

# Interview



## The Business Side of Being an Entrepmermaid *Linden Wolbert*

*In this second part of her interview, Linden Wolbert talks about the business of being a professional mermaid, and creating her own line of mermaid wear for children.*

***When you started your business as a professional mermaid, did you have a business model in mind, or did you have to improvise as you went?***

There was no business model for doing this because I was probably the first one. I really had to think through all these different facets of what it would mean to create the image visual and feel of a mythical creature.

***At what point, did you realize that you'd need to set up a company and everything that goes with it?***

Pretty shortly after I got stated, I set up a DBA as "Mermaids in Motion." When I eventually partnered with Body Glove, ultimately we needed to have protection for liability in case, heaven forbid, anything should happen with regard to our products. That's when I incorporated the business as "Mermaids in Motion LLC." It meant

doing things like getting life insurance and upping my liability insurance to some super-crazy amount like \$2M. It also meant setting up separate banking accounts, talking with lawyers and accountants, and lots of other things. So now, I am a bonafide, legitimate Mermaid business.

***Do you have employees now?***

I started out doing this completely by myself. I built my website myself, I did my publicity myself, I did all my social media. Basically I did it all myself. What you see, everything that has been created, has been through the generous care, love, and support of my friends and my family, first and

foremost. I could not be here, doing what I am doing, existing as I am, without them.

And I am eternally grateful for the people in my life who never laughed in my face, and believed in my crazy dreams,

I have contractors who I hire. When I do gigs, for example, I need a wrangler. I need someone who can carry me. Several friends of mine who are also aquatic can be safety divers if I need them on a shoot. If I am in the aquarium, I have a select list of people who I will call and say, Hey! I'm diving at the Aquarium of the Pacific. Can you come safety me in the tank, and film with the Go-Pro, and they're like "Yeah"!

Everyone is always stoked to get paid to dive in the tank with me. It's like a fantasy to be in the tank, and watch all the faces pressed up against the glass, waving, and smiling, and jumping up and down. It's the coolest thing in the world!

I had an assistant who was helping me for a while full-time, but it is such an up-and-down business. It has traditionally been seasonal, but the demand in the mermaid trend has been skyrocketing. For the last couple of years, I have watched a spike in mermaid tail makers, in mermaid and merman performers. It's to the point



Entrepmermaid Linden Wolbert.

now where it's like, "Oh yeah, I know a mermaid" normal.

When I started, I didn't know anyone else who was doing it, other than the girls at the Weeki Wachee Springs in Florida, who have been doing it as a roadside attraction since the 1940s. But they weren't traveling mermaids: that was their spot and people came to see their choreographed show. What I do is very different from that.

*You have been getting some really great press lately. Talk a little about that aspect of the business.*

I seem to have really good luck people finding me and wanting to cover the story. And they're really excited to ask questions and find out how things came about, why I do what I do, and what's in the future. I feel so blessed and grateful that the world is excited about what I do, because I really didn't know that would be the case when I started. I thought I'd just be swimming around in my parent's pool with this tail I spent so much money on and in debt from. But eventually, the business began to build "mer-mentum" (Sorry! I do bad puns all the time...)

*The business magazine Bloomberg did a full feature and a video about you in October 2016. What was that like?*



Story and video on Mermaid Linden on [Bloomberg website](#).

I was just blown away and humbled by the whole experience. I thought that it was just going to be two people: a camera person and a reporter, which tends to be the norm these days. They sent a team of six people – I couldn't believe it when two cars pulled up and six people got out with all this equipment. They brought a drone, they brought a gimbal, and lighting equipment, several photographers, and two video shooters and everything. And I said to the reporter that I thought it was just

going to be you and a photographer. And she said that when she started telling people about it, they became excited and everyone wanted to be in on the story....

I live, in this place I call "the grotto" and finding this place was "mer-acularous." I couldn't live in a place that fosters and depicts my passion and my work even more. By it's very nature, it enhances what I do and the happiness of my life. It's actually nice to recount this history, because there are some days when I do wonder about what I am doing. Have I made a mistake dedicating over a decade of my life in my prime to something that might not sustain itself? Will I find myself jobless in a few years when I no longer look nice in a mermaid tail, and I'm too old and droopy and saggy? And then

something wonderful will happen and I'll think that maybe I'm doing the right thing.

The Bloomberg team was amazing. They followed me around for two full days, and we had so much fun! Along with the video, they shot stills that appeared in the Bloomberg magazine. In addition to the promotion video, they also brought me in for a live interview that was syndicated for about a week. I sometimes have to pinch myself because I really don't think of myself as a business person, and the top business publication in the world did a full feature on me with video and print. I was just blown away.

