

SAVVY WOMEN



ENTREPRENEUR: KOREY HOWELL

Headshots Y'all is changing the focus and the locus of the ATX personal photography scene.

BY MACY MOORE

Growth: We crave it, strive for it and struggle to achieve it. Photographer Korey Howell is on a constant mission to grow, and she just launched her latest innovative venture.

She's not your average photographer. Unlike many photographers, Howell wasn't always passionate about her camera lens. Her true interest was in hair and makeup, and though she would sometimes document her work with photos, it took some time for her interest in photography to take center stage.

"Photography is not my hobby," Howell says. "My husband and I don't take selfies when we're out. I don't take a camera when I go on vacation. The only thing I take pictures of is my dog, Kona."

After three years of studying speech communication at the University of Texas, Howell graduated and sought a job doing hair and makeup. She was hired as a makeup artist for Headshots, a portrait company, fixing up clients before having their photos taken. It didn't take her long to notice that the photographer couldn't quite bring out the best features of the customers. So, being the bold and determined woman she is, Howell asked for the opportunity to shoot her own photos.

"The place where I think I am creative is in highlighting the right features," Howell says. "I can look at any face and see the best facial features immediately and know how to highlight those."

When she began to shoot, the Headshots owners saw an increase in business and offered Howell a trainer position for glamour studios throughout the country. This is when mobile photography first inched its way into her career, as she traveled to shoot photos for Mary Kay and later for Sam's Club. By 1999, Howell became partners with Headshots.

Photos courtesy of Korey Howell.

After feeling a little burned out, Howell and her partner at Headshots sold the studio and equipment, and she pursued a career in marketing and graphic design.

“Basically, I took people’s pictures and put them on business cards,” Howell says. “The marketing company I put together was called Athena Marketing, which was geared toward female business owners. Then I started creating websites and worked for small-business owners.”

In 2005, Howell’s career took a pause when her husband was diagnosed with cancer, her brother was injured in a car accident and her mother and father passed away. She sold her marketing company in order to have the resources and time to care for her family.

“My mother was working up until the end,” Howell says. “The lesson I learned from her was when she told me she did it wrong. She told me, ‘I worked, and then I died.’ ”

When she realized she didn’t want to live that way, Howell decided it was time to open her own photography company.

In a space of just 100 square feet, Howell began her business shooting professional photos geared toward the corporate market. When claustrophobia set in, she moved to a 1,000-square-foot space and began hiring staff. The studio sustained a consistent rate of success, but her ambitious attitude persisted and she knew it was time to grow again. With her studio located in Northwest Austin, the idea of a second studio came to Howell, and she decided opening a location in South Austin would be her next step.

The increasingly high rents for business space concerned Howell, and as she searched for a spot, the idea of a mobile photography studio crossed her mind.

“If I had a truck, that space could be anywhere,” Howell says. “If it didn’t work out on South Congress, then I could try someplace else. So we started exploring that idea instead of a second location.”

She discovered Cruising Kitchens, a food-truck-design company located in San Antonio. The business caught her eye after she watched a Cruising Kitchens video and paralleled it to the characters from *Duck Dynasty*, so she knew she wanted to work with Cruising Kitchens.

“I called [Owner and President] Cameron [Davies] and loved his energy from the beginning,” Howell says. “He understood me, and I felt like I could tell him what I wanted and it would be delivered. He exceeded my expectations. It’s better than I ever thought it would be.”

The exterior of Howell’s truck matches the magenta hue of her Michael Kors purse, as she requested. Inside, the wood floors, pink leather seats and patterned curtains give off a fun and relaxed vibe. The truck comes complete with a makeup station studded in light bulbs and a refrigerator holding cold drinks, so it’s easy to forget it was once a FedEx truck. Though there are studio lights inside, Howell is a big fan of using

natural lighting to shoot photos, so the back door of the truck can be opened to flood natural light into the studio.

Howell named the new mobile photo-studio company Headshots Y’all, and in just five weeks, the truck was finished and ready for business. Cruising Kitchens completed it much sooner than Howell anticipated, so everything launched very quickly.

The truck, which goes by the name Honey, works in three ways. First, there’s the “homestead” side to the mobile studio. Each Friday, the truck is parked at 1700 S. Lamar Blvd. to shoot photos by appointment. The “corporate roundup” aspect of the business has Howell traveling to various businesses during the workweek to shoot headshots for companies with 10 or more employees. Lastly, Howell describes the truck as a “party wagon” on evenings and weekends, when it acts as a photo booth for events and happy hours.

“For those coming to the truck to have individual headshots taken, they would make an appointment online, and when you come in, you have the option of having your hair and makeup done,” Howell says. “We have the studio-light option and the natural-light option when you’re getting your picture made. To make your final selection on the photos, you’ll go over to the co-working space called Fibercove, and you can sit with a professional to help you pick out your best images and do the retouching. The photos will then be emailed to you, and you’ll have the digital files before you leave.”

When it comes to her secret, Howell says she is “first a businesswoman, second a marketer and a photographer third.” While there are so many passionate photographers out there, Howell’s attitude toward photography is her key to success.

“I’m not sure that I’m creative in the same way that traditional photographers are,” Howell says. “I’m not all about the light and the composition. I shoot in [the] raw. I’m much more interested in the person having the right experience, and the photos are a souvenir of our time together.”

As for what’s next on her list, Howell plans to begin another business.

“I’m starting a newsletter for women entrepreneurs called *Girls Call the Shots*, and that will be what we concentrate on next,” Howell says. “We’ll be bringing together women business owners and helping them with their businesses.”

Her acceleration through life has moved as quickly as bringing her mobile studio from idea to reality, and Howell isn’t planning to put on the brakes any time soon.

“My philosophy is that I move forward when I see an open door,” Howell says. “If doors don’t open, I may knock, but I’m not going to struggle against a locked door. When things just fall into place, I go with it.”

For more information, visit koreyhowellphotography.com.

