



## Learning The Business Ropes Turns Filmmaker Into Entrepreneur

By: Geri Stengel



Some entrepreneurs are born that way. It's in their genes. Others work hard to become one. While a film student at Pratt Institute,

Aubrey Smyth worked the circuit: working at film festivals, heading the student film club, organizing student film festivals, and seeking teachers to mentor her. Talent and hard work paid off with awards and a paid gig: The Human Resources Department at Pratt hired her to make a film. It was so good that Pratt asked her to do more.

The market for digital content was growing by leaps and bounds. Yet most branded web films were unimpressive. It was hole in the market that Smyth and her partner, Oscar Luna, recognized. They set out to fill it with films that tell stories to promote brands in a way that engages viewers and activates them to share. But other motivations were in play as well, like controlling your own destiny. "I started a company because I wanted to be the boss," Smyth said.

Pratt refined Smyth's artistic skills. She knew how to write scripts, direct, shoot, edit, etc., but business skills ... not so much. She went back to school, courtesy of NYC Small Business Services, for free. First Smyth took Kauffman FastTrac NewVentures, a seven-day program. On her last day, she and Luna formed an LLC. Later Smyth took GrowthVentures, an eight-session evening program. I was one of the facilitators (and will be again for a class for aspiring entrepreneurs that starts June 9).

Smyth also took Strategic Steps for Growth Media and Entertainment Industry Program.

Many 20-somethings can't move out of their parents' basements, but Smyth and Luna leased a 1,200-square-foot office in Brooklyn's up-and-coming Navy Yard neighborhood. Their list of clients is impressive: DirectTV, Grey Group Worldwide, Make-a-Wish Foundation, Pantene, The New Yorker, and, of course, Pratt.

In a world in which 80% of consumer purchase decisions are made by women, only 3% of Creative Directors are women. With her female perspective — as well as enthusiasm and fresh approach — Smyth has an edge in reaching the women who make those buying decisions. All good. Also good is that Smyth recognized her weak points, invested in herself, and became a business woman as well as a creative.

Entrepreneurship isn't just passion and innovation, although those are critical ingredients for success. But entrepreneurship also means balancing the books, understanding cash flow, and investing in the right resources at the right time. So don't forget to hone your business skills as well as following your passion and thinking creatively.