

# ONWARD

MARKETING AND SALES STRATEGIES  
THAT ACTUALLY GET RESULTS

ISSUE 07 / APR. 2014

## Superior Design

How the  
Planning and  
Vision of Stuart  
Nordin Took  
Her Business to  
the Next Level



WEBINAR STRATEGIES:  
**INCREASING SALES FOR BRICK-  
AND-MORTAR COMPANIES**

MARKETING SECRETS:  
**HOW TO TARGET  
MILLENNIALS**

# SUPERIOR DESIGN

Interior Designer Stuart Nordin proves that growing a business takes vision, planning, and a lot of enthusiasm

BY MATT KERSEY

**B**uilding a customer base through excellent service, targeted media platforms (Houzz and Pinterest) and a partnership with a local retail business group have helped Stuart Nordin's interior design company and her brick-and-mortar home retail shop succeed. Nordin has been featured in *Modern Luxury DC*, *Luxe* and *The Washington Examiner* and her work can be found on her [website](#).

## ***What makes you fond of Interior Design?***

I studied Art and Art History in college. I've always been interested in color and design, shapes and structures in architecture.

I really just kind of fell into it by people liking my style and liking what I did in my own house and then asking me for help and advice with their homes. Eventually, I ended up getting offered a job in Washington D.C. from a very nice, smaller, boutique, interior design firm to be an assistant designer because they had liked some of the work that I had done on my own. I did that for few years while I was pregnant with my first son.

After my son was born, I decided to start my own business because I wanted be closer to



Stuart Nordin  
Founder, Stuart Nordin  
Home & Design



home and have a little bit more flexibility with my schedule. That's what I've been doing for the past 2 years.

***I know you have a retail store too. How does that play into your interior design business, or, are they separate?***

I really knew nothing about retail, but I have always wanted to have a small boutique where I could showcase all of my favorite things, favorite artists, favorite specialized products that aren't mass produced or mass marketed.

When I was starting my interior design business I thought it would be a good time to launch the store so I could have a physical venue for people to come in and experience my style and get a sense of the products I like, and who would then translate into design clients.

I wanted to be in an interesting neighborhood or be on an interesting block. I lived in Santa Barbara for a while and I spent some time in New York and now live in Alexandria which is where I grew up. I was always looking at retail space in all of those areas. One day when I was strolling my son through our neighborhood, I noticed a small retail space on the street where I grew up. I called to find out about it and everything about it felt right. At that moment I realized that if I didn't go for it then, I was never going to do it. So I started crunching the numbers and figuring out how much I needed to come up with to have a decent inventory and cover a couple months of rent.

I already had a small base of design clients from



**“ ...At that moment I realized that if I didn't go for it then, I was never going to do it. So I started crunching the numbers and figuring out how much I needed to come up with to have a decent inventory and cover a couple months of rent. ”**  
- Stuart Nordin

the previous firm where I worked. I was actually an independent contractor with them, and when I left to pursue my own thing I was allowed to maintain many of the relationships that I had built over the years. When I decided to do the store space and really formally launch my interior design business, I did the two in tandem. Then I sent a notice to all my previous clients, my friends and family in the area when I opened, and everything started rolling from there.

***Who helps you run your business? Do you have a business partner or somebody that handles the operations? How are the roles defended?***

It started out with just me. My husband really helped me physically get everything set-up. Then from there, as my business grew and as my shop and inventory grew, I realized I couldn't be there seven days a week by myself. So I hired a part time assistant, and then, that turned into a full time assistant. And that turned into two assistants. I just recently hired my first full-time project manager. She manages everything with the design business. I still do all the buying for the store and all of the marketing for the store. But because we run the design business out of the boutique, all of us are there when customers come into the shop. We all have a

hand in the day-to-day retail.

***How do you get people to come in? What do you use to promote your retail store?***

Being part of the local community of owner-operated boutiques, the boutique district has helped a lot because they have a mailing list and a network of thousands of people in our area and community. And so they're matched throughout Old Town.

