

## THE **PLAYBOOK** MEMBERSHIP

PLAYBOOK  
MEMBERSHIP



## From Solo to Agency: How I Built (and Scaled) Media À La Carte

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# WHAT WE'LL COVER

|    |                            |                                         |
|----|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| 01 | The Early Days             | From fashion PR to \$20/hour freelancer |
| 02 | Letting Go                 | My first hire — when, who and why       |
| 03 | Freelancer → Agency Owner  | Systems, delegation and my role now     |
| 04 | Lessons & The Next Chapter | Mistakes and opening Studio À La Carte  |
| 05 | Your Playbook              | Where to start if you want a team       |

*hi, I'm Amandina*

# FOUNDER + CEO, MEDIA À LA CARTE

- 5 years in fashion PR → 3 years as a social media freelancer → social media agency founder in 2020
- Launched Media À La Carte in May 2020 as a solo freelancer
- Opened Studio À La Carte, our content creation studio in Chelsea, NYC in 2023
- Clients include Laura Mercier, Blue Nile Diamond, YSE Beauty, Hydrafacial, Bare Minerals, Biossance, Yepoda, Kiss Lashes and more

2020

founded, solo

15

person team

150+

clients served

~200K

audience  
(50k IG, 150k TikTok)

CHAPTER 01

# The Early Days

*how it all started*

*May 2020*

# WHAT THE EARLY DAYS LOOKED LIKE

## Just me

I was the strategist, creator, account manager, bookkeeper and salesperson.

## \$20 an hour

Freelance rates, trading time for money, saying yes to almost everything.

First retainer client was \$600/month

## Built on connections

My first clients were all friends or friends of friends through word of mouth who needed social media support.

CHAPTER 02

# Letting Go

*the first hire*

*the turning point*

# I HIRED 3 MONTHS IN

## **The math that changed everything**

Every hour I spent on low-value tasks was an hour I wasn't spending on client work that paid more — or on finding the next client.

## **The question to ask yourself**

“What is my hour worth — and what am I doing right now that someone else could do for less?”

\*Now: it wasn't that I was making a ton of money and was ready to hire - it's that I knew in order to spend more time on client work I needed to have some help in order to continue to scale.

3

months into the business when I  
brought on our first contractor

*how I knew*

# SIGNS YOU'RE READY TO HIRE

1

## **You're turning down (or delaying) work**

Demand is there — capacity isn't.

2

## **You know your numbers**

"You can't hire someone if you don't know how much you can pay them."

3

## **Admin is eating your best hours**

The tasks that drain you aren't the ones only you can do. AND/OR you're constantly letting your own marketing fall to the backburner. Your business won't grow if you don't have time to market it properly.

4

## **You can write down how you do it**

If it lives only in your head, document it first.

*my first hire*

# WHO I HIRED FIRST — AND WHY

## THE ROLE

### Catch- All Assistant

A contractor, not a full-time employee — lower risk while the revenue was still proving itself.

\$15/hr

- blog writing for SEO + email newsletter
- community management for clients
- assist on small client work tasks

## Why this role first

- Wanted to put more time into marketing the business but was already swamped with our IG + client work.
  - Answer: offloading blog + email marketing for like 3 hours a week
- Contractor first = flexibility on both sides
  - Promised 5-10 hours at first
- Hire for the work that frees you to sell and lead or do what you do best like client creative

CHAPTER 03

# Freelancer → Agency Owner

*building the machine*

*year two*

# GROWTH WITHOUT FOUNDATIONS

GETTING HONEST WITH MY WHY

Around year two I was burnt out. The business was growing, but I was working 60-80 hours a week and almost every night and weekend.

## The fix:

- **evaluate pricing (common problem)**
- **examine correct staffing (always a puzzle)**
- **get back in touch with your ‘why’**

Let me be honest here: there is a lot of benefit to being a solopreneur vs. having a team.

If your ‘why’ is time and location freedom - ask yourself if scaling a team is really right for you.

In my opinion, successfully managing a team takes a lot of sacrifice. But I knew I had bigger ambitions than I could achieve with only 1 person.

*the foundations*

# SYSTEMS I NEEDED AS THE TEAM GREW

## Money

Monthly bookkeeping so every hire is a decision, not a guess.

## Offers

Tiered revenue: premium management, one-off audits & strategy, low-ticket subscriptions.

## Process

Documented SOPs for onboarding, content workflow and approvals.

## Tools

One home for tasks, files and client comms.

- ClickUp
- Slack
- Front
- Google Drive

## Culture

A place where team AND clients feel happy, valued and successful.

## Standards

Brand guides and QA checks for every client.

*protecting the standard*

# DELEGATING WITHOUT LOSING QUALITY

01

## Define

Write down what “good” looks like — tone, visuals, turnaround.

02

## Train

Show, then shadow, then hand over.

03

## Review

Check work before it reaches the client, then step back as trust builds.

04

## Own

Give people real ownership of accounts and results.

*Delegate the task — never the standard.*

*then vs now*

# MY ROLE THEN VS NOW

## 2020 · THE DOER

- Creating every post
- Managing every client
- Invoicing, admin, sales

## NOW · THE CEO

- Vision, strategy and creative direction
- Sales calls + proposals
- Leading a team, not doing the tasks
- Running two businesses

C H A P T E R 0 4

# Lessons & The Next Chapter

*what I'd tell my 2020 self*

*lessons learned the hard way*

# MISTAKES I MADE WHILE SCALING

## **Hiring is always a puzzle**

Most success we've had: hire for attitude + culture fit.

## **Growing without checking my why**

Revenue went up; freedom went down. Hello, burnout.

## **Taking too long to increase prices**

Don't charge 'what you're worth.' Charge competitively.

## **Waiting to invest in HR + Legal**

Trust me - expensive mistakes. Spend the money.

*expanding*

# WHY I OPENED STUDIO À LA CARTE

3,000+

Reels & TikToks our agency produced  
in 2022

## **The signal**

We were producing content at volume — and NYC had plenty of photo studios, but none built for content creation.

## **The move**

Built a multi-set, natural-light studio in Chelsea from the ground up over 4 months — for our clients, and to rent to other creators and brands.

*Expand when your existing business is already creating the demand.*

C H A P T E R 0 5

# Your Playbook

*where to start*

*take this with you*

# 5 STEPS TO GO FROM SOLO TO TEAM

## 1 **Know your numbers**

Do your books monthly. Know exactly what you can afford to pay.

## 2 **Audit your hours**

List everything you do. Circle what only you can do.

## 3 **Document it**

Turn the rest into simple SOPs before you hand it over.

## 4 **Start with a contractor**

Hire for the hours that free you to sell and lead.

## 5 **Build tiered offers**

Premium, mid-tier and low-ticket so growth isn't fragile.

“Delegate before you feel ready.”

*Leap and the net will appear.*

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# A Page Turned by Amandina Altomare

*thank you for building alongside me*

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