

"If you don't build your dream, someone else will hire you to help them build theirs."

— Dhirubhai Ambani

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▶ CECI JOHNSON TALKS BRANDING

With her impressive background in fine arts and graphic design, she has transformed the art of inviting and branding.

▶ AN INTERVIEW WITH FIONA HUMBERSTONE

Fiona has been styling brands, running workshops and creating websites since 2000.



#WEDINSPIRE

Kristin Banta



Kristin is an Event Producer specializing in weddings with a unique point of view, pushing traditional boundaries and the expected. Known for her Bravo TV special, "The Wedding Party," host of Style Network's, "Keep The Party Moving" along with being a vocal advocate within the community for marriage equality.

In this interview I chatted to Kristin about branding and how as consumers we all have relationships with brands and what that means to us as wedding professionals.

So branding. This is such a hot topic right now and everyone has an opinion on it. I thought perhaps we could start off by talking a little about what branding means to you and how you've developed your own brand as Kristin Banta Events.

Brand is what we believe in, what we stand for, the promise we make to our consumers ... it is our unique point-of-view. A brand can create passion and can inspire. The most successful brands stand out amongst their peers because they are built from the inside out on differentiation. Whether we realize it or not, our entire body of experience is what cultivates brand identity.

My brand was developed based on my unique set of influences growing up. Early in my career, I thought I would end up working in the music industry. I was then presented with the opportunity to do a wedding. I didn't know anything about weddings, I never imagined I would get married, and I didn't relate to the traditions ... but here I was, encouraged to produce a wedding in my own voice, and it ended up being incredibly successful. It occurred to me that if I didn't relate to traditions and craved a more unusual way of presenting a wedding, then others must as well. From there, I set out to create an event production company specializing in design and planning, geared towards weddings with a non-traditional spin.

I know for many understanding how other people see them versus how they see themselves can be challenging. Can you give us some ideas on how our readers, who are all wedding professionals, can get to grips with their own brand?

Be distinctive in knowing who you are, what makes you unique and what differentiates you from your industry peers. Ask yourself, how do others see me and does it match how I see myself? Every action, response and reaction will determine how the marketplace will perceive your brand. Be consistent with your message and remain true to your professional values and vision.

So this is a tough question. How do you define how you stand out? When you talk about branding you tell people to be known for something, can you tell us more about that?

Standing out is simply differentiating yourself from your peers. What makes you special? What is it that you do that no one else does? Creating a niche for yourself in an over-saturated industry is integral, as that is what will make your business relevant and necessary.

If you are constantly reaching out to “your people” and are clear on what you represent within the marketplace, there will always be a consumer. Not everyone is going to subscribe to your point of view. However, it is better to have a distinctive point of view than none at all.

Consumers are more discerning now than ever before, so how can wedding professionals take advantage of that within their branding?

If your brand image is clear, the consumer will know exactly what to expect and what separates you from other companies offering the same services. In a world of small service-based businesses void of factories and physical assets, your brand is the one asset that holds true value. If you are effectively and consistently communicating the unique value that you bring to the table, those who identify with it will seek you out.

A brand should tell a story and that is particularly relevant for wedding professionals. Can you tell us how you've accomplished that as Kristin Banta Events to give our readers an understanding of how they can do that too?

I developed my brand based on the things that I am passionate about ... abandoning formula, transcending trend, articulating individuality and redefining tradition. I love the couture and the theatrical, I aspire to create an experience, gravitating towards clients who know who they are and are fearless. I want to work with those wishing to tell their story in technicolor with full depth and dimension. This is my story – this is what defines my brand.

My clients are those that relate with me. They seek me out based on my distinct brand and unique vision. Your brand must deliver its own message ... you must tell your own story and determine what makes you special and unique to the industry. The experiences you have had, the things you believe in and how you came to be are all your brand story.





Consistency is so important. Everything should flow from one element to another. How do you keep the consistency throughout your branding?

Consistency is key. Your brand is reflected in every aspect of your business and all aspects should feel like one person with one personality. It's all about projecting a consistent look, consistent tone in communications, and a consistent level of quality. Emails, logo, collateral, voicemail greeting, blog, images, promotional materials and web presence - All should reflect the same thinking, imaging and clarity of ideas.

As part of what our students do at the start of a course with the Academy they have to do a SWOT analysis. In what way can you take your strengths and weaknesses and use them to help you tell the story of your brand?

