

Young, Fabulous & Self-Employed[®] Podcast

By YFS Magazine



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Guest: Laurie Davis, Founder of eFlirt and Author of Love @ First Click

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YFS Magazine: Hey, you guys. Welcome to the Young, Fabulous and Self-Employed Podcast. I'm your host, Erica Nicole. Here with me is eFlirtexpert.com founder, Laurie Davis. She's actually the "it" girl when it comes to online dating, a digital expert that helps online dating market their single selves. Laurie's also the author of Love @ First Click. She's a TEDx speaker. In the show today, you guys, we're going to talk about building your business through social media, landing a book deal, personal branding, working with a business coach, and scaling service-based businesses, and most importantly, the mindset shift that has to happen to bring it all together. Thanks so much for being here today, Laurie.

Laurie Davis: Thanks for having me.

YFS Magazine: Laurie, what most of our listeners don't know is that we met in 2011 when we featured you in YFS Magazine. I remember thinking your story was so amazing because 2 years earlier you had started your

business, eFlirtexpert.com, with \$50 and a Twitter account. What's the backstory there?

Laurie Davis:

Yeah, I really did start it with \$50 and a Twitter account. At the time, I was working in marketing. [00:02:00] I was a contractor. I had made a niche for myself managing large scale events, imagine 5,000 attendee user conferences. I really did all the marketing for it; managing the key messages, the keynote speaker, planning the content of the conference and the creative around it, too. While I loved doing that, it was a really tough transition during the recession for me, because my job was basically made obsolete. These companies that were having these huge events, just didn't have the budget for it anymore. The events were cancelled. Almost all of the events that I worked on were just outright cancelled, which means so was my contract. I felt a little stuck, because no one was having events like these when companies didn't have the budget for it. I actually don't even have a bachelor's degree. I really had nothing to fall back on either, except my experience.

I got inspired one day when one of my friends called me. He told me he was moving in with his girlfriend. I realized, oh my God. I helped you meet her on match.com. We talked about it for a while about how I helped him write his profile and gave him tons of advice, even once they got offline. He said, "Yeah, I wouldn't have this relationship if it weren't for your help." We talked through some of the things that were the most helpful for him that I had helped with. I realized that I have really helped so many of my friends. I had all these success stories of people I helped find love or get laid or whatever their goal was over the years, because I was an early adopter to online dating. I was just naturally the one that people came to for advice, because I was the one that had really honed this as a skill.

It was interesting to me to find this hidden [00:04:00] skill of mine; this secret, something that I'd been doing for years just out of goodwill for my friends and realized that it's quite a lot, marketing your single self. What if I applied everything I had been doing for Fortune 500 companies to people? Ultimately, you want to attract a specific audience with your profile, right? It's really the same thing I

was doing, just in a different way. Once I came up with this idea, I just got so excited about it, not only because maybe I could pay my rent by doing it, but also because wow, I could help people find love and really impact people's personal lives on such a deep level.

I started my business right there from my couch in my pajamas. I started brainstorming company ideas. I bought the domain eflirtexpert.com. I also bought a template website builder. The whole thing, the domain and the template builder website, costs me \$50. I opened a Twitter account and I just started tweeting.

YFS Magazine: That definitely seems simple enough, but I think we both know there's a bit of strategic thought behind it. For entrepreneurs that are listening to this podcast who are debating which social platform to focus on, can you shed some light onto why you chose Twitter?

Laurie Davis: Remember that this was 2009. Instagram wasn't really so much a thing back then. Facebook definitely was, but the truth is I had no idea what Twitter was. I knew that I could be strategic on Twitter with my marketing than I could on Facebook. On Twitter I could search certain hashtags and go find my customer. I would actually just jump in on their conversations.

YFS Magazine: That's great, Laurie. I think the key takeaway there [00:06:00] is that you strategically looked at what platform would help you best identify your customer. As you know, as we both know, every social platform has a very different demo and serves very different needs. I also learned through another interview that you did how you noted that you interacted in a way that was authentic. You didn't start to sell them; you started to create value. When you start to create real value, your brand becomes more valuable. I think that's a really important point.

