

Young, Fabulous & Self-Employed® Podcast

By YFS Magazine



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Episode: 002 – June 1, 2015

Guest: Jennifer Berson, Founder and President of [Jeneration PR](#)

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YFS Magazine: Hey, you guys. Welcome to the Young, Fabulous and Self-Employed podcast. I'm your host, Erica Nicole.

All right. Here with me today is Jen Berson. She is the founder of Los Angeles based Jeneration PR. That's Jeneration with a J, you guys. She specializes in PR for baby, beauty and lift style brands. Several interesting facts about Jen that you might not know is that she's a former lawyer turned entrepreneur, a wanderlust and a busy mom running a successful PR agency.

Sit back, relax, grab a latte you guys. You're going to really like this show because we're going to talk everything PR, startups, the reality of being a mompreneur and how to build a beautiful brand.

Thanks so much for being here, Jen.

Jennifer Berson: Thanks for having me, Erica. I loved that introduction. That's great. Thank you.

YFS Magazine: Absolutely. Tell the listeners a little bit about how you got started with Jeneration PR.

Jennifer Berson: Well, there's a long version and a short version. I'll try to keep it short. As you said, I was practicing law in Los Angeles. I had been practicing about four years. I discovered this fragrance line, [while traveling] after I took the Bar. When I ran out of this beautiful perfume I tried to buy some more for myself and also for Mothers' Day. I tracked down this company. It was really hard to find them. Lo and behold, the company was based in California. I thought to myself, "I found this fragrance in Europe. I can't get it anywhere in California. Everybody loves it. Surely, there has to be a way to get this company more sales and more visibility in California."

I contacted the owner and I said, "Let me help you. Let me get your products to celebrities. Let me tell the media about it. Let me introduce you to some key retailers that would make great partners for you. I said, "Just send me a big box of products, free products and I will help you promote it."

I can't believe it but this woman actually said, "Yes," and shipped me this huge, beautiful box of lotions and perfumes. It was the best day ever. I got this box in my office. I closed the door and tore threw the box. I just had such a vision in my mind for where this brand should be, who we should send it to and how to get it in the press. I got my very first press mention in "In Touch Magazine" in the Buzz column.

The results were so immediate for this brand. They saw increased sales right away. They had retailers knocking down their door trying to carry the brand. It felt so great to be able to have such a positive and strong impact on a company. I thought to myself, "I did this for free for this woman but if I can get paid at doing this, this will be the greatest job ever." That was basically how I got my start.

YFS Magazine: I think that it's interesting that you stumbled upon being an entrepreneur. While you were working as a civil litigation attorney, you stumbled upon a product that really made sense to you that you

were passionate about. You then became proactive. Tell me this. At the point when you discovered this brand, did you say to yourself, "Hey, I actually want to be an entrepreneur," or did the entrepreneurship come later on after the results?

Jennifer Berson: The entrepreneurship came a bit later. I really felt a connection to this specific product but I also realized that my personality, my interests, my creativity wasn't best matched for law. I feel like after I was no longer practicing, I started to realize that law and my legal career felt more like a job than a career. It just felt like I was going through the motions day to day. It never really felt extremely comfortable. I felt like there was a big side of myself that wasn't fully being engaged or being able to express in my job as a attorney.

The path to this career, it felt so much more natural and so much more organic, it almost made sense to me that the risk was not a huge risk. Taking that leap and leaving law in order to start this business felt very good and very organic. I knew I would love doing this job and I would work as hard as I needed to in order to make it work. Also, at the time, the economy wasn't bad. It was a really great, booming economy in 2004, 2005 and it didn't feel like a huge risk.

I always felt like I could go back to law. It wasn't that scary to take that leap because I always had a really great career to fall back on if this didn't work out. Fortunately, ten years later, I am going forward stronger than ever so I don't believe I'll ever have to go back to law. The entrepreneurial side came after I figured out what this career would look like and realized it was a great fit for me and my personality.

YFS Magazine: I think a good key point there is that you've really beat all the odds, right? You've survived your first year in business, your first five years in business and now you're on year ten. That in itself is extremely commendable. For our listeners that are possibly saying to themselves, "Hey, I want to transition, I want to take that leap," what were the steps that you took in order to build your business and transition from being an employee to an entrepreneur?

Jennifer Berson:

Well, the steps that I took at the beginning were pretty simple and pretty lean. Actually, my father is an entrepreneur. He has his own business. He's a car broker. I always saw him making decisions that were as lean as possible. He never really got an expensive office space. He didn't really spend a lot of money on growing his business until he really had to.

