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Mía Mariú pushes the envelope for Latina entrepreneurs

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Maria Eugenia Bermudez Price, Mía Mariú founder

Mía Mariú pushes the envelope for Latina entrepreneurs

By *Kemila Velan*

According to the [Center for Women's Business Research](#), nearly 10.4 million firms are owned by women, employing more than 12.8 million people, and generating \$1.9 trillion in sales.

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[Maria Eugenia Bermudez Price](#) starts every day at 5 a.m. with an espresso and creamer as she checks email and her to-do list.

By the second cup, she is talking to press or potential partners about her Dallas-based health and beauty direct-sales company, [Mía Mariú](#).

The third and fourth espressos fuel her sales force meetings, the development of new training programs and planning trips around the country, all while managing free time for her husband and three children.

"Being in startup mode, you have to wear a lot of hats and be good at time management and organization," said Price, whose 20-year stint working direct sales for Mary Kay and Home Interiors inspired her to create a similar company targeted to Latinas. Mía is "my" in Spanish and Mariú is a nickname for María Eugenia, the CEO and founder, who was once just a girl from Mexico with big American dreams.

While products such as Duo Noche de Amor eye shadow and Tentación lipgloss match Latina shades and cultural values, the company also offers Latinas the opportunity to have their own side business with an \$85 starter tool kit that includes makeup samples and a personalized website.

Price talked with TheLatinaVoz.com about her schedule, lifestyle, dreams and keeping a Latino company authentic in a marketplace packed with [long tail](#).

Your schedule is pretty hectic. Does your husband help out?

My husband, James B. Price, is the president of the company, so we live our company.

So what's the difference between your position and your husband's? Is he really running the company, or are you?

The idea for the company was born out of my own needs and experience in corporate direct sales for 20 years. From the onset of our marriage, my husband was very supportive. This is unusual for marriages.

From the beginning he was very instrumental in encouraging me to launch my company. He has been an entrepreneur for 25 years and has experience in finance so that was a help to me. He has been a wonderful complement in our company, providing strengths in operations, legal and finance – I do sales, marketing and I'm the CEO, so I have executive rights on all decisions. It has been a great opportunity to work with my husband in a team effort. He's a great role model for other men in being supportive to their wives in their careers.

In the network marketing business, the most successful people have support from their boyfriend or partner. When it comes to Hispanics, it's even more of a challenge to overcome. The man is always asking, "Where is she going? Who is she going to see? Is she making more money than me?" And it's important to educate men that this is an opportunity for both him and his wife.

Why would a Latina want to become a Mía Mariú Associate?

I would venture to say the majority of women in the workforce are looking for flexibility and a way to spend more with the family. So many women are tied to a desk job, 9-5, and they're always feeling guilty they can't go to kids' games and recitals. One of the wonderful things that Mía Mariú offers an associate is a way to build a side business while she is still working over time that allows them to have the flexibility to work their own hours. You have to make it a compelling earning opportunity as well. Being Latina, the family is at the core of what we're about. It's an even bigger chip we carry on our shoulders – how do I keep my role as a mom, but I have to work, I have to bring in income.

So your associates are like Avon ladies, selling and delivering makeup door-to-door?

Every woman is so busy today – she's working, has a family, gets stuck in traffic and barely has time for herself – one of the ways we address this time starvation is by leveraging the use of technology in our business. Somebody that has a Mía Mariú business can take advantage of products being shipped directly to the customer from our web-based store. She doesn't have to deliver products, so that gives her time and pays her more money by spending more time on income-generating activities.

So, you're a Latina entrepreneur. How does it feel? Is it different from working for corporations like Mary Kay?

It feels energizing and exciting to be in this position. It's a very different feeling to be in charge of your own destiny than to be dependent on somebody else's. We offer other women the same opportunity to take charge of their own lives, especially in the world we live in today, with a lot of uncertainty, lack of job security and lack of corporate commitment to employees on an individual level. Women in particular have to be in a position to have choices and options and not be so reliant on the traditional corporation that may be here one day and not be here the next.

Does it ever freak you out to be completely in charge?

[Laughing] It's part of the fun, part of the ride. When you take a risk like this, it stretches you in a lot of different ways, I don't know if I would call it freaking out! It certainly brings on a very different set of feelings. You learn a lot of things about yourself; you find strengths you didn't know you had. When you're put in certain situations, all of a sudden it's just there. I would never go back to a corporate environment. I always wanted my own business, it's just figuring out the right path and the right way just takes timing. I was on a journey throughout my professional life to prepare me. I find the feeling of being in control a lot better than not!

Right, but if you fail, you're the only one to blame ...

I think anybody that says it's gonna be a piece of cake is lying or cheating themselves. I do believe preparation is key. You have to prepare to launch your business.

Yet so many Latina entrepreneurs I've interviewed say they "just fell into" starting a business! What would you say is good preparation?

You need to understand what your strengths are first and then make sure whatever business venue you're considering, it fits and works off your strengths. Anyone considering launching into buying a business or investing a significant amount of money has to be prepared financially. Many people fail because they're not prepared. They need to say, hey, "I need to really think about having a minimum of 12-18 months of income to provide living expenses to deal with this." That's the type of preparation that is necessary, of course, depending on the magnitude of the business.