Old Town has a great website and they have events and everybody kind of piggy-backs off of each other. It's a great community, and it's a high caliber of stores to be associated with. So that really helped me from the beginning. And then just having events and building our mailing list through the shop. We encourage everyone who walks in to join our mailing list so they can know when we have new inventory, specials and events. The local press has also really helped make people aware of where we are and what we do.

***Who is your typical customer? How would you describe them?***

It's funny, my shop customers can really vary from my design customers. The shop customers are usually looking for something special and unique. A lot of the time they're looking for a gift. You definitely get more people walking in the store who were just kind of looking and want to see what you have. And then my design customers, most of them have a very clear vision on what they want and what they need. And they come to me because they know me or they have wandered in the store and liked what they have seen. We translate that into designs for

their own home.

***Let's talk about your Interior Design Business for a minute. I was looking at some of the pictures that you have on your site and it seems that you cater to a specific audience. Do you think that is true and if so, can you describe them?***

I think my clients share a similar style. I have clients that range from late 60's all the way to newly-weds. I have customers who are just having their first baby and even single people. It really runs the gamut. The one thing that all my clients have in common is that they are all such nice people that I've become friends with, and everyone I work with is the same in that respect. The common thread I guess is their stylistic interests. But it's all different types of people and families. Part of what makes my job so fun is that I'm constantly meeting new and different people.

***Do you have a lot of foot traffic around your retail store?***

Not really. Not as much as I would have thought, I'm right off of a main shopping street and part of the local group called "The Old Town Boutique District." But being on a side street, I don't get many people that come around the corner of the main drive. I thought that I would get a lot of walk-ins and a lot of tourists. And in the beginning, I purchased that way thinking about what those types of people would be interested in, would like to find and would want to buy. But it turned out that my shop has become more of a destination. The people who are coming in are coming specifically straight to us.

**What have you learned while growing your business?**

I learned that you can't have everything the way you want it, exactly when you want it. It is really important to manage your time well. It's so easy to get caught up and consumed by your business. There have been periods of time where I was still checking my emails and writing back clients and placing orders while I was in bed at 1 o'clock in the morning and after 2 years of doing that I began to realize how unhealthy it was. You can burn out. You really need to create a work-life balance where you know you're not being spread too thin in either role that you play. That's really hard especially for me.

I'm the kind of person that wants everything to be perfect all the time. I want all of my clients to be satisfied and I want to be able to answer everybody's question immediately and I want to have everything in the store looking awesome. I want to have events and there's always something that can be done. I think realizing that you can't do everything all the time, every minute of the day, is the biggest lesson that I've learned. And then also learning how to delegate has also been a good lesson.

It's important to surround yourself with exceptional people. People that you can share the load with and that you can trust and who are excited about your business. Not feeling that you have to hold onto every single little detail is important. I've been really fortunate that I had a great team from day one. So that has really helped my business grow and helped me maintain my own personal sanity.

I have great people around me that I can count on that are doing a really good job.

**I imagine that you attend networking events to promote yourself and your services. Is that correct?**

You know, I don't. And that is another thing that I'm interested in learning more about. My business has really grown through client referrals. When someone has a good experience with me and they have a friend who needs some help, they recommend me. A couple of times, people have had parties in their homes and a guest would ask who helped them and I will get a referral that way. And also people sometimes just walk by the shop and like the way it looks.

I haven't done that much networking. I have a two and a half year old at home and I'm pregnant with my second son right now. So I usually am home by five or six and I'm in bed by 8 o'clock.

**What is the biggest challenge that you are facing right now as a business owner? And how are you planning on overcoming this obstacle?**

I think it's time management. That's the hardest thing. I've been trying to manage that by hiring really wonderful, talented people that I can delegate work to. So that all of my clients' needs can be met, so that all of my business needs can be met, so that we just have all of our bases covered by a few people rather than me doing everything all the time. And it's so scary because as you're starting a business, you're worried about your overhead and making money and being profitable, supporting your family and all those things. Every new person that

you hire is more money out the door that you're committed to letting go of in hopes of turning a bigger profit and finding more people. It's all about finding a balance and being able to support and maintain that.

