

Audio Title: Green Blender Co-Founder Jenna Tanenbaum by FOOD-X MD Andrew Ive

Audio Duration: 0:25:37

Speakers: Andrew Ive and Jenna Tanenbaum

Transcript

Andrew: So, welcome.

Jenna: Thank you for having me.

Andrew: Of course. I know that you are time-pressured. You've got lots of things to do. I totally get that. So, why don't we just jump straight and tell me who you are and what the company is.

Jenna: Yes. So my name is Jenna Tanenbaum and I'm the co-founder of Green Blender, and Green Blender makes all—sends you all the ingredients to make pre-portioned smoothies at home.

Andrew: Fantastic. So, where do people find out about Green Blender if they want to sort of check you out while we are talking?

Jenna: Of course. They can find more information about us at greenblender.com or on Instagram, [green_blender](https://www.instagram.com/green_blender).

Andrew: Okay. What about the other twitty things and the Facebook-y things and that sort of thing?

Jenna: You can also find us on Facebook, Green Blender Smoothies and on Twitter [green_blender](https://twitter.com/green_blender).

Andrew: Fantastic. So I guess you're interested in talking to would-be customers, to—I don't know. What kind of people are you engaging with socially?

Jenna: We're engaging with pretty much everyone who is interested in creating really amazing healthy habits, building better relationship with their food and connecting to their food in a more meaningful way.

Andrew: That's very cool. So, let's get into that. So tell me—what was the “aha” moment for Green Blender? How did it come about?

Jenna: So I started Green Blender with my co-founder Amir who is also my boyfriend. We've been dating for several years and I'm very health-minded while he isn't so health-minded. So, I actually got a Vitamix and started experimenting with smoothies a few years ago and kind of giving him a couple sips of my leftovers as I was heading out the door for work.

Andrew: Okay.

Jenna: And he started drinking these smoothies and started feeling like he had more energy. He started making healthier choices in his day and craving healthier foods and he realized that just by changing his environment in a small way by making one healthy decision at the start of his day, it really set the tone for the rest of the day, where he wasn't even really trying to be healthier. He was just becoming healthier because he had started his day on a healthy foot.

Andrew: You think that's what it is?

Jenna: Yeah.

Andrew: You don't think there's any kind of girlfriend peer pressure thing going on here?

Jenna: No. We don't do that.

Andrew: All right, so—so did he have certain things that he gravitated towards? Certain flavors? Certain—I'm wondering how you go from giving your boyfriend kind of the last dregs of your fruit smoothie, how you go from there to what is now a thriving business?

Jenna: So, because he knew that he has this kind of relationship with his food, he realized that, you know, a lot of people have the same relationship where you don't—you're kind of indifferent is what I would say. You know that you should be healthy, but you don't go out of your way to be healthy or to eat a salad or to eat fresh fruits and vegetables and he realized that lo and behold, you feel amazing when you actually start eating whole foods and he realized that because he felt so good but he wouldn't do something like that on his own, there was an opportunity to help other people create healthy habits by sending them pre-portioned ingredients to make smoothies.

Andrew: That's a bit of a leap. Not everyone sort of gets that. So I'm wondering, was he—you were the person who was sort of trying different recipes, trying the mixer and so on. But did he sort of come to you and say, "Well, I'm feeling better. Why don't we figure out how to do this for other people?"

Jenna: Yeah. So, at that time, he was—he had just wound down a different startup. So he wasn't working and I was, and so he had a lot of time on his hands to think about these kinds of things and he—you know, I'm really ambitious about finding new ingredients and going to the grocery store and getting all these things and he's not and the way that he was thinking about wanting a large variety of smoothies in his day, it kind of was a barrier for him to go and research ingredients, find all the super-foods, test everything, understand what they taste like and come up with a menu. So, he wanted—he was kind of looking for his next opportunity and saw in helping people create healthy habits because we are making smoothies at home.

Andrew: So you guys—but you guys are not sending people smoothies, are you? You're sending people the raw ingredients. I'm trying to think about whether that would have helped or would that help me—let me say what I mean by that. I watched this Netflix thing, this Australian guy that travelled around the U.S. and he was—he literally spent the 21 days or whatever it was just juicing. You know the movie I'm talking about?

Jenna: Yup.

Andrew: Okay. So I watched that movie—

Jenna: Fat, Sick and Nearly Dead.

Andrew: I'm sorry?

Jenna: Fat, Sick and Nearly Dead.

