

STARTING YOUR OWN PILATES BUSINESS

Qualifying as a Pilates instructor is the first step to living the life you want. So, asks *Ingrid Thompson*, what do the next steps look like?



Karly's dreaming about starting her own Pilates studio. Now that she's fully qualified as a Pilates instructor, the idea of her own studio is an exciting one. Her vision is to bring Pilates to as many people as possible, while also making enough money to live her desired lifestyle. How can she do this? She feels like she has so many options.

Freelancing

Many of the graduates from earlier courses work in other studios. Her friend Mandy has an ABN and teaches Pilates in three different studios as well as at a gym. She says she loves the flexibility and variety of working across a few different studios and with all the different clients. Getting an ABN was easy, she just had to follow the prompts on the ATO website, ato.gov.au

An extension of the freelancer option is to teach in people's

homes. A group of friends can get together and arrange regular Pilates sessions in one place, or individuals can have private sessions in their own home.

Being a freelancer takes a bit of organising to get your days and times lined up and establish a base of regular clients, and once it's in place it's always liable to change at the whim of facility owners or private clients. Freelancers are responsible for their own taxes and superannuation. Those who do it and enjoy it wouldn't choose anything else. Karly's definitely considering starting out as a freelancer and seeing how it goes before potentially taking the plunge and running her own studio.

Studio owner

It would be great to one day have her own studio, and if she does, there are essentially two options: buying an existing studio, or starting her own.



There's no point in being the best Pilates instructor in your suburb if you can't pay the rent and instruct anyone.



1. Buying an existing Pilates studio

From time to time people sell their Pilates studios, for whatever reason. Buying an existing studio can be a great option for getting into a Pilates studio business.

Karly could buy a studio that has been operating for a while. That way, as long as she did her due diligence on the books of the business, there should be existing clients, regular timetables established, cash flow, marketing collateral and everything else that it takes to run a successful business.

One of the issues Karly is aware of is rent: it can be one of the most expensive parts of having a bricks and mortar studio, and signing a lease is a long term commitment. Someone once told her; 'it's easier to get out of a marriage than it is to get out of a commercial lease.'

2. Starting from scratch

Some people just love the challenge of doing

it all themselves. Karly wonders if she is the sort of person who could start her own business completely from scratch.

Part of her Pilates instructor training involved observing qualified instructors working with their clients in a Pilates studio. Two things Karly paid particular attention to during the observations were:

The instructor's style of teaching. Karly wants to emulate the people she most admires, so she's paying particular attention to their style of teaching, cueing and working with their clients.

How the studio operates. While Karly doesn't know much about running a business, she knows that there is more to it than just showing up and teaching Pilates.

After freelancing for a while, Karly has come to the realisation that, yes, she truly wants to create her own, unique Pilates studio. She knows she is a good Pilates instructor and her clients tell her that her instruction is making a difference to them. But she doesn't feel quite ready to go it alone yet.

To prepare, Karly works as a receptionist in a busy chiropractic clinic and then in a physiotherapy clinic that also offers acupuncture, while continuing her freelance Pilates instructing. She earns money and is learning as much as she can about the operations and admin side of things.

However, despite observing at the other studios and gleaning some insights from her receptionist work, Karly is aware that:

- She doesn't really know how to make money and doesn't fully understand finances – she'd rather be helping her clients.
- She doesn't have a plan or a roadmap, and doesn't know how to make one.
- She isn't sure of the best way to sell herself and find new clients. Yes, there's advertising, marketing and SEO, and, of course, everyone says you have to be on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter, and have a website – but what's the best way to invest her time and resources?
- She's frightened of failing. What happens if it doesn't work? Will she look silly? Will people say, 'I told you so...'? Could she potentially lose a lot of money?



The 30-second article

- Once qualified as a Pilates instructor, you have the option to freelance teach in studios and private homes, or to run your own studio
- Setting up your own business isn't for everyone, so it's important to consider whether you know what you're getting yourself into and whether you are truly capable of it
- Consider your ideal clientele, and what specific niche market you might want to cater to
- A passion for instructing Pilates doesn't always correlate with business savvy, so before jumping headlong into running your own Pilates business, it's critical to develop an understanding of the basics of business structure, finances and marketing.



