



Jessica Rios

Clearwater, Florida



All Brides 2 Be

Learn about Florida Entrepreneur Jessica Rios:

After taking the traditional route, with encouragement from her father, Jessica Rios, founder and owner of All Brides 2 Be, went to college, graduated with a degree in Bio-Medical Science and took a "safe" job working as a Territory Manager with a pathology lab. After enduring a second layoff within a two-year span, Rios had enough. She was tired of leaving her fate in the hands of others. With encouragement from her husband, she took the leap and started a business centered around a life-long passion.

"Sewing is in my blood," she said. "My parents are both from Puerto Rico. As you would expect, life on an island is expensive. In order to have nice things to wear, they learned how to sew and make their own clothes. I was probably seven when I first learned how to make a dress for myself. I've always loved it. When the second layoff happened, I took

it as a sign to follow my passion. In February 2011, I used my entire severance package to start my business."

When Rios first launched, she operated out of her house before quickly moving into a small shared space within an executive office park. Her initial business model focused on filling a void in the market by sewing custom, yet affordable dresses. When the demand reached a point where she couldn't keep up, her model shifted to stocking a collection of carefully curated dresses.

"I was able to locate designers and manufacturers that had warehouses full of dresses," she said. "I started to find that customers wanted to come in and see the dresses and take them home. Over the years, I added more and more stock. At first, it was just bridal dresses. I eventually added bridesmaids dresses, flower girl dresses, prom dresses, tuxedos and suits for guys and other dresses for special occasions."

In addition to adding more inventory, Rios has also expanded her footprint on multiple occasions. After starting with her first physical location in an office park in Pasco County, she moved to South Tampa before ending up in a beautiful location in Clearwater.

"When I first saw it, I loved it," Rios said, referring to her 2,500 sq ft store just minutes from downtown Clearwater. "It has high ceilings and wood floors and just feels like home. Customers are really impressed when they come in. It's a great location for us."

Despite capturing a significant share of the market and establishing her business as reputable and dependable, Rios, like many entrepreneurs

faced her fair share of challenges along the way.

"In the beginning, and even now, getting people to know about your business is always a challenge," she said. "It's easier now because of the Google reviews we've earned, but there were many sleepless nights in the beginning. There were days where no one came through the door and I'd think to myself, 'Did I make the right decision?' or 'What did I get myself into?'. By going to different networking events, bridal shows and getting out and about, business eventually picked up. Today, much of our business is through word-of-mouth. By focusing on the overall experience for our customers, unlike some of the big box stores, we've seen a lot of referrals and repeat business. We learn about their needs and we're honest with our suggestions."

Looking ahead, Rios is focused on sustaining the business and possibly hiring additional employees. Her business is growing and, as such, she's contemplated a second location, but hasn't made any decisions yet. For now, in addition to adding her inventory online to allow customers to pre-select dresses they want to try on, she's focused on the here and now.

What advice does Rios have for aspiring entrepreneurs? "If you asked me ten years ago if I would ever own my own business, I would say you're crazy," she said. "Honestly, I was kind of pushed into this. I'm not sure I would have done it if I wasn't. It was all or nothing for me. I had no other choice. I had to succeed. Sometimes, putting yourself in that position forces you to just do it. Along the way you'll need drive and persistence. Also, make sure it's something you really enjoy and have a great support system. That's key."

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