



AUTHENTIC BRANDING ELEMENTS EVERY JEWELRY DESIGNERS NEEDS WITH ALLYSON BAINBRIDGE RICCARDI

THRIVE BY DESIGN WITH TRACY MATTHEWS

“When you’re talking about feeling the buyers or retailers you have to also keep in mind that the way that you’re representing yourself to the buyer they have to be able to hook into it so that they can picture how they would actually sell your line or your pieces to their end customer.” – Allyson Bainbridge Riccardi

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 to the Thrive-By-Design podcast. I’m Tracy Matthews of Flourish and Thrive Academy, and I’m super excited to be here today to talk about authentic branding. Before I dive in I just wanted to say this that my mission with this podcast is to really give you the best business, marketing and lifestyle strategies for your jewelry business to flourish and thrive. That’s why we’re constantly curating the best experts in the industry, especially in the jewelry field to come chat with you about their area of expertise. Experts like Allyson Bainbridge Riccardi who is here with us today. Thank you so much for being here Allyson.

Allyson: Yeah great to be here. Thank you for having me.

Tracy: Well I’m really excited to talk to you because we met through the Women’s Jewelry Association at a networking event probably about six to eight months ago and we were talking about branding. And I was like oh you should come talk to the designers at Flourish and Thrive because you primarily work with jewelry designers. And now here we are six to eight months later. I don’t know how long it’s been, but we’ve had you come speak at our live event, and we’ve done other things with you. So it’s just really wonderful to have you here talking to our audience about authentic branding. I’m excited for today.

Allyson: Yeah it’s great.





Tracy: Alright so before we get started I just want to do a brief intro and tell the audience a little bit more about who you are and what you're all about. So Allyson is a Brand Marketing and Social Media Strategist focused on luxury brands and experiences with deep understanding of the jewelry industry. She collaborates with her clients to build cohesive brand personas and communication platforms. Allyson is also an editor for the jewelry book and part of the Women's Jewelry Association, New York Metro Chapter Board. And you also have an amazing website called Bambolina, right? Am I saying that right?

Allyson: It's Bambolina yes. So when I went out on my own and started being an independent contractor, you know, my name is kind of long for a URL. So Bambolina is actually my husband's nickname for me. He's Italian and it means "little doll". And so I was like you know what it's one of those words that it's foreign but somewhat pronounceable. I'm here in New York so that's how I came up with the name. And it's personal to me. People who are close with me know that my husband calls me that. So it has a nice little hook to it.

Tracy: I think it's great [3:00] because it's a really, it's a great business name and a great brand from a branding perspective too. So I'm really excited to talk to you. I know a little bit about your experience, but I want to share kind of, I want you to share a little bit more about your experience with our community of designers. So if you wouldn't mind, I'd love to hear a little bit more about what got you to where you are today and a little bit more about yourself and why you are so fascinated with jewelry.

Allyson: Sure. Well I started my career actually at a graphic design agency. I started at the front desk and was there for over 12 years and when I left I was VP of Business Development, and it was a very interesting time to be in that space because the agency changed quite a bit from mostly doing print work and getting that produced to dot com to seeing how that affected all of our projects with clients, to really becoming more focused on brand development and the projects come with, but really creating, establishing these cohesive brands and all the legs that go with it allow you to create interesting campaigns that hold up the original brand meaning.





So I worked very closely; the way that the studio was set up, I was an account person, so client services. I worked very closely with the creative team and the creative director, and I have a little bit of art background myself. It's a funny story. I actually was thinking about going to art school instead of liberal arts college and my mom told me that was fine if I wanted to do commercial art, and I kind of turned my nose up at that and decided to go to liberal arts and majored in English and French Lit, and now I kind of came full circle and was working in commercial design but not even as a designer. But I have that background as well.

