



# Building an Unconventional Brand Requires a Movement

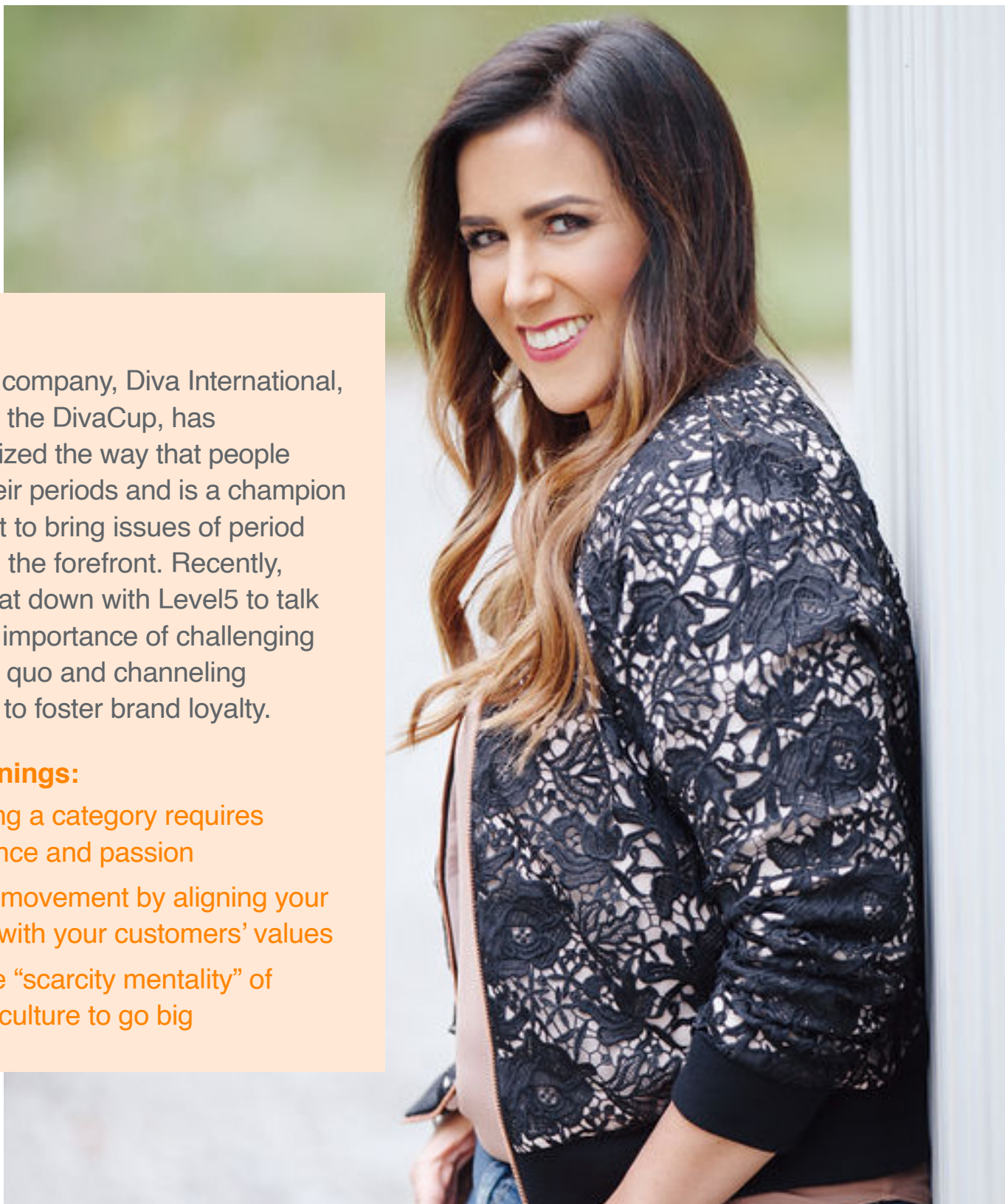
An Interview with DivaCup's CEO & Co-Founder

**Carinne Chambers-Saini**

## Q&A with Diva International CEO & Co-Founder

# Carinne Chambers-Saini

by Lily Hou



---

Carinne's company, Diva International, makers of the DivaCup, has revolutionized the way that people handle their periods and is a champion in the fight to bring issues of period poverty to the forefront. Recently, Carinne sat down with Level5 to talk about the importance of challenging the status quo and channeling advocacy to foster brand loyalty.

