

THE **small** BUSINESS BIG **MARKETING**

show

**INSANELY EFFECTIVE
MARKETING**

Episode #447

Janet DeNeefe's Midas touch has enabled her to grow a business empire she loves on the beautiful island of Bali



www.SmallBusinessBigMarketing.com

Janet DeNeefe Interview Transcription

Tim

What you loves about doing business in Ubud in 2019.

Janet

I think in Ubud anyway pretty well anything is possible. And the beauty of Indonesia is you don't have a lot of rules and regulations so you can sort of start tuning over an idea and actually create that without having to worry about you know filling out forms or paying tax on it or something like that. And I think also it's just a hugely creative environment.

Tim

It is you've got a bit of Byron Bay about it in that sense.

Janet

Yes is true.

Janet

I mean and I think because you're in a place where there's a lot of artists and craftsmen still practicing their trade. If I want fabric I can go to the next village and actually watch it being handwoven and buy it, I do that part of it.

Tim

Do you think he could have done in Australia what you've done here.

Janet

Not at all. I don't think I'd even think of it. I often think that if I were in Australia I would be teaching art and probably tearing my hair out, chainsmoking but I mean I think I'd be a different person if I had live in Australia

Tim

You arrived here in 1984 chasing love. Am I right?

Janet

Well I arrived in 84 after first coming here in 75.

Tim

Oh wow.

Janet

Yes.

Tim

Is that when you first met

Janet

No no no. We came in 75 because my dad had a bit of cash in his pocket that he didn't want to tell anybody he had and decided to take us on a family holiday. So that's when we first came to Indonesia in 75. Can you imagine.

Tim

Bali or somewhere else.

Janet

It was mind-blowing actually.

Tim

And he came to launder money.

Janet

That was always rendered old. So it was amazing as you can imagine it was this sort of overgrown tropical jungle with all these beautiful people wearing sarongs and everybody was walking back then the pace was even slower. It was an extreme kind of overdoes.

Tim

How old are you in 75?

Janet

I was 15 I think.

Tim

Young private schoolgirl. Janet's I know you're just down the road from where I went.

Janet

Where do you go.

Tim

I can't tell you. It such a Melbourne conversation. So 75 you come here you obviously fell in love with the place. In 84 you fall in love with the person.

Janet

So then it was a package and the food was in there too don't worry. So I came back in 84 you know amidst all the claims from other people saying don't got to Bali it's already ruined. And I walked back into the joint so it's hardly changed seriously in that timeframe. Very little has changed. So yeah I met my husband the second day and.

Tim

Tell us about that meeting. How did you meet there?

Janet

Actually I was staying in a hotel which is where most people stayed back then and even in 74 that's where we stayed. And he was just in the restaurant talking to Chuck Putra who's the Prince of Ubud. And he just joined us I was with a girlfriend he joined us after dinner.

Tim

So you got chatting to this young man who switched you off your feet or you sweep him off his feet

Janet

I think it wasn't sweeping in that sense either. I think it was more just an interest because I thought I've never met anybody like this before and it was extremely refreshing as you can imagine and intriguing.

Tim

So this isn't a podcast about romance but I think it is interesting because your husband father children and your business partner. So it is a business podcast. You fell in love with the man. Did you have a plan to start an empire or?

Janet

I never have plans. I never planned anything.

Tim

To this day.

Janet

To this day. I know my daughter is always telling me. You can't just do something you have to have a plan in life. I'm a bit like my dad I'm a firm believer of the spontaneous sort of action or spontaneity. DeNeefe's don't do planning.

Tim

Your about four hundred and fiftieth small business owners that I've interviewed and half of them have plans half of them don't I'm not sure there's a rule book that says you must have a plan and other people with plans laugh at people like you and I who don't have plans.

Janet

Sometimes I make a plan after I've done it and from pressure, I guess from people saying you have to have a plan.

Tim

Well talk about some the businesses that you have had and maybe look at them. How they came about with the idea you come from and how did you manage without a plan. However before we do that. fall in love bring your mum and dad I'm staying here I'm moving to Bali. This is it. You think I'm going to have a family and settle down here or was there at some point you must've thought you know what I am going to start a business.

Janet

I know we never planned that. So anyway yeah we met and I spent a number of weeks here then I went back home and then I came back because I thought oh well this feels good you know. But I wanted to write a cookbook. That's why I came back as well. And of course once I started to research the food I'm like holy mackerel this is a whole other ball game here because the culture is so rich that I realised I was actually learning a bit about the culture anyway just through unravelling the recipes it was sort of like heading to the pot of gold you know. Yeah so I just kept researching the cooking. I stayed in 85 for about six or eight months and then I took it back to Melbourne because I thought well it's all very well to be living this ideally life here. But what happens when you take me back to Australia. I'd been to Java yeah but never outside of Indonesia and this is back in the 80s so you can imagine taking him to Australia. Needless to say it wasn't extremely successful.