So I really love learning every aspect and as technology emerged how it affected projects and communications and engaging with audiences. I also had a very strong background in luxury brands, also experiences. So everything from liquor and spirits to real estate to hotels, hospitality and then of course jewelry was part of that, but it was really more big brands, Look Books, things like that. And then when I got married my husband's mother was an established designer in Milan, a jewelry designer and had this amazing collection. And when she was still around we tried to bring her into the U.S. She was really open to it until she realized that she had to deal with American production deadlines and doing things our way. So it didn't really work out, but I did have an introduction because we worked with an amazing consultant at that point into what it takes to bring a jewelry brand to market and kind of get a foothold in the industry.

And then when I left my agency the opportunity that I took was with a B2B fine jewelry organization that's affiliated with [6:00] the JCK Show. Pretty much I think most of your audience is familiar. It's the biggest show in the U.S. of the year. And so I kind of did a deep dive into the B2B end of things with small independent fine jewelry designers and the small independent retailers that would carry them. And I got to know this group of 60 different exhibitors who kind of pulled their resources together to market the destination where they were at the JCK Show. And spending all of this time getting their assets, learning about their stories so that I could use their jewelry and their brands to promote the show. I started developing relationships individually, and then my business kind of just grew from there.





So even once I stopped working for Prestige I already kind of had this network of fine jewelry designers and retailers who appreciated that. I actually didn't come from the jewelry industry, but I understood their pain points and the challenges they were facing in going digital and have that effect the way they done business for generations. And so I just started developing this niche for myself. When I worked at the agency I did do some copywriting, but once I was on my own; and I have a big network of different vendors that I've worked with over the years from photographers, copywriters, designers, web development. I just was having the hardest time finding a copywriter that I thought both could communicate well to the consumer, the target audience and understood jewelry so I started doing it myself.

So working with these designers made me understand how important it was to be able to come up with something that they really needed as their basic building block was this copy that got down to the essence of what their brand is about. Because without that all the other emails and social media and other kinds of marketing communications were just going to fall flat. So I started doing it myself and I did have the brand development background from when I was working at an agency. I did a ton of creative briefs back then and outside research. So that's become kind of a lot of what I do and what people look for because I'm sure your audience feels the pain of this when they're trying to do it themselves. It's tough. It's tough to talk about yourself. It's tough to dig deep and try to understand where your inspiration comes from. It's tough to explain really what you are about, and it's something I actually get a lot of satisfaction. I enjoy having these sessions with designers. I think it's fascinating, and I love jewelry.

As I said, I had some little taste of it here and there, but once I did this deep dive into the industry and go exposed to all these amazing designers and manufacturers and kind of had to do editing just to make the cut of who I'm going to work with and feature. I really love doing it [9:00] and I see the results when someone really has a handle on how to talk about themselves.

Tracy: I love that because that's such an important part of becoming a business owner and really establishing yourself as an emerging





designer is to be able to talk about your work. And it's almost like you talk about it in a way that it gets people hooked and interested, and it's part of like your sales process or sales system in a way because talking about your work is one way to attract clients. But it also becomes like just second nature at a certain point when you really have it nailed. Wouldn't you agree?

Allyson: Definitely. Definitely. It takes a little while, but once you have it you really feel like you have that confidence. It's something I know you talk with your audience about a lot. It really helps your confidence in saying okay this is what I'm about. I'm proud of it. It's easy for me to discuss with you. And you know when you're talking about dealing with buyers or retailers, you have to also keep in mind that the way that you're representing yourself to the buyer, they have to be able to hook into it so that they can picture how they would actually sell your line or your pieces to their end customer. So in that it's important really at every step of the business cycle.

Tracy: Absolutely. Okay so I want to sort of segway into this idea of authentic brand. And creating an authentic brand seems to be a total buzz word these days. What does authentic branding mean to you?

Allyson: Okay so yeah I think it's definitely a buzz word. I think it's kind of ironic that authentic is being overused because it seems kind of counterintuitive, but I think the reason why we're hearing about that so much is because everyone is just so inundated with communications and brands trying to reach them on every single communications platform. And you know people get a million emails. A lot of them are spam. A lot of them have nothing to do with what they're really interested in. And they want to cut through the clutter, and I think the easiest way to do that is to present yourself as like a real person who believes in what you do and people get inspired by that and want to latch on to it. So I see why it's become so important these day particularly.