I took his lead. To this day I still work from home. I have a really wonderful home office space, a dedicated space that I feel very inspired to work in. I chose all of my decisions to start the business in order to keep my costs down so that I could pass on the savings to clients and keep our retainers low in order to maintain that competitive advantage.

Some of the steps that I took were creating a really beautiful, memorable brand identity that made me stand out and really represented who I was and that I was proud to give in meetings. I created a logo and my company name, Jeneration, which was a reflection of my name. I created these beautiful business cards that I felt proud to hand out when I met with people.

After about a year or so, once we had a little bit of work under our belt that we could showcase on a website, I developed a really cool website. At the time, it was very cutting edge. It was all in Flash which now we know is not the way to go with a website. It was a really beautiful, branded site that had a great showcase of the work that we had accomplished already for our clients. We found it very challenging in the beginning to create a website which is a very visual medium that showcased a service because we were providing a service.

It took a little bit of time to develop the look and feel that felt right for us and wasn't stuffy and was different than anything else out there. I did it on a shoestring budget. I worked in trade with a designer who helped me create the brand identify and my overall branding suite. Then I worked with a programmer who worked for me freelance on nights and weekends and was able to get that site done for a couple of thousand dollars. It probably could have been done even cheaper now. I was really proud of it when it was all

done. Those key decisions at the beginning were creating a brand and a firm agency feel rather than just being a freelancer, I think really helped establish our reputation and helped me be able to charge agency rates versus freelance rates.

YFS Magazine: There are several key takeaways there.

A. You decided to run lean and mean. You're proof that you can fund big ideas with lean pockets. Today that means crowdfunding, peer to peer lending, online lenders like Funding Circle, you name it. Ultimately, start where you are with what you have.

B. You also recognized the importance of building a beautiful brand. We'll talk more about that later. You do a really good job with that.

C. You sought the right partnerships from day one instead of taking it on a loan.

Let's switch gears. As a seasoned PR specialist, I'm sure you've seen it all. What is the biggest mistake that startups make when it comes to PR?

Jennifer Berson: Well, this may sound like somewhat of a self serving statement, but I think that the brands that consider PR as an ongoing investment get the best results. The brands that come to us and say they just want a three month launch campaign, a little quick shot in the arm, they're really going to end up missing a lot of opportunity by not seeing all of their efforts through and continually reaching out to the media with new product launches and new pitch angles.

We get some brands that come to us and they'll say, "Well, we launched the product six months ago so we hired a budget agency that told us that they could help launch the product for a flat rate. We were lumped together with some other brands and a group pitch. We really saw no results from that." I think that's a huge mistake. I think your best opportunity to get noticed by the media is when you're new, you're fresh and you're the brand new kid on the block. You want to take full advantage of that.

Really the brands that have the best success are the ones that consider PR as an ongoing expense and they're continually coming

back to the media to talk about their brand, new product launches and new pitching goals.

YFS Magazine: Essentially, startups that make PR a necessity versus a nice to have win the PR game, right? To that point, the problem for many early stage startups that are bootstrapped is this, "We have a very limited budget but we still want to make an impact. How should we go about working with a PR agency when we've got really lean budgets?"

Jennifer Berson: We approach all of our clients as partners. If we really believe in a brand, we're going to find a way to make it work with them. If we have a company that's lean because they're in startup phase, I totally understand. I'm an entrepreneur. I see that budgets are lean and you have to do the best you can do to keep your budget tight. We're willing to work with brands that we believe in for a long term relationship.

If you're a startup and you need the right PR partner, it's worth your time to ask for a long-term relationship where you start out small and grow with the agency. A lot of agencies are willing to do that. You want somebody really hungry and you want somebody really eager to help see your brand succeed.

Another way that we work in that space with startups is we work on a fee and equity split. We have a vested interest in seeing our partnerships with these brands succeed because we take a vested interest in their company. That's worked out for us with some of these other startups that have come our way that we believe in but their budgets are limited. We want to work with them because we believe in them.

I'd say to a startup, ask for what you need, ask for what you're able to provide. Understand that you're paying for a service that is very time consuming. You're paying for value. You're paying for relationships. If you allow that partner to come on board as more than just a service provider but as an actual partner by giving them possibly equity in the company or asking them to start out small, then after about six months re-evaluate and offer them a bit more of

a monthly retainer, you probably can have a partner that will actually be more invested in seeing your company succeed.

