurous. Look at *Torture Garden* – for a lot of people it's the first fetish place they go. It's a step in the door. People like to dress up, people like to dance, they like to be sexy. They can do that in a safe environment."

Will swinging ever come out of the closet? Apparently it was very tacky in the seventies, all flared trousers and car keys thrown on the table. Although I wouldn't know, of course.

"There is a lot of crossover. I mean, a lot of people go to fetish clubs not because they want to have their genitalia nailed to a plank of wood at all. The perception of what is fetish is changing; certainly it has changed a lot since I've been on the scene. How happy are you to

have your hands tied above your head while having sex and having an ice cube slowly trailed around your nipple? Or maybe you do want to have your genitalia nailed to a plank! You've got every part of the spectrum now and I think that's what has changed. Swinging, well, many people in the fetish world do not consider themselves swingers at all – yet there are occasions when they may well extend their boundaries a bit, shall we say. It's a very broad church. That's one of the things I like about this world."

So, for anyone looking to start up a business in the fetish world, what's your advice?

"Do your research. Don't expect fast results. Unless you are dealing in bulk with Far East suppliers, you are doing it because you really care about what you're doing, not because you think it's a fast track to getting rich. Understand

your market. Talk to people. Talk to me!"

Cashflow and business plan?

"Absolutely. If it's not going to work on paper, it's not going to work in reality. Work it out on paper and you'll save yourself a whole lot of time, effort and heartache. Recognise that it probably won't work quite as well as you thought it would in the beginning, so have a safety net."

"Do your research. Understand your market. Talk to people. Talk to me!"

Now to get personal. Do you find that working in the the fetish business has affected your personal life? Do you play less now than in those early days when it was all new and you had a "normal" occupation?

"Yes it does and yes I do. I do play less, because I spend pretty much every weekend working at clubs. It's great because I started the business because I wanted to spend my time with these cool people in these cool places. But be careful what you wish for. I spend so much time clubbing that, when I do get time off, I just want to be with my partner, eat a pizza and watch a movie."

If you were not with your partner, for whatever reason, could you have a relationship with someone who was not into fetish?

"It wouldn't happen, because anyone attracted to me would be sure to have at least some seed of kink in them. I can sense it, I would cultivate it and pervert them. It would be a challenge."

*HandJobs Media is at
www.handjobsmedia.com*

ATELIER GOTHIQUE
FINE JEWELRY FINALLY HAS A DARK SIDE™

PHOTO: PHILIP FAITH PHOTOGRAPHY
MODELS: SERAPHINA BLACK & JESSI VAN MIINX
HAIR / MUA: BLONDE MOXIE MAKEUP
WARDROBE: NORTHBOUND LEATHER
PADDLE: OUCH.UK.COM
LOCATION: OASIS AQUALOUNGE

THE FINEST CUSTOM BRIDAL, GOTHIC & FETISH JEWELRY

MASTER JEWELERS & SENIOR GEMOLOGIST APPRAISERS
+1.248.953.5366 ATELIERGOTHIQUE@GMAIL.COM
WWW.ATELIERGOTHIQUE.COM