Tracy: Absolutely. What are some of the ways that someone can sort of authentically brand themselves? What do you help customers with or your clients with when you're working with them on their brand?





Allyson: Yeah I mean I really go back to the basics. I think that a lot of emerging designers have a passion for what they do, and they're working on developing an aesthetic, but sometimes it's tough to let go of things that don't make sense. You get very attached to your creations and you want to believe that everything you're doing just because you make it means that you're coming across in a certain way, and I don't [12:00] think that's necessarily the case.

So what I usually do with designers is have a kind of therapy session with them. I have this exercise that I kind of tailor to whoever I'm talking to that goes back to the beginning. I like to start with a big long conversation like how did you get into jewelry. And even back to childhood, what did you like to do? What interested you? What motivates you? What inspires you? I find that a lot of it has to do with travel and family. So a lot of designers are kind of surprised when we talk about this, it's like wow I never really realized that this was an influence for me. So I like to start with that.

I know Tracy you addressed this in another podcast, but developing your target audience and who you want to speak to, who you think wants to buy your jewelry and what their behaviors are and the demographics; the age range and income bracket and all of that, but perhaps more importantly the psychographic. How do they spend their free time? What do they spend their money on? What are you competing with? Jewelry in the past was more of a gift item. For the majority of women I think that jewelry is associated with an anniversary, a birthday, a holiday, and now the behavior is so much more self-purchasing. And so you really need to understand once you know who your target audience is, stereotype a little bit because not everyone is going to fit into it, but you need to do that a little bit to understand who else is competing for that \$1,000 or \$2,000 or \$10,000 because it's probably another luxury item like an amazing bag or a pair of shoes or it's a vacation.

You need to think about that because you need to show why someone should invest in your jewelry instead. So I think that's an important part, and then I also have people work on keywords and it tends to be like just word association, and getting down into really specifics. So





everyone is going to say luxury. Everyone is going to say precious, maybe fashion, but when you get into more descriptive words like ethical, ethically sourced or ethically mined. When you get into materials or you get into maybe a designer's influence by architecture or they spent a lot of time in India. It kind of helps people understand what form to aesthetic and then you have to go back and edit and say okay what are really the core words and descriptors that I feel characterize the brand.

And that's what well help you be more unique because let's face it there's not a lot of really unique things out there, and it's difficult [15:00] to differentiate yourself, but like the more different kinds of words you have the easier it is to kind of lay that out. And then I also talk about I like to have them a little bio in there like what were the designer's influences. Then we get to, once we've done all these things, what is the line about. What are the unique selling; What's the unique selling proposition? What is, in two to three sentences, what's the essence of this brand? What's it trying to do? What niche is it trying to fill? And then also what is it not trying to do? What does it not want to be like?

I think it's also important to look at brands outside of the jewelry space. It can be really helpful in brands that the designer gravitates towards or is interested by. It kind of helps bring some insight in, just kind of like internally as an exercise. Like I love the way Dolce Gabbana markets themselves like up and over the top kind of thing. I love the way Celine is super classic, it's sheik, there's a twist to it but like it's classic. And so I think that kind of helps as well. And again because you are competing against these other brands so it's important to see how they connect with the consumer, and it's helpful to look at bigger brands than yourself to see what they're doing.

Tracy: Absolutely. I love what you just said because I love how you pulled it outside the jewelry industry because I think that's a really important way to approach your business. Like when Robyn and I when we're developing trainings and courses we often use examples from non-jewelry businesses that do things really well to see how you can apply some of the principles or techniques or marketing ideas that they're





doing into a jewelry business because I think sometimes when we're not looking just at jewelry brands it can become so insular and almost like insular [ph] because you're like cross-looking at all these different people. It's like how can you stand out? So looking outside of the industry I think is a great tool to really help develop what is authentic to you.

