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## POSITIONING YOUR DESIGNER JEWELRY BRAND WITH ANDREA HILL

THRIVE BY DESIGN WITH TRACY MATTHEWS

*“Well you have to look really hard at yourself. At both your own business philosophy and how you want to do business. That will give you a sense of with whom you want to do business.”*

***You're listening to Thrive-By-Design business marketing and lifestyle strategies for your jewelry brand to flourish and thrive. Let's get started.***

Tracy: Welcome, welcome everyone. It's Tracy Matthews and I'm so excited to be here on the Thrive-By-Design podcast today. Speaking about positioning your designer jewelry brand with someone I admire so much Andrea Hill. Andrea thank you so much for being here today.

Andrea: Oh it's my pleasure.

Tracy: Awesome. Well I'm so excited because I got to see you; I mean you've partnered with us a little bit here over at Flourish and Thrive Academy. You did a branding training with us a couple weeks ago, and then I had the fortune of watching you speak this last weekend. This is going to air later but this last weekend at the MJSA Conference. So that was really fun because I love your stance on branding, on pricing, on just about everything that has to do with building a jewelry brand. So I'm really excited to have you here.

Andrea: Well I'm really excited about what you guys are bringing into your community because they need it. So like I said I'm delighted to be part of it.

Tracy: Wonderful. So before we get started I just thought for those of you who are new to Andrea's work that I would just do a little introduction. So Andrea Hill is the owner of Hill Management Group which has four brands serving small business owners. Strategy Werx providing strategy consulting, Support Werx which provides marketing services, Mentor Werx which is engaged in professional development, and a publishing division. She spent most of her career as a fix it specialist for ailing companies and has been the President and/or CEO for companies ranging in the 45 to 600 million dollar





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revenue ranges. Including companies like Rio Grande which we all know in the jewelry industry and Fulcrum Direct which had several catalogs in the apparel industry.

Over the years she developed considerable expertise in the strategies that facilitate growth and profitability. In 2007 she left her last corporate post to form her own company because she wanted to take what she had learned over the years and bring it to small business owners so they could compete. Which I totally admire because we're all here to support the small guys right?

Andrea: Absolutely.

Tracy: Alright Andrea so I'm curious to hear a little bit more about your background and a little bit more about yourself so why don't you share.

Andrea: Okay. I didn't expect you to ask that. I thought we would start talking about designers right away. A background in myself, I think I ended up in business kind of by accident. I went to school as a music major after high school.

Tracy: You know I can totally see that because of your personality and like there's **[3:00]** something musical about you.

Andrea: Oh, well thank you because that's; I'm a mezzo and I was classically trained from a pretty young age actually, but what I realized when I got to the university environment was that I didn't have the right personality to become an opera star. There's just no diva in me. Though I was capable of gaining the weight so I could see myself as an opera star but I couldn't see myself living that life so then I switched gears and got an undergrad degree in writing and then after that when I did my graduate work is when I fell in love with business and statistics and business culture and all of the things that kind of led me in the business direction. So that was my early years.

I've had some fun, exciting corporate posts in my life. When Christie Hefner went in to take over Playboy from her father I came in as part of the team that sort of redesigned the way Playboy worked and we opened up a big direct marketing division and started a music and video catalog that had nothing to do with Playboy. Had everything to do with the entertainment business, and so I really got immersed





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in direct marketing at that time. And from there I focused on running direct marketing companies whether it was the apparel company that I went to after that or Rio Grande which we all think of as a jewelry company but really it's a very big direct marketing company.

Tracy: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Andrea: And that was where I became immersed in the jewelry industry and never could remove myself from it. I just fell in love with the industry.

Tracy: Well we like you here so we're going to keep you.

Andrea: Well thank you because I love it here and I'm staying.

Tracy: That's such an interesting background from Playboy to Rio Grande.

Andrea: A few hops in between but yes. I just want to tell you Playboy was one of the best corporations I have ever worked for.

Tracy: I can see that. They're probably really put together. The Hef's probably just a personality and the rest of it's really cool.

