

# Made to order

Jessica Dolan tapped into her passion for tidiness to create a thriving home organizing and staging business. Read her tips for success.

## Jessica Dolan

35, Boalsburg, PA

### HER BUSINESS

Room to Breathe

### THE CONCEPT

A home organizing service that helps clients simplify their homes—and their lives.

### STARTUP COSTS

\$750

### IMPRESSIVE STAT

Gross profits increased 66% in 2012.

## ▶ Do what you do best

In 1998, Jessica worked at a medical equipment company in an extremely messy office. “Papers

were strewn everywhere and the retail shelves were stocked with outdated items,” she says. “I’ve always been the type to neaten things up, so I completely reorganized the filing system and displays.” Her lightbulb moment occurred when she saw TV shows about professional organizers. “I realized I could make a living by helping others get organized,” Jessica recalls, and she quit her job in 2004 to start Room to Breathe.

## ▶ Make your customers comfortable

Before starting any project, Jessica sits down with her clients to get to know them on a personal level. “I ask about their goals for getting organized and paring down belongings,” she says. “I know it can be an overwhelming and emotional process, so I encourage people to repurpose sentimental things that may no longer be useful.” For example, Jessica’s clients usually feel guilty about getting rid of family china, so she suggests hanging plates as wall art or reusing teacups to store bathroom supplies.



Jessica signs confidentiality agreements with her clients to assure their comfort.

## ▶ Be dependable

“I try to underpromise and overdeliver,” Jessica says. For example, she recently told a client she’d have a proposal in three days—then emailed it to her in less than two. “When I say I’ll do something, I do it. It’s really not that hard to make people happy,” she says. “They need to know they can rely on me, and that’s the best way to build my business.”

## ▶ Know your audience

Jessica understands that her target clients (typically, women ages 30 to 75) like to talk. “Word of mouth really helped my company gain recognition.” She networks with people who can recommend her to their clients, such as realtors and interior designers. As a result, she spent less than 1% of her annual expenses last year on advertising.

## ▶ Practice what you preach

Jessica welcomes potential clients into her own home—which is impeccably organized, of course—so they can see it for themselves. “Business owners need to do as they say,” she says. “Just as you wouldn’t go to a hairstylist with a terrible haircut, you wouldn’t trust a professional organizer who has a messy house!” ♦



Jessica transformed this artist’s studio from cluttered to clean and tidy.