YFS Magazine: I think that's really good advice. I think for listeners that are saying, "Okay. That sounds like a really good idea. Let me go on my search for a PR partner." What's the top thing that entrepreneurs should look for in their PR partner? Maybe there are one or two things.

Jennifer Berson: The best way to find a great agency is through referrals. Ask around. Ask for recommendations from people you trust. Also look at some brands that you believe in and brands that you feel are similarly aligned with your company whether it's the marketplace, the contacts that would be interested in your product but also be interested in these other brands. See the quality of the work that these agencies have done. Look at their body of work in your space. Ensure that the contacts are there, the expertise is there and the understanding of the industry that you're trying to break into is there.

Definitely do your homework. Ask really good questions. You want to understand how the agency is going to report results to you. How are you going to communicate with them? How often are you going to hear from them? What can you reasonably expect in a certain period of time, in the first month, in the first three months, in the first six months? Be very wary of an agency that over promises and will very likely under deliver. You want someone to set your expectations very realistically. Be careful of an agency that's going to promise you the sun, moon and stars because we can never really do that. No matter how great our relationships are, we just never really know what the results are going to be. We can easily predict to some degree but we can't guarantee anything.

I don't care who your best friend is at what outlet, we can never guarantee that something's going to run unless it's physically in your hands. Be very cautious and careful to choose a partner that's going to be realistic with you and set your expectations in a way where you feel comfortable that you know what you're going to be getting and you know when you're going to be getting it.

YFS Magazine: All right. I think that's excellent advice, Jen. We're actually at a really good pivot point right now so let's take a quick break for a message from our sponsor and we'll be right back.

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YFS Magazine: All right, so you guys, we're back. I'm here with Jen Berson. She's the founder of Jeneration PR. We're talking everything PR, startups, the realities of being a mompreneur and how to build a beautiful brand.

Earlier in the segment, Jen, you shared some great advice on how you got started in PR, how to approach PR with a limited budget, and what to look for in a PR partner. All that hard work is useless if you've got a bad brand. You, yourself, Jen, have built a first rate brand experience. Tell us a little bit about how you created the Jeneration PR brand.

Jennifer Berson: Well, thank you so much for that. I really love hearing that. We are actually in our second iteration of the brand identity, the brand look and feel. The brand that we launched with was great. It served us really well for about seven, eight years. I created a site like I mentioned before in Flash. I was actually unable to update it on the back-end by myself. Strangely enough, I had a site that wasn't current for about four or five years. I couldn't add any new press mentions. It was so frustrating because I had all of these great results I wanted to share.

My programmer disappeared. He ended up not being able to update my site for me. I was never able to add our new work. I felt like I was missing some great opportunities to share the results we had gotten in, in turn be able to grow my business based on what we had already accomplished for our clients.

The brand identity itself was also very girly, very feminine, a little bit useful. At the beginning, I was pretty focused on fashion. Over time I realized that my real interests were the baby industry and the beauty industry. I geared away from fashion and I felt like our logo, our branding and our website had to reflect that pivot, as you say.

About a year and a half ago, we did another re-branding. I wanted a very strong brand identity, but as gender neutral as possible so that we weren't going to be turning away any opportunities because it was a little bit too feminine or too girly. We designed a new logo that was just very crisp. It was just a very simple typeface logo. I didn't want a fanciful mark because I felt like maybe in a year or two it wouldn't look current. We kept it very simple. We used our results to build out the site itself. We have a presence online, whether it's social media, the website or videos we're sharing on YouTube, all have a very similar look and feel and infuse that same branding.

One thing that I've come to realize—especially because I'm busy with the business and with my family—is I don't have a ton of time to create new content for every single platform. We've found a lot of value in repurposing. I'll write an article for LinkedIn and we'll repurpose it for the blog on the website. I will post some pro tips for Instagram and we'll share the same content on Facebook. We're altering it ever so slightly for each platform to make it optimized for that platform but we're getting a lot more mileage out of that great content that we're writing by repurposing it for each platform and not trying to reinvent the wheel.

YFS Magazine:

Jen, that's a really interesting point. I think that's a really good takeaway there is that you first started by creating a cohesive brand. I don't know about you, but there's nothing worse than seeing a brand, especially with an online brand presence, that has multiple brand personalities. When you see their Facebook page, their Twitter page and their Insta—everything looks very different. Even possibly, when you go to their website, it looks very different. I think good brands do brand cohesiveness very well. They tell a consistent story. I love that point.

