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WTRMLN WTR Makes A Refreshingly Sustainable Splash



[Candice Helfand-Rogers](#), Contributor



Credit: WTRMLN WTR

The United States has a food waste problem, and Jody Levy wants to help solve it.

Levy is the creative director and co-founder of [WTRMLN WTR](#), a New York-based maker of all-natural — you guessed it — watermelon water that's sold across the country in retailers from Whole Foods to convenience stores.

Her product is made entirely from melons that would normally be thrown away because of superficial flaws, taking one bite out of a big problem.

Roughly 6 billion pounds of “ugly” fruit and vegetables are wasted each year, according to the Natural Resources Defense Council.

Beyond combating this national issue, Levy also wants to help Americans get healthier. “Many consumers are showing a growing awareness about what they’re putting in their bodies, and are looking for an alternative” to sodas and other sugar-laden drinks, she says.

Her pursuit of a bold solution has paid off. She and her team of 35 have built a venture that presses over 25 million pounds of watermelon annually into a product that she says is set to bring them a significant bump in revenue this year.

The Essence of a Good Business

Levy was born and raised in Detroit and went to college at The Art Institute of Chicago, where she earned a degree in 2001. Her lifelong exposure to the automotive industry and an innate artistic drive combined when she served as a founding member of O2 Creative Solutions. There, she collaborated with clients such as Chrysler, Ford, and Toyota to plan events that featured artistic installations.

In 2011, she founded her own firm, Stitch Experience Design + Assembly. She’s still involved with Stitch and some of its key clients, but her priorities shifted and her involvement in the everyday dealings of the business decreased after fate — and work — led her to form WTRMLN WTR.

Stitch brought Levy to the festival Burning Man in 2012, where amid the bright colors and eclectic sounds of the event she met future co-founder Harlan Berger. It was he who told her about the tons of unused watermelons that are wasted each year. “I had never thought about the epidemic of wasted, ‘ugly’ fruit,” she says.

Galvanized into action, Levy and Berger decided to tackle the issue by finding a sustainable way of turning those wasted melons into a consumable product — and a money-making venture. Less than a year later, they officially launched WTRMLN WTR.

In addition to establishing pressing and packaging plants and working with food scientists to develop the water itself, a key part of getting the business up and running involved forging relationships with growers throughout the nation. To source watermelons during months when they are more scarce in the continental U.S., Levy and Berger recently began working with growers in Puerto Rico.

Today, WTRMLN WTR has three facilities for processing melons and bottling its product located in different parts of the country.

Making a Delicious Difference

For Levy, WTRMLN WTR has always been about making an impact as well as turning a profit.

With that aim, she's particularly focused on improving access to her beverages in what are often referred to as food deserts — areas where natural, healthy foods are hard to come by, particularly for lower-income inhabitants of urban areas. The business' site even offers [astore locator](#).

“We're in this every day to democratize clean, healthy food, and to give everyone access to products like this,” she says, adding that her waters sell for \$3.99 or less.

It's an ethically sound call, as well as a business-savvy one. “There's a shift going on in the food and beverage world because of consumer demands ... for these products, which is great, and retailers want to provide them,” she says. “We came into the market at a time when we could take advantage.”

Her approach has won the attention — as well as investments and product endorsements — of celebrities like iconic singer Beyonce. It's thrilling for the brand, but also crucial to furthering Levy's cause.

“Voices like Beyonce's help tell our story to more people, and help them make the switch from high-sugar, artificial products,” she says. “It's amazing, because it all comes together toward this bigger vision of how we can encourage people to be the best versions of themselves.”

In Business for a Better Tomorrow

Levy has a big vision for WTRMLN WTR, too. New manufacturing facilities are on the way, and so are new partnerships.

Meanwhile, the 37-year-old entrepreneur continues to work with some clients at Stitch and is even starting new ventures, including offering creative direction on an app that will help freelance workers find more consistent means of employment.

But given WTRMLN WTR's burgeoning growth, Levy's entrepreneurial energy is now centered on tending to its upward path, including improving and streamlining her manufacturing and distribution methodologies and ensuring widespread access to her product.

“There are so many opportunities for making the process better, and paving the way for other companies,” she says. “That's where the biggest challenges have come in — reducing costs and making it more accessible.”

Indeed, Levy wants to improve the world not only through what she does, but also, how she does it. This part of her mission is exemplified — personified, even — by the firm's “Baby Doll” marketing effort.

Named for a type of watermelon, Baby Dolls are women who act as on-the-street brand ambassadors hired on a freelance basis to engage face-to-face with consumers. Levy is as excited about their ability to introduce more people to WTRMLN WTR as she is about helping these women find jobs.

“Empowering people to find work is the single best way to empower someone,” she says, adding, “There’s a magic with WTRMLN WTR that comes from our way of doing things. That’s the culture we’ve created.”

This post has been updated since it was originally published. Levy and Berger met at Burning Man, not Coachella, as originally stated.