

Natasha Nelson Interview | Yogurtini Founder Blazes the Way for Young Entrepreneurs

19. May, 2010



Hi Everybody,

I'm pleased to introduce to you a fantastic young entrepreneur whose hugely successful and rapidly expanding business in frozen yoghurt is taking the US by storm. Meet Natasha Nelson of **Yogurtini** – Natasha and her popular and creative company are based in Southern California, the perfect location for an entrepreneur who best describes herself as “**a true beach girl**” and who is constantly inspired by the youthful and creative culture of the south west's famous beaches.

Natasha and the company are a persistent advocate for good ingredients and good causes, including helping out in the Haiti earthquake. She also took care of her terminally ill mother in Arizona and still found time to work at night. Honored in the “**Top 35 entrepreneurs under 35**” by the Arizona Republic & AZ Magazine in March 2010, a keen traveler and always pushing forward with a drive to learn, innovate and lead the market.

Natasha Nelson is one of the most inspiring female entrepreneurs we have ever interviewed at RetireAt21.com and I just love her tip for coping with setbacks:

Get up, dry your tears, move forward, lose the baggage and learn from your mistakes

Enjoy the interview and let us have your comments.

-Michael

Natasha Nelson

I have always been an entrepreneur since I was a child. I think it is in my blood, my mom was also an entrepreneur. I love creating a business that focuses on something I am passionate and excited about, watching it grow and working with my staff to create fun and motivating projects for everyone. Business can be an art. One friend calls me the “business artist”. I love that!

I can't honestly say that money doesn't motivate me, but not for all the reasons people may think. I just returned from Haiti after the earthquake with 40 doctors, nurses and EMT's. After a trip like that your heart changes. Money can go a long way in a third world country, especially after a disaster. My sister and I have a heart for Haiti, Sudan and many parts of Africa. Yogurtini has worked with the community and many philanthropic companies and raised thousands of dollars from everything to Parkinsons research to raising funds for prosthetics for an ASU student who lost her leg in Haiti when a building collapsed on her, she now is rock climbing with her new prosthetic.

I'm always inspired by my sister's perfectly cool blend of funky style with a combination of being the brainiest and having the keenest street smarts that would be completely obscure to any stranger that meets her...and most importantly, God's grace when you know you have really messed up.



Natasha in Haiti

Natasha Nelson Interview – Yogurtini Founder Inspires Young Entrepreneurs

1) You founded self-serving frozen yogurt company Yogurtini – what drew you to this unusual niche market?

My sister and I have been frozen yogurt fanatics since we were kids. We were both living in CA but in different cities, we were always visiting different yogurt shops and texting each other when we would find a new flavor we liked. When we would return home to Arizona to visit family

and friends we were not satisfied with the choices we had. We had the same idea at the same time, which we often do. So, I wrote up a business plan, we started researching, became yogurt experts after a year and Yogurtini was launched.

2) Yogurtini is expanding across the U.S. – with a healthy profit. What has allowed you to grow so quickly in such a short space of time?

We were surprised how quickly we were profitable. It always comes down to having the best yogurt in town, we hear it over and over. After 944 Magazine readers voted us “Best place to chill”, College Affair voted us “Best Sweet Spot” and we were nominated in The Phoenix New Times for “Best Frozen Yogurt” we knew we had hit the mark. Our reputation was spreading like wildfire and within a few months we had many offers from investors who saw potential in our business and people asking about franchising. After about 9 months of going through the franchise registration process we have hit the ground running.

3) What next for Yogurtini? Where do you see the business in say 5 years time?

Our franchising program has started off so well I honestly wouldn't be surprised to see us with 100-300 stores in the next five years nationally. We have the team, inspiration and personal drive to make this happen.

4) Yogurtini is about fun and eating. I notice that there's also a big focus on healthy eating. How do you and your team keep on top of fashion trends in this industry?

I've always considered myself a newshound and no one can beat me at Trivial Pursuit's Pop Culture edition. I read the Wall Street Journal and Teen Vogue. Been doing it since I was 14 and my mom got me a subscription for both.

I also keep my nose in the yogurt gossip and believe we have created some of the trends that some of the other larger shops are following us on. My sister has made some amazing flavors partnering up with companies like Sambazon who brought the Acai' berry from the Ambazon. Soon after, we saw Acai' yogurt being offered by our competitors. We have a few new things up our sleeves as well, which I can't share with you yet! We also like to get CRAZY. Sriracha hot sauce and yogurt covered pop rocks are two of our most popular toppings...you aren't gonna find that at TCBY, Red Mango or Pinkberry.

5) Do you have any recommended strategies for getting customers who buy once to come back and buy from you again – other than of course good service?

Yogurtini is almost a lifestyle. Our brand reflects the lifestyle of those who want to eat healthy, have fun, want to create their own treat and most of all get away into a fun environment for a few minutes, enjoy your yogurt and listen to some great tunes. When you find a favorite, you keep coming back.

