



# Virtual Store Designs Profitability

Closing doors opens opportunities for Peach Berserk



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– Kingi Carpenter  
Peach Berserk Founder

From a dream of finding a way to put Eiffel Tower images on fabric, Peach Berserk founder Kingi Carpenter built a business out of designing unique and creative silk screened clothing.

“I like art with a use and you can wear art,” she says, noting her love of art and sewing converged with Peach Berserk.

Carpenter originally started designing dresses in her one room apartment (which shared a bathroom down the hall) and carried dresses on her bike to stores to sell on consignment. She also did a lot of work with the press to build publicity for her unique line of clothing and dressed on-air personalities. As business grew, she opened a downtown Toronto retail store but after 19 years running the store, she was ready to make another change.

“I worked so hard and lived above the store. I started thinking there had to be another way to run the business that was a little more laid back or just more fun,” she says. Peach Berserk “morphed” from a bricks and mortar retail store to an online business, but for Carpenter the reliance on technology is surprising.

“A lot of people will say I can’t have a business based on technology, because I’m not technical person; but I’m not a technical person and I base my living on technology,” she says. “Today, people are phoning in orders or placing

them on my website, so I can work in my kitchen.”

Closing her store to depend fully on online and phone sales, as well as scheduled appointments at her studio was “a big risk,” but Carpenter says, “I work less and have so much more money. And, it’s more fun.”

## Boosting Sales, Slashing Costs

Since she closed the store less than a year ago, the Peach Berserk website traffic has grown from 3,500 to 5,500 hits a month with an investment in search engine optimization, coupled with online and traditional marketing. She expects it to double again within the next month when she hits her peak season.

“This is a time when the population can handle it (an online store) whereas five years ago they couldn’t. Now we all buy online so I knew the timing was right,” she says, noting her 19 years of retail history gave her the credibility to make the transition. She estimates that today about 65% of customers place orders over the phone or through the website and only 35% make appointments to order in person at her studio.

“If you have a web presence, you exist,” she says, noting businesses without web presence have less credibility in today’s retail environment.

She’s able to run her business from

anywhere with her phone and her ASUS laptop featuring the Intel® Core™ i5-2450M processor.

More online traffic is also translating into more sales. "I am getting a lot more online and over the phone sales, and then when people make an appointment to see me they spend a lot of money and it's a big deal for them to come into the studio," she says, estimating sales have grown by 30% in the nine months since she closed her store. She's projecting a doubling of sales by prom and wedding season when she's at her busiest.

"I think it is the wave of the future. It seems more exclusive (using the web and a studio)," she says, noting with a bricks and mortar store, you are tied to store hours, have more people coming in to the store browsing to kill time without wanting to buy, and there's more potential for damage and theft. She says closing the store cut expenses by 80%. "I don't have the high heating, insurance and electrical bills anymore and I work when I want to."

"It is a completely different world now and honestly I think I am the thin edge of the wedge and a lot of businesses are going to go the way that I have. We want a better environment or life for ourselves and our children," she said, noting she's planned a trip to Thailand and will be able to seamlessly connect with clients while on the beach. "They won't know where I am. It means I can make the money I need and want to make. I can upload the designs and have them silk-screened while I am away. After I've uploaded the images for production, I can go for a swim."

### **Business in the cloud**

A web presence isn't new to Peach Berserk, whose site was created by a customer in 1995. "I started making sales as soon as it went up," Carpenter recalls, noting web traffic is continuing to grow exponentially and with it, her sales are increasing. "I sold 3 items already today over the phone with people calling up. I sell so much stuff now."

She's also opened an international market because she does something no one else does. "If you want a wedding dress with your husband's tattoos all over it there is really no one else. You have to come to me," she says, noting she really did design a dress like that for a customer.

Throughout her business life, her customers and contacts have helped her to innovate and expand her use of technology, from the customer who built her website in 1995, to a more recent client who helped her set up her cloud-based retail solution hosted by DreamHost and a blog site at WordPress\*.

"DreamHost has done a great job," says Carpenter. "I depend on people who have the expertise to do things (like online sales) that I can't do so I can focus on the things I do well."

### **Tapping into creativity**

To turn ideas into images that can be silk screened, Carpenter uses Photoshop\* to make customers' images look good on silk screen and Microsoft Word\* to create any text. Images are printed from the desktop or laptop on to special paper called Vellum that becomes camera-ready art and put onto a light table to transfer the image into the screen.

### **Challenge**

After 19 years running a retail store in Toronto, Peach Berserk owner Kingi Carpenter wanted to balance her work and personal life better while continuing to offer clients creative fashions.

### **Solution: Bricks and Mortar No More**

Carpenter uses Intel® to design Peach Berserk clothing and after closing her retail store, sells her apparel online or by phone supported by a cloud-based retail solution.

### **Impact**

- Expenses slashed by 80% with closure of downtown Toronto store and transition to a virtual store while boosting sales by 30%.
- In less than a year, search engine optimization and online marketing, timed with the closing of its retail store, increases web traffic from 3,500 to 5,500 hits a month with Peach Berserk estimating a doubling of traffic by wedding and prom dress season.

As an expert silk screener, Carpenter teaches the silk screening process to students around the world as well as hosting workshops. She has created YouTube and Vimeo videos and delivered small workshops using Skype. When offering full-day workshops, she brings her ASUS laptop powered by the 2nd generation Intel® Core™ i5 processor to the studio space where she's set up the printer and screens to allow students to create their own fabrics in class.

"I need a computer where we teach the workshops or everyone would leave. People in the class can go on Facebook or the internet to get their images. We then print out the designs and silk screen them during the class," she says, noting she needs a fast and reliable computer to handle the students' needs. "People are paying to take my class and if we can't get the images designed and printed quickly, they won't get their project done."

### Designs go digital

Carpenter also recently created an online dress design application, which is located in the cloud by DreamHost, where her customers can create their own fashions and send Carpenter the template they want. "It lets the customer do all the work. They can choose the print, its location, the bodice and they are so excited because it is their creation."

There's more innovation ahead for Carpenter who'd like to develop a Peach Berserk app where people can design their own fashions on their smart phones and tablets and send the orders directly to Carpenter to create.

### About Peach Berserk

Peach Berserk is a fabric and fashion design company based in Toronto that specializes in designing prints, making silk screens, printing fabric and making clothing. After closing its bricks and mortar retail store, the company operates virtually supported by an exclusive studio space.



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