



The Double X Files

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CNA 938 Live Interview The Double X Files – An Interview of eClarity Director Amanda Koo

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Yasmin: Amanda Koo joins us, she's the director of eClarity. It's very interesting, Amanda's story. She was once a corporate banker, now she's a jeweller, she's a mum, and she's also making waves in the industry. Hi Amanda! What a pleasure to have you on The Double X Files. How are you today?

Amanda: Hi Yasmin I'm doing good! How are you?

Yasmin: I'm great. Thanks. So, what's the average day for a jeweller?

Amanda: You know, you look at many many diamonds, gemstones, and you grade them, and you look under the microscope. This is what we do every day.



Yasmin: You mean to say, you get a new influx of new gemstones, everyday coming your way that you have to assess. Or are you just working with a pool that you have in your hands?

Amanda: We have about two shipments of new gemstones, diamonds, coloured diamonds every week. Depending on whether we're sourcing them for our store, or sourcing them for our customers, on average twice a week.



Yasmin: I see, it does take a week to look at an entire shipment so that's quite a bit of work. Well thank you for taking some time off to talk to us. Just talking about return of tourists on our island, and also, retail shop bustling a little bit more, in Changi Airport, and such. Does that give you hope? For your business, or businesses in general.

Amanda: It's very interesting because when the lockdown happened in year 2020, I think jewellery in general has gone online, whether we have gone into live streaming, for myself we have gone into live webinars, selling online. We are very excited in this new platform. Of course, when people are starting to come back, we can be very personal and jewellery pieces are always best seen with your eyes. So, yeah I think the return of tourists is wonderful.

Yasmin: Ok, well I'm happy for you. It's nice to know that you really went online, didn't quite have to suffer that much during the pandemic but surely there were challenges for you?

Amanda: Yeah of course, when it happens everyone stopped exploring digitalisation where everyone was talking about it. You have to start working on it. So we were very busy exploring different ways to go online. Because the default way to go online was live streaming. I think jewellers were all going online in terms of live streaming. The one I did, is something I know the best, which is giving seminars pre-pandemic. So during lockdown, we went onto giving webinars, so with different topics, on diamonds, on gemstones, on bespoke/ customisation, and also comparing between labgrown and natural diamonds. That being our most popular topic actually.

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Yasmin: Is this because of the move towards sustainability? Among your clients, or people who wants sparkly things on their hands, around their necks, the earlobes, want to know that everything they wear is sustainable and properly sourced.

Amanda: I think it comes from a few angles. And I would like to share with you a story. So a few years ago when I brought my kids to have McDonalds and then we ordered McFlurry, thinking that we should share because we should cut down on calories. And then I wanted to get an extra spoon and I was not allowed by my sons, to get the extra spoon because they want to save the world. That inspired me that the younger generations is just so ready love the world and protect the world. And we, our generation, meaning Yasmin and myself, we have a lot to learn, a lot to catchup. I think understanding how the younger generation see the world, becomes something I authentically cared about, like really cared about the world. That's one thing.

Second thing, it's also the product innovation is ready. It is commercially interesting to bring in labgrown diamonds because the price was right, the quality was good. With all these together, labgrown diamond is a meaningful business model, that is empowering the world, empowering customer needs at that time.

Yasmin: Interesting that your son taught you a lesson, huh? So explain this whole thing about sustainable jewellery to me. Where do we begin?

Amanda: So I think I am seeing it from a few perspectives. One perspective is labgrown diamonds so I explain to customers that natural diamonds grown under the world, 90-120 km beneath with high pressure high temperature, diamonds are grown. And labgrown diamond is basically mimicking this environment, but in a lab,

diamonds are grown. Physically and chemically, sharing the same properties. So, if we understand that, accepting labgrown diamonds become possible with a noble cause. So that is a good foundation to start.