Andrea: It was. It was diverse before diversity was a buzz word and very open and accepting of everyone that was there and everybody was really into being creative and creating a product and then you know like that direct marketing division not necessarily Playboy brands but everybody was into creating something that brought value to people. So people always laugh when I say it was at Playboy and I'm like you have no idea it was a great corporation.

Tracy: Oh absolutely and at the end of the day we're all here to bring value right? That's the most important thing that any of us could do. That's the number one lesson out of this podcast and we haven't even gotten started. So you teach so much about branding and brand positioning. What do you wish every designer would embrace about developing and building a brand because I know some designers they feel like oh I'm small I can't compete with the big brands, but I know you have a different stance on that so I would love to hear from you about this.

Andrea: The first thing I'd like everyone to embrace is that a brand is not a creativity pursuit. **[6:00]** A brand is a very strategic and tactical





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pursuit. We tend to think of brands as being about colors and fonts and logos and what shows. We tend to think of brands as being the visual front of the company but brand is really something that's like the blood vessels and tendons running through your body. It's what makes everything else tie together and therefore work. So I guess that's the first thing I wish people knew is that branding; there's a creative piece to it but it's very tactical.

And the second thing I wish everybody would recognize and just accept is that not only can you create a brand as a very small business. Its well within your reach, but you must because it's the only competitive leverage you'll have in a world where very big and very small are all competing in the same space all the time now.

Tracy: Absolutely. Oh I love that. So you're talking about big and small competing and there's so much jewelry on the market. You could practically throw a rock and hit a jewelry designer I feel like. There's so many. So with so many designers out there what are some of the ways that an emerging designer or an independent brand can develop a point of view and a point of differentiation for their brand and for their product?

Andrea: Well you have to look really hard at yourself. At both your own business philosophy and how you want to do business. That'll give you a sense of with whom you want to do business. I always tell everyone you don't need all the customers you just need the right customers.

Tracy: Amen.

Andrea: Honestly we live in a world in which there is enough for everyone. Everyone won't have enough because not everyone will pursue their individual business with the same amount of discipline but there is enough for everyone who decides to go after a small business with a lot of discipline. So the first thing is look at yourself. How you want to do business? What you do want to do, what you don't want to do and then you look at your design as well. It's both you and how you want to work and your design and then look at your design and say what do I want to make, what am I good at making, what is the essence of what I'm designing that I can see as sort of a core theme or element that can help me bind my work together and you put those two things together and then you say now who does this





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appeal too and that's where you start crafting an audience for yourself.

I've had many situations where I would sit down with a designer for the first time and they'd spread out all their jewelry and designs and drawings across a big table and I like to get it all in front of us and we look at it and at first glance it looks like just a bunch of stuff. They're kind of all over the board. [9:00] Most designers tend to be a little all over the board at first. Particularly if they're extra creative and extra prolific but any time you stare at that work for a few minutes and kind of move things around and categorize and group you start seeing a couple of aspects of that designers vision that just comes through every time and it's different for everyone.

And we all know the big examples of this you know Todd Reed with his rough diamonds or Adel Chefridi with his really delicate Tunisian and almost ancient looking stuff that's so feminine but it's not always that obvious. Sometimes it's a very simple little thing. It's the way you do your bezels, it's a flourish or design element that just seems to repeat itself. It may be the way you treat your finish but there's something in there that's an element that you can use to start tying everything together. Because if you're going to do a collection you need to find a design element that ties everything together or a design that and then you also need a business philosophy and a story that ties everything together and so those are the big things you're looking for at first and from there you can refine.

Tracy: So the common thread, the determination, and strong discipline and having your story and I feel like I'm forgetting the last one that you just said.

Andrea: Your business philosophy.

Tracy: Philosophy. Yes, yes that's it. Absolutely now I love what you said about; we do collection reviews in our Laying the Foundation course and it's interesting because sometimes designers who are just starting out or they consider themselves one of a kind designers they submit stuff for the review and it's all over the place and you know they don't yet get the concept of defining that common theme that ties everything together. So you can have a range of looks in your line as long as there's something tying everything together. I love how you described that. That was amazing.