Tim

What happened?

Janet

I think he was just really shocked and I never really thought about cultural differences because I know it's cool in Bali. So laid back fruit in their offerings and food's amazing and so then we go back to Australia and he's just another Asian. And so this is fairly important man in town. You know he's just sort of one of them.

Tim

And I hate saying this but there is an element of racism in Australia you would understand and there still is you know and he probably felt that.

Janet

Of course he did but he was also confused. He wasn't used to living an isolated life like that. Even when I took one of our cooks home last year she felt the same thing. There's no community everyone's living in our own little house you don't really see anybody.

Tim

But just ask was taking it back to Melbourne in the back of your mind. Yet despite having no plan was it maybe he'll come back and live with me.

Janet

I guess it was. That was a bit of a plan and yeah I just wanted him to see what it was like. And so anyway he went back and I stayed on teaching and then eventually I had to pay all my bills I've been living in my credit card. I didn't have any money. So then the following year I think I'll been back once and then suddenly in maybe September or something. A friend of mine who had just been in Ubud she called me from Sydney and said hey look you better get back to Ubud now because hes just going into a restaurant business. I said oh my god you're joking because I was crazy about food and I'd been waitressing and you know it was my dream but I just never imagined it would happen. She said yeah and it seems like the guy that they knew who had a restaurant was Chinese Indonesian he was owning gambling all the time many went bankrupt so suddenly he had to give up his restaurant and his mate who lived just nearby said Ah well what do you reckon if we take it. Yeah that's a good idea. So suddenly we had a restaurant there was a five year lease left on it. It was very simple and small it still had all the furniture just simple bamboo furniture. The kitchen was about the size of a pea but there was still equipment in there. And so I came back and then all we had to pay there were four of us at the start was a thousand dollars each and we got

a fully equipped restaurant with a lease for five years so although that's hilarious even then I thought it doesn't even matter if it doesn't work as long as it doesn't. So there was a start and I was so excited because as I said I worked in restaurants and it was like a dream come true for me.

Tim

What do you do as a business owner here? Do you just let the staff do as they do because we're in their country? Or do you teach them that no this is how it happens in Australia America England where your customers are from. You do that.

Janet

Yes we do that of course. I mean I'm not saying you necessarily are successful and back then it was easy because I had a smaller team was now of course now it was a team but I think also now everybody is more aware of customer service and how they should treat them and they're a very good at being hospitable it's in their nature so they're very caring anyway.

Tim

It sounds like right off the bat Janet that you've had a success you've come over you've had a ticket to the game straight away with your husband being a local and allow you to take part in a business not a lot of money you found a hungry market. And so that's then obviously allow you to start to give you some cash and some resources and access to other things here. Labor and all that to then move on to the next step which was.

Janet

So after that actually my backgrounds art and it's cooking in terms of my kind of major hobby but I trained as an art teacher and my grandfather was an artist and so I've always grown up in that really arty sort of world. So yeah my aim actually back then was actually to paint and sell my work which I did a few paintings and sold them but my other big passion is textiles and even fashion design in a way. My daughter is now doing fashion design so actually after that I started dress shop. And I called it rococo.

Tim

Why.

Janet

Because I love the word

Tim

So who's cooking in a restaurant by the way as rococo gets off the ground.

Janet

I just made my team.

Tim

You train them up yeah they're ready for the next challenge. Do you have short attention span?

Janet

So anyway, I'd still hang out there. So in the end after that I moved into homewares.

Tim

So you then decide to start a homeware business of which you have now many many businesses I'm going to ask you about branding because if I were you I'd look at my list you've got a restaurant you've got a honeymoon guest house one and two you've got a kitchen a bakery you got indoors restaurant which I had a beautiful meal out the other night with my wonderful girlfriend Sarah. Emporium cooking school adventures with Janet. So your homeware stores called Casa Luna.

Janet

Yes.

Tim

Is this a branding issue or is the market ongoing?

Janet

I know because Casa Luna and I was going to call a Casa Luna home wares I never thought of calling it Janet Deneefe homewares it's a bit of an Aussie thing. So anyway, I call it Casa Luna and the home wares was easy because you only have to sew four straight sides basically if it's sheets or cushions.

Tim

You're making all your own homework.