Second is that, to reduce the excess capacity, reduce wastage. You know how Yasmin, like if you own a 1 carat, then you buy a 2 carat, you stop wearing the 1 carat. So, I am also starting a new community, is named under The Sample Line. Where customers could come in and subscribe to the service, renting their jewellery that they are not wearing anymore, and they get to wear a new piece of jewellery every month. So, instead of buying, your tenth pair of earrings, that you may wear or you don't wear, now you have the option of renting, returning, renting it up within the community.

Yasmin: That's a very novel idea. Are you one of the pioneers of that here in Singapore?

Amanda: Based on our research we could be one of the first in Singapore to have a subscription model. I think in the past, when you think about jewellery rental, it's always for your wedding day, or that very special day. And you rent that 1 piece of jewellery. So, you still continue to buy, on a yearly basis, on a monthly basis. In terms of subscription model, we want to really encourage that, sometimes renting could be better than buying and then you actually get a new pair of earrings every month. Why we say earrings is because this is like Zoom kind of era where earrings can be seen more than, let's say bracelet. But every item is popular right now.



Yasmin: Yeah because we're actually meeting face-to-face. Soon you'll be renting out anklets. And maybe even toe rings. Hahaha, you never know. But do you have to select people, who are qualified for your rental service carefully? Because jewellery is something you entrust to someone else, normally. You pass it on to your loved ones, your niece, your daughter, your child. And here you are putting it around to strangers, clearly, you must gain the trust of people who own these precious pieces in the first place.

Amanda: Yes, so in the beginning, subscribing to The Sample Line was something that only by invitation. So we only invite people to join the platform. Now as we progress, we have more measures in place. For example, we need a copy of their IC, we also have the option of having insurance before you start to subscribe. So yeah there are more measures in place to make sure that the people who are subscribing and also the people that are renting out are in a very safe space.

Yasmin: Yeah okay that sounds good. I think I understand now when you said, earrings and necklaces because that's one size fits all versus a ring, that's harder to fit isn't it?

Amanda: That's right Yasmin. But you have ten fingers. (Laughters) So it's interesting, like I am a size 9 on my fourth finger, but probably a size 11 on my middle finger, and a size 10 on my second finger. So you know, we could try around with our different fingers. And eClarity has this little ring snuggy. If it's too loose, we have something to tighten it. So we have little creative solutions to holding a ring better on different fingers.



Yasmin: What are the trends in jewellery that came about because of the pandemic? It's interesting you say people want to adorn the upper part of their body, all because of Zoom. Anything else? Would they prefer cleaner design, they felt more confident to buy on the Internet versus they buy a little more embellished?

Amanda: Actually to your surprise Yasmin, actually Singaporeans are very boring, pre-pandemic. You know, solitaire, the bigger the better, for example your friend bought a 1.2 carat, and you got a 1.5. It just gets bigger and bigger and colourless and it's round. I think inspired by our experience shopping online, we are all expert in shopping online now, and then we are all exposed to fashion, and pictures, and Instagrams and TikTok and all. I find that Singaporeans are getting more and more interesting, you know. They are starting to look at pink diamonds, blue diamonds, black gold, champagne gold, fancy shapes, eg: Marquise shape, Emerald shape, and it's actually getting more and more exciting. In terms of ring design, they also like something that is not symmetrical, it's no longer a classic design with a row of diamonds on the side, but you can have it non-symmetrical, very artistic people.

Yasmin: Nice to know! Sounds like social media's helped us a lot on our education. Okay. Amanda, do stay on the line, we are continuing the chat with you.

Yasmin: So did you hear from Amanda Koo, director of eClarity that, are Singaporeans getting less boring when it comes to our jewellery choices? I know we love our solitaires, but apparently asymmetrical jewellery is also the order of the day. Nice to know! Amanda I learnt so much from you. You also offer in-depth consultation for clients, not just giving educational talks, so what's the most common mistake people make when they want to approach this whole jewellery buying experience?