To that, you also spoke a lot about building your brand through social media and taking your content and repurposing it. A lot of entrepreneurs may feel like, just like you said, "I don't have time to create all this content." The key is to build content that you can easily repurpose and build additional shelf life. I think those are really excellent points. For entrepreneurs that are looking to build their brand through social media, what's your number one key takeaway tip there?

Jennifer Berson:

Entrepreneurs should take a look at the various platforms out there and decide which platform makes the most sense for their brand and really invest in one platform. It's very challenging to grow a strong presence or huge following in every single platform.

For example, if you're going to jump into Facebook ... I think Facebook is great, but it's no longer a free area. It's definitely pay to play for marketers. If you're going to invest in Facebook, you have to pay to grow your presence. Then you have to pay to market to your followers because they're not going to always see the content that you're putting out. There's value in that. If you invest in growing your presence and then you pay to promote your content when you have some kind of a promotion or a discount or some way to push people to buy through that initiative, it's definitely worth it. We do see great ROI on our paid Facebook campaigns.

I think, to really grow your presence you choose the platform that makes the most sense for you. Right now, Periscope is really hot; which is live, streaming content. There is Vine and YouTube. Brands have seen huge growths from these various outlets. Really, for me, I love Instagram. I think it's beautiful. I think it's really easy to update. It's great to get engagements. It's pretty pure at the moment so there's basically one outbound link opportunity through your link and your profile. Other than that, it's all about beautiful images, engaging content.

Brands that approach Instagram like it's a magazine and create content that has a very consistent look and feel that reflects their brand, reflects the content of their target customer would be interested in seeing—those brands are doing the best job on

Instagram. It's a really pure, fun platform for brands and marketers at the moment. It could change just like Facebook is always changing and we know Facebook owns Instagram. For the time being, I think Instagram is a great way to invest.

In order to grow your following there, you have to be engaged. You have to be liking and commenting on images that you see, follow hashtags that relate to your content and see what other people are posting or engaging with that hashtag. It's really easy to create your own hashtag on Instagram and get your customers to share their content with your brand through your own hashtag. It's just a really fun, great medium. I think that brands that take the time to invest on Instagram right now have the best opportunity for growth and the best opportunity for engagement.

YFS Magazine: I'm right there with you. One thing good brands do well on social media is going beyond the product. They're tapping into consumer insights to extend into lifestyle branding. Customers can say to themselves, "What does my life look like when I connect with, use, benefit from this brand?" You do a really good job with that. What's a must have tip that you personally use to build a lifestyle brand that supports your bottom line business?

Jennifer Berson: Social media is about sharing. You're going to want to share to the extent that you're comfortable with. You're going to want to share tidbits about your life, the behind the scenes goings on of your company. For me, it's also sharing a little bit about my family and my kids because we really are focused on this mompreneur approach. I feel like a lot of our potential clients, our potential customers are also entrepreneurial moms. In order to share a bit about myself and my family, what really it means to be a working mom, how the crazy day looks or how I wrap up my evening after my kids go to bed, what we're doing to unwind, relax and have fun, all of that gives a glimpse into my business, my life and what it's like to work with me. It's really helped to grow my brand by having people feel comfortable, almost like they already know me or they know what I'm all about.

I share the same tips with my clients that they can give the lifting of the veil to their business. What's behind the curtain? What happens as they're developing products? What happens in the office that makes it a fun place to work? It allows potential customers to feel connected to that brand in a deeper way than they do by reviewing a polished, finished advertisement, a finished promotional piece or just a website presence.

It's all about honesty, natural engagements and giving this exposed behind-the-scenes insider approach and insider perspective on a company. The brands that do the best job of that have the most loyal customers and the most excited customers. Your most engaged customers end up being your biggest brand evangelists. Give a little behind the scenes. Look at what happens with your company, who works there, what it's like to work there, how you develop your products and you'll see such great engagement with your super fans by doing that.

YFS Magazine: Speaking of behind the scenes, Jen, you mentioned that you're also a mompreneur. Tell us what it's really like to run a business and be a full time mom.

Jennifer Berson: It's crazy. It's amazing. It really is amazing. I am so fortunate to do what I do. Definitely looking back on the past I was on, being a lawyer, I realize looking around that there wasn't a role model that I could look up to and say, "Okay, that woman has everything that I want. She's a partner in a law firm. She's a wife and a mother, and sees her children, goes to their sporting events, picks them up from school and she's PTA president. That's what I want." I just looked around and I didn't see that. I felt like the path wasn't right for me and I wouldn't ever get where I wanted to go if I went down that path.

