



## SMALL BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT: CHANTELLE FRASER BRINGS “FLAWLESS” BEAUTY TO BUSINESS



Chantelle Fraser’s life is anything but average. Her free spirit and business savvy have taken her from studying at the London School of Economics, to serving celebrities at private members’ clubs, to jet setting around the globe with high fashion models in tow.

As the CEO and founder of Flawless Entertainment & Promotions, Fraser gives major brands and influential individuals access to the power of beauty and entertainment to take their events to the next level. I caught up with the UK-born entrepreneur to discuss her organic journey to success.

Flawless was born when Fraser realized the models at the agencies she worked for needed help making ends meet between jobs. The company has since expanded to represent musical and specialty talent. As her business continues to grow, it’s amazing to think that it all started with a young woman making cold calls from her bedroom.

We started our conversation at the beginning of her professional life. After running an IT recruitment business while studying for her master's degree, Chantelle set her sights on the entertainment industry.

Madame Noire (MN): When did you move to the US?

Chantelle Fraser (CF): The way I got to the States is an interesting story. After I finished my master's, I started working at a private members' club as a waitress part-time. I was working for Ronnie Wood [of the Rolling Stones]. It was great networking with lots of celebrities and interesting people. I met somebody who turned out to own a retail empire in England who went to the London School of Economics. He said to me, "Give me your resume. I've got contacts in the entertainment industry; I'll try to help you." It turned out he was moving to the States to conduct some business. He gave me a job as his personal assistant in the States.

MN: What were you doing before you started Flawless?

CF: After that [assistant] job ended, I got a job working at a modeling agency. I always knew I wanted to start my own business, but I thought the way to do it was to start small. I could have taken the corporate route, but realistically I'm not going to go work in a bank. So, I thought what kind of business am I realistically going to be able to run myself. I worked at agencies for about three years before launching my company [in 2006].

MN: What was the catalyst that made you start your business when you did?

CF: I initially thought I was going to end up owning just a regular, high fashion agency. But, I kept getting these calls from clients who wanted to book models for promotions and events. I always had to turn those jobs down because we were managing these models' careers. In those days it wasn't seen as good for their careers to be doing events. We're turning these really well paying jobs down, but I'd listen to models and they'd be struggling so much because they'd be doing all these editorials that weren't really paying a living wage. I'd see them out when I go to restaurants and they'd be hosting and waitressing.

I thought why don't I just start a business where clients get to fulfill their needs: they have beautiful people at their events, promoting their product, making them look good, and elevating their brand image. And also I'm providing the models with extra income and a means to showcase their other skills, other than just standing there pouting for the camera.

MN: You've talked about the needs Flawless meets for clients and models, what need does it fill for you?

CF: I always wanted to be the architect of my own destiny. I'm a free spirit. I always believe in being unreasonable. I wanted to do something dynamic. Flawless was a way for me to live my dream. It was the perfect type of company that encompasses all the things that I love... meeting people, inspiring other people, managing people. I love casting models, making people happy, and growing something. It's really fun to actually grow a business from a seed to making your visions come to life.

MN: Tell me about that first year operating out of your bedroom. What mistakes did you make and how did you learn from them?

CF: I was living in the moment. When I look back on it I think, “Oh my God, that’s so crazy!” The first month I started my business I didn’t have money to pay the rent. I had a roommate, it was a rent-controlled apartment, and I was like, “Damn, have I made a mistake?” But, for some reason I just didn’t have fear.

I was calling major brands – Playboy, Estee Lauder, high-net-worth individuals – telling them about my company. I didn’t have a website. I didn’t have anything. All I had was my voice, my charm, and my models, which I think were always of a very high standard. I was able to get business, and clients kept referring me to other clients. Eventually I grew myself out of my bedroom and into an office. One summer’s day, sitting there, I was lonely and said, “I think I’m going to get an office.” I think it was in the first six months I had an office in SoHo with a steady stream of clients and a couple of employees.

MN: How long did it take for you to turn a profit?

CF: I turned a profit pretty quickly because there are really no overheads to my business. The only overhead was my phone bill. All I needed to do was get a booking. Luckily, because I started at the top, my first clients were big corporations. I was actually making a profit straight away, basically from my first job.

MN: What are clients looking for when they come to you?

CF: Clients are looking for a means to elevate their brand, to make their events look elegant and fashionable, and ultimately to sell products. What Flawless does, in terms of the overall brand, is leverage the power of beauty and entertainment to connect individuals and their audiences in a way that will enhance their image and attract consumers to their product.

It’s not just about the models being beautiful. They have to have personality and charisma. Yes, you have to be physically attractive. But being attractive is also about your internal beauty and what you emanate. I really look for social intelligence. That is one of the big things that clients look for because they’re not just getting models, they’re getting models that can attract people and represent their brand the way they want to be presented to their audiences.

