

Ep9 – Papier - Transcript

SPEAKERS

Claudia Winkleman, Taymoor

Claudia Winkleman 00:08

Hello, welcome to Business unusual from Vodafone Business. I'm Claudia Winkleman. I am loving the people I get to meet on this amazing podcast but I have to declare in interest in the type of business we're talking about today stationery is if you like my weakness, some people like fast cars or a fancy hotel. I like a really decent notepad with nice thick paper. Today I'm talking to the founder of Papier, a sustainable brand created in 2015, which is the home of beautiful greetings cards customised notepads, planners and wedding invitations that are affordable. But all the while supporting new and really wonderful contemporary designers. Today, my guest is Taymoor Atighetchi where are you speaking to me from Taymoor and thank you so much for joining us.

Taymoor 00:56

Thank you so much for having me, Claudia. I am currently at maison Papier, which is our which is our HQ here in, it's in Camden.

Claudia Winkleman 01:05

I love it. So in a world of emails, and E cards, which are a disgrace by the way if anybody's listening. How did you, how did people react? How did you when did you decide you know what I want, I just want a lovely, beautiful, solid notebook.

Taymoor 01:25

I think anyone who's received, as you say, an E card and also received a physical card, we'll just straightaway know the difference. And the differences is is huge in terms of the impact it has. And so I was always, you know, sure that that demand for some physical tactility would be there. And what's been fascinating to see is that demand has actually grown as digital has grown in parallel. So in effect, people are craving that physical tactility, that pen to paper, that handwritten note, you know, using a notebook, as opposed to your notes on your phone is, is gathering pace, students are going back to using pen to paper. And I think I think it's actually linked to the proliferation of digital and in general.

Claudia Winkleman 02:13

I think maybe we're fed up, sometimes we would just want to put our phone down. And also there is something about it. I don't know if this is too big a word about beauty. And about having, you know, you design your perfect card, or it's just a colour block notebook, but the colour is perfect. There's something lovely about that, in your hand. How did the idea come to you and why was it important to you to found this company?

Taymoor 02:41

So the idea was rooted I guess in in it a bit about me and what I wanted I I've always been into art and history, I studied history of art as a student. And I always loved self expression through paper and you know, studied works on paper. And, you know, that's always been a huge passion of mine. And I was looking for a way in which I could build a brand that actually could utilise some of that. And stationery is that stationery is art and especially the stationery at Papier we work with artists, we work with fashion designers, illustrators. And so for me, Pappy was not just building a brand that could serve paper people like myself, but it was also a way in which I could use and get back to what I was so passionate about in art and design.

Claudia Winkleman 03:28

Absolutely. I love this quote from you stop talking about things and just do it. Is that your advice? Lots of people who listen to these podcasts are budding entrepreneurs, or they've got a burning idea. And they're like it is it for you just get on with it? Because we all have ideas?

Taymoor 03:46

Absolutely. Absolutely. And I think, you know, just do it, is obviously a very well known statement, but it really is the best way of describing how I think one should just go about it. And it's so easy to talk yourself out of something. It's even easier for your friends and family to talk yourself out of it. And I actually, I was kind of in I kind of kept it under embargo. I just said no, I'm not going to tell anyone about this, because it's going to be so someone's going to say Oh, well what about this? And don't you think the markets a bit, you know, not right for it. So I would say just do it. And also don't worry about the idea. The the actual idea is just a seed and it will grow and it might change into something completely different. What's important is you just get going and get and get on with it and don't let yourself or others talk you out of it. You have to be unusually stubborn and single minded actually. And some of the best entrepreneurs I know are but at the same time can also take feedback as well. But this is a rare moment that you kind of have to be quite one eyed about stuff and just get on with it.

Claudia Winkleman 04:51

That's so interesting to hear because so many people want I suppose support you know to arrive at a dinner or you see your family member and say, guys sit down, I've got something that's going to blow your mind. But instead, you're saying you've got this sort of little secret, this thing you're going to do, and you have to hold it close to your chest.

Taymoor 05:10

Absolutely. And I think the only point at which I actually started telling people was kind of very close to it being launched. And I remember people just being really confused, and some people mildly offended. Saying why have you kept this secret? And the real reason is, you know, I think there's an enormous amount of pressure anyway. And you put enormous amount of pressure on yourself. And in a weird way, you know, I think having that kind of slightly closed, of course, you can lead in certain people into it, but you know, going to a dinner party or drinks or whatever is, is the most notorious setting for this kind of thing, where you go around a room, and the inevitable question comes, what do you do, which is my worst question, I hate when people ask, what do you do but anyway, but you know, and then you've got a lawyer, and then maybe bankers, and then you get to you, and I'm setting up a business. And then that's when, you know, all of a sudden, everyone it becomes Dragon's Den. And everyone

started to understand that ask what, what it does, and then start picking holes, you know, so I kind of think, you know, you can afford a bit of secrecy around it, and it kind of in a weird way, kind of makes it more fun.

