

Coffee business thrives online

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Like thousands of other people, Melanie Breitreutz had a dream a few years ago to open up a cafe.

She put together a business plan but she couldn't find space.

"I could not find a space for the life of me that I thought seemed really good, and I knew it had to be perfect being a brand-new company if we were going to have a chance to survive," she says while sipping on a freshly brewed cup of coffee in her northwest home.

Breitreutz came up with the idea that she should start a website for the coffee shop. She started building the company in 2006 and it started operation in June 2007.

It took three to four months to develop the website.

"People started to buy coffee from the website," she says. "During this time I was open to having a cafe, kind of waiting for a realtor to call us with the right place. But sales started to pick up and I started to think that maybe it was an interesting idea to just have the online store."

That was the genesis of **Be'ato** Coffee Co. for the 27-year-old Breitreutz, who was born and raised in Calgary and went to SAIT to take architectural technologies and 3-D graphics. She also took some entrepreneurial courses at Mount Royal College.

It's a convenient and easy online store and can be found at www.beato.ca. All the products are sold online and delivered to the customer's door.

The coffee gets to customers within a month of it coming off the roaster -- when coffee tastes its best, she says.

Earlier this year, she also launched Farmers' Market Online--a Canada-wide Internet-based farmers' market. Products offered are available for purchase through each vendor's website and will be delivered within Canada.

Breitreutz received support for her new **Be'ato** venture from the Canadian Youth Business Foundation, a national charity that helps to drive Canada's economic prosperity by providing those aged 18 to 34, who have a great business idea but are unable to access funds through traditional sources, with startup financing, world-class mentoring and business resources to create and sustain their own successful business.

Breitreutz's mentor for the business was Rosemarie Enslin of the Enslin Group, who has lengthy experience in the public relations/marketing industry.

Before you take on an entrepreneur, you have to interview each other in a very serious and thoughtful way to see if you can work well together, says Enslin.

"When she told me she was going to do something in the coffee business, my eyes glazed over. I said, 'This is going to be hard. The coffee business? It's tough.' "

After all, the giants of the industry such as Tim Hortons and Starbucks are everywhere and there are hundreds of other coffee shops and cafes throughout the city. But when Breitreutz explained to Enslin that she was going to do something a little different by delivering freshly roasted, high-quality coffee from Fratello, "I thought she just might have a chance," says Enslin.

So what's Breitreutz's advice aspiring entrepreneurs?

"I feel like I'm still learning every single day," she says.

"One of the biggest things is write a business plan and make it thorough. There are going to be so many things that catch you off guard as it is that you need to be as organized as possible. "

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• Colour Photo: Canwest / Melanie Breitreutz started the Be'ato Coffee Co. online business after failing to find suitable real estate for a traditional bricks-and-mortar cafe. Edition: Final

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