But then at the same time if you don't take those leaps and you don't have good help and other people sharing the load so that all of your clients and customers are happy then you're going to lose business. It's just a matter of searching the numbers and weighing the pros-and-cons and then ultimately taking that leap of faith that the person that you hire is really going to bring more to your business and make your business even better. And luckily for me so far, that has happened.

***What is your content strategy for your Facebook page? What kind of things do you like to talk about on Facebook?***

I have mixed feelings about Facebook. They changed their format, so that people who had signed up to like our page in the beginning were getting all our posts but then... I don't know when it was but something changed and everyone had to create a separate list of things that they like and want to see on their newsfeed. Because of this our posts only get seen by like a quarter of the people who actually like our page now and if you want to reach more people, then you have to pay for advertising.

I don't post on it as frequently. I have Twitter and we use Instagram and blogs. I need to be better about using social media that is one of the things that always falls to the bottom of my list. But from

what everybody else tells me, it really makes a difference. I'm actually interested in spending more time doing that to see if it brings people into the store.

But as far as the content that I put out, whenever we're doing a photo shoot of a clients project, I'll do a sneak preview, and I'll put that on Facebook. I also use it whenever we have any press or whenever we're having an event. A couple times I've done secret code words for people who are shopping online or shopping in the store, and we've gotten good feedback from that.

***How do you approach referral marketing? What is your overall strategy?***

I just try to make sure that all of my clients are happy and that their needs are met. You know I just do the best job that I can for each individual client, and I think their satisfaction of their experience with me is what translates to them wanting to refer me on their own. For interior decorating there is a website called Houzz. And there are a lot of other websites out there now too like Pinterest and things like that.

Pinterest and Houzz have helped my business more than Facebook and Twitter because they're geared toward people looking specifically for home and design ideas: products and professionals. On Houzz I did ask a few clients if they wouldn't mind writing me a referral on that website. When people are looking for a local designer in the area through that website or they're searching for a type of room and they've come across a picture of a room that I did,



they can read testimonials from some people who have worked with me and I think that has been really great for my business.

***How do you keep customers coming back? How do you retain your customer's long term?***

Well, I haven't done too many whole house projects. Usually what happens is someone will call me to see if I can help them with one room or couple rooms in their house. Eventually, as their tastes change or their budget allows, they call me back and ask me to help with another room and it sort of just evolves over time. I have one client who I just love. She's actually one of my very first client and I started by helping her with her husband's study. And now, five years later, I've pretty much made my way through their whole house.



***Do you have anything that you wanted to talk about that I didn't ask you that you want to share maybe?***

Sometimes people ask me how I figure out what to buy or how I figure out what fabrics to put together for a client and basically what I've done from the beginning is always just look at things as if I were my customer. I bought things that I personally like and purchased myself. I know that there are other people like me out there, or at least I hoped that there were.

One of the big mistakes that I made when I started my business was that I was buying for the people that I thought were going to come in. I thought I would get tourists. I thought that I would get foot traffic from people of the main drag so I bought products by trying to get into somebody else's head. And that definitely didn't serve me well and I think that's a trap that people get into just trying to figure out what somebody else would want. Whereas, I've had the most success by just trying to keep it simple and thinking about what I like, what resonates with me, and what I'm comfortable spending. That has worked very well.

**MATT  
KERSEY**

your Associate Editor: Onward  
Magazine

LIKE ONWARD?  
WE'D LOVE FOR YOU TO LEAVE US A REVIEW

**TAP HERE TO LEAVE A REVIEW!**

# ONWARD

DON'T MISS OUT.  
NEW MARKETING & SALES STRATEGIES, EVERY MONTH.

**TAP HERE TO SUBSCRIBE TO ONWARD**