

Teen entrepreneur makes her mark in social media

Bethany is a social media manager for online marketers and businesses, and just marked the third year anniversary of her foray into business after finishing high school at 16



BY ELIZABETH CHONG

GEORGE Bernard Shaw famously said youth is wasted on the young. But then, he never met Bethany Looi. Like many young people, Bethany loves social media, taking photos with her iPhone and travelling to new places. However, unlike most, she's managed to combine these three with her love for the Spanish language to pursue a career in social media marketing and journalism.

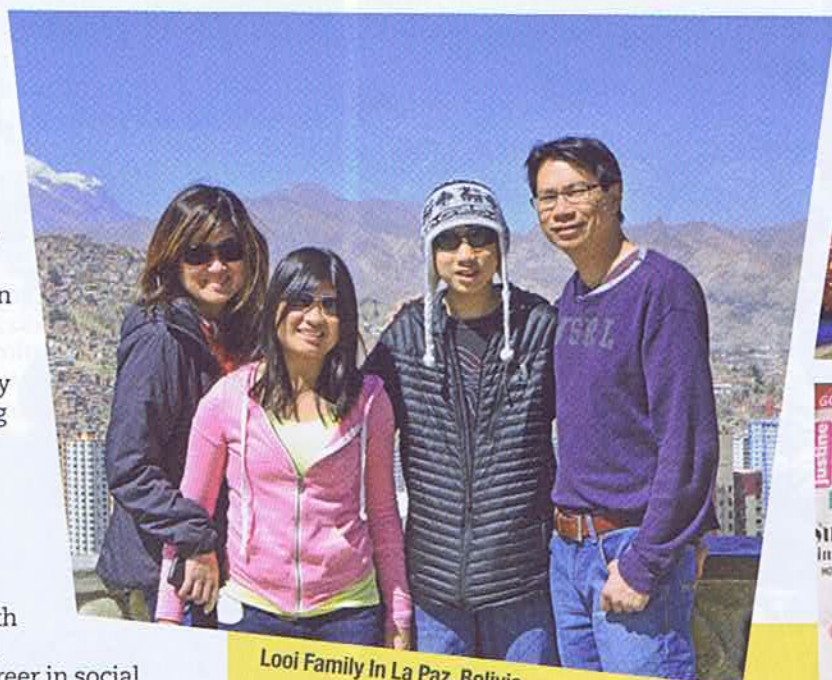
At 19, New York-based Bethany is a social media manager for online marketers and businesses, and has done this business for three years after finishing high school at 16. "At 16, I hired a business coach who spent the day helping me plan what to do for my future. We talked and she suggested I set up a business in social media. I was already interested in social media so it kind of fit," the teen entrepreneur says in an interview over Skype.

She recalls thinking "this is so cool" when signing up for Twitter and Instagram the day she started her own business. Three years on, the "cool" factor has not diminished for Bethany and she remains passionate about giving the best service possible to her clients who are mostly in the travel, health and wellness industries; and the occasional non-profit organisation. Acting as a virtual assistant for Internet marketing, she helps them develop a presence in social media and teaches them to use various platforms.

"I try to manage four or five clients at a time. This is freelance work so we go on a monthly basis. If the client doesn't want to continue, I stop," she says, adding that "it's fun getting paid" to do something she enjoys.

Depending on the client's requirements, she handles their Facebook, Twitter and even Pinterest accounts. Based on the testimonials posted on her website, www.bethanylooi.com, Bethany has helped a number of satisfied and happy clients bridge the jump into social media.

Bethany belongs to a travelling family who stay in the countries they visit for weeks or months at a time. Since the globe-trotting Looi family practically live out of their suitcases, Bethany is adept working in a café, restaurant or a homely apartment when they are in a new destination.



Looi Family In La Paz, Bolivia

Bethany was featured in *Justine*, a US teen magazine

Pursue your passion

LISTEN to your parents. That is Bethany Looi's advice for young people who want to pursue their passion. "First, find out your purpose. Know what you want to do. If you don't know, you can't aim for it. Listen to your parents. As teenagers, it is typical we don't want to listen to them. A lot of my success is due to listening to my parents because they know more.

"Listen to your mentor. Get people to teach you: people you can rely on, who know more than you, and do what they tell you. Finally, be yourself. Hold on to what you believe in," the teen entrepreneur says in an interview.

Asked how she stays motivated, Bethany says: "I believe if you have a purpose, there is no problem with motivation; it should just come. There are days I don't feel motivated but this is my life now so I have to learn to enjoy it. If you don't like it, change or learn to like it. You are in control of your life."

Embracing a nomadic lifestyle since February 2013, the Looi family travelled through South America before returning to New York City earlier this year.

Not your typical tourists, the Loois strive to live like the locals wherever they visit; from taking the bus everywhere to buying fresh produce from the market.

"When we travel, we make our own schedule which may include going on local tours. On a typical day, depending on what activity we have decided on, one of the first things I'd do is check in with my clients. Throughout the day, I will keep checking in because I care for my clients although there is no obligation to do so under our contract," says Bethany.

She keeps up with Spanish language lessons online no matter where they are. Her 16-year-old brother Jonathan is equally fluent in Spanish and their proficiency stood the family in good

stead when they were in South America.

On their return to New York City, Bethany started a six-month internship with VaynerMedia, a social media brand consulting agency founded by Gary Vaynerchuk, a global authority on social media. "I believe I was their youngest intern," she says, adding that the company made sure its interns learnt stuff by doing. When her initial three-month stint ended, she requested for, and received, a three-month extension. "You can do a lot with asking, being not afraid to ask," she surmises.

Not surprisingly, the highly motivated go-getter was featured in *Justine*, a US lifestyle magazine targeted at teenage girls, in the "Amazing 12 under 20" list for its June/July issue. *Justine* aptly dubbed her "International Busy-ness Bethany" who has visited 27 countries and successfully maintained a business.

Bethany caught wanderlust early in



Bethany at a US market selling candied apples



life. Her Malaysian-born parents – Ken and Claudia – were in the travel and tourism industry, and took Bethany on her first long-distance journey when she was barely one.

"As a family, we spent almost every summer overseas. When we didn't travel, I didn't feel normal!" she quips.

Earlier this month, the Looi family left New York for Iceland, then Russia where they will take the Trans Mongolian Railway to Beijing. They plan to live in China for a few months before departing for Florida.

Bethany says she had no plans for college when she finished high school, preferring to take time off to figure out what she wanted. "I have a general idea: I want to focus on travelling, developing websites, blogging, photography... I have a lot of interests and it takes time to work through them."

"My parents are very supportive. They are non-conventional, inclined to go against the norm," she laughingly adds.

Travelling takes the teenager away from friends but that doesn't faze Bethany. "I stay connected with a few close friends; social media makes it very easy. You don't need to be physically present with them. Friends are important, just not everything."

Their itinerary for any new place is mostly planned by her mother, a former travel consultant. "If we have any suggestions, like visiting a certain place, we try to add that. When we get to a place, we try the popular things and also take a local route to experience how the locals live. Sometimes we plan trips on the spot, like the overland tour we took in Ecuador. Everything works out."

Much like any family, they sometimes squabble. "We have our own opinions, argue and still travel together and get things done," she says.

At least they agree on one thing – travel! 📸