Andrea: And you do need outside eyes to see that.

Tracy: You do.

Andrea: I'm glad you guys do design reviews because when we're immersed in our own work.

Tracy: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Andrea: You don't see the thread. I know when MJSA first started asking me to write a monthly column for them and this was back in I don't know 2007 maybe.

Tracy: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Andrea: It was Rich Youmans who's the editor over there. He said you always kind of wrap your family into everything you do so we would love it if your column included something; keep that family element in it. I didn't even realize I did that. His outside editor eyes saw that.

Tracy: Well I mean I think that's really positioning yourself because people want to know your story and they want to feel a part of your world.

Andrea: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Tracy: And that's what ends up intoxicating them and getting them to want to buy eventually I mean in my opinion. That's how I feel.

Andrea: Oh I think that's very true and research about, particularly about millennial buyers.

Tracy: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Andrea: But it works up into the older generations as well. We know that they buy stories. We also know that when you're selling women tend to be; women and men are both responsive to stories [12:00] but research shows that women are more responsive to stories when purchasing than men are and for that female self purchaser many times she's not willing to give herself to treat herself.

Tracy: Mm-hmm (affirmative).





Andrea: But if you get her emotionally engaged in your story now she's not being selfish; in other words treating herself.

Tracy: Right.

Andrea: Because you know how bad we women are about treating ourselves.

Tracy: Yes.

Andrea: Instead she's investing in your story. So the story is very engaging to the female self purchaser. It emotionally draws her in and it actually helps her give herself permission to purchase. So it works on a lot of levels.

Tracy: Absolutely and we want to give those self purchasers permission to purchase.

Andrea: Yeah we need to help each other out.

Tracy: Help her out yeah absolutely that's what we're all hoping for. So I saw this blog post a few months ago. I mentioned it earlier. It was entitled "What I wish consumers knew about buying designer jewelry," and I read that thing and I was like I shared it with the community right away and I'm like this is a great read you guys have to check it out. So I would love for you to talk a bit more about how designers can approach their brand as a brand that's forging forward with their own point of view versus a brand that's reacting to the market.

Andrea: That's a really good question and it's kind of a big one to put to words.

Tracy: Let's break it down.

Andrea: You put all the details of your brand together. What you don't want to do I'm trying to think if there's a good analogy because sometimes analogies are better for sharing one of these thought processes. But if you think back to high school or college there were always a group of people that kind of nodded together and they made sure they dressed very similarly and they kind of talked the same way and they didn't venture to far from the borders of their group and eventually they all kind of looked alike.





Tracy: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Andrea: And then there was always someone and this someone just told their own story their own way. They weren't worried about being in a group, they weren't bound by the rules that everyone else was following and it wasn't like they mocked it they just weren't part of it. They had a story and they kind of boldly went forward and told it and that is a very important thing for you to do to convey your brand. If you're designing a little of this and a little of that and you're thinking about what the market wants and you're forgetting who you are in the mix then there's going to be a lot me to it. It might not be me to it in your design but it will be me to in the way your market and promote and the customer is not even going to get to your design if they feel like you're just another squeaky voice in a sea of squeaky voices.

Tracy: Absolutely and it comes back to that idea. You don't need all the customers. You said it this way and we say it a little of a different way. You don't need all the customers; you just need the right customers. [15:00] Right?

Andrea: Absolutely. So once you figure out who that right customer is and by the way that's never just a magic formula. I mean if you wake up some morning and you know exactly who that right customer is I applaud you that would be very exciting and I guess it could happen, but for most of us we experiment and test and ask a lot of questions and over time we get closer and closer to who that right customer is. It's like dating before you get married.

Tracy: Absolutely and you know what I like to; how I like to teach the designers at Flourish and Thrive Academy is really more like when you work with someone where you're like that's it. Document everything about that person their personality, their age, what they like to wear, where they shop; all those things because that's going to give you a lot of information about where other people like her or shopping or him.

Andrea: Yep. That's a great way to do it and then yes you can go out and test it and say okay now I'm going to look for more people like her and let's see how this theory pans out.