### Key Learnings:

- Disrupting a category requires persistence and passion
- Spark a movement by aligning your product with your customers' values
- Ditch the "scarcity mentality" of start-up culture to go big



**You started DivaCup with your mom, Francine, 19 years ago and today you run a multimillion-dollar company. What has this brand journey been like?**

The journey has had many growth phases over the years. Initially when we were starting out, we experienced so much resistance and many obstacles. It took us about two years to pioneer and develop an effective marketable product and achieve the appropriate regulatory medical device clearances. This was followed by years of incredible focus and hard work; we faced challenges with educating consumers and retailers about an unknown concept, while fighting to build mainstream distribution. Years later, once we gained traction in North America as well as achieved significant global distribution, we managed to truly disrupt the menstrual care category and build a global brand.

---

*“We also have a passion for breaking taboos and helping communities and groups around the world who experience period poverty. This happens to align with a massive and vibrant global social movement towards the abolishment of the inequities surrounding menstruation, which has allowed us to incorporate DivaCares, our company’s philanthropic arm, into our business model.”*

Over the years, we were able to solve many difficult challenges while growing the business such as navigating the mass market, building the right team, facing new and emerging competition in our space, and building a brand voice that supports and speaks to our loyal consumer base. Now, we’re finally in the phase of doing the fun things: developing new products, growth plans and marketing. Our team is super excited to execute our plans and see what’s to come!

**Can you tell us a bit more about DivaCares?**

DivaCares encompasses all the different organizations we work with to address the many issues and inequities surrounding menstruation that people face around the world. This work ranges from increasing accessibility to affordable menstrual supplies, to advocacy work for better legislation related to menstruation. During the COVID-19 pandemic, accessibility has been more important than ever. We’ve increased our partnership base to accommodate the growing demand for supplies amid rising unemployment in communities that need it most. After all, as coined by activist and lawyer Jennifer Weiss-Wolf, “periods don’t stop for pandemics”. If people cannot afford food, they cannot afford menstrual products. One of the core values of DivaCares is enabling people to menstruate with dignity.

**DivaCup customers are known for their brand loyalty and many have become advocates for Diva’s products. How have you been able to build such a strong customer base and retain it?**

It definitely helps that we have created a product that literally changes people’s lives. When we were starting out, no one believed in the product; we were laughed out of every boardroom and trade show, especially industry shows. It was challenging because there was no social media to promote the brand and everything was person to person. Satisfied customers made up the initial following and growth, and we did all that we could to fuel meaningful relationships with them and add value to their experience. Education has been a huge pillar in building long lasting connections with our customers. We have always positioned Diva as a trusted source, a brand that stands for more than the bottom line. Our company is a Certified B Corporation, meaning that it balances purpose and profit, which is what drives our customer loyalty. Our customers are devoted and we love that about them!

We know that our customers feel good about what we do and who we are as a company. The younger generations are using their dollars to vote, and they’re looking to support companies that reflect their values. Multi-billion dollar companies don’t hold the market captive anymore – that model has changed. New companies are coming out of the woodwork and they’re challenging the status quo.

*“One of our guiding mandates is that we don’t accept things just because that’s the way they’ve always been. We’re connecting with consumers that feel the same energy and want to be part of the new movement.”*

*Education has been a huge pillar in building long lasting connections with our customers. We have always positioned Diva as a trusted source, a brand that stands for more than the bottom line.”*

Carinne and her mom,  
Francine Chambers, co-founder of Diva





### What advice can you give to aspiring entrepreneurs?

For an entrepreneur, bringing in appropriate people to support the company is probably the most difficult transition, especially when you begin as a grass-roots start-up with a very small team. What Diva began, it was mostly my mother and I, with two or three other people supporting us. We were trying to do everything ourselves including sales, marketing, operations, order fulfillment and compliance, etc. I didn't realize at the time that I was holding the company's growth back by trying to do everything myself.

As an entrepreneur, it can be hard to make the decision to hire someone. "Scarcity mentality" takes root, which isn't uncommon for start-up businesses running on a shoestring budget. On the other hand, no company can scale at the level it needs to without people assets – they're a critical part of the growth process. Once we were able to get past that uncomfortable juncture and take a leap of faith, that's when everything started to really grow and the business almost took on a life of its own.