And some of the brands that we really love are DryBar and BirchBox and they're like totally; BirchBox is somewhat related because there's beauty samples. Sometimes they might add jewelry or something in there. But DryBar is like a totally different kind of business because it's a service based business, but I love what they do with their brandings. So thanks for bringing that up about different types of brands to look at.

Allyson: It's interesting that a lot of designers list Apple as a brand that they admire. The way that the branding and the marketing and just the whole package. I think that most people don't understand why that is, and it's really very simple. They are super, super strict about the way that their product and service and interaction is presented. In fact that's why when you do an update if anyone has an iPhone and you see the font changes you're like whoa and then [18:00] you have to get used to it a little bit because they don't make any exceptions. There's no like ah, let's just use a different font for this one thing or you know let's use an orange background. It doesn't work. That's something that you know if they are such a huge brand they do so much. It might not even seem relevant, but the takeaway is people love when you just know immediately when you see something it comes from Apple or Mac or the i-whatever. You know immediately.

And how they achieve that is being super strict about the way that they present themselves and thinking about it and doing it in advance and not just like oh let me just post this or here's a random picture out of nowhere. That doesn't work for everyone. They have this super clean persona and maybe you want to be more eclectic, but it's just good to keep that as an example in mind.





Tracy: Absolutely. So now that we've talked about all these different brands, I love that you brought up Apple. Everyone brings up Apple I think because they're so innovative right.

Allyson: And they've been so successful.

Tracy: Yes.

Allyson: They're just universal at this point.

Tracy: So now that we've talked about brands outside the jewelry industry, what are just like real quick a couple of jewelry brands that you think are branding themselves really well?

Allyson: So I have a couple of examples that come to mind. I'll start with someone who is small. Who I actually met also through Women's Jewelry Association about two years ago now, Marla Aaron. I don't know Tracy if you know Marla as well.

Tracy: Not yet, but I will get to know her.

Allyson: She's amazing. You definitely should. She when I met her she just came to a WJA event for the first time. She just started her own business after being in corporate marketing and PR for many years and it was kind of like she's reinventing herself. And she's just so interesting because she does understand marketing. We have great conversations, and her business was started on this idea of The Lock, and it's like a Carabiner but in different precious metals and you can have it engraved and personalized and they're in all different sizes. That was how she started her business.

She became super active on Instagram actually. So she had a website. It's wasn't e-commerce. Everything was custom order, and she started; around when I met her she just started blowing up on Instagram and she was unabashed about it. She has a very strong sense of individual style and it's all about her. She'll take selfies. Not everything is composed and perfectly done, but it feels so her. And as a result really of Instagram and the work that she did on Instagram and the way that she would style things, and shown how it's worn and post clients who were happy and how they would wear these Locks with their pearls or





[21:00] with a special chain that was in the family or add charms to it. I actually got a bracelet for my husband and she allows you to do super tiny engraving on the Lock. So it's really a very personal main product that she started with, and then she's grown it from there.

I think that what she did so well was identify that; She doesn't care about everyone liking her. She does not care at all. What she cares about is being true to herself and people like her style they love her. And if they don't like it, fine that's not her customer. She's somebody who refuses to do consignment. She has the luxury that she'll take the time to wait to develop relationships with retailers that are willing to buy her line. She has also a very direct connection with the end consumer. And so what she projects is just so authentic. Like you know when she does a post that's her that wrote it. That's her that took the picture. It's here quirky kind of style that's coming across that she thinks is fabulous. And I may not love everything that she does, but I know it's her when you're talking about (22.20 unclear), I'm like it's so Marla when I see something.

