

An Entrepreneurial Spirit

An Interview with Sarah Evans and Jamie Lynn Sigler, Partners, J Public Relations

EDITORS' NOTE Jamie Lynn Sigler grew up working in the tourism business in her native Cape Cod, Massachusetts, learning the inner workings of the hospitality industry, where she became obsessed with the details of service while working jobs in housekeeping, food and beverage, and middle management. Certainly, that insider knowhow and industry moxie set her apart when starting her agency from the ground up. She and her business partner Sarah Evans were named by the New Yorker Observer's "Power 50" PR Agency List as one of the most powerful PR firms in the country and top in their category.

During her 15-plus year career, Sarah Evans has worked to publicize some of the greatest names in hospitality including Fairmont Hotels & Resorts, Dorchester Collection, and The Ritz-Carlton. In 2015 alone, she helped launch eight large-scale hotel openings and renovations including Gurney's Montauk Resort, and in 2016, she debuted the Trump D.C. in the historic Old Post Office building. She is a spokesperson in the field, having been featured as a travel expert on MSNBC, ABC, and Fox.



Sarah Evans



Jamie Lynn Sigler

in New York, so our entrepreneurial spirit had to go into overdrive. That's where relationships started coming in, but it didn't happen overnight.

I had been in New York for five years at the time and had been fortunate to work with major hospitality brands all over the world. I had a deep understanding of the industry and the media, being on the ground in New York.

Through relationships and referrals, we started getting more clients on the East Coast, which turned into national and global clients. Our first big global hit was Fairmont Hotels & Resorts in 2011.

Now we have four offices and clients on six continents, and many of them are well-known, luxury brands.

How do you define what your niche is?

Jamie Lynn: We started off with hotels but we don't believe they're what define travel and hospitality. A big focus for us has been making sure we're able to safeguard our business. We have over 150 clients that we represent so we continue to figure out how to grow our business, spread our wings, and find clients that align with one another.

In the early 2000s, we saw the birth of the boutique hotels and with that, everything from lifestyle brands and products to real estate and hotel experiences – everyone wants to have a lifestyle and boutique feeling. A lot of trends within the global marketplace truly follow that trend, so we have been able to grow our business while staying niche.

Within that space, is there a right client for you?

Sarah: The right client for us is someone who has a story, someone that media and influencers are going to want to write about and photograph; also, someone who sees us as a partner and not a hired agency, as well as someone who respects us as experts in our space.

Most of our clients have come from relationships and referrals. We believe that good work and happy employees produce happy clients and lasting relationships. Hospitality and real estate are cyclical businesses. We now have clients who have worked at several different places over the years.

Will you talk about the structure you put in place in attracting and training talent?

Jamie Lynn: Because we hold our staff, our team members, and our talent as our number-one priority, client service is very important to us. We believe that a happy staff and a well-trained, empowered team – and proving loyalty to our team – is hugely important. We have created something incredibly special in our culture that started at the top but goes down to how our interns are hired, trained, treated, respected, and mentored.

We put our talent, our culture, and our team at the top of our list.

Sarah: If we had to describe our culture in one word, I would say "genuine." It's a genuine love for one another and what we're doing. We're creating a culture that comes from personal caring and respect from the top down. It's not forced and toxicity is never allowed. There is a genuine passion and team spirit here that is hard to duplicate. We don't look at ourselves as a PR agency necessarily. We've worked hard to create a brand at JPR and our brand is our employees and they are first. It's always been important to us to have a brand that each person is excited about and believes in.

If we nurture our employees and our brand, the rest will come. ●

COMPANY BRIEF With offices in New York City, Los Angeles, San Diego, and London, JPR's (jpublicrelations.com) reach is global with a robust presence on both coasts. Its leadership team is backed by 50 of the best storytellers, dot-connectors, trend-setters, and industry experts. JPR is a trusted resource for its insider status, next-level strategy, and relevant brand partnerships, and its in-house social division (7th & Wit) navigates the dynamic online media landscape with laser focus.

Will you talk about the vision around what you wanted to build with J Public Relations?

Jamie Lynn: I founded JPR in 2005 so we're now over 11 years old, and originally I had founded the agency with another partner in San Diego as more of a boutique shop.

I came from an agency where we had one client in each sector. It was fine for a local business, but a frustration of being an all-encompassing agency without a niche was that it was hard to truly understand a client's business as well as to develop relationships outside at a local and regional level and become a go-to person.

In 2004/2005, we were talking about the vision of J Public Relations. Downtown San Diego was in its infancy at the time and there was a lot of development on the horizon.

We saw an opportunity that San Diego could support a business like this. We started growing quickly in the area, and I worked my way up the coast.

We were engaging several hotels that loved our approach and our deep understanding of the hospitality business, but they wanted us to be in New York City. That's where Sarah came in and we launched our New York City presence.

This is how JPR was born on a national level.

Will you touch on the entrepreneurial spirit it took to build a business in the New York market early on?

Sarah: We had a couple of good bi-coastal projects out of the gate, including Hard Rock Las Vegas.

However, we were up against a challenge because we didn't have any New York clients; we had a small website; I was the only person