

EPISODE 18:

HOW TO BUILD A MEDIA BRAND: AN INTERVIEW WITH THE SKIMM CO-FOUNDERS CARLY ZAKIN & DANIELLE WEISBERG

Have you ever wondered what it's like to build a media company in the modern age? Or perhaps what the future of content creation will look like? In today's episode of WorkSmart, Morgan chats with Carly Zakin and Danielle Weisberg, co-founders of theSkimm, about their experience in entrepreneurship and leadership in the media world.

They share how they grew theSkimm to one of the most influential media platforms for this generation of women, and how they thought about branding, scale, and mission at every stage of growing their business.

HOW THEY STARTED

TheSkimm started nine years ago on a living room couch in New York City. Carly and Danielle had combined just \$4500 in savings, but they saw a need and an opportunity in the news business to create content targeted at millennial women. “News is so personal, there has to be a relationship of trust for you to keep coming back,” Danielle says.

THESKIMM’S MISSION

In less than a decade, they’ve grown from an email newsletter to a multimillion-dollar media brand. Their community has grown to millions of readers. And the mission is crystal clear: To make sure this generation of women feels like they have the right information to make the choices that are right for them and their families.

Carly and Danielle say that they focus on the idea of “intimacy at scale” at theSkimm, which starts with creating a real connection with their audience. From that foundation of trust in news, they have been able to expand in all areas of ‘life necessities’: career, money, health, and more. (Aka the real stuff you need to know that other media brands tend to under index in.)

INNOVATION, GROWTH, AND BRAND BUILDING

The key to their early growth was by hiring “methodically” and intentionally, not just growing for the sake to grow. They were also strategic about the new platforms they adopted (meanwhile their competitors were going all-in on Facebook or Snapchat.)

Where their peer set rushed to be bigger and rushed to have the largest audience, they instead focused on who their audience really was and having a relationship with them while achieving scale—which paid off in the long run.

RAISING CAPITAL

TheSkimm has raised more than \$30 million in venture capital—and has a track record of profitability. They often found themselves a few steps ahead of other venture-backed media companies. At many turns in their business, investors were leery of their ideas. “The venture community didn’t get this at all—that we were focusing on women, that we’re email fist,” they said. But they leaned into their gut instincts because of their clear understanding and relationship with their audience.

BECOMING A BUSINESS LEADER

From learning about RFP's to building out a board, Carly and Danielle have learned business leadership principles along the way—all without a fancy business school degree. When it comes to their product philosophy and their approach to scale, it's all about balance: they say their leadership style is 51% gut-driven and 49% data-driven.

DIVERSIFYING REVENUE STREAMS

The Skimm has grown well beyond just a newsletter company. Today they bring in revenue through advertising, branded content, subscriptions, podcast, e-commerce, and more. Their focus on content is all about meeting their audience where they are and integrating into that routine.

THEIR ADVICE FOR ENTREPRENEURS

Stay curious. That's their advice for other entrepreneurs (and aspiring entrepreneurs!) It's important to flesh out new, creative ideas for your business, but in a smart way. Set some goals, create budget restraints, and test your ideas.

Remember: work smarter, not harder.