



Success story: Kirsten and Toby MacKelden's publishing venture was based on a pre-nup agreement

Picture: Stuart McEvoy

A bride idea at the right moment

Louisa Deasey

KIRSTEN MacKelden was so frustrated when she couldn't find a bridal magazine to give her the help she needed in planning her wedding, she talked her husband-to-be into sinking his life savings into starting *Real Weddings*.

Although neither of them had any publishing experience, the company they founded in 2002, Indigo Media, has been named by *BRW* magazine as one of the country's fastest growing companies.

"The concept for the magazine was born out of sheer frustration. I couldn't find a bridal magazine that had quality editorial from Australia. I was also shocked at the gap in the top end of the market. I kept asking myself: 'Where would the Park Hyatt advertise if [it] wanted to market [itself] to brides?'"

Her husband Toby says "the market opportunity and Kirsten's enthusiasm" are what compelled him to invest his \$120,000 life savings in getting the magazine off the ground.

"I was petrified about losing Toby's money," Kirsten MacKelden says. So for six months she worked round the clock to get the launch issue off the ground.

MacKelden credits much of the magazine's growth to the way Indigo Media approaches

advertiser spending. "I found that a lot of advertisers were frustrated when they learned a rival had got a special deal when they booked close to deadline," she says.

"So we never offer deadline discounts. This means we tightly manage our yield per page, build genuine and long-term relationships with advertisers, and they don't feel they could have got a better deal if they pushed us harder or waited until the deadline."

MacKelden also has used the size of the company to their advantage. Adding the personal touch to sales pitches and follow up has ensured loyal clients.

"Constantly recognising that our clients are important — not just when their contracts are up for renewal — has allowed us to snare advertisers and revenue from the big boys," she says.

The list of advertisers has grown from 20 for the launch issue to 80, and she says little things such as movie tickets, chocolates and handwritten notes seem to have made all the difference. For one sales pitch to Estee Lauder, a printer malfunction meant they missed the overnight courier from Melbourne to Sydney. MacKelden hopped on a plane with back issues of the magazine, a media kit and a proposal wrapped up like a wedding present

and hand-delivered it. Estee Lauder signed on.

One reason *Real Weddings* has become quickly profitable — that initial investment has been returned several times over — is that it saves on editorial costs by getting brides to submit personal stories and photographs. The money saved can be spent on quality paper stock, magazine design and production, creating a more appealing product for readers as well as clients.

Real Weddings keeps the editorial-to-advertising ratio high to ensure not only greater cut-through for the advertisers but also so readers don't have to wade through pages of ads to get to the stories.

Although it has only half the readership of ACP's *Bride To Be*, MacKelden says the aim has always been quality, not quantity.

"For our advertisers, sometimes it's not about how many times their phone rings but rather how many of those [callers] are able to afford their premium brands.

"We're not interested in just getting enough ads in to fill the space and budget. We're very selective about the advertisers we feature and this benefits not only the reader, who gets more editorial from our high yield per page, but the advertisers too."