Capitalize on your brand's strengths. Minimize your brand's weaknesses. Strengths will be the bat signal, so to speak, that helps your audience find you – those are the messages that should be constantly communicated. As for your weaknesses – it's ok to admit them. I am not the best choice for those with smaller budgets, looking for design light events nor am I likely the best fit if you want a horse drawn carriage or mason jars and dream catchers but that's the point...there is enough to go around. You need to find your audience by relating to them.

The key to branding is knowing who your audience is and then relating everything you do back to them. What are your top tips for doing this?

Finding your audience comes from identifying your people. My people are usually some combination of edgy, rebellious, theatrical, trendsetting, fashion-forward, funny, confident and maybe a little irreverent. They are the individuals, the independents, the free thinkers and the contrarians.

Brands are about finding alignment between what the customer is thinking and what you are saying. There must be an emotional connection between your consumer and your company and your brand should be the way in which you reach them. Once you know your audience, you must make sure that you are clearly and effectively communicating the unique value that you bring to the table.



Knowing where your consumers congregate and socialize is so important as this is the key to being able to reach them. Do you have any advice on how to identify where these places are?

Visibility is key. Once you have determined what sets your brand apart from your peers, evaluate where your greatest opportunities for growth exist. Where do your consumers hang out? Determine where they circulate and strive to create a brand presence and a voice in those communities both physical and viral.

Pursue press that support your brand and work to vigilantly control what is featured. My work has appeared in everything from Punk Rock Confidential to InStyle Magazine to Martha Stewart, however all are outlets that have presented my brand in a consistent light. I may know that I can get a particular wedding published but if it feels like it will read as inconsistent with my brand to the marketplace, I am better off to refrain from pursuing it.

Social media and the Internet have both simplified and magnified the importance of self-promotion. They make you accessible everywhere - they are not your brand nor is your brand based on how popular you are in this forum. However, it can amplify your reach. Make sure that your presence is authentic and unique to you and your voice. I use Facebook to showcase causes, to make people laugh and to interact with my community and audience. I look to Twitter to both promote and get feedback on our business as well as to highlight vendors, feature my work, and to actually have a conversation with followers. I use Instagram to feature more photo-rich content and to showcase lifestyle. I use Pinterest to feature my work, to articulate my personal taste and to illustrate a level of style and personality. And I use YouTube as an opportunity to post videos from television shows I've appeared on, as well as to highlight some of our event work.

Over the past few years, I have established a TV presence. However, out of protection for my brand, I have very carefully curated the projects I have been involved with and have been very clear about the roles that I have served. I have been cautious, avoiding risking my brand by being arbitrarily cast on a TV show, and I have created, developed, and pitched shows that I felt would be consistent with my brand. You must always weigh a possible opportunity with the impact on our brand.

Can you give us some ideas on how you can cultivate your clients?

The best way to cultivate your clientele is to understand where they congregate and how you can reach out to them. Whether you do so via social media, a booth at a bridal show, an ad in a magazine or via word of mouth from your favorite past couples, there are always ways to find

ways to find your new clients. I personally feel as though referrals are absolutely the most important way to go. There's nothing better than one having had first-hand experience with your brand at a past event whether that be the client, an attendee or the venue.

I know you advocate being a thought leader within your community but can you give us some ideas on how our readers can do that?

Get to know your industry. Determine which creatives and professionals within all aspects of the event industry inspire you and then hone in on your own unique point of view. It is important to understand your industry and to know what you are bringing into it. You don't need to be a jack of all trades but you should at least be able to speak the languages as an event producer. Learn every aspect of the job so you understand everything from textiles to lighting, flooring finishes to tent structure.

Understand the difference between coordinators, designers, planners and event producers. Once you have done your research, do everything possible to work with those who have a business you connect with and respect. Don't hesitate to start an intern or an assistant. You should not have to pay for this experience. There are many internships – find one where you can freely trade your time and work in exchange for experience and education, the more time you can commit, the better as this will allow you to be an asset to a company.

The more responsibility you successfully can take on during your internship, the greater your value to that company and the more knowledge you will obtain, thus if at the end of your internship, if there is not a job for you there, you can leave with strong references and experience to bring to another company or your own pursuits. Additionally, I recommend workshops and conferences where possible, volunteer to help if you cannot afford to pay to attend them...and network as much as you can as those relationships will be very valuable to your career.

Above all, if your goal is to become a successful Event Producer it is imperative that you establish a unique brand and develop a business model based on the qualities that set you apart from your peers - research and knowledge are the keys to determining this.

Words by Kylie Carlson

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