Andrew: Yeah. Fat, Sick and Nearly Dead. So I went out and I bought myself a juicer next day like literally compelled, passionate and I probably did it for about 2 months and then I stopped. And then after about a month or two, I started feeling guilty so I bought myself a NutriBullet and I did that for about 2 months. So I'm wondering if you guys have kind of cracked the code by actually providing everything for people so that they don't have to kind of go through the aggravation of kind of doing it, of seeking out the best stuff, of putting it all together. Is that the thinking?

Jenna: Yes. That's exactly right. I mean people—the way that the food industry has kind of matured with the rise of pre-packaged foods and ingredients kind of helps aid people keep their fast-paced lifestyle and their busy lifestyle. But now there's kind of a backlash for pre-packaged goods and consumer-packaged goods, and people want to go back to the roots of eating fresh fruits and vegetables and maintaining a healthy lifestyle in that way, but they want to continue the fast-paced lifestyle that they've grown accustomed to by just grabbing a muffin at a bodega or grabbing something quick on the go because, you know, going to the grocery store, finding all those ingredients, researching what the flavors are like, getting enough food but not too much so you don't have to have any food waste, it just takes a lot more time in people than the average busy person can spend at the moment on their food. So what we help people do is just eliminate all that friction. People, if it's in front of them, they'll eat it and I think that's really what we're trying to help people do is take out that friction of having to think about the recipes and going to the grocery store and eliminating food waste and just allowing you to open up your refrigerator and just pour stuff right into your blender.

Andrew: Okay. So you guys go and you find the best quality fruit and vegetables. You prepare it and you get packaged up and you send it with the recipe or—how does that work?

Jenna: Yup. So we send enough ingredients to make 5 different smoothies and all the pre-portioned ingredients for that. So you literally get a menu every week and everything is in the box ready to go. All you need to provide is some water, some ice and your blender.

Andrew: Perfect. Okay. And that's for an individual or for family or it can be all of the above?

Jenna: We give you enough per recipe to do two 12-ounce servings so you can either split with somebody or drink the whole thing for lunch.

Andrew: Okay, super. Or breakfast obviously?

Jenna: Or breakfast.

Andrew: Yeah.

Jenna: It really depends on what your health goals are and how much you want to eat.

Andrew: Okay. So, backtrack a second. Boyfriend starts thinking, "Okay, maybe there's a business here." What happens next?

Jenna: So, we put up a landing page with like the value prop. We didn't really decide to start a business like we were really—we both kind of started our career in tech and so we subscribed to this lean startup mentality where we want to test everything and get something live and see like how people reacted before we spend too much time, money and, you know—and it's some sort of investment into it.

Andrew: Sure.

Jenna: So, we created a landing page with what our product offering was and we drove traffic to it through AdWords to see if people would be interested in signing up and we ran a test I think for about a month in the winter just to see what the response was and how many people were going to sign up and people seem to really liked the idea. We have a lot of sign-ups and we decided to pull the trigger and start shipping.

Andrew: So you got enough people from that test to say, "Holy crap, there's actually a real business here."

Jenna: Yup. And I think that, you know, it was important to be able to do that gut check first before we went out and found a warehouse and got employees and, you know, created even a robust website, all of those things. First, we did the test and at the same time, I'll have to say also is we started all of our social channels as well, just publishing recipe ideas and kind of establishing ourselves as a social brand first and foremost as a way to kind of generate legitimacy based on followers and engagement.

Andrew: So you didn't—you didn't spend \$3000 on a website and started, you know, taking money out of 401(k) and that sort of thing. You literally threw out one page and then spend, I don't know, \$500?

Jenna: Yup, \$500 was our marketing budget.

Andrew: Holy shit. Look at that. I'm so cool, I managed to get the exact number. Okay. So you spent \$500 over a period of a month and you sent enough people there to know that statistically if you had an offering for real—I mean how did you get around that? Did you actually have an offering at that point? Or was it more conceptual?

Jenna: It was an offering where it was a signup page with the offering and the price and then as people tried to sign up, we said that it wasn't available in their area.

Andrew: Okay. So you didn't have your boyfriend in the kitchen chopping up lots of mangoes and things just in case you got orders. You actually just sort of—you got the concept out there. You had people sign up and once they signed up, it basically said, "Coming soon," or you know, "We're going to be launching in the next few months," or whatever it said.

Jenna: We didn't even say that. We just said that it wasn't available in their area. So—just to keep that going.

Andrew: Okay. So now you know that there's enough people out there that think this is something they really want. You then what? Raised the money or borrowed some money or how did you go from there?

