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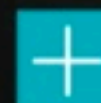
THE MAGAZINE FOR COSTCO MEMBERS

Mom's the word

How six Costco members
found digital success by
dishing about family,
food and fun **20**

Catherine Belknap
and Natalie Telfer
(better known as
Cat and Nat)

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2019



KIRKLAND SIGNATURE

The best of Costco's
private label

Choosing the
right auto battery

Social success

Becoming a social media influencer—by building a digital community through a blog, Instagram or Facebook—can fast-track a side hustle or lead to fame and fortune. Here's how a few Costco members catapulted their platforms to the top.

by Wendy Helfenbaum and Patrick White

Keeping it real

Cat and Nat's honest, hilarious #MomTruths videos—shot in Nat's car and covering everything from sleep to sex to how clubbing prepares you for motherhood—have led to a best-selling book, a live tour, a board game and other merchandise their fans eagerly snap up.

Their real names are Catherine Belknap and Natalie Telfer, and they've been best friends since their teen years. With seven kids between them, Toronto-based Cat and Nat (catandnat.ca) know all about feeling overwhelmed, and in 2013 they birthed their brand, based on the idea that laughing while commiserating helps women feel better. "All we saw on social media were perfect images of motherhood, which was so not our experience," says Telfer. "Our mission is bringing women together in a positive, supportive way."

During their daily Facebook Live show—they've uploaded 2,100-plus videos—they express out loud what most moms think every day, dispelling myths about perfect parenting. "We struck a chord with moms, because finally they were seeing something that they could actually relate to," Telfer says.

Organizing moms-night-out events in Toronto and producing viral videos quickly grew their online community. Soon, sponsorships rolled in.

"We realized you can make money if you have a devoted audience that's the right target market for the product, and once we started working with sponsors and doing TV appearances, brands reached out to us," says Belknap, citing partnerships with Fisher-Price, Hilton, Old Navy and Pampers.

When fans across Canada and the U.S. asked for live #MomTruths shows, the friends began touring across North America in 2017. At one of those events, a fan who



Top: Sisters Billie and Helen Bitzas, with their mom, Dimitra Bitzas.
Below: Cat & Nat.

worked for Penguin Canada approached them to write a #MomTruths book, which was released in March 2019.

"We've grown an incredible audience that trusts us, and we love being there for them," says Telfer.

Capturing cherished recipes

Sisters Billie and Helen Bitzas launched their Greek food blog, MiaKouppa.com, in 2016, mostly for selfish reasons.

"Our primary motivation was to preserve our parents' recipes for our daughters, because when we'd re-create meals from their instructions over the phone, it was never the same," says Billie Bitzas.

The sisters began watching their parents cook, measuring and documenting everything. After friends and colleagues suggested they make the recipes public, the sisters were surprised by how many followers flocked to the site. One especially popular feature, Greek-isms, chronicles how the Bitzas' parents improvise while cooking.

"They'll say, 'Cook it until it's done' or 'If you have onions, use them,'" laughs Bitzas.

MiaKouppa fans across Canada, the U.S., Australia and South Africa tell the sisters they regret not cooking with their late

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Cat & Nat's tips

Stay true to yourself

"The game is changing all the time, and the people who do well are the ones who really are themselves," says Cat Belknap. "The digital audience is smart. They can tell if you're authentic. Some bloggers hide behind a computer, but video pulls the curtain back on who you are; that's why we don't use filters on anything we do. You'll see us in leggings, schlepping junk everywhere. Just try to find you, rather than trying to find an audience."

Know when to delegate tasks to an expert

"You can't be good at everything," says Nat Telfer. "For years, we did everything ourselves, but we learned to reach out to people who are better at accounting, brand partnership and booking tours. We built a team of women around us."

Know when to ignore advice

"Sometimes your team has a traditional background and they're safe. We're risk takers and we like to follow our gut," says Telfer. "So make sure your team trusts your gut."

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Cat and Nat's book *Mom Truths* (Item #2119651), will be available in select warehouses. And you'll find computers, cameras, phones, and more, to chronicle your own life and influence family and friends.



Maria Lianos-Carbone

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"The last few years, I've really seen a difference: Brands and agencies are on board now, and understand the value of bloggers and influencers."

—MARIA LIANOS-CARBONE ♦

children, until we're depleted and burned out. I wanted to address how mom feels once she's home with the baby, how to deal with in-laws or the inadequacy felt when comparing yourself to other moms."

Her journalism background helped boost Lianos-Carbone's credibility. "Today, anyone can throw together a blog, and some influencers just have an Instagram page with nothing but pretty pictures, so being a professional writer definitely helped me stand out," she says.

Monetizing amotherworld took time, as brands got up to speed on how to collaborate with bloggers, she adds. "The last few years, I've really seen a difference: Brands and agencies are on board now, and understand the value of bloggers and influencers."

Lianos-Carbone has partnered with many companies. "It's important to work with brands and services I actually use and places where I actually shop," she says.

In 2018, Lianos-Carbone's book *Oh Baby! A Mom's Self-Care Survival Guide for the First Year: Because Moms Need a Little TLC, Too!* (Familius, 2018; not available at Costco) was published, further enhancing her business. "Because technology changes so frequently, it's challenging to keep up with new trends; you need to stay fresh and relevant," she says. "For me, it's about sharing information people can connect with, especially on an emotional level. My goal is to make a difference to a mom struggling with postpartum depression or with the day-to-day challenges of parenting while juggling work and home life." ■

relatives. Popular recipes include Spaghetti with Olive Oil and Mizithra, Moussaka and Melomakarona Cheesecake.

"We're now going into other people's homes and cooking with their families," says Bitzas. "This experience opened our mother up to us in an entirely new way. Every time we spend the day together in the kitchen, waiting for dough to rise or cookies to bake, we learn something new. Cooking together creates a beautiful environment for this to happen."

Offering moms a little TLC

Author Maria Lianos-Carbone started her blog, amotherworld.com, in 2007 to connect with other moms. At the time, there was lots of available information about caring for a baby, but next to nothing for moms who needed support.

"I'd wanted to write a book about self-care for a long time," says Lianos-Carbone. "We focus so much energy toward our