

THE IT

FACTOR

BY CAROLYN PATRICIA GRISOLD | PHOTOGRAPHY BY PATRICK DEMARCHELIER

Between New York City and Toronto, Natasha Koifman, President of NKPR, finds the balance she needs to leverage a network built on authenticity and good work

If you search the media for Natasha Koifman, you'll find most results focus on her work – not the woman behind her eponymous publicity firm NKPR. And that's the way she likes it. "My job is to get the brands at the forefront," she says. "I make sure to [impart] a certain lifestyle that attracts and appeals to the brands we represent."

Koifman's personal brand is clearly defined; behind the signature black outfits, killer heels and coquettish grin is a powerhouse player who, over the past decade, has grown NKPR into the agency of choice for high-profile clientele across Toronto and New York City. There's no ego around it; it's just good work.

"Yes, I get publicity," she admits. "But it's publicity overall from a brand perspective."

We're having afternoon tea at Toronto's Soho House, where Koifman is an Every House member and a welcoming, recognizable face. Cheek-kisses at the hostess booth from fellow member and National Post societywriter Shinan Govani seem par for the course.

The exclusive club provides a perfect



setting for networking with the city's glitterati, and its vintage, relaxed style in locations around the globe offers comfort when Koifman travels. Which she does – a lot. Her February, for example, included trips to London, Manchester, Montreal, New York and Los Angeles – where she'll soon be expanding NKPR's fashion, beauty and talent divisions.

"You need to get outside of your day-to-day life sometimes," she says. "It opens up your world in a different way."

This exposure to other cities helps Koifman cultivate influence and keeps her on trend – a necessity for the company that created the IT LOUNGE, which takes place during the annual Toronto International Film Festival. Last year the celebrity gifting experience included an exclusive portrait studio with acclaimed fashion and beauty photographer Patrick Demarchelier.

"It was the New York mentality," Koifman replies when asked how that came about. "I was watching *Devil Wears Prada* one weekend, which is one of my favourite movies, and that scene came on where Miranda says, 'Get me Patrick! I thought, 'We should get Patrick!' So on Monday I went into the office and [asked the team], 'What do you think about getting Patrick Demarchelier?' And they were like, 'We can get Patrick?' I said, 'I don't know, but let's try!'"

Leveraging her U.S. network, she got him.

"That's the difference between New York and Toronto," she explains. "In New York everyone says, 'That's fantastic! Of course you got Patrick.' But in Toronto they ask, 'How did you get Patrick?' It's the difference between 'Of course you can make it happen' and 'I wouldn't even know where to start.' I love Toronto [but] New York pushes me to make things happen. It balances me."

Opening an office in the Big Apple was a natural progression for Koifman

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and it came about through an existing client relationship.

"We were doing PR for Ford Models here in Canada, and they were looking for an agency in New York," she recalls. John Caplan, who at the time was Ford Models President & CEO, said he wanted to give Koifman the business because he liked what she did in Canada. Everything kept rolling from there. She went to her existing clients and said NKPR's in New York now and she'd love to service them there as well.

A year later she opened up NKPR's digital division, doing social media for a client across Australia, the U.K., the U.S. and Canada.

It was all networking, she says. "But it was networking not for the sake of networking. It was networking because we did really good work, we did what we said we were going to do, and that's how word-of-mouth travels"

She cautions against the behaviours of certain social media users who – all schmooze, no substance – make connections without providing tangible results. "If you're going to network, network based on what you do well. It's the good work that you do. I think that's what sets us apart"

Since launching NKPR in 2002, Koifman has infused her work with authenticity and genuine talent, in turn building a clientele and network of supporters that have helped her agency soar.

"My first client was Visa Canada – leveraging their film festival sponsorships across the country. And it was through them that I got my next client, CIBC. Within three years, NKPR became their agency of record."

Not bad for a publicity firm Koifman began in her basement when she was 31, living with husband James and her 13-year-old son, Justin. He's in law school in Syracuse now, and on a recent visit home, Justin told Koifman how it's interesting the way they've grown up together. "And I thought we *did* grow up together," she says. "I had him when I was 18 years old – I was a child. I was in university with a baby. No one did that in those days."

Before starting NKPR, Koifman was unsure of who she wanted to be, or what she wanted to do. "But I knew – as soon as he was born – that I wanted to be someone he'd be proud of. Every decision I made, [whether] conscious or subconscious, was based on [that]"

When it comes to networking, she maintains her values of honesty and integrity, focussing on mutual benefits. Referring to client and friend Carrie Kirkman, President of Jones Group Canada, Koifman says they support each other in all areas – it's a relationship built on respect and admiration.

"I think that's what [good] networking is. It has to be give and take. You can't always be the taker. You have to be able to give too. And that's what will make it successful for you. In an authentic, pure kind of way."

With our teapots now empty and the Soho House filling up for dinner, I ask, lastly, if after all she's built, her son is proud.

"He is," she replies, thoughtfully. "What he's seen is that I've worked really hard. He's proud of me, but I'm also really proud of him. Again, talk about growing up together, we're now at a place where we can say it about each other." ♦

Read more from Natasha Koifman on Personal Branding at www.womenofinfluence.ca/newyou.