Claudia Winkleman 06:17

Yes. Like, the early stages of pregnancy, which I didn't expect you to.

Taymoor 06:25

Similar, yeah,

Claudia Winkleman 06:26

I know how to, like, you know, you're, you're doing something extraordinary, but you're just not asking about it. You are five years in, at what point did you go, guys, we smashed this, we've done it. And do you base that on the amount of orders when 5000 people are saying, I like this notebook? Or how do how do you measure it?

Taymoor 06:48

It's, it's interesting, because it moves so quickly, you rarely get a chance to actually pause and then reflect and say, well, where have you got to? So there's never a single moment, but actually, weirdly, the moments that I find, I you know, kind of think, Gosh, this is this is got a lot bigger than I ever thought it was, is actually when you think about team and we were now just over 85 people, and there are those moments beer, you know, Christmas parties or something where everyone gets together and you sit down and you toast and you celebrate and those have always been the moments that I kind of have to do a double take and think god you know, this started with a kind of random idea that I and all of a sudden there's these 85 people all building this amazing brand together I think those for me are those moments but yeah, of course you know when you when you get those big customer numbers and you know we had a we had a 1,000,000th customer only a few months ago. Again you just get those weird you know, kind of pinch yourself moments thing. A million a million paper people have come into Papier as well which is which is just amazing.

Claudia Winkleman 07:54

I'm just interested because as I said to you, I think before we started recording I've been using your website since the beginning. Do you have lots of and it was just interesting me when you said our millionth customer because do you have lots of repeat orders?

Taymoor 08:12

Yeah,

Claudia Winkleman 08:12

Like me me?

Taymoor 08:13

Yeah, absolutely. We we have we have kind of groups of people we have we have we call them stationery addicts, which sounds like you as I am who you know for whom stationery is not just pure

utility. And actually you just want more and you crave more and you use them for different things. So you know, over half of the business businesses orders come from repeat customers people that are coming back and are regular stationary users. So which is which is fantastic. It really shows that there's there's brand loyalty and we can continue to provide something that people want from us.

Claudia Winkleman 08:49

Absolutely. You are transatlantic, how different was it launching a company in the US compared to the UK?

Taymoor 08:56

More different than we expected. I think that's the story of all of our international. The thing that is constant the thing that is universal and we think that's universal across the entire world we've been looking at stationary in Japan which is obviously a famously big stationery company is this love this stationery love so when you meet a paper person in the UK, who loves stationery walks into a stationery shop and gets that tingling feeling and just actually ends up buying 10 times as many things as they actually need, that paper person exists everywhere. That's something that's universal. What's different are tastes, sizes. You know what size notebook you use in the UK is slightly different to what you use in the in the US. There are those nuances. Same with wedding invitations, small size differences, shapes of envelopes, there are all these little nuances which actually matter. They are the difference between someone saying no I'm not going to buy that or not. So, stationery and paper that the love people have for stationery that magic of stationery is universal, but there are certainly a lot more little nuances that we didn't foresee at the beginning and we've slowly got to understand.

Claudia Winkleman 10:10

What is if this isn't to weird of question, what is Papier's USP? What's your unique selling point?

Taymoor 10:18

Yeah, I mean, we, we tend to, we tend to talk about three, but I'll list them in order of kind of what's the most important but the first is design - the way we approach design is entirely different to every other stationary. And that's both because we can't there we collaborate with up and coming and established fashion designers, illustrators, artists, who are relevant and increasingly influencers as well and capture their aesthetic. But also because we have an in house design team that are always looking at what the race recent trends are, and also shaping future trends based on what we're seeing in kind of artistic culture more broadly. And the second is quality. We've always been really keen to make sure that, you know, if you're going to buy stationery, it's got to be great quality. And the people care about the tactility of paper and we use the best papers that are all sustainable, but have that magical tactile feel, we always use uncoated for anyone who's a paper person out there, they'll know that uncoated matte finish of paper. And then thirdly, it's personalization. And we've we've, this is a tech business that enables the power of paper and stationery. And so what we do is enable people to personalise every aspect of their notebook and their planner, their diary and everything. So those three things design, quality, and personalization have always been the pillars of what makes us different.

