

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/the-rewarding-risk-of-shark-tank>

Sophia Edelstein, co-founder and co-CEO of Pair Eyewear, shares how she and Nathan Kondamuri decided to take the risk of pitching their product on the television show "Shark Tank." She also notes another risky bet that led to the company's pivot to focusing on the adult eyewear market.



Transcript

- The "Shark Tank" was an awesome experience.. 00:00:05,940 For those that don't know, "Shark Tank's" a TV reality show where they pick entrepreneurs who have companies to pitch to a panel of celebrity investors like Mark Cuban, and pitch for funding in your business.. It's a really fun show and we encourage everyone to go watch it if you haven't seen our episode.. It was really fun.. It's back when, you know, as Emily said, we were really focused on kids, so that was the focus of the pitch back then.. And we decided to go on "Shark Tank" because at the time, we were family and kid-focused, and we realized that if you wanna grow a company, a fast-paced startup trajectory and go from zero to 100 overnight, you need to do things that are more risky to help accelerate growth.. Normal businesses don't grow 160% year-over-year.. It's just, it's not natural.. So in order to do the unnatural, you need to find virality and you need to have growth marketing tactics that allow you to grow at an unprecedented rate, and you need to do kind of risky things like "Shark Tank." So for us, we realized that "Shark Tank" was this amazing opportunity where if aired, we'd be able to be on the TV screens of families all across America overnight and be able to tell our story kind of directly from ourselves to these families and get in front of them.. So, with "Shark Tank," we got reached out to actually by a producer..

I think they must have maybe read about the company in an article.. And from there, you begin an audition process.. There's no guarantee ever that you're actually gonna air.. Even when you film, there's no guarantee, which is definitely stressful.. You kind of just have to trust and do your best to create entertaining TV, 'cause that's what's most likely gonna air.. But it was a really fun process and a great experience.. So we ended up airing.. We found out we were gonna air only a week before we aired, so it was like a mad dash to get the website ready, make sure nothing was gonna crash.. We ended up having a watch party, which was very funny because it was the last weekend, you know, it was four years from today, it was the last weekend before New York City, we're based in New York, completely shut down because of COVID.. So at the time I remember we had 100 people, friends and family, early investors in a room together..

We were handing out Purell and we thought that was gonna be fine.. We were all gonna be okay.. (Emily laughs) Luckily no one ended up getting COVID from the viewing party, but it's really funny to look back.. And it really jump started kind of the rapid growth that we then continued to see throughout the next four years.. And some of the ways that it really helped is we actually, it was really helpful actually in gaining our first licensing partnerships.. So it created trust, not just with consumers who were seeing the brand, but also with licensing partners.. And it allowed us partially to sign what became our first

licensing deal, which was Marvel and then the NBA.. Those were our first two partners.. And then after that, we really created this well-oiled machine of signing on other licensors, and also very much a strategy of if you're not on the Pair marketplace, you're kinda missing out on this revenue opportunity.. So when we spoke to DC Comics, their only con was, "I can't believe you talked to Marvel first." (Emily laughs) So, you know that really, all of that really happened because of "Shark Tank," and then of course sales..

And because of "Shark Tank," we actually started seeing this really interesting behavior where adult customers started purchasing our kids' frames.. We were perplexed at first.. We were like, "These are for kids.. "Why are these adults buying it?" But we understood after doing interviews that they loved the concept and they wanted it as well, and they wanted it so badly they were willing to buy a child's pair of glasses not knowing if they would fit.. And at the time, our investors, they were very focused on us staying within kids, but once we saw this behavior, Nathan and I kind of went against their wishes and we were like, "We have to lean into this, right?" "Like, this is a customer demand.. "We're seeing customer need "and we're solving a customer problem with adults," so we created a landing page on our website.. We found models in New York City essentially overnight.. We brought them into the office.. We did a photo shoot of them wearing the largest children's frames that we had, and we started running ads for adults, and overnight the business exploded.. Of course, we showed these metrics to our investors two weeks later and they were like, "Oh my God, we always knew this would work for adults." Like, "This is incredible." But that was kind of just one example of as founders, you have to take risky bets..

You have to iterate incredibly fast, right? Like, that landing page, when we look back, like, I would laugh at it today.. Like, it was horrible.. The ads were so bad.. Nothing was high fidelity, but it was a proof of concept, and one that we could do incredibly quickly to get learnings that would then give us enough confidence to invest more money into something.. And today, you know, as Nathan mentioned, we're 90% adults...