

STARTUP DIARY

SERLINA BOYD



01 EARLY JAN DISTRIBUTION ISSUES

'Even though supermarkets and shops aren't where we make most of our sales, having our magazines on the shop floor really helps with awareness – but we also come up against plenty of distribution problems. For the past three days, our best-selling supermarket hasn't actually had our magazines on its shelves and nobody seems to know where the stock is. I'm told by our distributor that this kind of thing happens all the time, but it really makes me feel annoyed and brings up the feeling that our company isn't being taken seriously. If I hadn't been keeping an eye out when I was in the shops, we may never have known about this, which makes me question how many other stores are having problems like this with our stock.'



'The pandemic has given people more time to read and reflect, but it's also impacting the postal service. When I'm sending out magazines at the moment, there can be big delays, especially posting to the US where it can take up to six weeks to arrive. Although the customers actually seem happy enough to wait for their products, it still stresses me out as I want the readers to get the magazines within the monthly time frame so that it still feels relevant.'



'There's a real sense of excitement. The girl's mother is also someone that I really look up to, so to have her here, happy with how the shoot is going feels so good.'

03 EARLY FEB IDEA POACHING

'Recently, we've pitched to other brands for collaboration and they've taken our ideas and gone elsewhere. It's hard when you spot your idea somewhere and think: hang on a minute, I gave them that! They know they've messed up, so we're currently in talks with them about how to sort it out, but it still feels so frustrating. I'm now more careful and if I'm pitching an idea I get everyone to sign a non-disclosure agreement. Another challenge is with other brands taking us seriously. The January issue of Cocoa Girl features a hairstyle that's very similar to a later cover of British Vogue. It went crazy on Twitter. Everyone is saying, "Wow, Vogue is watching you!" These moments are really beautiful but it would also be great if these brands wanted to collaborate with us in some way.'

02 LATE JAN NEW STUDIO

'We finally start renting our own studio space in Peckham, south east London, for a few days a week. It's lovely to have access to an office and we can also do our photo shoots there, which is permitted under the current regulations. It feels magical to go from working in our bedrooms or the kitchen table to somewhere with so much potential, and where we really have the space to be creative.'

'On our first day in the studio, we do a Michelle Obama-inspired shoot, where we style a little girl to look like her and hold her book *Becoming*. There's a real sense of excitement. The girl's mother is also someone that I really look up to professionally, so to have her here, smiling and happy with how the shoot is going feels so good.'

The new space serves as an office (above) and a studio for photo shoots (below).



IMAGE: Condry Calvin Mililo.

In June, Serlina Boyd and her six-year-old daughter, Faith, launched *Cocoa Girl*, the UK's first magazine for black girls. There have been distribution woes, NDAs and negative headlines – here Serlina reflects on the past few months. @cocoagirlnag

Serlina and her six-year-old daughter Faith; the magazine (below) serves to inspire young girls and provide representation.



'A post from The Independent on black British innovators pops up. When I click on it, I'm included! This feels really special, as I thought I had gone under the radar.'

04 MARCH UNEXPECTED PRESS

'I've become quite afraid of the press due to a negative experience in 2020. I'd been asked to speak about launching the magazine on the TV show *Good Morning Britain*, but the interview just focused on the magazine not being for everyone, which just isn't the case. After the interview, the *Daily Mail* made a negative news story out of it, which seemed unfair. I received some really horrible emails and a death threat, so I had to close the contact form on our website. I chose not to speak out, but felt hurt. Consequently, I've turned down a lot of interviews since then. But today I see an article as I'm scrolling LinkedIn and a post from *The Independent* on black British innovators pops up. When I click on it, I'm included! This feels really special, as I thought I had gone under



05 MARCH COMING FULL CIRCLE

'Cocoa Girl is finally on the news stand at my local Tesco supermarket! It's a big moment as this is where it all started – when last year I came in trying to find Faith a magazine that had representation in it. Unable to find one, we started up *Cocoa Girl* and then later *Cocoa Boy* magazine. It's taken a lot of work to get to this point – we'd initially tried to get the magazines into another major retailer, but they'd said we should have gone to a big publisher and let them do it, which I just wasn't up for. Then a distributor called Market Force got in touch and they were able to put our magazine in front of supermarkets like Waitrose, which were interested. Tesco was also pitched and have agreed to 48 stores initially, including my local store. For me, this is such a beautiful moment because it



shows that if you've got something you're passionate about, you can make it happen.

'I give Faith money and film her walking to the magazine stand to find *Cocoa Girl* – she does a little skip as she takes it to the check out. But it's when I see the name *Cocoa Girl* on the receipt that I become tearful. It feels incredible, so I keep it. Faith is still young, so I don't know if it's quite registered that she works on a magazine, but I can really see the change in her; that she now has more love for herself and no longer dislikes her skin colour or her hair type.'