There is a caveat to all of this because most entrepreneurs don't usually have the right experience to manage a growing team. So, we made a lot of mistakes initially and it took me some time to acquire the right managerial skills and grow into the CEO role. Without this learning curve, I don't think that Diva would be where it is today. As the company gets bigger, every decision becomes riskier. We had planned to launch more products, which wasn't such a big deal when we were a \$2 million company. At this bigger level, however, it's a huge deal because so many resources go into it – our team resources and supports 65,000 retailers. All these decisions have a massive impact, more so if they turn out to be failures.

---

*"Bringing in appropriate people to support the company is probably the most difficult transition. No company can scale at the level it needs to without people assets."*

### There are more women in senior leadership roles now than ever before. In the past 10 years, the number of female CEOs in Fortune 500 has doubled. How do you think we got here? And, do you think there is more that could be done?

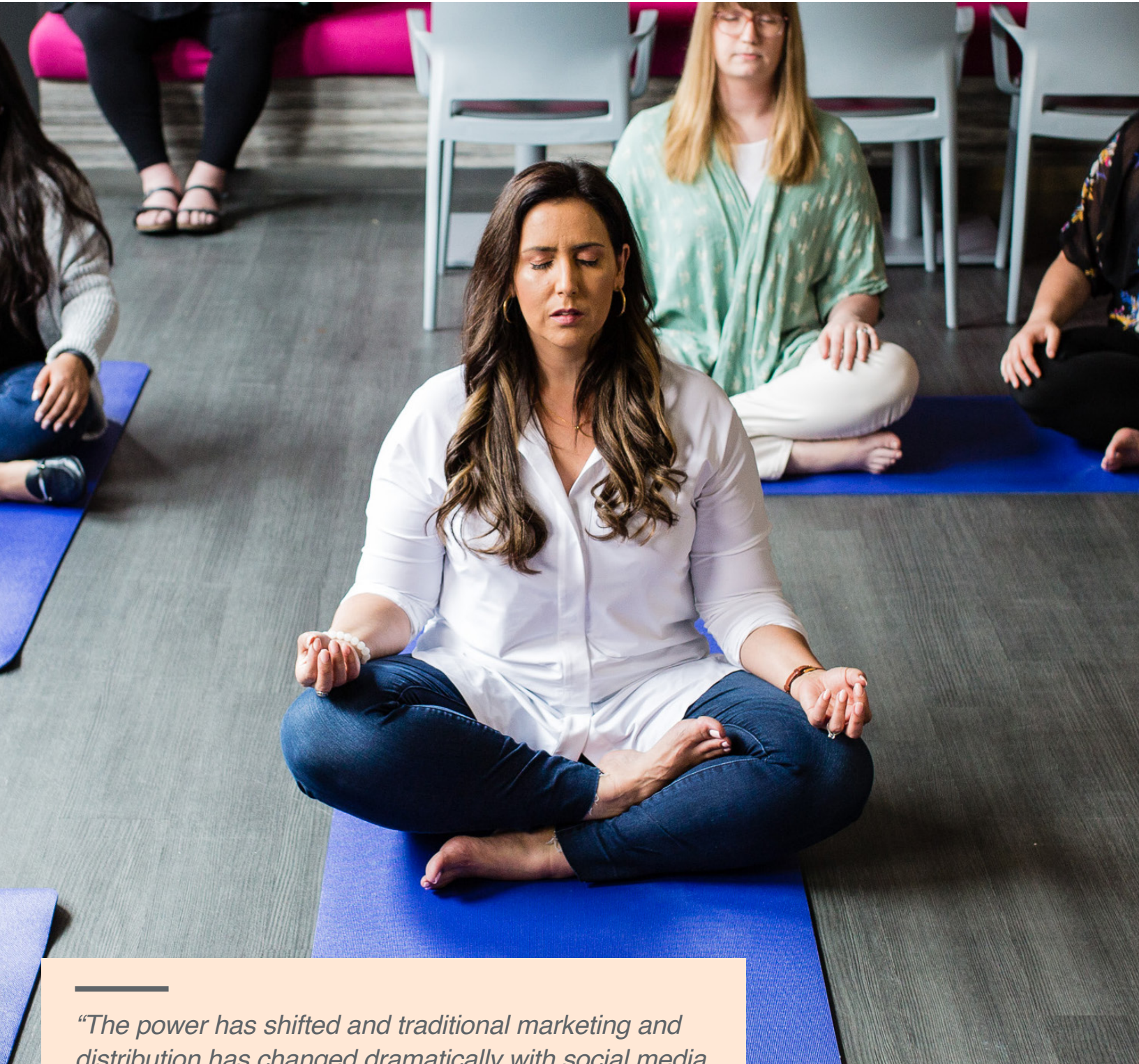
I think that one of our superpowers [as women] is that we see things differently than our male counterparts. We make decisions with more empathy and thought. I love having the female-male balance in our company because each side brings something unique. There was a time when most of our staff were only women and it was problematic. Having diversity is important.