*Have you thought about expanding the business at all, and bringing other people on to be mermaids and mermen?*



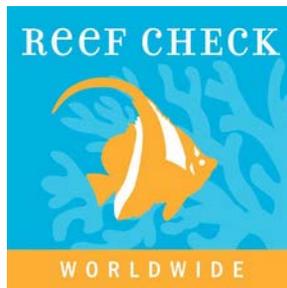
The Bloomberg team photographing Linden and a group of children testing her new monofins in a local pool.

At this point I don't have plans for that, because the brand is me, and when people book they want Mermaid Linden. There was a very brief time several years ago where I did hire another girl or two, and outfitted them in neoprene tails. It was not a good idea. I'm not an agency. Maybe as I "age out," I may consider hiring other mermaids or mermen, but at this point in my career I am very busy with bookings and performances.

I do refer other mermaids from companies that I trust and feel comfortable with. There are tons of other mermaid companies in Los Angeles and around the globe providing that service, and I'm not that. I'm the original brand so I keep focused on that, and also on my new line of the "mer-chandise" including my new body glove that has been so much work but a lot of fun.

I was up until 3:30 am this morning editing a product loop video for 2017 trade shows. They're taking my line to toy shows in Europe and Asia and they ask for a good video loop of all the products. I had all this footage from when we went to the Bahamas and filmed with amazing friends of mine and their beautiful kids in clear water. And we shot different products including the monofin and so on.

***Your new business venture of creating monofins for kids sounds like an extension of what you're already doing to promote the sea and awareness***



***of marine sciences to kids. How did that get started, and how does it fit in with your line of business?***

It actually fits in beautifully. It weaves in to the tapestry of what I do all the time, which is children's parties. Children wanted to be like me, and children wanted to be able to swim like a mermaid or merman. Previously there were some pretty awful and not very effective monofins for kids. Back when I first started doing this, there just weren't any good monofins for children. They were poorly designed, and flimsy, and they fell off – it drove me nuts when I'd bring monofins to the parties and watched kids struggle with them. They were more of a hassle because I'd spend all my time at the party trying to keep the fins on the kid's feet.

The interesting part is that the universe seems to just deliver me what I need, and this is no exception. Just as when I wanted to make a mermaid tail and become a mermaid, suddenly Alan Holt was delivered into my life by a very dear friend at exactly the right time, and we made a mermaid tail.

Then I had Russ Lesser, the President of sportswear maker [Body Glove](#) serendipitously fall into my life through my work as a board member with [Reef Check Worldwide](#), my favorite ocean-related non-profit. Russ was on the board too when I met him. He's super-sweet, the best guy in the world: if there's anyone I want to be when I grow up, it's Russ Lesser. He's a man of his word, he's honest,

he's funny, and he gets things done with integrity. When he was the mayor of Manhattan Beach, people joked that if he jumped off of Manhattan Beach pier, the entire city would follow him into the water.



One day after a board meeting, Russ asked me to explain what it meant that I was a mermaid. So I told him a little bit about it, and the kid parties and birthdays. And then I asked him, in his role at Body Glove, how much he knew about the manufacturing side, or whether he could point me in the right direction to someone who knew about manufacturing, because I had some ideas for some products, including a monofin.

I should say that I had zero intention of working with Body Glove. I just wanted to pick someone's brain about how I could start the process. And then he asked whether I'd like to meet with him the following Tuesday at his office, and ask him anything I wanted. I always tend to be over-prepared, so I made sketches of all the little aquatic related products I had in mind just to show him so I could ask who I would talk to about them.

So I met with him and after lunch he started driving in another direction and I asked where we were going. He said that we were going to Sport Dimension, one of his manufacturers. When we arrived I found myself meeting with the Presidents of Body Glove and Sports Dimension, and all these

marketing and design people. And Russ proposed, totally without my knowledge, that he wanted to create a line of Mermaid Linden children's swimming products. I just about fell out of my chair.

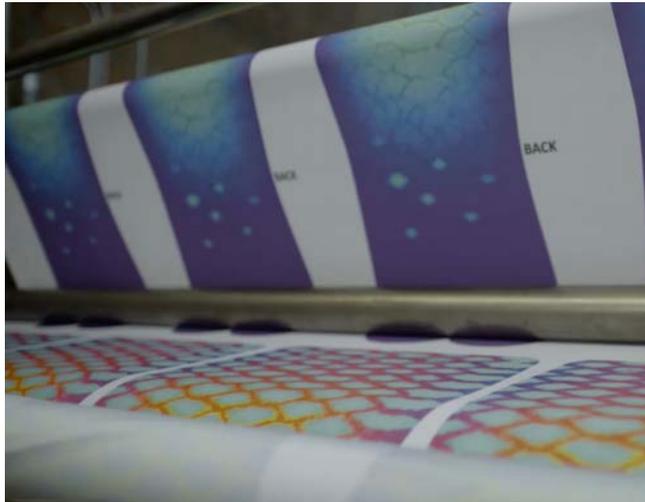
Ever since that day, my life has been turned upside down with design and back-and-forth email correspondence to people in China because so many products are manufactured there. Communication was challenging, and there were language barriers, and there was so much to deal with creating designs.