- Although she has plenty of contacts to ask for Pilates advice, her network of potential business advisors isn't so evident.

I work every day with people like Karly. People who are extremely good at what they do and want to do it with, and for, as many clients as possible; Pilates instructors, yoga teachers, PTs, physiotherapists, chiros and other health professionals. It's a shame when these skilled individuals are unable to successfully turn their passion into a successful business, which is why I am such a strong advocate for investing time in learning the business skills to compliment your skills as an instructor. There's no point in being the best Pilates instructor in your suburb if you can't pay the rent and instruct anyone.

Starting your own Pilates business: seven essential elements

Having the right foundations in place is critical. These seven essentials are the basis for creating a successful Pilates business.

1. You

Your business starts with you. Who are you to start a business? Some people are more suited to starting a business than others. There are two key questions to ask yourself: firstly, do you know what you're getting yourself into? And secondly, are you truly capable of it?

Specifically, you also need to consider:

- Are your personal finances in order?
- What is your big 'why?' – the real reason you want to start your own business, besides making money?
- Are you action-oriented? Are you resilient? Tenacious? Consistent? These are just a few of the key characteristics of successful business owners.

Who you are as a person will directly correlate with the success of your business.

2. Your idea

Your idea is Pilates. But what sort of Pilates? There are many options and your Pilates studio can stand out from all the others by having a specialty or a niche. This might be mat, reformer, post-injury, pre- and post-natal or another specialist group.

Carving a niche to serve a particular need in the market can be one way to really improve your chances of success in business, and can help position you as the 'expert' in that particular field.

3. Your clients

Who is your ideal client? What do you know

about them, and what do you need to know about them?

Every business needs to create their ideal client avatar. There are four aspects of an ideal client profile to consider:

1. Geographic
2. Demographic
3. Psychographic
4. Behaviour profile.

Once you identify your ideal client, the next step is to consider how and where you will find them.

4. Your brand

It can be easy to think that branding is only for big businesses, but in fact defining your brand is just as important for small businesses. Your brand is your story. Your clients are looking to you to stand for something and tell your story.

This is one of the strengths of a small business: you get to say what is important to you personally, and your clients can connect with that on a more intimate level than is possible with a big enterprise.

5. Your structure

When you start a business, there are compliance matters and legalities to adhere to. It's important to stay on the right side of the law and to set solid foundations for your business. It's important to understand the pros and cons of the different structures available and the impact they can have on your business. This Network article on choosing the right structure for your fitness business is well worth a read. Also important to consider are insurance, risk management, and systems and processes.

6. Your finances

Over time, I've found that many of the people who wish to start their own business are not really numbers people. How much will it cost to get started? Where will the money come from?

When you are running a business, it is important to understand some of the

financial basics: the difference between revenue and profit; how to calculate whether you are making a profit or a loss; and how to manage cash flow, among other things. Even something as seemingly simple as deciding how much to charge for your service offerings can take considerable time and research.

7. Your marketing

Marketing is all about attracting and retaining clients. A few essentials in marketing:

- Create a client journey map that will help you identify the various points of contact where your clients interact with your studio. I like to think of them as 'moments of truth'.
- Advertising and social media are important elements for communicating with your clients, and the available technology is constantly changing.
- Your underpinning philosophy is driven by your values – both personal and business values.
- No matter what medium you are using, there are fundamentals that bring clients to your business and then keep them coming back.

Taking the time to develop your marketing plan will enhance your chances of success.

The choice is yours

Pilates is a wonderful idea for a business because it enables so many different options.

Regardless of which route you take with your venture, ensure you give yourself the best chance of success by having the right foundations in place. **N**

Ingrid Thompson is the Founder of Healthy Numbers Pty Ltd. The author of *So You Want to Start a Business*, she has combined her business savvy with her love of Pilates to create the online program 'So You Want to Start a Pilates Business'. Ingrid can be contacted on 0405 212 882 and Ingrid@healthynumbers.com.au

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