Claudia Winkleman 11:42

Yeah and also anything with initials or name on.

Taymoor 11:45

Yes.

Claudia Winkleman 11:46

Just makes it better, right? Especially for a present. I've given them those your beautiful, huh, halfway and half sort of apricot books with a child's name on people jump up and down. Let us talk about investment and investors. How much support did you need at the beginning?

Taymoor 12:06

So I launched the business with investment. And that's not necessarily the only way to launch a business for other entrepreneurs out there, you don't need to go and necessarily raise money. But I did, I decided that I needed an amount of money to get the business up and running to employ a few people to get the website up. And so I did need the support of investors, primarily kind of that belief in what we were building and obviously the capital to support that as well.

Claudia Winkleman 12:33

Okay. And how difficult was it to get people to go "Yeah, okay, I'm in" without really something in your hand? I mean, you might have mocked up notebooks, but quite difficult telling somebody who's got , who is attached to their iPhone "no, I promise you people are gonna want to do list notelets that are really beautiful and very, very pale, see green, with their initials on the back" and they're like, what is this man talking about?

Taymoor 13:01

Yeah, no, totally. And, you know, especially raising in getting investment for a category that A. is not very well known but also an important part is also the vast majority of consumers in stationary are women, about 90 95% of Papier's customers. And unfortunately, the investor community is still primarily it's changing, and it's changing a lot for the better, it's still primarily male. So you not only have this kind of odd world, but you also have your basically pitching to someone who's not really your customer either. And so it was it is remarkably difficult. I would say that in a weird way, though. It's easier to raise before you've launched anything, because what they're investing in at that point and investor is an idea. And the individuals in this case kind of me the founder and some of the original kind of initial team that that are together. Sometimes it can be harder to raise a few months after you've launched because at that point, they're looking at your numbers. So in short, sometimes it's it's easier to invest on a hope and a dream than it is on a three month old business.

Claudia Winkleman 14:13

More from my chat with Taymoor in just a moment. First I want to introduce a brilliant you initiative from Vodafone Business. In the last year, there's been a huge rise in the need for businesses to get online. Small and Medium Enterprises make up 99.9% of the UK business population. founders and entrepreneurs have never had so many decisions to make when it comes to technology. Digital skills are more important than ever, but at least a third of small business owners in the UK said they aren't sure which tools will best suit their needs. Many haven't invested in any digital support. Some have only the most basic cybersecurity that's why Vodafone have introduced Business.Connected a free online

training programme to support 100,000 businesses across the UK. It offers free webinars, workshops and online training modules. There are different levels of upskilling to cater to those just starting their online journey, as well as businesses looking to build on existing experience. Find out more via Vodafone Business, online knowledge and Resource Centre V hub, where you can sign up to business connected and connect your business to the free tools and training. You need to digitally transform search Vodafone Business V hub. Of course, you will co founder of something before let's talk about The Tab. The business you founded, what inspired The Tab? And for anybody who's going what, what what was it? What is it?

Taymoor 15:45

The Tab is effectively a student news publication modelled on tabloids. And you know, I think it's it's something that, obviously is a real Marmite topic. As tabloids have been both notorious for kind of the way they publicised but the reason me and a couple of others did it. We were we were at Cambridge University, notoriously famously kind of highbrow very academic institution and what we what we sent, so the only the only publication that was around was, again, quite a stiff, and quite, almost essay like publication. And we we had a sense that potentially, just because everyone was, you know, academic doesn't mean they wouldn't want something that was a little bit more entertaining. And so we launched the tab, which is, which was effectively the university's first student tabloid. And, and this was just in the on the cusp of when Facebook was coming out. And so there was there were elements of that, and it went completely viral. And I think that was the first experience I ever had of building a brand or something that suddenly everyone around you latches onto and is talking about. And that was the story behind it. It's subsequently rolled out to pretty much every university in the country, and also the US. And I think most students now still potentially, go and check out the tab for their local student news.

Claudia Winkleman 17:11

That's so brilliant, and you were so young, how important is it when you get involved in any of these things, whether it's paper, or whether it's making student news slightly less, like wading through treacle? How important is it for you to do something that you love?

