

Feature

Entrepreneur shares ins and outs of sex doll business at trade show

Could business model for a popular sex doll rental service work in Vancouver?

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Travelling alongside Catanna, Aika and Zach, Kristen Dickson's upcoming trip to Vancouver will combine business and pleasure on a level never before seen in the city's history.

Dickson is the owner and founder of House of Dolls, a sex doll rental service in Kamloops that opened in early December.

She'll be in town this weekend for the annual Naughty But Nice Sex Show at the Vancouver Convention Centre to spread the gospel of the doll — courting prospective franchisees who may want a piece of the action and even renting out her dolls to a few frisky Vancouverites.

If there was ever an example to validate the saying "sex sells," Dickson's story is it. Her website crashed for several days after it went live late last year and Dickson now has "astronomically large" bandwidth to keep up with demand.

"The last few months have been crazy," Dickson tells the *Courier* by phone.

Dickson's business model goes something like this: customers comb through her website and choose from eight, life-like dolls — both male and female — which are then rented from her home-based business and taken to a remote location for a 24-hour period.

The dolls are transported in a carrier that resembles a guitar case.

The going rate for a day of doll time is \$249, plus a \$500 deposit, and Dickson's clientele is quite literally all over the map. One fellow from California booked his ski trip near Kamloops specifically so



Kristen Dickson, who opened Kamloops' House of Dolls rental service in December, will be at this weekend's Naughty But Nice Sex Show with a few of her dolls.

See video at vancouver.com. PHOTO SCREEN GRAB

he could spend time with one of Dickson's dolls. Customers include seniors, couples, gay people, straight people, those with physical disabilities and others who are trying to figure out their sexuality.

Dickson says approximately 70 per cent of her customers are men, although she has not had any female clients come in by themselves to rent a doll.

"I've had young, physically attractive, normal looking people that you would think would have no need to find someone to entertain them," Dickson said. "It's curiosity."

Made out of thermoplastic rubber, the dolls weigh between 60 and 90 pounds and are between five and six feet tall. Each one costs Dickson between \$1,600 and \$3,500 to purchase and, of course, they each have names: Marriah,

Sadie, Zach and Chanel. Victoria is the newest addition to the group.

Indeed, whatever itch you may need scratched, Dickson has the doll or body type for you.

"You can get anything you want — whatever somebody's desire is, you can get that," she said.

Dickson uses antimicrobial soap to clean the dolls after each rental and has an internal camera just to be safe. Cleaning time usually last three hours a pop.

"You have to powder their skin with talcum powder to make sure there's a soft, realistic feel. And their hair and makeup have to be touched up again," she said.

Taking care of business

Dickson says her neighbours know about the business and are supportive, though she did face

some online criticism when her website launched. A 38-year-old mother of two kids aged two and six, Dickson tells her kids the dolls are just like mannequins seen in a department store — the only difference is that mommy just so happens to rent her mannequins out.

Dickson's last job was in management at a Walmart in Kamloops and before that, she ran a short-lived escort service.

Last summer's brouhaha over a sex doll brothel in Toronto — it never opened — was Dickson's sign that it was time to act in B.C. She lawyered up, made sure her idea was above board and now pays a \$196 annual licensing fee for a business that's designated as "rental of adult novelty items." Kamloops' business licence inspector Dave Jones said he and other city bureaucrats reached out to several

provincial health agencies when Dickson's application came up, but none had any regulations regarding sex doll businesses.

As such, House of Dolls has been legit since the day it opened on Dec. 5, 2018.

"The business is current and in good standing with the City of Kamloops," Jones told the *Courier*.

Two other similar business types were attempted in Toronto last year, but neither exist at this point. Rumours of a sex doll brothel in Vancouver — reportedly called Bella Dolls — made headlines late last year, but sources have told the *Courier* the business isn't currently operating and may not re-open. The *Courier* asked the company for comment, but received no response.

The city hasn't received any business licence applications from companies attempting to operate a sex doll brothel and no one contacted by the *Courier* could point to a similar business operating anywhere in Canada.

A city spokesperson also told the *Courier* Dickson's business model in Kamloops could not be replicated in Vancouver. Instead of operating out of her home, Dickson's business would be classified as an adult entertainment store — the city's zoning and licensing specs would require Dickson to set up shop in a commercial area. The license fee for such a business in Vancouver is \$375.

So to recap, hundreds of Dickson's customers have no problem with sex dolls, her neighbours say they're on board, the City of Kamloops is cool with them and, in theory, the City of Vancouver could be too.

What do we make of all this?

Doctor approved

Dr. Jessica O'Reilly makes a living travelling the world talking about sex and, like Dickson, she'll also be at the Naughty But Nice Sex Show this weekend.

In her line of work, O'Reilly helps couples and individuals get over the proverbial humps inhibiting their sex lives.

O'Reilly says sex dolls can help in any number of different scenarios: premature ejaculation, understanding one's sexuality or in situations where two partners have different libidos.

In other cases, it could simply be couples looking for a different type of spice that wasn't previously on the rack.

"If you have all party's consent, I believe you can do what suits you. I don't think an object or a specific piece of technology would be problematic," O'Reilly told the *Courier* by phone from a speaking engagement in Miami.

When O'Reilly is asked whether the dolls ruin our collective moral compass, she responds by adding two words to any of those hypothetical objections.

"Instead of saying 'it's too much,' what you're really saying is 'it's too much for me,'" O'Reilly said. "I don't think you want to assign your reactions, because those reactions are emotional, they're personal and they vary from person to person."

The Naughty But Nice Sex Show runs Feb. 8 to Feb. 10 at the Vancouver Convention Centre.

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