I think she's an example of someone who didn't have any kind of budget, didn't have any kind of help. She just believed in what she was doing. She loved wearing what she was making and made herself like the brand ambassador of what she was doing and sharing all of the process, you know, when something is on the bench and when she wears a piece just around town or if she's going to the opera or celebrating the anniversary. She just really nailed it as far as portraying it in an authentic voice and in an authentic brand. And now she has laid that groundwork. I mean she's doing so well. Now she's in six or seven different doors. She has clients from all over the world, private clients. She started an e-commerce website. She really with those kind of what I call pillars of her brand, she's been able to build on top of it without it collapsing. Everything makes sense because it all comes back to that initial kind of brand essence of this like quirky, interesting, non-traditional but very interesting in craftsmanship and being precious.

Tracy: I love that. What a brilliant example. I can't wait to check out her Locks. That sounds so cool.





Allyson: Yeah they're great. And I'm thinking of her because we just saw her at the Jewelry and Watch at the Metropolitan Pavilion on Sunday. I just happened upon her.

Tracy: Oh amazing. So what's one big brand that you think is doing really well? Just like a quick example.

Allyson: So big brand again [24:00] this is on my mind because I recently met the global marketing director for John Hardy, and I have a personal connection with that brand because my first big self-purchase was a John Hardy bracelet which I wore until it feel off in the clasp didn't work and then kind of was introduced to more emerging and interesting other designers. But I still have a lot of affinity for that piece. I didn't necessarily; I like their Contour collections, how they evolved, but it became a little bit too--and I don't meant to say this in a bad way about David Yerman--like it's just a little bit too you see it all the time. But at an event I met their marketing director and I told him the story of my bracelet and how I wish they would make some in that same style which was very much, it was the silver classic bracelet but it had like 18 carat accents, and it was very (25.02 unclear). It was like beautiful Indonesian pattern, and they don't make stuff really like that anymore.

And I told them I don't really buy stuff anymore because I love your initial stuff that I was first introduced to. By the way it's broken, how can I get it fixed. It's like I pitched him. And I ended up celebrating their 40th anniversary and invited me up to the showroom last week which is spectacular. The reason why I'm bringing it up is that they did very well last year. They had Cara Delevingne as their model for their campaign last year, and he said; and everyone was like wow, that's such a coup congratulations. And he was like well no actually we decided not to go with her anymore because everyone was talking about John Hardy, but in the context of Cara and not in the context of the jewelry.

What we decided to do is go back to the roots. It's all about Bali now. It's all about conservation. It's about the ancient craftsmanship of making things in Bali. We're not showing faces. We don't have a supermodel. We're using other models. We're cropping into their faces





and it's just about the specialness of this product and that no one else can make these chains the way that we do. If you go on their website, I don't know if you have followed the brand at all, but they're doing a huge ad campaign. I think they were just a national jeweler. It's an incredibly big campaign, and they're really relaunching themselves for their 40th anniversary. Going back to their roots, the heritage and it's all about those craftsmen in Bali like touching your jewelry, your piece of jewelry that you'll eventually wear. And I think it's really brilliant and there are so many legs to build from there.

Tracy: Yes.

Allyson: So I think that's a good example.

Tracy: Well thanks for sharing that story. I mean I love that you had that conversation. [27:00] You're like oh, I don't really like the jewelry anymore. It needs to go back to the roots. Not that it's saying you changed the direction of the course of their design, but probably your feedback combined with other people's feedback got them back in touch with their brand which I think is really important, right.

Allyson: Yeah it was like serendipitous but it was great to see that they were doing that, and it was also very smart because he just got me totally invested in the brand again. I'm talking about it to you, and I think they did an amazing job.

Tracy: Amazing. So what are some of the key elements an emerging designers needs to consider as they're developing their brands, their branding and in your opinion what's the best way to approach it. Where should they start?

Allyson: Yeah, I mean, just going back to what I was saying before about getting back to the basics of why you became a jewelry designer. What was it that drove you? What are your influences fashion-wise? We have a friend in common who is crazy for cars and it doesn't look like her jewelry. When she told me the story of her building her first car with her dad in the garage and being like a real gear head and into cars and stuff, and then she does these super delicate pieces, but you know what. They're very functional.





