



Toys are us

Liza Shieff and Barbie just weren't getting along. Liza wasn't really happy about her young daughter playing what was - basically - dress-ups with a grown up. Then, when her little girl started comparing herself unfavourably with Barbie's unattainable figure and long, blonde hair, Liza decided Barbie had to go.

But the question was; what would she be replaced with? Liza's dilemma increased with the arrival of her son Daniel, now 2. She wanted quality, long-lasting toys for him and his big sister Dasha, now 10, that would enhance their childhood and make it a magical time.

"I found it hard to find nice toys," says Liza, who arrived in New Zealand from Russia seven years ago. "Then I saw the Haba catalogue and fell in love."

From then on things happened very quickly. Liza got the rights to sell the German toy company's products via her online store and became its New Zealand distributor.

Daniel was just a baby when she started the website, but Liza says in many ways it was the perfect time to start a business.

"It's great being the Mum of a new baby, but it's a completely new routine and sometimes it can send you a little bit crazy," says Liza. "I wanted something else to do that would keep my mind active and make sure I was still developing new skills that would make me feel good about myself."



Liza's tips

- **Do your homework:** It pays to know exactly what you're getting yourself into, especially if you're involved in a business that requires you to purchase products.
- **Find a niche:** Go with what you know, your personal knowledge will take you a long way.
- **Consider going on line:** The ability to pick and choose your hours and to be able to work from any room in the house is a benefit when children are a major focus in your life.

Setting up www.bebabo.co.nz meant she was using skills from her three major talent bases - teaching, accountancy and motherhood. As a teacher she knew what would appeal to children and adults alike, her accountancy training meant she wasn't daunted by the idea of writing a business plan and it was motherhood that gave her the idea in the first place.

"As an accountant I would never have even thought about toys, but as a mother finding the right ones is so important."

The set-up and maintenance of the business has been done almost completely on-line, making it a way of working that Liza says is compatible with her family's day.

"Daniel has always been on a strict routine, so I know exactly when he's going to be asleep and how long he'll sleep for, and how long I'll be able to work for. It also works well in the sense that if it's a beautiful day I can take them to the playground and catch up on work in the evening when they're asleep."

Liza says the great thing about toys is that there's so much joy surrounding them. She's proud to represent toys that are ecologically sound, as well as child-friendly.

"I love imagining how excited people will be when the toys arrive and they open the box. I always make an effort to use new boxes and wrap them nicely. It takes a lot of time, but it's worth it."

