



AMBER MAC: A LEAGUE OF HER OWN

by Jennifer M. Williams

Amber Mac is a multi-talented tech expert, author, speaker, TV host, and president of her own business, AmberMac Media. She got her start during the dot-com boom in the late 1990s and has written bestselling books like the business manual *Power Friending* and co-wrote the online safety guide *Outsmarting Your Kids Online*. As a pioneering woman in the tech industry, she's shared her expertise and insight with CBS, CNN, Bloomberg TV, and *Fast Company* magazine, among many other outlets. Amber has also been featured as a keynote speaker at events around the globe and continues to grow and develop her brand. She spoke with *The Edge* about technology, her career, and her experiences as a woman in tech.

You've witnessed the growth of the tech industry since the dot-com boom. How did learning and growing up in that environment shape you?

During the dot-com boom in the late 1990s, startups were much riskier in terms of overspending. I worked at one startup that raised more than \$20 million and spent most of it within a couple of years without any significant revenue. Also, there were more barriers to entry in terms of starting a business during that first bubble. Today, it's easier than ever to launch a company thanks to plenty of third-party tools (whether it's Freshbooks for invoicing or Squarespace for website design) and more opportunities for seed funding. If you want to start a business in your basement, it's doable.

As a child, you attended school in a two-room country schoolhouse. What was learning like in that environment?

As a child growing up in rural Prince Edward Island, I had a unique experience that shaped who I am today. While I've had incredible professional experiences such as writing two bestselling books, working with top technology companies, and interviewing Prime Minister Justin Trudeau this past May, I always remember my very humble roots. From a learning perspective, I always knew I would have to work harder if I was going to succeed on a global scale; after all, I had no built-in network, being from the country's smallest province. As the child of entrepreneurs, I was working in the family business at the ripe age of 8. While my parents were running a property management company during that time, my brother and I often cleaned up garbage in parking lots that my mom and dad oversaw before heading to school in the morning. I believe that this early work ethic has helped me grow my business and my brand.

What inspired you to want to be an author and what was your motivation for your bestseller, *Power Friending*?

If I identify as one thing, it's as a writer. I've always loved writing. I wrote for my city newspaper in high school and then my university's newspaper. I decided to write *Power Friending* in 2010 and *Outsmarting Your Kids Online* in 2016 because I'm

committed to helping businesses and families understand how to leverage technology in a positive way. So many people are fearful of the digital world, but through constant adaptation and education, we can all use these tools to our advantage.

Did you always have an entrepreneurial spirit?

I've almost always had two or more jobs. I worked an early morning job at a radio station in San Francisco before my day shift at a technology startup. I was hungry for success in my early 20s, so I always knew I could outwork others my age. Today, I have no problem putting in the hours required to win in our digital economy. I don't watch much TV or drink alcohol, but I'm all in when it comes to my family and business.

After you launched your own digital agency in 2006 with your brother, your first client was Tony Robbins. What was it like working with him?

Working with Tony Robbins changed my life. The world-famous business coach gave us an opportunity to do business with him even though we didn't have much experience. In other words, he gave us a chance to help him on the social media front, and I am forever grateful for that experience. Despite the fact that Mr. Robbins is incredibly busy, he was always generous with his time and we're still in touch to this day.

Diversity is something the tech industry continues to struggle with. Have you ever had to deal with gender discrimination or the glass ceiling?

I have often dealt with gender discrimination in the tech industry, but it hasn't stopped me. Thankfully, unlike many other women, I get to be my own boss, so there are fewer issues in front of me. However, I recognize that even in my technology companies there are ongoing problems in terms of diversity, both at the executive level and in certain departments such as programming. Thankfully, there are organizations such as Move the Dial that are working hard to change this.

During your career, have you observed any changes in how women in tech-related industries are perceived and treated?

I give my mother and her generation credit for being one of the first to raise families and go to work outside the home. Over the past couple of decades, I've seen plenty of positive changes in the tech industry when it comes to how women are treated. There's a popular saying, "If You Can See It, You Can Be It," which applies perfectly to women in tech. While there are more of us, we need to continue to put the spotlight on these women at work.

You've really made yourself into a brand. How did you go from running your own agency to hosting TV shows and writing books to creating AmberMac Media?

I really, really love connecting with people on social media; I see every new connection as a chance to learn. While I didn't set out to create my own personal brand, as an Islander, I'm quite open and social. This helped me in the early days of social media to reach out and share online. From there, I started getting offers to speak about digital marketing and eventually got my first book deal from Penguin in New York. As a broadcast journalism graduate, I also had good training to share my technology expertise on television.

What are some of the best strategies that an entrepreneur can use to grow their business and keep their clients interested?

Today's entrepreneurs must always be adapting to new digital tools and technologies. Consider a recent trend like artificial intelligence; all business owners should be working hard to figure out how AI can help make their companies more productive. Whether it's introducing a chatbot for customer service or learning how an AI-driven sales tool can maximize opportunities, it's important to stay relevant.



Are there any lessons you learned when you were in San Francisco during the dot-com boom that are still relevant today?

I was quiet during my first job at web agency Razorfish in San Francisco, but I was always listening. I think this skill is undervalued in today's world where people are constantly shouting at each other (whether it's online or offline). What I mean by that is we sometimes forget that sitting back and hearing another person's perspective is the best way to educate ourselves and grow.

To inspire personal achievement and success, do you engage in goal-setting or is your trajectory more about taking advantage of opportunities?

When we first launched AmberMac Media, our goal was to double our revenue after the first year. We achieved that goal. In fact, since we first incorporated the company, we've seen substantial financial growth while maintaining low overhead.

During my early years working with my parents and eventually taking a couple of jobs during the dot-com boom, I become very conservative in terms of spending. While business is good today, I'm always prepared to weather any disruptions that come my way.

What do you think is the key to living well?

For me, the key to living well is having the freedom to travel with my family and incorporate work into my life in a way that it's enjoyable no matter where I am. I see no division between work-life and family life; This might sound horrible to some, but what it means to me is that I never have to miss any important moments with my 9-year-old son because I have the flexibility to be there for him whenever he needs. I also work with my husband, who is our director of production, so we make this business work, whether we're spending time at our winter getaway in Florida or at my parents' home on Prince Edward Island. I have engineered my life to be close to the people I love and still run a successful business. //