Supporting women starts early, in high school. Girls need to be exposed to successful women and entrepreneurs and have female mentors. Showing diversity from all backgrounds, colors and races is equally important. My own experience as a young woman was disheartening because I wasn't taken seriously. I was laughed at by our competitors and category advisors, and big companies were trying to poach buyers by telling them that no one would buy our product. Now, the power has shifted and traditional marketing and distribution has changed dramatically with social media and e-commerce. Old-school companies are being shaken up. The playing field has been leveled and it's anybody's game now. Business isn't just a boys' club anymore. We're all equal and need to collaborate together.

### What advice do you have for female entrepreneurs or women who want to start a business?

To pave their own way. There are no rules anymore. We threw every possible rule out the window and created our own. It didn't matter what we came across, we kept trying until we found a way. That's when the change and progress truly happened. Don't be afraid to put yourself out there. Entrepreneurship isn't comfortable. If you're not willing to embarrass yourself or fail – don't become an entrepreneur. If you believe in what you do, it doesn't matter if it takes 10 times longer than you expected it to take or if 25 people slam the door in your face. And finally, follow your intuition. It's a powerful tool that shouldn't be underestimated.





---

*"The power has shifted and traditional marketing and distribution has changed dramatically with social media and e-commerce. Old-school companies are being shaken up. The playing field has been leveled and it's anybody's game now."*

**How has Diva shown agility in its response to COVID-19? What long-lasting impacts do you think COVID-19 will have on your company and the industry in which you operate?**

As soon as the announcement was made to close schools, we immediately moved everyone to work from home to ensure our team was protected. Luckily, we already had a work-from-home program in place for almost two years. We allow our team to set hours at their own pace. Personally, I've been able to enjoy more family

time such as going for a lot more walks, which I love, and I've gained more control of my time. As a result, I've been travelling less. In the future, I will definitely re-examine the things that I'm willing to travel for.

I think moving forward, the shift from the brick and mortar stores to e-commerce will accelerate. This is going to have a huge impact on us because our distribution model is built around a mass market where the majority of menstrual products are sold.

*"Entrepreneurship isn't comfortable. If you're not willing to embarrass yourself or fail – don't become an entrepreneur. If you believe in what you do, it doesn't matter if it takes 10 times longer than you expected it to take or if 25 people slam the door in your face. And, follow your intuition. It's a powerful tool that shouldn't be underestimated."*



### About Diva

Diva was founded in 2001 by Carinne and her mother, Francine Chambers, who developed the DivaCup to offer a reliable, clean and eco-friendly approach to feminine hygiene. Over the past 19 years, Diva has grown from a two-woman operation into a multi-million-dollar international company. Today, Diva is still family-run and in 2018 became a certified B Corp, meaning Diva is using business as a force for good for customers, the community and the planet. Diva also invests its expertise and resources in educational, community and International organizations that offer empowerment through health care and menstrual health education worldwide.



### About Level5 Strategy

Level5 Strategy is a leading strategy and transformation consulting firm that helps our clients achieve profitable growth and a superior ROI by leveraging the power of their brand. We focus on four distinct yet interconnected core services: Insights, Strategy, Transformation and Customer Experience. Since our inception in 2002, Level5 Strategy has partnered with over 300 clients across B2B, B2C, government and not-for-profit sectors in Canada, the U.S. and other parts of the globe to navigate their most critical challenges and opportunities and to build and execute practical strategies that convert decisions into actions.

*Ready to take your business to the next level? Get in touch with us [here](#).*



# LEVEL5<sup>TM</sup> STRATEGY

18 KING STREET EAST  
MEZZANINE LEVEL  
TORONTO, ONTARIO  
M5C 1C4



Scan the QR code to sign up for the Level5 Perspective newsletter, featuring a wide range of Level5 insights and perspectives on the subjects that matter in business and management.



info@level5strategy.com



level5strategy.com



416 361 3468



Level5 Strategy