

## We are happy to introduce Nicole Centeno, founder and CEO of Splendid Spoon.

In this interview Nicole provides her perspective and learnings from starting a food business from scratch and gives some insights to the consumer trends impacting the D2C food market in US.



### What was your background before starting Splendid Spoon?

I've done a few different things but food has always been a way of life for me. I studied nutrition, biology, and bio-chemistry as an undergraduate at Boston College, and my work on diet therapies as treatment for epilepsy was published in Nutrition and Metabolism. Later, I went to culinary school in Manhattan while working a full time job in publishing.

### How come you started up Splendid Spoon – what was your key idea behind the company?

When I was pregnant with my first child I was working a corporate job while pursuing a culinary side hustle through various catering gigs and pop-ups. It was a pretty full plate, and I was trying to figure out how I could 'make it all work' with a little one on the way. I realized the biggest problem was my nutrition. Even with all my culinary and science know-how, I could not seem to avoid packaged foods and nutrient-void snacks. The reason was time – I was just so focused on building a

career that I didn't have time to cook for myself. I knew this feeling would be even more challenging once I became a mom so I created a set of plant-based meals that would make nourishment easy and delicious. What's amazing is that plant-based eating is so effective, that I noticed a difference in my overall health after only a few weeks.

### What would you say are Splendid Spoon's biggest milestones so far?

Every meal category launch is a big milestone for us. We love that plant-based health can be achieved even with one small change a day – that change is different for everyone, so each day part has a big impact on our business because it invites more people to the table so to speak. When we launched breakfast smoothies, we realized how powerful the 'grab and go' breakfast is for the busy American household. When we launched our noodle bowls we confirmed our hypothesis that adding a hearty and comforting dinnertime meal would help convert new customers.

When we launched breakfast smoothies, we realized how powerful the 'grab and go' breakfast is for the busy American household. When we launched our noodle bowls we confirmed our hypothesis that adding a hearty and comforting dinnertime meal would help convert new customers.

### What are your key learnings starting up a food-tech company in the US from scratch?

When I started, food-tech was a new term. Food had been a big, fragmented, slow-growth space that required very large market share to succeed, or loads of upfront capital to break through and establish a brand in grocery aisles. And consumers had really caught on to all the problems of big-Ag and big-CPG – so it was a really excellent time to launch a disruptor brand. One of the best decisions we made was to forgo the grocery aisles and take a bet on building our own direct to consumer platform. It allowed us to better understand our core customer, establish value across multiple dayparts, and test our product offering across a wide geographic region (we deliver to all 48 continental US states). Another big shift for us has been understanding when a trialist becomes a loyalist. It is easier than ever to start an ecommerce brand, and the competitive advantage is not just about acquiring new customers, it's about becoming an expert at converting the average customer into a super customer.

### How do you see the consumer trend of D2C food solutions evolving in the US?

What's exciting is that D2C brands are giving the customer more time back, and

convenience remains the number one reason consumers are choosing D2C over a traditional retail purchase. Also, after 2 years of pandemic living, customers are eager to try new flavors and experiences. Just about every category in food has the opportunity to be disrupted as consumers seek higher quality ingredients, improved nutrition profile, and more varied global





"We think a lot about consumers who consider themselves flexitarian or plant-curious (those who will not totally give up animal proteins, but are trying to eat healthier and trying to eat more fruits and vegetables). This is somewhere between 75-85% of the US population."

flavors will have an edge. I think categories that are historically viewed as 'convenient' – snacks, cereals, frozen meals – will continue to see new and exciting innovations. D2C brands also offer customers two things that traditional retail channels do not – transparency and personalization. D2C brands will need to invest in these areas to stay competitive.

**Are there any key trends that are more important for Splendid Spoon when it comes to healthy eating and living?**

We think a lot about consumers who consider themselves flexitarian or plant-curious (those who will not totally give up animal proteins, but are trying to eat healthier and trying to eat more fruits and vegetables). This is somewhere between 75-85% of the US population. We love thinking about all the incremental changes this population is making throughout their day – a better for you snack, swapping out sodas for fresh pressed juices, or trying a new frozen meal to make dinnertime healthier.

and better living intersect, Splendid Spoon will be there.

We are also huge believers in the opportunity to disrupt the weight loss space. Ultimately, this is one of the most

powerful drivers for customers seeking to build a healthier lifestyle. Sadly, weight loss psychology is one of reduction and limitation. We love looking at traditional and comforting flavors to make plant-based health more inviting, and more likely to become a habit. The key to achieving and maintaining health goals is sticking to a few small changes over a lifetime. We think there's no better way to do that than through delicious and familiar flavors that have been reinvented to deliver on a health promise.

**Where do you see Splendid Spoon 5 years from now?**

Splendid Spoon's web product will be a platform for our core customers to engage with the newest and most exciting plant-based food products and leaders in the plant-based movement. Our most convenient offerings will be available in a wide variety of channels to invite more to the plant-based lifestyle – music venues, the productive workplace, and sporting venues are all ripe for disruption when it comes to better-for-you plant-based nourishment. Wherever convenience, joy, and better living intersect, Splendid Spoon will be there.