So again, I just cannot believe my luck, here I had dreamed of doing this thing, and suddenly a person comes into my life and proposes, not just to introduce me to the right people, but to help create a line of products, funded by another company, and I get to have complete design control. I got to design a fin based my own mermaid tail design: down to the buckles, and the safety releases and the velcro, and the tread on the bottom, and the soft fluke tips that flow in the water: all of it.

That's how that happened, and it's been the biggest blessing because now I'm able to give kids the experience that I have, in a way that is comfortable for their little bodies. And they love it, and the parents love it. And they're selling like hot crab-cakes on places like Amazon. We had a big order from Walmart in 2017, and we're finally starting to build "*mer-mentum*" after everything it took to get to this point from the day of that first meeting three or four



**Above:** Production meeting at Body Glove offices. **Below:** Lycra tail fabric on the printing press. Images: Bloomberg.



years ago to today where I'm sitting here at my desk looking at fabric samples that just came in from China for my new mermaid bikinis that are coming out next year to go in tandem with the lycra skin mermaid tails that just came off the printing press.

I'm designing all these products right now and reviewing emails from China asking about product designs, and seeking approvals, and asking about suggestions for

colors and design changes. I'm so excited that it's actually hard for me to go to sleep at night – I probably need to learn to chill out a bit.

So that's what I'm doing besides running my company. Unfortunately there's not a lot of time for social life right now, but I look at this as a big investment for the future, so that I can afford to do the things I'm most passionate about, which is the educational side and the experiential side for kids. The Body Glove thing is obviously great for my branding. It's an amazing, incredible gift and an opportunity that I'm still pinching myself over.

#### ***When will these products come out?***

The lycra tails are actually on the market. They're available through my website, and we're taking them out to trade shows and looking for retailers. It's the "Mermaid Linden by Body Glove" line. And here's some big news: I'm designing adult monofins right now for next year, hopefully. They're meant to be both functional and beautiful. They're designed after my tail shape and the basic design of my tail, but I also want them to give great propulsion in the water, and be aesthetically very beautiful. They'd make a great base for a fabric tail in addition to being a great stand-alone product.

#### ***You're going to have to start a new Olympic event now: mermaid swimming.***

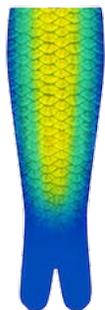
Wow! Let's work on it! There's actually a sport called "fin swimming." It's



Mermaid Linden merchandise display.



The Parrotfish Tail



The Linden Tail



The Seaglass Tail



The Searincess Tail

been huge in Europe for years. It's high-speed monofin swimming, and it's so cool. Frankly, I'm surprised that it hasn't been proposed yet as an Olympic sport.

I told Russ that my tail is so fast, that I wanted to challenge someone like Michael Phelps to a race for charity. Imagine if people bid on either the mermaid or the merman. And Russ asked whether I even knew whether I could beat him. So I actually timed myself in a pool after a free diving competition. I am a judge for that sport so I asked the safety staff whether they would time me doing a 50m in my tail under water. to compare to Michael Phelps' freestyle world record. I came in to within two seconds in my tail. That's how fast and powerful it is. There's something secret in that sauce.

A year later Russ was at an event where Michael Phelps was present. He introduces himself and tells him he knows this mermaid who wants to race him for



Young mermaids testing the products at a local pool.

charity, but unfortunately Russ politely declined. I'll keep at it. Maybe I'll create a video for my YouTube channel and pressure him into it!

***Thank you taking the time for this interview, especially at this very busy time for you.***

Gosh! This might be the most amazing, and broad, and detailed interview I've ever done. I'm just humbled, and delighted, and really grateful for the experience to reflect back as well. It's such a gift Thank you!

***Linden Wolbert shares the life aquatic with humans as a professional mermaid "edutainer."*** Linden graduated from Emerson College with a BA in Film and Science. She is a PADI Master SCUBA Diver, AIDA International Freediving Judge and serves on the board of Reef Check Worldwide. She can hold her breath for over 5 minutes and dive to 115 feet. Her passion is reaching children with her message of ocean conservation, education and exploration. In 2013, Mermaid Linden co-branded with Body Glove International to create the 'Mermaid Linden' line of swim products. Linden has been featured on Bloomberg Businessweek, CNBC, Huff Post, BuzzFeed, Fortune, NPR, Fast Company, Shark Week, ABC 20/20, The Today Show, Univision, Inside Edition, AOL, MAXIM, UK Daily Mail, MSN and Entertainment Weekly among others. Learn more at her [Mermaids in Motion](http://Mermaids in Motion) website, and follow her on Instagram at @MermaidLinden.