MN: Describe the process you go through for each client. I assume it’s more than just booking models.

CF: It’s not just about booking a model or entertainer and you’re done. It’s a whole big process. Everybody has such specific needs. They could want everything from standard models; say tall, blond model waitress who speaks Swedish because we’re having a party and everyone speaks Swedish. We get requests like that all the time. We source models through advertising, word of mouth, and our extended network. We use our models to source other types of talent.

The casting process is very interactive. It’s either a physical casting, or a Skype casting. We’ll even send clients videos. Once the talent’s booked, if it’s a very private event at home we don’t necessarily need to be involved. Larger scale events we would have managers on site making sure our talent is adhering to our Flawless terms and conditions.

MN: You have a really niche business. How do you make sure clients know you’re the person to come to?

CF: Most of it is word of mouth. I always ask existing clients for referrals. I'm just completely shameless. The minute the job ends and they're satisfied with the job, I ask if they have any other clients or friends they could refer us to. I have to say it's the best way that I've found to get clients.

The second way is just biting the bullet and cold calling. Nobody wants to talk on the phone anymore. It can be quite difficult to motivate my employees to get on the phone. I always tell them, when I started I had nothing. It was just me, myself, and I. I always tell these people there's never an excuse to not pick up the phone and get clients.

When I'm out for dinner or socially I always talk about my business. Everyone I meet is a potential client. You don't know where someone is going to be in six months or a year's time.

MN: What was the most difficult request you've gotten? How did you satisfy the client?

CF: I had a hedge fund client. They were entertaining Mongolian politicians and they wanted me to hire beautiful, tall Mongolian speaking models in New York City. I didn't know any Mongolian people. When they called they said they had called every modeling agency in Manhattan and nobody could help them. I was like, "We'll do it!" I never say no. I had no idea how I was going to do it. Once I accepted, somehow doors just kept opening up. I spoke to people, I asked everybody in our network, and we got referred to some people. We managed to them a cast of beautiful, tall Mongolian models.

You don't necessarily know how you're going to get somewhere you just have to start and doors will open. I had another client who wanted ballerina waitresses. That was hard.

MN: How did you build a network that allows you to fill such specific requests?

CF: I've always focused on being socially intelligent. I don't know if it's something I've developed or evolved, but I have an amazing memory for what people tell me. I think myself a good listener. I always encourage people to tell me about themselves. Maybe they'll tell me they have a boyfriend who is a break-dancer. A year later I'll get a request for a Chinese break-dancer, and I'll remember that I met LuAnn who had the boyfriend.

Second is building up trust. We have great relationships with managers and agents. It is a great way for us to have access to other talent. We've been able to develop these really great relationships because we've always kept our integrity in business. Whatever we say, we do.

MN: Flawless has come to offer much more than models. What service areas do you offer?

CF: We have three main divisions. "Flawless bringing beauty" is focused on beauty. It's been scientifically proven that people are attracted to beauty. Some attractive people are able to yield more attention and influence decision makers more quickly and easily. What we do is provide access to high fashion models and commercial models for live events and promotions. In essence we are providing brand ambassadors that represent the look and brand image to help them attract customers and tastemakers to their brand.

"Flawless bringing rhythm" is offering world-class DJs. This division was again organic, just out of client need. We were getting fashion brands asking us for DJs that were talented but also fashion forward that would be suitable for playing runway events or department stores. So I thought why don't we just get together a group of really great international DJs who are not only exceptionally talented musically but also charismatic. Charisma is really important to me. You're not just a model handing out product or a DJ spinning for an event. Their presence sets the tone for the event.

“Flawless bringing entertainment” offers aerial artists, contortionists, fortunetellers, henna tattoo artists and other types of specialty artists. We live in a very technologically-driven society and we are totally stimulated. People want great music, and they want to be visually stimulated. It’s not enough now to put on a DJ and hope for the best. People want interactive entertainment. Events have definitely evolved a lot in the past 10 years and we’re here to fill that niche.

MN: What’s the next step for Flawless?

CF: I would like to focus on growing the DJs by Flawless division. That’s really my biggest priority for 2013. I would also like to open up physical locations in Miami, Los Angeles, Chicago, and internationally as well. Dubai is a great market. England is my home and where the promo industry started. So, that’s my focus.

MN: Any advice for women thinking of going the entrepreneurial route?

CF: Don’t let your lack of knowledge or experiences stop you. When I started my company, and even to this day, there are still things I don’t know but I believe in myself and believe in my team around me. I believe in my core skills to get me to that next level. We just have to embrace it. It’s kind of like climbing a mountain or driving in the dark. You don’t see your destination; you only see the next couple of feet. The same thing is true in running a business. You don’t have to see the whole picture; you don’t have to have the answer right there. Just start and it will come to you. The answers will manifest themselves to you.