Jenna: Well, kind of the beauty of the products that we're building is that our members paid for the product upfront. Can you hear me?

Andrew: I can hear you fabulously well and I'm imagining—Don't worry. We'll just cut that bit out and join the two pieces together.

Jenna: Okay.

Andrew: There we are. Fabulous. Okay. So, I would just—what did I just ask you?

Jenna: Well, your video isn't working. I don't know if that's an issue.

Andrew: Is it not? I can see me. Let me turn it on and turn it off again and maybe that'll—did that work?

Jenna: Yup, that works.

Andrew: Wohoo! Okay. So, I said did you need to go raise some money?

Jenna: So, I'll just repeat what I just said.

Andrew: Sure.

Jenna: So the beauty of what our product is is that members paid for their boxes upfront, so we were able to use the proceeds of the boxes to kind of generate enough revenue to pay for the—we were calling it kind of like a project to start. So we did that for probably 6 months before we joined Food-X.

Andrew: Okay. So, people were paying upfront which meant then all you needed to really focus on was going out and getting the best possible produce.

Jenna: Exactly.

Andrew: I'm preparing it.

Jenna: Exactly.

Andrew: Perfect. How did you figure out what people wanted though from a recipe perspective?

Jenna: We asked them. So—

Andrew: Darn, that's so smart.

Jenna: I know.

Andrew: Why didn't I think of that?

Jenna: At least for the very beginning of the startup Green Blender, Amir and I—well, first Amir and then I actually quit my job and worked on this full-time. But Amir was dropping off all of the packages by himself on the subway. So he was talking to our customers face-to-face because he was kind of the delivery messenger service as well. So we would constantly ask them how did they use their—how did they use Green Blender, when did they use it, who did they share the smoothies with, how did they like the taste, how did they like the quantity and kind of got all of that feedback and started iterating on the product itself.

Andrew: Is he still the delivery guy?

Jenna: No.

Andrew: So how are you—so how are you keeping in touch with consumers in terms of how they're feeling about things and how they—you know, what are they liking about it? Are you still able to—is there some kind of way of—I mean it's fabulous that he was actually able to have those direct conversations right in the beginning. It's a shame to lose that, right?

Jenna: Yeah. I mean it's all about figuring out how to scale it. Obviously one person can't go all over the country and deliver every single package. But what I think is really important is that we view ourselves a health brand first and people that are trying to improve their health really find a lot of benefit in a community aspect. So all of our members are welcome to join a private Facebook group where we share insider tips and we do Periscope every morning where I make one of the smoothies that are in boxes that week and it really allows our customers and even non-customers, just smoothie enthusiasts to kind of jump into the conversation and give us feedback and say what they liked and what they didn't like or if they needed to add more cayenne pepper. A lot of times people will have a—I mean it's just like with anything, everyone has different tastes, so it's really a matter of empowering people to allow themselves to make tweaks to the recipe. If you know you don't like cilantro, don't put that cilantro in your smoothie and just kind of letting people get off the hook for doing that and knowing that it will taste great either way. I mean it will probably taste better if you don't like cilantro so don't put the cilantro in.

Andrew: So if you're allergic to nuts, don't put the nuts inside—I'm just being slightly facetious but—okay. So, I mean one of the things that I really love about this model is that you guys have a subscription, right?

Jenna: Uh-huh.

Andrew: Which means I don't get to be lazy. I wouldn't get to be lazy. I couldn't sort of order it one day, get it and then after about a month, I'll be like "Oh, I've had enough. I'm just sort of this is too much aggravation." Because it comes, it's prepared and it's a subscription, it arrives on my door and I'm like, "Okay, I have to use this now." So it's sort of—it's committing me to health.

Jenna: Exactly. And that's where we really focused on helping people create healthy habits that last a lifetime. I mean I'm sure everybody can relate to stories like mine, but I feel like I've been on every single diet like since I was 12, I have been thinking about food and dieting and South Beach and vegan and all these types of things, Atkins and paleo and you end up—when you start doing something like that, you end up—like 2 things will happen usually. One is that you'll go into these extreme modes where you're like "I can't have any grain ever again" or—and then you start feeling very kind of constricted and you have a very bad—you start forming bad relationships with your health whether you're feeling disgruntled that you have to eat this apple or you're feeling guilty that you had a piece of pizza. So what we're really trying to do is help people create healthy habits that last a lifetime and not just a 3-day juice cleanse or a 30-day challenge or 21-day whatever. That's not going to show long-lasting results and it's not going to like—you know you have to be health for your whole life and so it's a matter of just creating the habits on an ongoing basis. It's not about doing a diet every quarter.