Now, I'm so fortunate because it is crazy and it's super busy. I would say there isn't perfect balance. I don't believe that balance is possible. I think that you focus on what needs your attention at the moment and you do the best you can do and try not to allow yourself to feel guilty. Running my own business, I think really sets a great example for my children. My husband has his own company,

too. They see Mommy and Daddy we're hustling and we're working extremely hard. We are the ones that reap the rewards of our hard work because they're our own businesses.

It's a constant juggle and shuffle and hustle but I wouldn't have it any other way. It's extremely rewarding. I am very fortunate to have a career that I love and to be able to do it on my terms and be there for my children when they need me. It's crazy but it's incredible.

YFS Magazine: I think that's an excellent point. Doing business and living life on your own terms. That, I think, is the ne plus ultra. That is the thing that every single entrepreneur wants to be able to achieve to have that independence in life and business. Along with independence also comes hard-won lessons. Tell me, what's the hardest lesson that you've learned being in business so far?

Jennifer Berson: It is such a great path to go down, but you're absolutely going to work harder than you ever have in your whole life. It's like you just can't shut it off. You can't sleep at night because your mind is going a million miles an hour. You just get up out of bed and you don't shut it off. You work harder than ever. It's so worth it.

The hardest lesson has been learning when to say no. No is a complete sentence. You shouldn't have to make excuses for why you're saying no. Your time is extremely valuable, especially when you have children because your time is limited. Before I had children, I've had my business for ten years. I've had five years of learning my company before I became a mom and five years now that I am a mom. I realized I have to say no and I have to be okay with it. Saying no is your best tool for time management. Be comfortable with knowing that no is a complete sentence and you don't have to justify why you're passing on opportunities.

YFS Magazine: Absolutely. It's very trendy to say yes. For an entrepreneur, if you're always saying yes, you become very time poor and eventually very unsuccessful. You spread yourself way too thin. In contrast, successful entrepreneurs are not a mile wide and an inch deep, right? They drill down into what's truly important. Speaking of success, what apps and tools help you achieve it?

Jennifer Berson: The best thing that we did recently that has helped tremendously with productivity is transitioning our email over a Google Apps, for Google business. So, I run my Jeneration PR email through Google. It functions like a Gmail account. We're using Slack to communicate with my team. I have a whole team of social media strategists that are executing on social media strategy who are our clients and also for Jeneration PR. We communicate on Slack. I can see on my iPhone when they are sharing a file with me. I can see that same content seamlessly in real time on my computer as well.

My third tool that I love so much is Wunderlist because like you, I'm a list maker. I create overall big goals for my company and for myself. In order to move those goals forward, it doesn't help just to write the goal down. I have to actually break it down in its meaningful tasks. If I can think of three tasks that I can do today that'll move the overall goal forward, that's what I put on my to-do list. It's not the goal itself but the tasks that are going to move me closer to accomplishing that goal. Ever since I've been doing that, I have been way more productive.

YFS Magazine: I love that productivity tip, Jen. That's a really smart one right there. I think that's something that we do, a lot of us do, by default but don't realize that sometimes it's not an obvious step, right? I know especially what you mentioned like the collaboration, the productivity tools, those are a game changer. I literally don't know how we'd get anything done without tools like Slack. For us we use Asana and that in itself is a great collaboration project management tool.

You're managing so many details as an entrepreneur, that if you don't have those systems in place like you mentioned, like Slack and the app which I did not know about Wunderlist.

Jennifer Berson: Wunderlist, yeah.

YFS Magazine: To make that happen, your business becomes significantly harder and more challenging to run.

Jennifer Berson: That's right. To be able to collaborate and have that all sync effortlessly it just has made such a huge impact on our productivity around here.

YFS Magazine: Absolutely. We're all about productivity around here too. I love those tips. Good stuff!

YFS Magazine: Thank you so much, Jennifer, for sharing your story. Your advice is priceless. Great talk.

Jennifer Berson: Thank you so much, Erica. It's been such a pleasure chatting with you.

YFS Magazine: Absolutely. You guys to learn more about Jen visit JenerationPR.com – that's Jeneration with a “J”. For more fresh, provocative and insanely addictive business know how visit yfsmagazine.com. As always, have a successful and productive week ahead. Thanks for listening.

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