Taymoor 17:31

I think it's critical. I think the reason it's so important is because I just I kind of say it's your downside risk, you are you are, you're up against it, setting up anything, the vast majority of businesses don't make it. And so if you're not guaranteed to, you know, succeed, make money, you might as well have a good time while you're doing it. Because at the end of the day, if you come out of a journey, however long it may be and say: "Look, didn't go anywhere, didn't make any money didn't didn't succeed. But I had a brilliant time". And I loved every minute of it. That is your data. That's your downside, right? So that's why I think it's, it's so important to do it, and to love what you're doing, because that's what's gonna keep you going. That's the fuel that will they actually say, "No, I'm going to go out this day after day after day". So I think it's really critical.

Claudia Winkleman 18:25

I think it's so interesting, because this is our second series of business unusual, and of every founder I speak to, is passionate about what they're doing, whether it's making peanut butter, whether it's

transforming wheelchairs, whether it's starting a app for new mums, you know, nobody's doing this just with pound signs in their eyes. That's that doesn't seem to be the impetus.

Taymoor 18:53

No, I think I think you really, I mean, if your one and only objective is pound signs, I can definitely advise everyone that there are far far easier ways of making money than building and setting up a business. It certainly is not. As and I've not met a founder that that has that as their primary motivation. In general, it's it's an outcome if you're lucky.

Claudia Winkleman 19:19

Exactly. Have you talked to me how you feel about because many people really love the idea of mentors.

Taymoor 19:27

I think they're really important and we have, you know, both internal mentors, at Papier, we have a huge culture of personal and professional development. And every every other week, everyone will come speak to their manager and mentor about how they're doing, how they're progressing. That's something I've always been passionate about. I think, for me, I have a number of mentors from all different parts of business and non business as well. And a lot of them a lot of it is quite informal. So I think one thing I would possibly advise is to say what It doesn't have to always be a formal relationship. You don't have to kind of go to someone and sa, "Could you be my mentor"? I think you can know everyone. I mean, the way I said, you know, your, your, for me, you know, my mom is a mentor, but I never had a conversation with her saying, "will you be my mentor", but I think you can have these mentorship, relationships with people all across the board. And, and not necessarily have that as a kind of very key formal thing. The key is to be open to development. I think that's the thing that I think, you know, once something clicks inside you and you go, actually, I need to treat this like exercise or sport where I'm continuously assessing how I am progressing. I think that's a really liberating piece where all of a sudden, everyone becomes a bit of a mentor, because you suddenly become open to learning, which I think is so important, especially as a founder where everything is new. You know, this is, for me, at least the first time I'm doing a lot of this

Claudia Winkleman 20:55

Taymoor, there is a misconception that it's not possible to run a sustainable paper business. But that's a myth, isn't it?

Taymoor 21:03

Yeah, it is a myth. It's a myth. It's a huge myth, and one that we obviously, you know, are very keen to bust. And people think paper equals bad. And we're very used to seeing kind of notes at the bottom of an email saying, you know, please don't print this etc. And actually, if you are using which we do, and actually most producers of paper and stationery in, in Europe and the US are using sustainable FSC certified papers, then you are actually contributing to growth of forestry in Europe and actually, the forest that that, that produce a lot of the pulp and the paper that that we use, primarily in Eastern Europe, they're growing at a rate of about two football pitch pitches a week. And that is surely fueled by this industry. So it is a massive myth that this you know, the Amazon forest has been cut down none of

none. No paper comes from those regions. That's that's really where kind of garden furniture and etc comes to play when it comes to paper, and especially if pappy we are contributing to growth in forestry across the planet.

Claudia Winkleman 22:14

Okay, thank you. I am going to end with some quickfire questions if you don't mind. What three words would you use to describe Papier?

Taymoor 22:25

Chic paper addiction.

Claudia Winkleman 22:32

I love it. What three things couldn't Papier survive without?

Taymoor 22:37

Kindness, team and love.

Claudia Winkleman 22:41

Aw. Finally, what is next? Not for Papier, but I don't know for you in 20 years? What do you want to have achieved? Do you think I'll be done with paper and I'll fancy doing something else?

Taymoor 22:53

Yeah, in 20 years, I think I'll be on probably business three, maybe the first maybe the third success? Who knows?

Claudia Winkleman 23:02

Oh, well. Huge, huge luck from us. And thank you so much for taking part. Thank you, Taymoor.

Taymoor 23:08

Thank you so much.

Claudia Winkleman 23:13

Next time on business unusual from Vodafone Business. We're revisiting Little Moons with Vivian and Howard Wong. Thank you so much for joining us today for business unusual. We'd love you to rate and review the podcast and while you're there, please do subscribe to hear more from the UK as most inspirational founders in this series from Vodafone Business. Goodbye