Laurie Davis: Absolutely. I think that on social media, when you're marketing that way, it's really about giving. Something I started doing at the beginning was not only giving people little bits of personal advice when they'd asked questions or like I said just jumping in on random conversations, whether they like it or not, but also I had a tip of the day. Every day I gave one little tip in 140 characters. That

was something that people came to rely on. They came to want. I'd say the new school version of that is quotables on Instagram, which I do now too. Also, my policy from the very beginning has always been a little contrary to some other people on Twitter is that I follow almost everyone back.

YFS Magazine:

That's really interesting. I think that's really been a topic of debate for quite awhile; should you follow back on Twitter? For your business model it definitely is a strategy that works. The key takeaway there is, is that you're creating value on Twitter. You build trust, credibility, and ultimately you're converting. I think the struggle for small businesses that use social to build their business is the conversion aspect, right? Getting someone who's interested who is also an ideal customer to take that action which results in sales. Most entrepreneurs, if we're honest, aren't tweeting for their health. The end game is to provide solutions and move a person from prospect to satisfied customer, right? Tell me about your sales funnel. How do you move social followers from brand awareness to eflirtexpert.com clients?

Laurie Davis:

If we imagine [00:08:00] that I'm having a DM conversation with someone, because honestly, so much more of my Twitter happens through DM than it does what you see when you go to my Twitter profile. Though it starts there, but then that gets them thinking that maybe they should DM me. If we imagine having a conversation with someone, I point them to resources on our website. Maybe they're having trouble with the first date. I'll point them to a blog post about the first date or maybe they're like, "What can I do to get better matches?" I'll say, "You should subscribe to ..." We offer a free gift on our website to anyone who wants it. It's the free chapter of my book on messaging. People will be like, "Wow, this chapter's amazing." They begin to rely on the content. I'm just pushing them to free places on our site that give them a little bit of resources, it doesn't really take a lot of my time to point them to a blog post or an opt in or something like that. Then, they get into my normal funnel. It's also getting our site traffic. We get a lot of traffic through Twitter.

YFS Magazine: Laurie, that's a great point. As you know, I'm also a very big believer in content marketing. Using social to create value and leverage your content on the backend to drive awareness, trust, and credibility I think that's a really important factor.

Laurie Davis: Yeah. Something that I do too, when I'm launching something new, earlier this year we just launched our first group coaching program. Part of my strategy for promoting it was before I tweeted or did anything public promoting this, I went right to people that I knew I was tweeting with that would find this helpful.

YFS Magazine: What percentage of your sales revenue can be attributed to your social efforts on platforms like Twitter?

Laurie Davis: You know, I would honestly say it's probably about 25%.

YFS Magazine: That's a good number. That's not negligible [00:10:00] at all.

Laurie Davis: It's a huge part of our business. If I weren't doing that, to think that we would have 25% less revenue and clients, that's huge. If it's something that you're not doing right now, it's really a huge untapped resource. Sure, it takes time and it takes energy and it takes effort, but look, it's worth it.

YFS Magazine: Laurie, you also mentioned that throughout your journey you landed a book deal with a major publisher called, Love @ First Click. I love that title, by the way. Tell me how the book has contributed to the success and growth of your company.

Laurie Davis: The book converts. To be honest, I was a little nervous, because here I am writing the guide to online dating. The Ultimate Guide to Online Dating actually is the subtitle. I was a little nervous that people would read the chapter on how to write your profile and then maybe our eMakeover and Love at First Site services, which are profile writing services might not get as much play. We might lose revenue there, because people were able to fix their profile by reading a chapter. The truth is that people read that book, in particular that chapter, and they feel like, "Oh my gosh. There's no way I can do this myself. I need Laurie and her team." We get more [of these 00:11:24].

YFS Magazine: That's a really good point. By becoming a published author, not only did you get immediate press play, but it's also a really good long-term lead generation tool. By repurposing your content you can also drive your leads on the backend.

Laurie Davis: Yeah. I think there is no such thing as secrets. There should be no such thing as secrets, because the more you spread your advice when you're an expert like I am, they say, "Oh, wow! I need to work with your company."

YFS Magazine: That's a good point, too. Maybe some of our listeners are entrepreneurs who want to write and publish a book. [00:12:00] From my understanding, you got a pretty cool book deal. Tell me about that process.