6) How does your physical shop market itself online? I see you're a Twitter and Facebook user; how important is it to use these sites to reach your audience?

If you aren't using Facebook and Twitter you are way behind. Our “Twitter Tuesdays” have become somewhat infamous at our Tempe location near Arizona State University students. I am

always working on the next online marketing tool. Study, study, study.

7) Do you have any suggestions for coping with set-backs, negative experiences?

Get up, dry your tears, move forward, lose the baggage and learn from your mistakes; and my personal favorite “fake it ‘til you make it”. All easier said than done...but sounds good, huh? That is what I try to do.

8) How do you keep your business focus – Do you have any suggestions for entrepreneurs who are experiencing challenging times?

It's not easy for me right now, just like everyone else. I have a lot of distractions in my personal and professional world. I don't rush what I don't have to; I work when I have the motivation and that next “big idea”. Sometimes I am not able to focus for a week...then the next week I wake up in the middle of the night with an idea and I can't stop working on it for a month. Is that manic? I don't know if it's healthy but it works for me. I have worked for myself for almost seven years now. I think a lot of entrepreneurs go through that. Most of my friends and family work for themselves, so I'm surrounded by other entrepreneurs with similar experiences.

9) What people do you look up to and model yourself on?

That is easy, my mom. She was a workaholic. I am not, but she taught me a good work ethic. There wasn't a day she didn't work on something while I was growing up whether it was her career, her masters degree or her other businesses she started. She had a very level head when it came to business. I try to be more like her everyday and find myself thinking “What would my mom do?” – I can't leave out my father, he has such a great demeanor with people and engaging people in a conversation where you feel like the only person in the world he cares to listen to at that moment, there is no one who doesn't like my father. I like to think my business partners and employees enjoy me as a person as well, if they do, I owe that to my dad.

One of my first bosses when I worked for an Advertising and PR agency deserves a shout out too, Shawn Buckley. He was young and likeable but we had a respect for him and just a wee bit of fear. I never missed a deadline working for Shawn. I also never missed a party he would throw. He taught me a lot on how to manage people without losing your temper but getting a big point across you wouldn't ever forget. I also knew I could knock on the door and talk to him as a friend. Plus, he had class. I hope my employees and partners say that about me one day.

10) Do you have any favourite business or related books that you can recommend to other entrepreneurs?

I love to read but it's not always the business books that inspire me. For instance, I just read one of Chelsea Handlers books and it was hilarious, it put me in the best mood. I felt creative and so motivated after that read! I read ‘Gone With the Wind’, my classic favorite I try to read every few years, and suddenly took on the spirit of Scarlet, she had gusto and a no holds barred, “I won't take anyone's crap attitude” – But, if I need to know about a specific subject I do my research. If I am hiring a consultant, you bet I want to speak their language and sound like I know what I am talking about. I am also a huge advocate of public relations and publicity. The best book I read on that was ‘The Fall of Advertising and Rise of PR’ by Al Ries. Every entrepreneur should read that one. I have a few other books that have helped me in the yogurt industry but those are on

my secret shelf.

11) What is the best advice you have ever been given?

Personally, a prayer my father gave me during a hard time about accepting things I cannot change and changing the things I can. I believe it is called the serenity prayer. In business, my mom always repeated “don’t let them cheat you”. Maybe that was from a bad experience she had and my sister and I would roll our eyes, but we always remember she probably knows better so we check, check, check. Check your books! Check backgrounds on people you work with!

12) You’ve had a difficult 12 months out of the business. Based on your experiences, what advice would you give to a anxious Young Entrepreneur starting their first business today?

We haven’t had many difficulties to date but my best advice is to find people who will be honest with you who have experience...and use their advice. If your first business fails, try again. No one is a winner every time. Accept that before you even start.

13) What do you like best about the Internet?

It’s fast and immediate; I can create my own brand and impression I am in control of.

14) What do you like least about the Internet?

If someone posts something on your FaceBook you don’t want anyone to know about it and it goes out to all of your friends and family...also accidentally seeing all your exes with their new girlfriends, ick!

15) Have you any plans (personal or business) that you can share with us about your future plans / goals / lifetime goals?

I want **Yogurtini** to grow into something bigger than my family ever imagined when we first had the original idea for one shop. I want to create a business atmosphere of fun and growth with my employees. I love the team and family feel a good leader can create.

Personally, that is easy. I’m still a girl looking for true love, aren’t we all? And yes, the beach house in my secret spot in Hawaii is right underneath that. Learning, understanding and working on sustainable ways to help impoverished countries is on my list too. I currently work with Transformational Development Agency (<http://www.tdaafrica.com>) in my free time and went with them to Haiti. An entrepreneur can use their skills for empowering change globally as well. That is what I would like to be remembered for and would love to work on that with my sister in the future. **Yogurtini** will be the just a blip on my obituary I hope.