Amanda: Very interesting question Yasmin. You know, people, I think when they over-read, people like to come in-store and pretend that they know how to use the microscope.

Yasmin: HAHHA and you can tell when they're pretending.

Amanda: Yeah I think 99.9% of people are pretending, saying "Can I have a look?" "Can I use the microscope?" And then you ask, "What are you trying to see?" Because you know I was a graduate from NUS, and I went for a post-graduate in Gemology. I learnt for years before I truly know how to hold a microscope properly, correctly. I see with a smile in my heart, that the young people coming in asking for microscope, I say sure!

Yasmin: They're trying to look-out for flaws.

Amanda: Yeah they are they are. You know there are dusts on the diamond. The very crucial learning point is how do you differentiate a piece of dust, on the surface of the diamond versus an inclusion inside the diamond.

Yasmin: Somebody not trained would obviously not know that. So, do you let them be that 10 minutes of imposter?

Amanda: HAHA! I usually let them have about 2 minutes, maybe. And then, I will start my education. So you know how there are 4Cs in diamond. Colour, Clarity, Carat, do you remember? And then there is one more...

Yasmin: Oh no! No, give it to me, I'm gonna take forever to dretch that up.

Amanda: So, cut.

Yasmin: Cut! Okay.

Amanda: So there are 4Cs. We share how you prioritise the 4Cs. So I will always present two diamonds.

Unfortunately now I cant present two diamonds over the radio if not I will. I will ask, which C could you see it first? Carat first? Or can you see the inclusions first? Which is clarity.

Yasmin: Hmmm

Amanda: So, learning how to prioritise the 4Cs get you better value.

Yasmin: Generally, the average buyer would perhaps prioritise clarity last?

Amanda: That's right Yasmin! Yeah I like that.

Yasmin: Yeah because you probably start with, I don't know, the size of it first?

Amanda: Well done!

Yasmin: And then you go for the shape?

Amanda: Yeah, so shape is not known in 4Cs. But shape is important.

Yasmin: Wouldn't that be the cut though?

Amanda: Yeah or the colour. I will still describe colour as water versus honey drink. You don't need a microscope to differentiate water and honey drink, right?

Yasmin: Yeah. Is it easier to sell diamonds or jewellery to people who have bad eyesight?

Amanda: I have guys who come in and say Amanda I'm colour blind, so I can't tell the difference. And I say too bad, your girlfriend is not colourblind right?

Yasmin: That's a good one. You have an answer for everything, Amanda. I want to talk about your journey a little bit. You were a computer science major. And then you became a corporate banker. And then you went to the US to study gemology and you really wanted to start this business because you grew up in the jewellery business too, a fascinating background. You do realise a lot of women who studied STEM subjects apparently do not go on to pursue STEM jobs, and you fall in that category. How do you explain yourself?

Amanda: Ok, so I think studying computer science is so important to me. Because my mind was totally artistic before the computer science study. I was so much into literature, acting, singing and you know when you're in computer science only results matter. So don't express yourself and no need to explain yourself.

Yasmin: You just need the data and the answers.

Amanda: Yeah like, is the programme working? So that really opens up a problem-solving skill in my mind. And I think when I thought of a way, to incorporate or integrate my study versus my interest. So my study was Computer Science, and my interest was diamond and fashion and beauty, and then I integrated it with our online, live time online diamond database. So the moment I thought about it, it's time that we could give back to the world, where you revolutionise the jewellery industry, by having this integration.



Yasmin: And most of us could log-on to the diamond database? To see the availability of the diamonds in actual time?

Amanda: Yes definitely.

Yasmin: What a way to give back! Yeah so that's your pairing of your art and your computer science background. Lovely! Amanda thank you for talking to us today and you're such a joy! I learned a lot from you.

Amanda: Thank you Yasmin.

Yasmin: Amanda Koo is director of eClarity, my guest on The Double X Files.