Laurie Davis: I would recommend it to anyone, because I think that writing a book really is taking thought leadership to a next level. It just gives so much credibility in the eyes of your clients, in the eyes of the media. I did get a pretty cool book deal. I work with Atria. They're a division of Simon & Schuster, that's who published my book. The thing that I love about Atria, the reason why that was really the publishing house I wanted to be with was, because they support digital so much. Digital dating is what I do. I think that sometimes in the publishing space they're a little scared of digital. My book has a QR code on the back. They're very cool and tech savvy. It was a great mutual fit for us.

YFS Magazine: If I remember correctly, you worked with an agent in order to secure your book deal. What would you recommend to entrepreneurs that are looking to possibly get in touch with an agent? How would they go about that process?

Laurie Davis: There are probably people in your network that you know who have written books, right? The best thing to do is just to start by reaching out to them, other experts, other people who consider themselves thought leaders and who you admire. From there, if you can't get some connections of theirs, the best thing to do is to put together a bit of a proposal together yourself and shop that to agents. Your agent is most certainly going to help you adjust things once you start

working together, because like I said, agents really have an understanding of what publishers are looking for. I think that really starting within your networks is the best way to go about it.

YFS Magazine: Let's shift gears a bit. One of the things that you do really well as a thought leader in the relationship and dating space is personal [00:14:00] branding. What essential steps did you take in order to establish your brand?

Laurie Davis: When I started my brand, I didn't really know if it was going to be just me or if it would be a company. Today it's a company. I have other experts who work with me as well and I have a team who support me, but I didn't know that it was going to be that. The hardest part for me in branding, actually, was that transition from personal brand to company brand. The brand of mine has transitioned a lot over the years; even the look and feel of the brand has changed. Most recently we actually worked with an agency to help us with that. Previously I did it all on my own. Really, I think about branding from the perspective of my potential client. What does my potential client need from me? What are they going to get out of this relationship? Who might this person be? I really thought about it from the perspective of my potential client. Who is that person? What do they want to get out of a relationship with me? What can my brand bring to the table that's going to excite them? It wasn't just thinking about who are we or who am I, but really who is our ideal client and what's going to be attractive to them.

YFS Magazine: I'm glad you said that. By default, a lot of entrepreneurs first say to themselves, "How can I make more of me shine through in my personal brand?" At the end of the day a personal brand is not all about you, right? Your audience is always asking themselves, "What's in it for me? How are you meeting my pain points, my immediate needs?" A personal brand has to speak to that and take that approach from "me" to "we". I think that brands that speak to that do really, really well. [00:16:00]

Laurie Davis: Yeah. It's just like you're dating. If you think about it, if you were on a dating site and you were looking at someone's profile you wouldn't be saying ... you would be looking at it and saying, "What could a

relationship between the two of us look like? What could this person be like in my life?" That's what you're looking for and so it's really the same exact thing.

YFS Magazine: That's a really good point. I remember reading, actually, a study that suggests your online dating profile picture affects whether people trust you, the same goes for branding. If you're a man and you're giving me a duckface, I don't trust you. In the same way, your brand affects whether people trust you and want to do business with you. That's a really smart point when it comes to building a personal brand.

Laurie Davis: Absolutely.

YFS Magazine: Hold that thought. Let's take a quick break for a message from our sponsor. We'll be right back.

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YFS Magazine: Okay, I'm back with Laurie Davis the founder of eflirtexpert.com. Laurie, you mentioned that you ended up taking your personal brand and transitioning it into a more robust company brand. I think I read somewhere that a part of that strategic move was rethinking your strategy, where you recognized the need for a business coach. How did you decide, hey I need this and what has a business coach done for your business to date?

Laurie Davis: Oh my gosh! It's completely changed my company. At the time, what happened in my business is we have this service called the Concierge. With [\[00:18:00\]](#) our concierge service we basically manage your entire love life and coach you through all the relationships that develop, too. It's a very full service. We can only take on a handful of people at a time, because we really make your love life our full-time job. What happened was a great thing.

Suddenly I woke up one day and we were at max capacity, but we still had leads coming in. At one point we actually had a list of 35 people on our waitlist. I was like, "Oh my gosh. What are we doing? It's going to take us forever to get to all these people. Some of them hopefully won't be single by the time we're able to help them either." I knew that I had a problem. I just didn't know what to do about it. Immediately I thought about scaling, but the truth is I didn't want to get too big too fast. I didn't know if this kind of momentum was sustainable or if it was just a one-time thing. I had all these questions about scaling.