Andrew: So there's a couple of things that strike me as you're talking. One is from what I understand from the research, habits are typically established over about a 90-day period. So you need to do something consistently for about 90 days for it to kind of re—reprogram is the wrong word, but kind of get the neural pathways aligned during that period. So, if you're going to start eating healthy, it's not something you need to commit to for 30 days. It's typically, you know, at least 3 months to kind of get that thing going. But the other thing is this whole abstinence “don't do this, don't do the other thing, stop all the things you love, stop all the things you enjoy.” The great thing about this kind of concept is your product actually tastes good.

Jenna: Yes.

Andrew: Not only is it healthy but it's actually quite yummy.

Jenna: Exactly. And I think that that's definitely one of the aspects of the product that we are most proud of and really showing people that you can have delicious food that's also healthy for you and I think a lot of the times just connecting with the food as you're eating and being able to prepare it even if it only takes 5 minutes to do really gets you more invested in the food as you're eating or drinking and you're able to learn a little bit more about it. A few weeks ago, we did a citrus box where we put sumo citrus which is a type of citrus, a mandarinquat and just a normal orange in the box, and so people were able to compare the tastes and connect with it and something that you wouldn't—you probably pass up in the grocery store because sumo orange is kind of looked like crinkly oranges and you would just think that they are bad, but they are amazing and sweet and have no seeds. And being able to take that and learn maybe 1 or 2 sentences about a sumo citrus really allows you to kind of invest a little more into why you like a food.

Andrew: You just gave me something to do now. I'm going to—

Jenna: Sign up for Green Blender.

Andrew: I'm going to go—NO, no, no. I'm going to go rush out and buy one of these—what is it called? A sumo-

Jenna: Sumo citrus.

Andrew: Sumo citrus. Sounds fantastic. I know you have like 3 minutes left and I'm going to be very respectful of your time. Question for you, what is your favorite Green Blender recipe?

Jenna: That's a really hard one, but if I had to choose—

Andrew: You do.

Jenna: I really love the apple pie smoothie that we make and with apples and spinach and apple pie spice and walnuts and almond milk, it's very simple, not a lot of ingredients but it tastes exactly like an apple pie.

Andrew: That sounds great. What about your boyfriend? What's his favorite? Has he ever shared that with you? Or does it change?

Jenna: It definitely changes since we never really repeat recipes, but he definitely tends towards the beets and ginger combinations.

Andrew: Okay. So he's sort of in the more tangy, more sort of less sweet side of things.

Jenna: Yeah.

Andrew: So his recipe would be beet, ginger—

Jenna: His recipe would probably be beets, ginger, orange and then some sort of super-foods that we would toss in there like pomegranate powder and camu camu.

Andrew: Do you give people the recipe that they can keep? So in other words, if they like a particular recipe because you guys don't, you know, revolve recipes, they can actually make a couple of those things themselves?

Jenna: Yes. As I was saying in the very beginning, we're really invested in this idea of building a social channel and becoming more of a destination. So we definitely do not hoard our recipes. We publish every single one and if you're ambitious enough to go and grab all the recipes and go to the grocery store and make everything, we don't stop you. We actually encourage it. So everything is online. We publish our recipes every day to our Instagram and our Twitter and really helps people kind of connect with us and connect with just—we want to help people live a healthier life—

Andrew: Perfect.

Jenna: to get people healthy.

Andrew: All right. Thank you for your time today. We have 60 seconds or less to go. Where can people subscribe and become a fully-fledged lifetime member of Green Blender?

Jenna: People can go to greenblender.com and start signing up there. You can also go to [green_blender](#) on Twitter and Instagram and Green Blender Smoothies on Facebook.

Andrew: Fantastic. I'll make sure that everyone does that. Silly question, but maybe people would want to know. Are you in a particular location? In other words, if you're in New York, you get to enjoy the pleasures of Green Blender. But if you're in Wisconsin, you don't. Or is it—

Jenna: We ship nationwide.

Andrew: Awesome. What about outside of America?

Jenna: Not yet, but we'll be there.

Andrew: Okay. We'll keep an eye out for you. All right. Thank you so much for your time today. I really appreciate it. I'm going to press pause in one second and then you can say goodbye to me, okay?

Jenna: Okay.

Andrew: All right, one second.

[End of transcript]