

Knowing and growing your influence with WeArisma

As part of our quick founder questions series – or QFQs – we spoke to Jenny Tsai, CEO of WeArisma about influencer marketing, social media ranking and building brand affinity with Gen Z.

While leading Hearst media properties across international markets for Cosmopolitan, Elle and Harper's Bazaar, I saw firsthand the impact that influential sources have on brand building and performance.

My educational background is in Financial Engineering and I have always been fascinated by the impact of applying datasets to fields not traditionally associated with decision-making characterised by the bestselling book Moneyball. In the book, data and analytics were used to assemble a team of previously overlooked baseball players with the skills to create a winning team. I applied the same principle to influencer marketing and earned media and founded WeArisma in 2015.

In recent years, consumers' purchasing journeys are becoming increasingly fragmented, driven by changing habits in where and how they interact with brands. While Google used to be the de facto search engine, today billions of people globally discover brands on their personalised social feeds through earned influential sources such as press, influencers and celebrities. This is because consumers have a desire to connect with influential sources they may share interests with and can relate to, and whose perspectives they often trust more than brands.

Tell me about the business - what it is, what it aims to achieve, who you work with, how you reach customers and so on?

WeArisma is an earned influence analytics company helping global brands measure and grow their influencer marketing and earned media Return on Investment (RoI).

Influencer marketing is an important tool in a marketer's strategy to not only reflect the changes of how consumers discover brands and products, but also help grow brand affinity, loyalty and drive commercial impact.

Our platform is now used by over 40 global brands, including some of the world's most valuable luxury and Fortune 500 brands, such as Hermès, Unilever and Coty.

How has the business evolved since its launch? When was this?

When I founded WeArisma in 2015, it was long before the term 'influencer' became widely used and before the influencer phenomenon took off. As a result, we have built the largest, independent worldwide data panel and insights platform – something that Business Insider called out as being the “only credible independent global source of data in the market”. And we're very proud of this positioning.

We like to think of WeArisma as being the perfect blend of human expertise and AI; helping transform the industry from one that looked set to become highly commoditised and untrustworthy to one of the most authentic channels in the digital era.

Tell us about the working culture at WeArisma

At WeArisma, we have a strong team culture whilst placing a big focus on empowering employees to have a strong sense of ownership and autonomy over their work. This helps everyone see their direct impact on the company's growth.

Needless to say, WeArisma wouldn't be where it is today without the razor-focus and dedication of the team- and we're proud of how we've grown into a diverse and highly-skilled company.

How are you funded?

We have had two successful rounds of funding. The latest of these was in June 2023, where we raised £2.5M in Series A funding with exclusive investment syndicate, Adjuvo to develop our brand discovery and influence analysis tool.

We also received investment from Morgan Stanley in 2022 to help the company accelerate growth as part of the company's Inclusive Ventures Lab.

What has been your biggest challenge so far and how have you overcome this?

A challenge we have faced is finding the right balance between harnessing AI capabilities and human creativity when building our product. To overcome this, we've focused on building a strong team of sector-specific experts across the entire company and importantly in areas of engineering and data science.

With the team's strength and expertise, we have been able to create a platform that seamlessly blends cutting-edge AI technology with a unique touch of human ingenuity.

How does Wearisma answer an unmet need?

The nature of how consumers search for things has changed. Google used to be the first port of call, today billions of consumers start their purchasing journey much earlier on through recommendations from influential sources. In fact, 40% of Gen Z users now prefer to use TikTok and Instagram for search over Google. This makes it vital for brands to understand how they are performing on these earned media channels and how to improve.

And while it is easy for a brand to identify whether they're on the first or fifth page of Google search, many brands are unaware of how they rank across these earned media channels and how their products are being recommended ahead of other brands. They also struggle to understand how well influencer content is being received, how competitors are performing on these channels and which gaps/opportunities they should capitalise on.

WeArisma's earned influence analytics offer similar insights into the prominence of the brand and its products on social feeds, helping brands drive to the top of mind of billions of consumers via influential sources they trust. The platform goes beyond just quantifying brand mentions and engagements from influential third parties but can also assess if these interactions are effective in driving brand affinity and commercial impact.

What's in store for the future?

We plan to introduce new features to the platform. This includes boosting coverage of the leading social channels in APAC and globally – so brands can unlock new revenue opportunities in markets that see consumer purchasing decisions heavily driven by influential sources.

WeArisma will also scale its team to help brands to better use the platform to understand the impact of influential sources on holistic brand strategies and, ultimately, close the industry measurement gap of the power of word of mouth recommendations from influential sources.

What one piece of advice would you give other founders or future founders?

Do. Or Do Not. There is no Try.

And finally, a more personal question! What's your daily routine and the rules you're living by at the moment?

Being a CEO is like being a high-performing athlete. It requires balance, focus, mental and physical wellbeing. This is why it's important to boost your stamina and skills in order to successfully coach a high-performing team.

Jenny Tsai is the CEO of WeArisma.