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JAN 31 | WRITTEN BY ASHLEY IGHOREWO

Meet: Kaya Nova

28-year-old Kaya is an all-around creative, or what she likes to call an “artistpreneur”, and the title is quite fitting because she really does it all; Kaya is a writer, producer, and musician, amongst other things. The New-York native is the founder of “[GROWN Media](#)”; A media company and digital magazine making safe space for Gen-Z to millennial black women.

We had the chance to chat with [Kaya](#) about her journey and all the sh*t that comes with running your own platform (and FYI, it is not easy). “GROWN”, which was originally called “She Unplugged”, was founded in Kaya’s sophomore year of college. When asked how her journey with GROWN began, she took us down memory lane, for real.

“I honestly started it because we had ridiculously long winter breaks in college, they were like 6 weeks long. So, I knew that going back home, after living my BEST life at school, I was bound to be depressed; I experienced a lot of depression in college. I already knew that it was going to hit as soon as I got home. So, because of that, I started this blog. I literally started on WordPress, because back then being a blogger was actually a thing, and I didn’t think I was going to be that. I just wanted to start writing about stuff.” She went on to say, “At the beginning, I was literally just writing about what I liked and how I felt, but my dad really encouraged me and told me I should make it a real thing, and have some of my friends write on there. I wasn’t even thinking that big at the time”.





Photo taken by: [@stnlyjcln](#)

And with her father's push, she did just that. She hit up a few of her friends, and asked them if they wanted to write. The requirements were... well, at the time, none. "I let them know that they didn't need to have any experience and they could write WHATEVER they want, I didn't care. Whatever they wanted, we were gonna put on the site". And that is how GROWN was born. As time went on, she began receiving more inquiries from different writers around the world, and that's when it finally hit her that she could actually bring her platform to another level.

As the platform's social media presence kept growing, Kaya officially rebranded from "She Unplugged" to "[GROWN](#)" in 2019... This also marked the beginning of a burn out. "I was just tired. I was running this blog for years after graduating, went to grad school, and came back home. I didn't have a job, so I was broke, but I was up every day working on this blog. I don't know why I was so attached to it, but I just felt like I couldn't let it go. That's when I said if I don't put a team together and quick, enough is enough. I'm broke, tired and I can't keep doing this by myself".

Kaya took a risk and boldly put out an AD on craigslist to find people to join the [GROWN](#) team. A few girls responded and from there, she held interviews in a Starbucks; The rest is history. "Looking back at this story is really hilarious, but the more that the platform grows, the more I grow with it. I never thought I would have a media company, or ever considered myself to be one of those "boss babes". I'm just trying to do what I can every single day to make sure it survives. I really think this space for black women is needed; I grew up reading magazines like "Essence", but I always felt like there was just a hyper-focus on celebrity culture in black media, and if you weren't the Beyoncé's or the Oprah's, you didn't feel seen. So, GROWN was my way to bridge the gap for the girls fresh out of college who are trying to reach their dreams. I just wanted to hold space for us, and yeah... that was a long ass answer, haha".





Photo taken by: [@manichrome](#)

As any entrepreneur would, Kaya's faced some struggles and continues to learn necessary lessons whilst running her media empire. "Competition can be a very dangerous thing", says Kaya, "constantly watching what other people are doing and comparing yourself can take you down a very dark hole that you sometimes can't get out of. I still have those moments, and this is going to sound weird but sometimes I've felt shame that GROWN is going on 8 years, and that's something that should give me pride as a founder. But in social media world, it feels like damn, "we've been running this thing for 8 years and we still not making no money". She continued on to say, "We just recently began monetizing and sometimes it makes me wonder what I'm doing wrong because some other girl can come and start a platform, and in the same year get 50,000 followers. So, sometimes it's hard not to see that and feel "less than", but it's also funny because whenever I get in those moments something happens with GROWN; either a post goes viral, or someone sends me a message reminding me of my reason behind this platform. And it's in those moments that I remember that everything is happening the way it's supposed to. Focus on your community!"

Behind every great business, is an even greater team; your faves don't get things done by themselves! They have help! When asked how important it is to have a solid team on a scale of 1 to 10, Kaya replied by saying "You know, having a team is very, very important but something that's more important than having a team is knowing how to lead a team". She continued on to say, "If you just have people there, and you don't really know how to delegate tasks, or how to uplift them in the work that they're doing, or inspire them to keep working, especially in the start-up phase, it will become more of a stress for you then it's supposed to be a help. And that was largely my problem when I decided to bring other people on; I had been running GROWN by myself for years, I didn't even know how to let people help me and I still struggle with that till' this day".

Luckily for Kaya, her team knows her pretty well and commends her every time she is able to ask for some help. "We were having a meeting the other day and I just flat-out told them that I need help with something that I'm working on for GROWN, and they were all so happy that I just asked. They know me and know that I can be a very ten toes down, "let me figure it out on my own" type of person. I'd say on a scale of 1 to 10, having a team is probably like a 8, but the importance of having the skillset to LEAD is like a 9 or 10".

Not having a team established right away doesn't discredit or devalue your work as a creative, and doesn't mean you won't make an impact. "I was using the word "we", when it was just me. Doing stuff like that, I think, slowly spoke things into existence. So, it's okay if you need to be the one-woman person in the beginning, the team is going to come and you will become the leader that's meant to lead them".