Tracy: Absolutely. So I love that analogy of the cliquy sort of high schoolers and then there's that one Indy person kind of sticking out probably with the green hair and the nose ring or whatever.

Andrea: Yep.

Tracy: So what are some other ways that you can imagine a brand sort of positioning themselves outside of the crowd?

Andrea: Well there's a lot of I wouldn't say unprofessional but just sort of what is the word I'm looking for well in the very small business sector there are a lot of business people out there that are just kind of throwing things together. They don't look particularly put together. You can stand out by being very, very put together and what it will do is it will increase confidence from that potential buyer. You can put together a website that looks amateurish.

Tracy: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Andrea: Or you can put together a website that looks great and it costs the same amount.

Tracy: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Andrea: So you might as well make the effort to putting together a website that looks great.

Tracy: Right.

Andrea: You can put out email campaigns that visually look amateurish and then verbally are amateurish or you can put out email campaigns that are polished with great subject lines and laid out beautifully and it costs the same amount. So the next way to stand out is to make sure that you never come off as amateur.

Tracy: Yes.

Andrea: You can be small, you just can't be amateur.

Tracy: That's a great way to put it because I think a lot of people think oh I'm small what do I have to say but there's so much to say in a polished way. I don't like to use the word professional in a way





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because I like to be goofy in my emails and that might not be necessarily what some might consider professional but it's always polished and there's always a point to it like what we're going for.

Andrea: Absolutely.

Tracy: So for my jewelry brand or for Flourish and Thrive Academy [18:00] and you can infuse your personality in there to like definitely position you as someone else and a little story from my history. When I was starting my second business and starting over I did a lot of work with online marketing because I knew that in my new business I was going to be reaching potential prospects online and I would be communicating with them via email.

So I started learning more about copywriting and I became a student in copywriting. I became really curious about strong calls to action and showing people what to do next and an interesting thing happened. People who had been on my list for a long time or had been fans of mine for a long time started emailing me back and they would say did you hire a branding expert and I was like oh you know I just started learning a little bit more on how to get people engaged and how to really speak from who I really am not how I thought I should be talking to people and it works when you do that.

Andrea: It does. Well you did hire a branding expert. You hired yourself and then you stepped up.

Tracy: All we need is ourselves right we can hire ourselves. You're hired.

Andrea: We can hire ourselves and then we can demand as much from ourselves as we would from a person that we hired and paid a salary too.

Tracy: I love that. So tell me a little bit more about your experience working with Jennifer Dawes on that beautiful ring that she designed for you?

Andrea: Oh well it's funny. Well okay you know how sometimes people will go to a designer and they say I want a piece of designer jewelry and then they go to that designer and they find the designer they love and the work they love and then they dictate the entire design, makes me crazy. Why would you go to a jewelry designer and then tell them what to design?





Tracy: Exactly.

Andrea: I see it working with a lot of designers. I've worked with just so many of them over the years as a personal advisor and it made me crazy. These are top designers by any calculation and then people would be in there dictating the design. Jennifer had won or had been one of the finalists in the Future of Design contest that Cindy Edelstein and I do together and so one of the things that I gave Jennifer as part of her prize and for all the finalists was consulting over a period of time and that's for free so she wanted to make something for me as a thank you and she said what do you want me to make and I said I want you to make something that you think suits me and she said well that's not enough information and I said I love your design. She said well give me just a little guidance and she said gemstone color, just give me gemstone color. I said well I love green. So that was what she worked with and then oh and then she wanted to know which finger I was going to wear it on and I told her I wanted to wear it on my index finger. So that was the guidance that she had.

Tracy: I love that.

Andrea: Yeah and she just, I think it tortured her [21:00] more than giving; I think she would've liked more guidance but I just kept telling her Jennifer I love your work.

Tracy: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Andrea: Every time I see it I love it so I'm going to love what you make for me. We've been working together very consistently for eighteen months. Do what makes sense to you and in the end I think she really had fun with it.

