

How to Turn a Lemonade Stand Into a Multi-Million Dollar Operation

When Mikaila Ulmer was four years old, she received an old cookbook from her grandmother. It was tattered and the covering was falling off, but the recipes were still intact. Thumbing through the pages, she stumbled on a mixture for flaxseed lemonade.

“We tried making it, and it tasted really good,” Mikaila [recalled](#) in an interview years later.

The Austin, Texas, native decided to sell the concoction at a lemonade stand. After a while – and an additional touch of her own, an infusion of honey, inspired by a newfound fascination with bees (more on that later) – Mikaila was encouraged by a local shop owner to bottle and label the lemonade, which would allow the shop owner to carry it.

Shark Tank’s Jumpstart

So that’s what Mikaila did. Just like that, Me & the Bees Lemonade was born.

By 2015, Mikaila had turned her single stand into a full-fledged operation. Her lemonade was being sold in about 35 stores, and with every purchase, buyers were receiving a message: Buy a Bottle...Save a Bee. (A percentage of all profits are dedicated to saving honeybees.)

By that time, Mikaila had demonstrated enough success to score a break: She was invited on *Shark Tank*, ABC’s hit show, which features wealthy business people investing in budding entrepreneurs. Her business savvy and charm (not to mention

her adorable smile) won the Sharks over that day, and Mikaila received a \$60,000 cash injection from Daymond John.

She parlayed her 2015 *Shark Tank* appearance into [a dinner date](#) with President Obama and, later, [an \\$11-million deal](#) with Whole Foods. Today, Me & the Bees Lemonade is sold in hundreds of stores and can be [purchased on Amazon](#) for \$45 per 12-pack.

Her success, however, was not simply the result of luck or hard work (though hard work certainly helps). A look at Mikaila's success also reveals a business and marketing savvy others can learn from.

Her Lemonade Isn't Just a Drink, It's a Cause

Consumers increasingly don't want to simply consume. They want to consume with a purpose.

[Conscious consumption](#) is a growing consumer trend, particularly for younger consumers (Gen Z) who see consuming as an opportunity to express their identity. By donating a portion of all her profits to "[saving the bees](#)" – which some researchers say could be in danger of extinction – Mikaila makes her product more than simple consumption of a drink.

She Created a Story

Mikaila's amazing story may never have been realized if her parents had not encouraged her to sell her grandmother's lemonade. And not just because it got her outdoors learning about entrepreneurship. On that fateful day, she was stung by two bees, which inspired her fascination with the creatures. The bees became a crucial ingredient not just to her product but also to her entrepreneurial story. Having a story matters. There's a reason we know the stories behind [great](#)

[entrepreneurs](#).

We know that Warren Buffett had a paper route and sold his first company when he was 17. We know that Carlos Slim bought his first stocks at age 13, that Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak started Apple in a garage, and that Bill Gates wrote his first software program when he was 13.

For Mikaila, the bees and her grandmother's cookbook are an integral part of her story. Just as a trip to the bank is for her fellow child entrepreneur Alina Morse, who [came up with the idea for the Zollipop](#), a sugarless sucker, after her dad discouraged her from taking a sucker from a teller.

Stories matter. They are a way of helping humans understand the world. And they matter not just for movies and novels but also for entrepreneurs.

She's Media Savvy

Does an entrepreneur have to be good at talking on TV? Of course not. But it certainly doesn't hurt. This is especially true for young entrepreneurs, I suspect, since they are usually the face of the marketing efforts.

Shark Tank was not lightning in a bottle for Mikaila. She's done a whole bunch of interviews, and she does them really well. It doesn't seem to matter if it's [a quick chat](#) with Megyn Kelly (above) aired for 2.4 million people or a deep dive interview on entrepreneurship at Brain Bar in Budapest (below).

This young lady is confident, bright, and engaging – and that has no doubt made a difference. To be sure, there are lots of ways to be media savvy. Mikaila simply has found one way that's worked for her.

The Big Lesson

In the documentary [Made in Mékhé](#), the entrepreneur Magatte Wade discusses a question that she began asking as a small child: *why are some nations rich and prosperous and others poor?*

The answer, Wade concluded, could be found in a single word: *entrepreneurship*. Entrepreneurs make the world better because they effectively identify needs within a society and develop cost-effective ways to serve those needs. Through their efforts they create wealth, jobs, and products that we use, making everyone more prosperous.

Mikaila Ulmer is one such entrepreneur. She took the initiative as a small child to serve others something she created, and in the process, she made everyone better off.

Mikaila's success should be celebrated, as should the system that allowed her to achieve it. Her entrepreneurial efforts were not shut down by [police officers wearing body cameras](#) writing tickets.

We'd do well to remember that a prosperous society is one that allows free exchange and rewards industry and entrepreneurship. These are virtues an aspiring society should seek to foster in its young, and Mikaila Ulmer's story is a perfect example of why.

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