

Celia Cheng

A DIGITAL FEAST

Cravings started when, as a student in the SVA MFA Design/Designer as Author + Entrepreneur program in 2005, Celia developed a guide to finding specific dishes in restaurants. Over the ensuing years it evolved into a design-conscious online publication that highlights food, wine, travel, and lifestyle. To make it more expandable, Cheng founded Cravings Productions, which produces videos, custom letterpress, photography, design, and consulting services. Now she travels between New York, Taiwan, Hawaii, and Japan.

You left a good job to start Cravings. Why and how?

Cravings brought out the entrepreneur in me. What started out as a database of recommended dishes at restaurants soon grew to include events to meet and eat with chefs, sweepstakes giveaways, and travel videos. The creative ideas just kept pouring out and I was having so much fun with it, the growth was organic. Two years after findyourcraving.com launched, I quit my job to focus on it full time. My timing was just right, since blogging, food culture, and social media were all experiencing explosive growth.

What triggered your interest in developing Cravings?

I saw a need in the marketplace. I was getting so many inquiries on where to eat and drink, and what to order, that I realized I needed to create a guide that could be easily accessed by a large audience. Print-version Zagat guides were still in their heyday back then, but I knew that this tool I was creating needed to be online. Being online allowed us to expand quickly from a food guide to a lifestyle guide extending to topics on wines, champagnes, travel, and culture. I also knew that Cravings needed to be colorful, lively, and luscious, just as food should be, and as a designer, I could make my guide unique by incorporating design, creativity, and fun. One of the main aspects that differentiates Cravings from other guides is that we are just as focused on the design as we are on the content. I am both a food editor and a graphic designer, and I find gastronomy and design to be completely complementary, and what sets us apart.

How have you gone about making it into a business?

A combination of online advertising, partnerships, organizing events, and providing consulting, video production, and graphic design services. Cravings focuses on food, wine, travel, and lifestyle, all of which is presented through thoughtful design. People noticed the design immediately and started to ask us to help them with design services from the beginning. As the demand for these different revenue streams grew, I decided to pull them together and launch Cravings Productions, a company that produces videos and provides letterpress, design services, and photography, with a focus on the food and beverage industry.

Have your plans and goals always worked out the way you want? Were there failures, and how did you overcome them? What did you learn from them?

cravings

FIND YOUR CRAVING

sign up • login
f
t
in

search by neighborhood, zip, city, craving, restaurant or keyword (e.g. SoHo, Brooklyn, 11249, burger, Chinese, Lupa)

LOCATION | FOOD | DRINK | TRAVEL | CULTURE | READING | SHOPPING | PEOPLE | GUIDES | VIDEOS

SUSHI NAKAMURA 鮨 なかもら

AJI SUSHI

f SHARE

p PIN IT

t TWEET

e EMAIL

f FLAG

★ FAVE

MY FAVORITES



Masanori Nakamura's Michelin-starred sushi bar is a honey-hued cocoon designed, like many other sushi restaurants of its kind, to soothe the senses and focus the taste buds. After one bite of the chef's exquisite sushi you'll know you're in the hands of a master. One standout was his *aji* (horse mackerel) sushi. Part of the pleasure is watching Nakamura score (with lightning speed) the top of the fish *tateyoko* (horizontally and vertically). When it is draped over a dainty finger of vinegared rice from Niigata Prefecture, a bumpy cross-hatch pattern of silver and pink emerges. The technique renders the fish delectably silky. No vulgar soy sauce needed here; Nakamura brushes the top of the sushi with a layer of subtle *nikiri*, a soy sauce and sake mixture in which the sake has been cooked off. Be prepared for the exotic, too: our omakase included abalone dressed with the intestines of sea cucumber and an intensely salty, flavorful taste of fermented red sea urchin.

Editor's Pick
Nancy Matsumoto | August 15, 2013

[-] Information

SUSHI NAKAMURA 鮨 なかもら

7-17-16 Roppongi, Minato-ku
Tokyo, 106-0032, Japan
+81-(0)3-3746-0856



Aji Sushi: \$\$\$\$

SEE ALL CRAVINGS IN ROPPONGI (5)

YOU MIGHT ALSO LIKE...





FEATURED IN...



There have been lots of curveballs along the way and I expect many more to come. Some partnerships didn't work out the way we envisioned and some streams of content didn't appeal to our audience, but the good thing is that we learn from each lesson and don't put ourselves in the same situation. It's extremely important whom you choose to work with: your team, your partners, your vendors. I've learned to listen to feedback from my team and my audience, and always strive to exceed my standards.

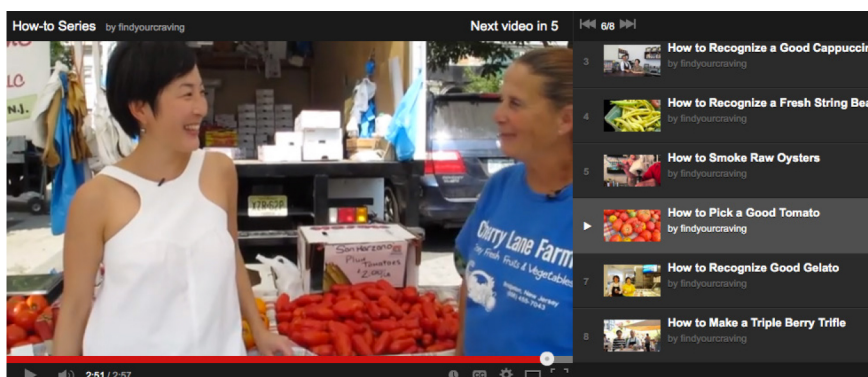
You were putting on events. Is that still part of your business plan?

If the right opportunity comes along, we are open to putting on events, but it's not part of our core business right now.

Can you actually profit from a website newsletter? How?

The newsletter is part of the brand outreach to our community. It's a platform that keeps our subscribers in the loop of what we are up to. The content we provide attracts an audience that has genuine interest in our recommendations. In addition to our latest content updates, the newsletter also lets our community know when we have events or sell services or products.

118



The digital space is the Wild West of business. Have you figured out how to tame it?

At the digital agency I worked at before Cravings, we used to joke, “Phil, so did you reach the end of the Internet today?” It may seem odd that we had a dedicated resource whose job was to surf the web, but as much as it seems like it is play, it’s really work. Keeping up with the digital space and finding new trends, strange phenomena, emerging technologies, and more is work, and it’s endless. There are no limits to the opportunities in the digital frontier. Technology is not something we can tame, because it is constantly changing, but it’s a matter of figuring out which tools can be useful to your business. For example, when we launched Cravings, we focused more on colors and used photos sparingly, due to the high cost of setting up photo shoots. While we started investing in photography equipment and honing our skills, smartphones proliferated and photographing food became so easy. Similarly, YouTube opened the gates for video blogging, and today, video content is just as common as written content. Once we jumped on that technology, it opened new doors for us both in terms of a new audience—our viewer demographic on YouTube is very different from that of our website visitors—and a new revenue stream. Once people saw our videos and knew we could make short, creative, and well-edited videos, they started asking for the service, and now videos are a growing market. Social media completely changed the landscape, allowing you to reach an audience by just putting it out there. It’s spurred the growth of artisanal producers, who once had to worry about how to market and distribute their homegrown product but now can easily reach millions of people. In that same vein, while letterpress seems like an old-school art form, it’s one of the design services we provide, and by promoting it via social media, it became an instant business. Tomorrow there will be something new, and I look forward to seeing how it will fit into my business.