Tracy: I love that story because as someone who does a lot of commissioned work it's so fun when; for me it's really fun when the person on the other end just completely trusts you and they're like go for it. You know sometimes my clients have feedback. What I try and present them with is a couple of ideas and then we refine there but it's always in my point of view and I think that's an important part is to be able to deliver as the artist your point of view.





Andrea: Absolutely and that's one of the things I wish people understood about designer jewelry. If you want generic jewelry go to any jewelry store. There's case after case after case of generic stuff but when you want something from a designer's point of view then be open to what that is.

Tracy: Yeah I often times get people who just don't understand the process emailing me I love this ring and my budgets two hundred dollars and I email them back. I'm like well that's really nice. Sometimes I'll get them on the phone and explain the process and then they're like okay I get it and budget raises significantly or if it's not a right fit I'm just like you can Google something on Amazon.com and you can find some generic ring. I don't compete with mass production people. I'm never going to compete on price. It's always going to be about the design.

Andrea: Absolutely because when you try to compete on price you're going to get put out of business in a hurry.

Tracy: Yeah you can't compete on price. No one can be Wal Mart or Amazon I mean unless you have a gagillion dollars backing you and tons of technology.

Andrea: Right and at that point you really don't care if you're making jewelry or Pop Tarts.

Tracy: Exactly and that's why Amazon.com lives.

Andrea: That's right.

Tracy: Oh my gosh this has been so much fun. I always like laugh and have a great time talking to you. So is there anything else that you'd like to add or share with our community?

Andrea: Just that I think the thing that is daunting to a lot of solopreneurs in the arts world is the business piece of the business and I just want to remind you that it's not rocket science and my favorite story that sort of reflects that is when my daughter was in nursing school and she was living at home at the time with her daughter and finishing up school and she was sitting there doing homework one night at the table and I was sitting and working at the table and she looked up and she said mom you want to know the big difference between





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your career and my career and I said yeah I do. She said if you make a mistake nobody dies.

Tracy: That's crazy.

Andrea: And you know at the time I was running [24:00] a really, really large corporation and sometimes when you have five hundred people you're responsible for and millions of dollars on the line every day you can feel like everything is life or death but the truth is it's not. Business is not rocket science and you can learn the things you need to learn to run a business nice and efficiently and profitably. So I cannot design jewelry that is not my skillset. I believe its part gift and a lot of putting in the time to cultivate that gift and so that's what you can do and other people can't do it the business piece you can learn it.

Tracy: Everyone can learn it that's willing you just have to be willing to learn it. I used to you know anyone can make the excuse like oh I'm not left brained or I'm not a business person but I feel like it's not, it's not what I enjoy to do the most but it's something that has been a learned skill for me and you have to do it or else if you want to have a business. Otherwise just keep it a hobby.

Andrea: Absolutely and the truth is we tend to not enjoy things we don't feel confident about.

Tracy: Yes.

Andrea: The more skill you gain in some of these business things the more you will enjoy them. Now you need to leave time for your design. I fear too many designers get wrapped up in the business part and so little time goes into the design but you will enjoy it more and more as your confidence grows.

Tracy: And you can make it fun. It just turns into a game so you can.

Andrea: Yeah.

Tracy: Start building your confidence, make it a game, make it fun; I think the more fun you can make the business side of it the easier it is to sort of and exciting it is to embrace.





Andrea: I agree.

Tracy: Alright. Well where can we find you Andrea?

Andrea: Well I can give you my email address which is [andrea@strategywerx.com](mailto:andrea@strategywerx.com). All my brands end with Werx.

Tracy: Awesome.

Andrea: So and then those are my websites too Strategy Werx, Mentor Werx, and Support Werx.

Tracy: Awesome. So go check out Andrea's stuff. She's amazing and she is really just as Robin likes to say a wealth of knowledge about many topics and I can't wait to have you back because I feel like we have about fifty other things to talk about.

Andrea: Well just let me know because I'll be glad to come back.

Tracy: I will. Alright everyone thank you so much for listening to the Thrive by Design podcast. If you enjoyed the show we would love for you to do us a huge favor. Make sure you subscribe to our podcast, rate the show, and write us a little review. Take care until next time.