Janet

No I don't still make them and we do have them and we do everything for them guest house too so yeah yes there was fun actually we were the first homeware store on the island.

Tim

Wow. It must be incredible as a business owner who's come to Bali who is highly creative and has ideas in cooking and clothing home wares and whatever it is. But even back then I'm assuming now you have money to actually do whatever you want within reason. But back then you still could do it your ability whereas in Australia you know you couldn't have started homewares store like you do.

Janet

Well this is just the village homeware store and you know what happened. I can't remember how many years after I had the homeware store but suddenly at Casa Luna my staff called me and said Oh these two women here that want to meet you. So I rushed up to the casa luna and I met these two designers interior designers one's American one's from Scotland and they said look we're looking for some soft furnishings for a very small hotel. I said yeah it's only 12 rooms that's easy to do that. Yeah. Well it's actually a hotel on an island. And then they said Yeah it's actually on Necker Island.

Tim

Sir Richard.

Janet

Yes.

Tim

So little Casa Luna homeware store in little island of Bali.

Janet

So yeah that ended up being the most extraordinary deal I mean well the workload ended up being enormous because every room of course had cushions and throws and kimonos and these big cupboard what we called turtles as enormous cushions on the ground and we even made the cushions for all the seats in the dining room and it was an enormous contract.

Tim

So 12 rooms was really. One of the most exclusive islands in the world.

Janet

But it was a joy to work with the women there an absolute comedy team they're hilarious. Oh yeah they were just so gorgeous and yeah we had so much fun because they were kind of crazy in their combinations of textiles and I'd go off scouting for stuff because most of the time we didn't have time to get it made. So I kind of knew the different places it had the best quality the sort of cotton that all these amazing motives. So every room had its own colour scheme they'd have like various shades of turquoise. Then suddenly with like a burnt orange thrown in the middle

Tim

Did you get to Necker?

Janet

No I've never been there.

Tim

Never been there. What fascinates me and as we talk about each of these little businesses that you've created we haven't even got to honeymoon guesthouse which is where we're sitting right now and how many 14 room guest house on one side of the street and on the other side.

Janet

There's like 20 20.

Tim

20. What I'm fascinated about is how is all this just happened. I know you're over here in a country where labour is cheap so it's easy enough to put resources behind it and materials are cheap. Yeah but it requires a certain psychology of the person doing it and you're not an implementer I don't know you but I'm guessing that I'm sitting here and sitting next to me smiling Yeah I'm guessing correct me if I'm wrong you are an ideas person. So who was following you with a very very large broom making sure that all this mayhem that Janet creates is put into action and launched

Janet

All the building is done by my husband.

Tim

He's a builder.

Janet

Well he is now yeah and he loves it. He loves doing that and nothing makes him happier than building.

Tim

So he's highly practical.

Janet

Yeah he is very good he's got a very good sense of space. I can't do that for quid's you know that he can create a room under a room and he just creates spaces so he's got a very logical mind which I don't have. So yeah he's the builder and he just could see when there was a need to do something he'd just jump in and do it.

Tim

Very early on did you realise that in order for you to do what your dream is here that you needed and he needed to step up and focus on what he was good at so that you could focus on what you're good at and if you did that you're going to build an empire.

Janet

I didn't think about that. But he just built them anyway. So suddenly then we had four rooms and kitchen might have then been at front and then we had another little room between the four rooms. That was like our little lounge area but there was still a little room inside and that's where we did a lot of the clothes for the clothing shops. So suddenly I think there was trouble in Jakarta and that was I think 98 and suddenly there were no tourists.

Tim

It's a problem.

Janet

So okay we have to survive this. We've got to think how we're going to get the word out about our guest house and I thought well we have to get it out overseas now we can't just sit here and wait for people to wander past looking for a room. So I suddenly thought I've got to get the word out. How do we do that. And then I happened to meet a friend at Casa Luna this was Aussie guy old fella and I said you know I just feel it's not good times right now and nobody is coming and it's a bit depressing and I need to get the word out there and he said Well have you heard of this thing called a Web site. Do some research and find out and there's somebody on the island doing them I know there's one person

Tim

So the timing is perfect again because all the sudden the Internet comes and takes your business to the world amplifies it.

Janet

It was amazing. Yeah there was one Aussie girl on the island creating websites and so I called her up and said I think I need a website and that's it. So we created a website together. And so when people started Googling Bali accommodation.

Tim

You clearly have great karma because things are going right. Has anything gone wrong. Lost a thousand bucks or something but where you really kind of got that feeling where you got the wobbles and you've gone. This is not going to work

Janet

Look times are not always good but we just ride it out that's what you have to do and that's the thing about being in tourism you have to just be patient and wait till the people come back.

Tim

How do you do that. It's a lot of business owners are listening who are in tourism trying to ride out a tough time might be a plumber might be a chiropractor just doing it tough

Janet

You just have to be creative and think outside the box and I know it's harder in Australia when times are tough was here and just a few savings or you're really right now we're in the process to sort of reinventing ourselves a little bit. Our family our business because the kids are now at a point where two of them come into the business and the demographics in Ubud are a little bit different now. You've still got the old folk like me that you know you've got the young kind of young guineas and the vegan's and so we sort of having to think about a little bit of rebranding I guess or strengthening the brand or just reinventing it. So yeah but you just go with the flow because while it's tough one minute then the next minute it bounces back so.

Tim

Had your hope for a family business. Now you're talking second generation. Is that a scary proposition? Family businesses are tough require tough conversations sometimes from what I hear.

Janet

I grew up my dad had his own business. We always had our own business and then I had a few jobs in Melbourne obviously and then in the end I decided I only ever work for myself.

Tim

Got a favorite business. Of all the ones in the Janet DeNeeffe empire.

Janet

I probably tend to hang in Casa Luna the most because it's my Cass it's my home you know so it's always been like my first child sort of thing not saying the others are lesser but you know it's the first one that really took off. I mean the other restaurant we have we ran for five years and that was small and unmuddied first road but then when we came into the main road that's really launched Casa Luna in July 92 but I love the other the adventures I do these culinary adventures the spice tour the cruise I'm absolutely crazy about. I love it. I'm doing the Komodo Islands one in April and I'm just crazy about these adventures on the ocean amazing food and fresh fish you know.

Tim

Well you're in the services business you're selling products at emporium one of the trends is selling experiences people looking for experiences so you tap into something that's fantastic just to finish up. You have so much time on your hands. You started the Ubud writers and readers festival. Is that out of a social conscience is that a business decision?

Janet

Not a business decision because it's a foundation it's what we call a Yayasan and yet it was in response to the first Bali bombings actually. So when that happened in 2002 and you know. Bali was deserted you can imagine there was nobody here. So I just thought wow what are we going to do. We're just going to die you know. So I thought yeah we have to do something. And it has to be meaningful. And so I started to think of the whole Pied Piper

thing where you bring in whatever it is to bring everybody back. So I thought well if you want to encourage Westerners to come back it has to be someone famous and. They've got to be impressive. They've got to be leaders in a way. And then we've also got this terrorist issue. So at that time I was finishing my book fragrant rice and I was being invited to speak at Rice festivals etc. so I was already operating in the fishery arena as such and then even with a friend we'd been talking about having a poetry night said and I'm crazy about how we treat literature. So I just said okay writers festival and another food festival that's five years old and I've been dying to do it but I had to wait to see if my team was ready for it. And so I thought you know I can't just do these things too quickly. But after the 10 year mark that okay. Now we do the food festival.

Tim

Good on you. I'm exhausted after this. This is your life. What's next.

Janet

Well actually I guess through the food festival I mean food is the major passion. We've just been kind of looking at all the young kids on the island and the young farmers. So I've been really blown away actually by these kids that are trying to pursue farming against the odds so I went to a school the other day a high school and it's an agricultural school. It's the only one left in Bali. So there were eight. And the other seven now have transformed into hospitality schools. So there's one left and they're doing amazing stuff it's part of that future farmers organisation so they've got young people growing micro herbs and beautiful eggplant and all these beautiful greens and things. So I went to work with them I met another guy who's growing amazing chocos which I love and then I met a guy the other day who's actually producing baby pig pork in and then there's another young Balinese girl up that way who's doing something and then there's a guy over the other side who is growing mushrooms so it's this young generation

Tim

So your intent is to not lose the Balinese farming culture you get involved in this school is the only one left.

Janet

Yes so I want to work together with them and do like Harvest dinners and then I'm sort of cooking up ideas for this Javanese buildings we have on the other side there how I can bring them all into there and sort of integrate

Tim

I always like to finish by suggesting to listeners where to find my guest. You do have a personal website which is Janet DeNeefe.

Janet

That's my blog. And then the other one of course is Casa Luna Bali dot com.

Tim

Well Janet I really enjoyed this conversation and I think it's refreshing hopefully it inspires a whole bunch of other people to come to ubud. Is it too late to do that?

Janet

To come to ubud?

Tim

And start a business.

Janet

No never too late.

Tim

There we go. On a positive note.

Janet

Never too late never too late.