What I started to do, was I started to just talk to entrepreneur friends of mine, people who I knew who had scaled successfully and started talking to them about some of the things that they did that helped them. Along the way, also, ended up talking to a couple of business coaches. One of them took a look at me and I thought I was amazing at sales. I have like a 99% close rate. She looked at me and said, "Oh, honey. You're not charging enough. If you're closing that many clients, you're just not charging enough." I thought, "Oh, wow. She's so right." Of course if we're at max capacity and there really is a need for this, maybe she's right. When I looked at the numbers I realized [00:20:00] with some of these clients, we're losing money. We're not making a profit. We're not even breaking even. Oh my god. She's so right.

I started working with her. We 5Xed my prices, literally overnight. The next day I sold my first package at the new price. I had a lot of nerves going into working with her. I knew I needed her, because she was right; this was the problem. Paying for her in the meantime was still a challenge. Literally, overnight she paid for herself. Ever since then our brand and company has just grown so significantly. She's opened my eyes to new ways of doing things, lots of fears that she's helped me dispel and the way that I look at my business, too. Last year we actually nearly 3Xed our revenue.

YFS Magazine:

That's exciting, yeah. As you well know, especially since you're not in a low-margin business where you can make up for it in volume, that's the kiss of death for a service-based business; trying to operate

at low margins when in actuality your pricing may need some adjustments. That's a really interesting story.

Laurie Davis: Yeah, because it's just everything that we do is so time-intensive. That's the biggest challenge of it, but the impact that we make with people's love lives is just like, wow. We have 50 marriages and engagements so far in only just 6 years and a couple of babies running around even. The work that we do is so exciting, but we do need to make a profit here. It is a business. Balancing that is something that I've recognized and have become better at.

YFS Magazine: Yeah, you know, scaling in itself is not kid's play. Scaling a service-based business model is definitely not an easy feat when you compare [00:22:00] it to a product offering. Kudos to you on that. Tell me how you overcame the challenge of scaling a service-based company.

Laurie Davis: The challenge with scaling a service-based business, and by the way, you're right, a lot of people when I first started my business said, "Well, this isn't a company. This can only ever be you, because no one can do what you can do." I just refused to accept that. I thought a lot about how I could scale. The truth is, this is a very unique skill set to have, to help people with their digital dating lives. I thought about all of the components that go into what we do. There's a little bit of psychology. There's a lot of writing. There's just so many varied skills. You know who I got really inspired by? The business model that inspired me the most was yoga instructors. If you think about the way that they get trained, it is very cross-disciplinary. They have classroom work, but they also have practical work. I modeled the training for my team after yoga instructors.

YFS Magazine: I love how you leaned on the insight of another industry to fuel your growth.

Laurie Davis: You don't always have to recreate the wheel. I think that, of course, creating the way that this training works took a lot of creativity, but there's inspiration all around us. It might not come specifically from your industry, but I think it's really important to look at what other

models work for people and how you can apply that to your own business, too.

YFS Magazine: Looking at other business models across industries is a great way to fuel more creativity in your own, especially in an industry that is possibly underdeveloped or stuck in a "we've always done it this way" type of thinking. Most would say that actually requires a mind shift. How [00:24:00] did your mind have to change in order to meet new challenges that came along with scaling your business?

Laurie Davis: I feel like my mindset ... gosh, I feel like it's shifted once a year to pivot along with my business and grow along with my business. Really, when I first started my company, everyone thought I was crazy. No one really believed that this was going to work. I had some friends who were supportive and my family was supportive, but there were also a lot of haters. There were people who said, "Well, you're not really an expert." or "Why do you think people need help in their online dating profiles? That's crazy." This idea was insane to people.

In the beginning, I really used the haters to fuel my success. I actually was dating a guy at the time. He thought I was certifiable. All those little things that happened in the beginning that are so exciting, he was just ... he didn't even want to hear it. One time we ended up at a party one night and everyone was like, "Hey, so what do you do?" I was like, "Oh god. Here we go. I get to talk about the point of contention between the two of us." I kind of mumbled, "Oh you know, I'm an online dating coach. I help people write their profiles and educate them on online dating." Everyone was like, "What? Wow." He was like, "Yeah, yeah. That's brilliant." I was like, "What? Okay. Nope. Time for us to breakup! Nope you're not going to work for me."

