

# TIDAL RIVER

## The Secrets of Her Success

### How Beauty Kitchen Founder Heather Marianna Built Two Successful Businesses Without Spending Millions on Advertising

Heather Marianna knows how to build buzz. Ten years ago, the California-born beauty enthusiast launched a YouTube series called Beauty Kitchen, where she shared skincare recipes viewers could make with ingredients most of us have in



our pantries. Thanks to Heather's bubbly personality and passion for chemical-free products, the series quickly racked up a following of more than three million viewers. Television producers caught wind of the series' popularity and booked Heather for hundreds of beauty segments; stints on MTV, Oxygen and Bravo's luxury travel series, *Tour Group*, followed. An astute businesswoman, Heather used her massive popularity to launch Beauty Kitchen and Marianna Naturals; both companies are beloved by celebrities, supermodels and consumers who appreciated Heather's natural approach to

beauty. Here, the entrepreneur chats with writer Amy Hourigan about how she built awareness for her businesses, how she's helping other entrepreneurs build their own brands, and the advice she has for women.

# TIDAL RIVER

**Amy Hourigan: Congratulations on your success, Heather. As an expert in using influencer marketing to build a brand, can you tell our readers how those relationships came about? Was it organic in the early days, or a deliberate part of your strategy?**

**Heather Marianna:** It really started out organically. As more people discovered my at-home skincare remedies online, I gained this fanbase that kept growing, and people kept coming back to ask for more treatments. After I launched my brands Beauty Kitchen and Marianna Naturals, influencers started trying them out. My involvement with Bravo and MTV brought me more in contact with celebrities who appreciated the effectiveness of my products and just endorsed [the brands] through their social media. In a way, the influencer marketing part of my business just naturally grew as social media itself became a more prominent part of business. To some extent, I still allow our influencer collaborations to occur organically. You really can't duplicate an authentic enthusiasm for the products. If someone has already tried the products and know they work, when they share them with their own followers, it really comes across as an honest opinion.

**AH: What kind of influencers do you like collaborating with, and what types of products or services work best for them?**

**HM:** Influencer marketing has become a really valuable way of reaching customers, especially for an independent business like mine that doesn't have millions of dollars to spend on advertising. In the same way that you have to be selective of the media you advertise in or the stores you sell to, I have to be sure that whoever I collaborate with is compatible with the brand. I need to be sure that their platform represents either the same fundamental concepts of my products or appeals to the same customers I need to reach. Their numbers are less important to me, because what good would it serve if, for example, an influencer has millions of followers but posts about cars? It's really the influencers who are beauty experts or enthusiasts, who believe as we do in leading a vegan or healthy lifestyle, and whose followers look to them for their opinions and advice.

**AH: Makes sense. OK, so after you've decided which influencers are compatible with your brand, can you walk us through the process?**

**HM:** In my case, I'm usually approached by celebrities or influencers because they've been gifted our products or discovered them on their own. But we do actively seek out important figures in beauty who reflect similar values regarding all-natural or plant-based beauty regimens. And we approach them on a case-by-case basis because there really isn't a standard rate for these collaborations. It can depend on their reach or sometimes even just their willingness to receive free products. If we can reach an agreement with them, then we just iron out the details, including what they intend to post and when we can expect to see those posts. We really can't impose any kind of expectations on the ones who are

# TIDAL RIVER

doing it for free, but for those who are receiving remuneration, we do have a standard agreement with regard to the number and types of posts and when they should go live. We also reserve the right to approve the post prior to it going live. This makes the process clear for both parties.

**AH: Along with running two successful businesses, you operate a brand incubator and accelerator program. How did that come about?**

**HM:** I started the brand incubator and accelerator program because I was constantly being approached by people—celebrities or our own customers—who ask me for advice about how to start their own beauty brands. I realized I could be much more of a help to them if I simply provided these services. I already have the manufacturing and marketing capabilities in place. So, I provide full turnkey coaching from conception to production to selling that can really go a long way in getting someone off the ground with their very own product line. I know I could certainly have used this kind of mentoring when I first started because I had to go through a lot of trial and error.

**AH: It's wonderful that you're helping other entrepreneurs. Is your accelerator open to anyone? And what can someone expect if they sign up?**

**HM:** Yes, it's absolutely open to anyone! We provide everything they need. I guide them through the preliminary stages of developing the brand. We offer the sourcing and formulation of their products, manufacturing—all the way to marketing and selling. I really get to know the entrepreneurs and their brands so that the products reflect what they are trying to express as their image. I am also there to help them avoid the common pitfalls of starting a business. It really gives participants the advantage of getting ahead of the line instead of all the stumbling around in the beginning if you don't know what you're doing.

**AH: Anything else you want to mention to our community of women investors and women- and minority-led businesses?**

**HM:** I truly believe there is strength in solidarity with other women-led companies. We still have a ways to go in supporting each other, as well as supporting minority-led businesses. It's been a long time coming, but we can't take anything for granted. My advice is to be really mindful how you "vote" with your dollars. Support small business or those who value authenticity, and most especially those that deserve and could use your patronage.

**Amy Hourigan: Thanks, Heather, Great advice.**

**HM:** My pleasure.