

Local entrepreneurs to share advice on evolving business plans amid global change

As the founder of Pink Dreams, a social media company with global reach, Aurora resident Jennifer Ettinger has approached this borderless medium with unique focus.

Describing herself as a 'holisticpreneur,' she has kept her eye trained on both the big picture and a decidedly more intimate picture as well: working with the individual with the three-pronged approach of 'empathy, compassion and connection.'

It is not just a tagline, she says, but is an essential formula in forging a path forward in both business and in every day life. It is a philosophy that served her well when she, like so many other business owners, had their long-term and short-term plans disrupted by COVID-19.

Next week, Ms. Ettinger will join a number of other local business owners for the Aurora Chamber of Commerce's annual Women's Summit, which will be held virtually this year in accordance with local health guidelines.

Joining her on the morning of October 27 will be Tracy Smith, Founder and CEO of Kitchen Table CEOs, on the subject of 'You've Got Mail: The Crucial Role of Email Lists,' and Nikki Pett, Founder of Sigma Promotions, on 'Personal Development for Increased Profits and Productivity.'

Ms. Ettinger will speak on 'Business Adaptability in Times of COVID-19,' a particularly timely subject as York Region re-enters Stage 2 of the Province's plan to re-open Ontario.

'It is really important now more than ever to realize we must think differently than we did before,' says Ms. Ettinger. 'The biggest challenge we have as entrepreneurs is understanding there is a creative process that needs to work and an intuitive process towards your work as well. As a 'holisticpreneur', which is what I have coined myself, I have always worked in a whole-being philosophy towards social media. It is all about empathy, compassion and taglines 'are you listening to what your audience needs?'

'Our world is now thinking completely differently than we were before COVID and if we are not attuned and sensitive to those needs, even in our social media and our day-to-day practices, we're not going to be able to be sustainable in our business because we're not listening. That is a really key factor in understanding it is not always about broadcasting; it is about pausing and listening to what your potential clients and current clientele are sharing with you so you can adapt and be able to provide a service that is really, truly going to be of essential value.'

When COVID-19 hit this past winter, Ms. Ettinger said she went into 'turbo mode' looking at her business strategy going forward. She considered what she could cut from her financial budget and whittled things down to the bare essentials for both herself and her enterprises. She considered where her clientele was from a business perspective such as whether they or their employees had been laid off, whether they are now working part time or dealing with family members who might be sick.

'I needed to understand where they were coming from,' she says. 'I listened and I sat down and created a very diversified program portfolio of doing my best to make things affordable for those who were [with] very limited financial means, in terms of keeping their business afloat and needing guidance, to those who were still not impacted by COVID.'

'There was absolute diversity in the financial service aspect of things, in program design, and I had hopefully something for everyone based on their feedback. I have never worked so hard in my life!'

But her efforts paid off. Since the pandemic, she has seen a philosophical shift on social media as a whole. Before the virus, people were often focused on 'broadcasting' their message, even going so far as collecting paid followers to 'build up this façade they had the perfect brand for you.'

Now, it is more and more about forging those 'genuine connections,' which is very much in Ms. Ettinger's wheelhouse 'as is building connections at the community level through opportunities like the Aurora Chamber's Women's Summit.

'I am thrilled to be able to take the time, focus and priority to work and collaborate alongside my community,' she says. 'Community has been really important for me throughout my whole career and for the last several years I was being pulled in a direction where my priorities needed to be elsewhere in terms of the public-facing and now I have this opportunity since COVID as well to align myself with the community and be a part of that and give back.

'I really believe in the importance of giving back and to be learning with other women in my community. We're always in a position where, I hope, one would be open-minded to be a continuous student and be open, especially in COVID. What is so important right now is open-mindedness and not one way now is the right way; it is the real way that is important. For me to be able to collaborate and be around the Chamber members and other speakers and just absorb is only going to be helpful for myself and I am hoping that social synergy of me putting together [my presentation] from this holistic approach, which is a bit niche when it comes to the world of social media, that is going to resonate with someone who will realize that maybe they can think differently and step into their social with a different approach.'

For more on the Women's Summit, including a full list of keynote and guest speakers, and how to book your place, visit aurorachamber.on.ca.

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter