

'We Didn't Know We Could Do That!' These Co-Founders Built a Unique Photography Business That Tapped an Unexpected Need – And Now Is Found in 60 Cities

Jennifer Tsay and Jennifer Yeh are the co-founders and CEO and COO, respectively, of the professional photography platform Shoott, which offers free photoshoots where clients only pay for the photos they love. *Entrepreneur* spoke with Tsay about the birth of the business and the strategies and tactics they've used to grow it from a local business to one found in 60 cities throughout the United States.

Please give us the elevator pitch for Shoott

Shoott is a professional photography marketplace. We set up a photographer station somewhere, say Central Park in New York City, and let customers know that they will be there from 12 to 5, and that they can book a half-hour session. Now here's where things are different: with most other platforms, you have to pay up front for a photo session. But with Shoott it is risk-free. You actually don't have to pay for anything until you see your photos and decide you want them, which you receive in three to five business days. You only pay for the photos you want.

Where did the idea come from?

I have an artistic background, and I have a business background. And while I was working as an artist, I noticed so many artists were living gig-to-gig. Many couldn't make enough money and had to quit. So we were like, what if we could

create a business model that helped artists stay artists? That was the entire impetus behind it. Let's provide the artists with a platform that will bring in a volume of work. They do what they're good at, and we do all the business activities for them.

As an artist, how has it been focusing on the business part?

I worked in investment banking in corporate finance for a few years before I decided that I wanted to try being an artist. So I took acting classes, dancing classes, I produced a documentary, I planned weddings. I had all different types of experiences, and I kind of mashed everything together to create this.

What was your breakthrough moment?

We really thought at first that influencers would use us, and some did, but we weren't getting the momentum we wanted. It wasn't until we trialed having sessions in Hoboken that we really hit on the fact that it's all families. We realized that moms are usually the ones taking the pictures on vacation, so this was great for them. We wound up taking photos of 50 families in one weekend. It was so crazy. That's when we know, there's like a real need and want for family portraits. We began targeting neighborhoods with lots of kids and public parks that were convenient for parents. We started advertising very specifically towards moms and realized, this is our target demographic.

Credit: Shoott

What has your growth been like?

In year one, we made something like \$80,000. In year five, we hit breakeven. And then the following year, which was 2024, we were at \$10 million top line, and close to a million in profitability. So we 20X-ed our profitability. It just shocked us. We were like, “Oh, we didn’t know we could do that!” We started with just three of us, and now we have 12 full-time people and five part-time people. We’re in 60 cities across the US, working with about 750 photographers.

How do you build your network of photographers?

We have a refer-a-friend program with our photographers. And we reach out on all of the platforms where photographers are looking for work. One of the biggest challenges we had was

educating the photographers about our free photo shoot offer. Some assumed that we were scamming them. But we're very transparent about how it works, and last year, our photographers on average made between \$166 and \$199 per hour, and they don't have to do any of the business stuff. They just do what they love. So if you want to make extra cash and you're a good photographer, it's easy.

What is your best advice for other business owners searching for that big momentum boost?

Try new ideas and do them fast. Not taking your business personally is really key. It's actually like this weird meditative experience where you keep what's serving you and you let go of what doesn't, and you don't get upset about it. And every day it's that same process over and over again.

What is something that many people think they need to start a business, but don't really need?

I think a lot of people want to feel sure and super confident before they start. And I've seen a lot of people get really stuck in their own heads, and you just never want to be in that energy. You want to have a hypothesis and test it. Just try doing stuff. Don't be afraid of making mistakes at all. I think a lot of people are like, 'What if I do this wrong?' I don't even think about that. I'm like, 'Let's try this. Let's try that.' You want to have a mentality of experimentation. Try it at a small scale and don't overthink it.

Do you have a mantra or quote that helps inspire you during tough times?

I didn't even realize I did this, my co-founder pointed it out. I'll be working, and I start whispering, 'I think I can, I think I can, I think I can' from *The Little Engine That Could*. You know, sometimes things feel very overwhelming, but you have to keep going!

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