Tracy: Yes.

Allyson: They're very sleek, and I think that me pushing her on that, at first she was like yeah. She was giving her back story and I kept asking her about the cars. She's like why you keep asking me about the cars, but then after a while she's like you know what I realized and I started talking to my mom and my parents about what I was like at that age and what drove me and how I got on this path. It's really helpful to do that work I think, and it's not always easy. If you don't have the budget to work with someone like me, just sit down with your friend or your sister or your mom and say can we just talk about this. Where did this come from? Did you see it in me? Did you see the creative side of me? How did I express it if it wasn't in jewelry initially? And I think it helps you understand kind of your formation, and then you can go from there. But I definitely start with that. Just what's your back story, how did you get here?

And then I think thinking about what is the core aesthetic and of course you can have different collections with different themes. So what's the core aesthetic? What is it about? Some other brands that I was thinking about for the previous question you asked me were Melissa Joy Manning which I know Robyn used her right?

Tracy: Oh yeah she's a friend of mine too, forever in the industry.

Allyson: I mean she's another one that she made ethical sourcing as much as you could possibly do in the jewelry industry, a main point for that she wants to talk about all the time. [30:00] So that's not for everyone. Not everyone depending on the materials you're working with can do that, and it is becoming more popular. So it's not going to be your only differentiator, but you need to find core values like that that drive you and that kind of influence the aesthetic and the finished piece because that's what you're going to build around. So you know you fell in love with gemstones, Kimberly McDonald is one, it's all about the stones, the geodes and interesting stones that might not have been considered precious before but then you combine them with precious materials. She certainly not the only one doing that right now but she speaks about it really articulately. You can tell by looking at the piece that it's her's.





So figuring out whatever it is that you're attracted to, that you try to emulate, that you really connect with. And it's not going to be just one thing. You should come up with five or ten things and then narrow it down. What are really these core values? I think that's really the next step, and then identifying the target audience. And then coming back to okay now I'm armed with my main keywords, my core values. Now I can start to write about myself. What is the line about? What does it represent? If I'm in the elevator or in the elevator, in the women's, in the ladies, meets like my dream client, what am I going to say to get their attention in three sentences. I'm a jewelry designer. I'm all about ethically source materials and my aesthetic is all about complimenting your classic pieces. So I'm going to give you the bracelet that looks amazing with your tennis bracelet or whatever it is. It's more than one thing that when it's combined together makes you unique.

Tracy: I love that. I love that you brought up Nicole because she's about to launch her brand. Hopefully it will be launched by the time this interview goes live. More will be revealed on Nicole. You will probably hear me talking about her. That's interesting because hearing the story about the cars--I know I'm kind of pulling this back a few minutes ago--but that's such an interesting talking point to pull out about an influence and I can totally see it now. She just showed me her collection the other night that she's about to launch in January, and I could see that influence of the mechanics. She worked for me briefly as an assistant designer, and one of the things that she was really skilled at is figuring out how things work which I think is interesting. So it makes sense.

Allyson: Yeah I think it's really interesting because it's not at all what you would think. When I first saw her first try of jewelry when I met her, and it's evolved so much since then, but now when I look at it with all of that information I'm like yeah totally. It's super elegant, but it's really well thought out about how does everything lay. It's functional. [33:00] It's that beautiful functional.

Tracy: Absolutely. So Allyson this has been such an amazing conversation. Thank you so much for being here today. I still have one more question





for you. Where can everyone find you if they want to learn more about you and Bambalina?

Allyson: Yeah so my website is www.bambalinanyc.com. My contact information is there. My Instagram feed is there. I am on social media as well with BambalinaNYC, but I tend to do most of my social media work for clients. So it's just here and there. So my website is really the best place to go to find out more.

Tracy: Awesome, awesome. Thank you so much everyone for listening today. 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 a little review. I'm super excited to keep bringing you very valuable content and inspiration every single week. I'm Tracy Matthews of Flourish and Thrive Academy and take care until next time.