Our business has massive magnitude because we're a network marketing company – for us the preparation was very, very big. We have to be able to support one associate or 30,000 associates.

So, how long before launching were you preparing?

The legal entity was established in 2007. We began operations in mid-2008. And the official launch was in May 2008. We've been working out our operational kinks and optimizing the customer service. It really took two years from business plan to execute. Again, this is a very different animal, but if you're investing a lot of money, you have to do market research, understand the industry, how you're going to let people know about it, and have proper systems in place to be able to handle certain types of volume. Coming from a professional corporate background, that was the great schooling I had. For me it wasn't an accidental thing. Having said that, the beauty of our company is, somebody doesn't have to go through that preparation and invest to start a side business. We offer a business model for a minimal investment, and we provide all the back-end technology.

What unexpected challenges have you encountered since you started the company?

There really haven't been any unexpected, per se. The Hispanic market is very diverse. And we've taken on addressing this diversity, in terms of generations, first arrivals, immigrant base, language barriers versus acculturated second generations. The beauty of what we've been able to do is our message is resonating in all of these segments. We're a relationship business, so that's one of the advantages of our sales model. So we are able to connect with people at a very direct level and work within the bicultural differences.

Yeah, because even here in Miami, you can't even say, "Latino." Many Cubans don't subscribe to the Latino label.

It's a tricky thing – but regardless of where you're from, or your generation, we like to be sexy, we like to look good – we're *coquetas*. By talking to a lot of women of different origins – Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Mexicans, South Americans – we really did our homework and decided what is the commonality? It's this void, at a personal level, that bypasses where you're from because now we're getting into the essence of a woman. It's such a basic need for her to have the confidence to look good. We have products that have tapped into that messaging. And also, from a much broader perspective in our corporate mission, it's also to help each other as a community. We all share a warmth. If I met you, I would kiss you on the side of the cheek – that's just the way we are. There is a Puerto Rican woman living in McAllen, Texas, who has cousins living in Florida and they started a business. Then they had another cousin in Virginia, and they have connected both because of our broader message. We all share something by being here in the U.S. I happen to be an immigrant – a very assimilated immigrant – but we share traditions. So I believe our company helps us connect at that deeper level.

I recently heard a Latina say that her company addresses the "Quadruple Bottom Line": People, Planet, Profit and this cultural sensibility you're talking about. Usually an American company just goes after the single bottom line. So you're doing more than running business, you're creating a whole community ...

You're hitting it right on the nose. When we say we're a company created for Latina women, we pay it off in every which way, from our product, our opportunity, how we train, how we support – I think that's a very key advantage because we don't have to be all things to all people and we can truly serve the market in a complete, direct way and a lot of companies can't do that – they're not a niche company.

You have an MBA in International Business from the University of Dallas and studied in Germany, France, Austria and Italy. How does this experience affect your business approach?

There is a saying: "Think globally but act locally." That is something that is very important. When you are learning another language, you can study for years from books and classes, but unless you go to the country, you don't become fully fluent or fully understand where people are coming from until you get into their environment. So how that has helped me, from a professional standpoint – traveling gave me a lot of cultural sensitivity which is very critical in what we're doing because we're all about cultural sensitivity. That's one of our biggest points of difference. I wouldn't be able to do what I'm doing without that experience.

What advice would you share with other Latina entrepreneurs?

Take the risk. A lot of people want to do something on their own, but they're afraid and a lot of times they're fighting against their own self and limitations. If they have a dream and a burning desire, then I say, just go for it. The worst thing that can happen, if, for some reason you fail – although I don't believe in failure – you always learn something.

When you get tired, and you don't think you can take another phone call, what do you do?

Ohhhh, I take a break and take a walk. I'm a big believer of when you reach a point in the day, and when you disconnect and change your environment, your mind will literally go off email or phone mode and reconnect with nature. I like to do that. Even if it's a 10-minute walk. That reenergizes you. I'm able to go out and take a walk and see some trees.

Describe what your office is like ...

Because I do so much traveling, I'm running out of my house. We have a separate warehouse in Carrollton, a suburb of Dallas.

I don't use too much makeup. I prefer the natural look. But as I get older, I will probably want to cover this and enhance that – which of your products would you recommend for a Latina like me?

Latina women are looking for a natural look – that's the whole idea. There are a lot of Latinas who never found a product that enhances their natural skin tone. The cornerstone of our line is foundations and concealers. Because we have the diversity in our backgrounds – our blood mixes. That creates a whole level of complexity with pigments and undertones. Our whole claim to fame is we can match you perfectly and naturally; how you get to the perfect canvas – you may have a little discoloration or redness, shadows under eyes, how do you get rid of that, and achieve an even skin tone. So our products are mineral foundations so you bring out your own skin tone rather than some heavy base or foundation that doesn't match.

What does the future look like for the business and for you personally?

Super bright! We're so excited about what's going on, how we're literally transforming women and the mission of helping other Latina women. We're very focused right now in developing a presence in Texas and expanding at a national level, and the long term is to expand to Mexico and Latin America. I get a lot of reward in seeing the difference in other people's lives.

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Kemila Velan, 32, is a Miami-based freelance writer and founder of Biscayne Writers Inc., which serves as host to writing workshops for aspiring novelists, screenwriters, poets and lyricists.