I think initially the haters really fueled me. I find that, honestly, if I'm being really honest with myself fear is what holds me back a lot. For me, recognizing the fear and figuring out what the fear is, once I can figure it out [00:26:00] then I can push myself forward and I can get rid of it and unblock myself.

In particular, I had this group coaching program that I came up with this concept two years ago. For an entire year, I told myself things like, "Well, I don't know that I can really make an impact on people in a group instead of one-on-one, because I've only ever done one-on-one. That's what I'm comfortable with. That's how I make the biggest impact. I don't know if people will really know that they need this. I think they need this, but will they know that they need this?" I told myself all these things that held me back. I ended up creating this massive to do list for launching that just seemed so impossible and unreasonable that there was absolutely no way I could ever accomplish it. Every time I went back to that to do list, I was like, "Oh, I can't do any of this. I don't have time for this." I just kept putting it on the backburner, but really once I realized that I was afraid and that it was really just fear of not succeeding with this program and not changing people's lives.

YFS Magazine: That's a really critical point; what are you afraid of? I personally think that the quickest way to overcome fear is to take action, even at the smallest level. Everything you want in business is on the other side of your fear.

Laurie Davis: Yeah. Look, when you're an innovator there is no standard set. We can only do what we think is good for our clients, for our market.

YFS Magazine: That's great advice, Laurie. When talking about taking leaps and massive action, how have those leaps turned out for you? What is your best success story so far?

Laurie Davis: There's so many. I think the reason why I wake up every morning is to help people find love. Some of our clients just want to get back out there dating-wise, but really it [00:28:00] definitely is the love that fuels me. We have 50 marriages and that's so amazing. I am so humbled by that.

YFS Magazine: That's awesome. What you started as seemingly a very basic service has morphed into a business with a higher purpose. We actually talk about that in YFS Magazine; [how to build a higher purpose business model](#). Essentially, it equips you to be more effective and positively

impact humanity in a really big way. I think that's really commendable.

Laurie Davis: Thanks.

YFS Magazine: There's so much I'd love to dive deeper into. You've shared a lot of small business advice, Laurie that I know our listeners can act on. Much of this is about working smarter. Tell me this, what resources, apps, tools help you work smarter, lead the way, and serve your customers?

Laurie Davis: Oh my gosh. Well, as a digital dating coach you can imagine I am all into the digital solution for my business. We use Podio. It's one of my favorite tools. It's basically a customizable dashboard for you. It's not just CRM. It's not just a task management tool. It's really everything that you would need to collaborate with your team all in one place. Also, really helps us with managing every moment of our clients' time with us. Whether it's when their package started and all those details or whether it's what happened on their latest date, everything is happening in this one space for us. It was completely customizable.

Another tool I love is called Boomerang. Boomerang actually let's you send a message at a later time. Imagine it's midnight and you're working, but maybe you don't want someone to reply at midnight or know that you sent a message at midnight. You can schedule it to go out the next morning instead.

The last tool that I love is by HubSpot and it's called Sidekick. [00:30:00] Sidekick basically allows you to track every time someone opens your email or clicks on a link within your email. It's really great, I find, if I have to send some tough advice to a client that I'm not really sure how they're going to take it, it's a bit sensitive, or maybe it's a sales conversation that I'm having. I can literally watch my client think about it, because I can see; they open it, they opened it again, they opened it again, they clicked on the link.

YFS Magazine: Those are great tips. I'm actually writing a few of those down. I didn't know about Boomerang or Sidekick. All right! Let's wrap this

up, Laurie. What's one piece of advice our listeners can use in the next 24 hours to improve their business?

Laurie Davis: Social has just been so important to growing my business. Now, we use a lot more than Twitter, but Twitter still really is our main way to get new customers. If there's one thing I can encourage you to do in the next 24 hours is to take action on social, whether it is Facebook or Instagram or Twitter. Whatever it is that you think is going to resonate with your customer the most, go find them and talk to them.

YFS Magazine: That's great, Laurie. Incredible advice. We've covered a lot of topics that are really relevant to our listeners. Thank you so much for joining us.

Laurie Davis: You're welcome. Thanks for having me.

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