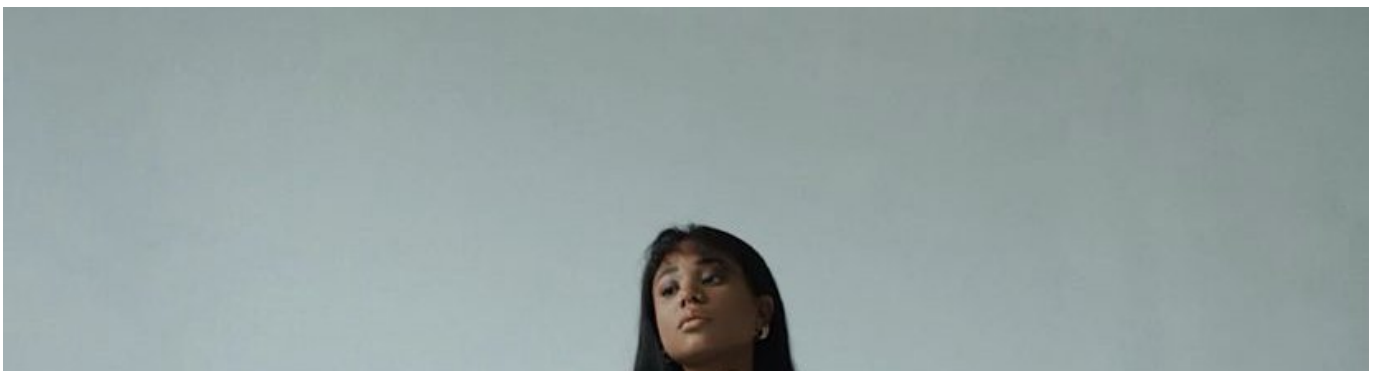




Photo taken by: [@manichrome](#)

Kaya is an avid mental-health advocate and speaks about the topic very openly on her [social media](#) platforms. We asked her about where she is on her mental health journey, to which she responded "I think I am at this point of like, constant self-forgiveness and patience. I think the very beginning stages of my mental health journey was like, trying to figure out why I was so hurt, and where these feelings came from. Now I'm like in this routine of knowing that there is kind of no such thing as being fully healed; healing is a constant journey that you're always going to be on. I had to come to the realization that those feelings never go away, you just get better with time. You get more patient, and you get better at not projecting those feelings on to other people. So, this point in my journey is really about forgiving myself for my instinct to be hard on myself when those feelings come up, and then patience while the feelings are present. I'm not a broken person for feeling like crap on a Monday".

When it comes down to purpose, we know that it can be an amalgamation of multiple things. You can be talented in more than one aspect and claim all the titles. This is something that [Kaya](#) is very familiar with (she calls herself an "artistpreneur", remember?). We asked her which one of her many talents aligns with her purpose the most, and she said "I really love words. I really, really, really love words. And I think that is why I make music, why I write, why I express myself on social media the way that I do, why I have a media company because I care about voices and stories. I was never able to connect all of my passions, because I just thought it was so weird to be a musician and have a media company, I thought it made no sense. GROWN wasn't in my bio for the longest time because I didn't think it would make sense to people because of my music brand".

She continued on to say, "Aside from GROWN, I also work at a creative marketing agency; I do social media marketing with different brands and that's all about words and community as well, and I love it. All of that helped me find the foundation of my purpose. It also helped me take some pressure off my music, running GROWN and being the artist who technically still has a day job. I'm doing work that I love to do though, and I think if people spent more time finding that connective tissue between all of their interests, we would be able to give ourselves more grace. I've just developed an ebb & flow between my music, GROWN and the fact that sometimes my day job is busy; I just try not to punish myself for whichever section of my life I spend a little bit more time in than others".

[GROWN](#) has been super active online and is making strides to be more present offline. From their digital covers, to being at Culture Con last year, Kaya is making sure that the platform's presence remains prominent. We asked her what she thinks is GROWN's biggest accomplishment to date, to which she responded "I would definitely say us doing digital covers was a really big thing. We started that in 2021. That was huge, because we had never put a whole shoot together before and hired people or anything like that. It was a real step out of the comfort zone that I think really inspired us as a team, and helped us shine a light on so many amazing women. And it's crazy because every woman we've featured on our cover so far, a few months after that, they just explode and their careers started flourishing like crazy. And I'm not saying that it's because of us, because they were already doing amazing work, but it's just amazing to see and I love that we're able to be a part of that".

Kaya is currently working on curating an offline experience for the GROWN fam to revamp what it means to go to a conference. In-person events are on the 2023 menu for GROWN, along with more cool content and digital covers.



Kaya at Culture Con (2022)

Towards the end of our interview with Kaya, she spilled the tea on what it was like attending [Culture Con](#) for the first time, "It was very interesting being there. One, just being around those many creatives was beautifully overwhelming, I realized I haven't really been in that

many creative spaces. I've been so low-key, just in my house doing stuff, and people know me through social media but I'm never on the scene. I got to see Tabatha, Taraji, Tracee and all these other amazing black women. I only wish I had more time to network with people because there were so many amazing people there, but there was so much going on! I really want to go again and hopefully be a speaker one of these days. I was just happy to be there with the GROWN team and have that moment together".

Kaya's journey is a concrete representation of most, if not all, black girls who are on the journey to create their own lane and make their dreams come true... All while dealing with real life. "You just really have to give yourself grace and be patient with yourself and where your story goes. You have no idea how big it's going to get, and how far you're gonna go. All you can do right now, is these day to day things to continue towards your goals. Don't give yourself too much anxiety about what it could be... Anything you want to grow will take time. Your work is not in vain, don't let social media think you're not worthy. Community is all that matters right now".

[Kaya](#) is a writer, producer, musician and the founder of [GROWN Mag](#). She also offers creative coaching services where she helps creatives with creative marketing, community growth, organizing projects/releases mindset coaching and more. Be sure to follow Kaya on all her [socials](#) and tap in to GROWN [here](#).

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