

CMCN 423 Madison

# Demo Diva

---

From Event Planning to Demolition

GraceAnn Carroll

April 30, 2021

## ***Overview/ Introduction***

Simone Bruni was a successful corporate event planner who loved her job and people in New Orleans, Louisiana. In 2005 she was jobless, homeless, and had no direction for future success after Hurricane Katrina destroyed her city. Over two years, Simone learned to adapt to the growing need for demolition and now is the owner of the company Demo Diva. Simone used her skills she learned in marketing and communication to become one of the most successful businesses on the Gulf Coast.

A personal interview with Simone Bruni, question in **Appendix A**, and articles written about the Demo Diva became the basis of research for the case. Article sources include, but are not limited to, the New York Times, St. Charles Magazine, Ursuline Alumnae Spotlight, and Lagniappe Online. The company website provided information as well as a [Ted Talk given by Simone Bruni on Redefining success.](#)

## ***Background/ Research***

Simone began Demo Diva in 2006 to clean up the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. She started out helping her neighbors begin to rebuild and let church groups around her community. Her passion for services allowed her to thrive during a time of crisis. "My motto was let me help get home, trust me" (Simone Bruni, Personal Interview 2021). Demo Diva started in New Orleans but has not expanded to the entire Gulf Coast and has cleared away thousands of flooded and blighted homes.

The natural disaster ended all commerce in South Louisiana, and the only open job fields were construction, clean-up, and demolition. The Demo Diva took advantage of this opportunity and created a new niche. As a single woman, she had the time to help out her neighbors in complete distress. Simone started by visiting their evacuated homes to cheap for damage and

vandalism. Simone believes, "My positive attitude and voice got my neighbors to come back to the city" (DemoDiva.com). She then began to gut her own house after flooding and decided it was time to enter a new market using the skills she learned from her event planning career.

The process of starting the company faced a learning curve. Simone did not have any experience in demolition, did not have a crew, and did not have tools. Her budget to start a brand-new company was \$250, so she decided to spend \$30 on business cards, \$50 on car magnets for her vehicle, and the rest on yard signs. Knowing that the best way for her to reach her publics was to make her brand apparent, Simone asked homeowners if she could place her yard signs on previously demoed lots. From there, her business began to grow and find success, as she says, "in the mud" (Personal Interview, 2021).

All of her ideas were spontaneous. She matched the needs of her community and did not have any set plans. Simone adapted the Demo Diva to fit the community in which it was thriving. She refused to say no to any jobs offered to her. Simone used contractors because she did not have a crew, and she rented the equipment needed. She eventually gained enough success and funding to hire employees and begin to take a brand further with her pink equipment shown in **Appendix B**.

### ***Objectives/ Strategy***

The ultimate objective of this campaign was to create a new business in the middle of a natural disaster crisis. Once Simone analyzed the business idea and defined the niche, new objectives emerged.

- **Objective 1:** Establish a local presence in the community and gain the trust of the citizens.

- Demo Diva would not turn down any jobs, even if she did not know how to do them or have the resources to do so. Simone Bruni (Personal Interview 2021) said, "I was adaptable and flexible to all work environments, and I sought out to satisfy the need."
  - Simone rented out equipment and subcontracted crews.
- Reach out to everyone she knew to show how much she cared about and loved New Orleans.
- Establish company values that showed caring features. "Our company values are centered around compassion and love for the diversity of people, cultures, architecture, and nature" (DemoDiva.com).
- **Objective 2:** Create a brand that would stand out in the field of demolition.
  - Simone purchased a hot pink excavator from Volvo and hot pink dumpsters around the city for brand recognition. "Companies laughed at me when purchasing pink equipment and tried to talk me out of it because of the resale value, but they realized the marketing advantage I was establishing" (Personal Interview 2021).
  - Placed in previously demoed lots were yard signs to create the sense that she was already working, trusting, and credible in the field.
  - Create a commercial that furthers the brand locally.
- **Objective 3:** Reconstruct her career to fit the need of the population and target audience.
  - Establish the value of the product she was producing.

- Contractors and crews were scared during the recovery period, so Simone showed that as much as she needed clients' business, they needed her as well.
- Create a second business that would support the culture of New Orleans and keep valuable items out of land fields.
- Create a loop on constant change, adaptability, and expansion while staying in her niche.

### ***Target Audience***

Demo Diva caters to people of all cultures and backgrounds due to the constant need for recovery and reconstruction. The target audience for the company began as women. Women are the primary decision-makers of the household. "Many demolition companies will try and talk to the men of the house, but the ultimate decision is usually made by the women" (Personal Interview 2021). Simone believed that just like her, many women were unsure how demolition companies operated and what steps to take after a disaster. The Demo Diva showed understanding to the target audience and created a bond of trust with the women and their families. She knew that men would see that she knew nothing about demolition starting and dismiss her business, but she could establish trust with women.

### ***Execution***

The Demo Diva began the business by advertising her brand in any way she could. She placed yard signs around the city, distributed business cards on cars, put a hot pink dumpster in high traffic areas, and gave interviews to anyone who offered. The planning phase of the campaign blended with the executive because of the adaptability of the company. Rather than

setting designated measures, Simone was flexible in the completion of objectives. Opportunities became apparent as the business began to grow.

After purchasing five pink dumpsters, her brand became well known around the city, and she decided to sponsor 400 girls in a flag football tournament. Simone created a competition for best chant during the sponsorship, with the prize of being a part of the Demo Diva commercial. Simone's goal of the competition was to help women and girls believe that they can accomplish great success in an unknown world. The winners included cheerleaders from various New Orleans school pictures in **Appendix C**. The chosen chant of "[It takes a Diva, to do what we do](#)" became the known catchphrase of the company. The community began to recognize the Demo Diva worldwide, including "A McDonald's worker who asked if I was the Demo Diva" (Personal Interview 2021).

Simone continued her philanthropic efforts by partnering with the Make it Right Foundation as their official demolition crew. The Make it Right Foundation was founded in 2007 by Brad Pitt to build and rebuild homes for people in need while quartering to green building standards. "We began in 2007 by building homes for families in New Orleans' Lower 9th Ward, who lost everything in Hurricane Katrina" ([Make it Right Facebook Page 2009](#)). Demo Diva also partnered with the Rebuild Together Foundation, in which she donated architectural materials such as crystal door handles and Cyprus flooring recycled from demolition projects. Items were sold in the Rebuild Together Storefronts for affordable prices to locals in the New Orleans area.

The Demo Diva took this inspiring experience and then expanded into a new second company called Reclaimed Diva Millworks. The company's goal is to "Provide reclaimed custom-milled antique heart pine floors, stair treads, mantles, and beams from demoed properties

around the nation" (ReclaimedDiva.com). Simone wanted to take control of the demolition business and keep usable materials out of land fields.

Advertising strategies then increased dramatically as the Demo Diva participated in frequent interviews from the press. Her story traveled to Japan, where she visited the Shibusawa Foundation and spoke on recovery after the devastating tsunami. "They wanted me to share a story of hope and recovery from a demolition aspect, as well as to share how in the world I got into this industry as a woman" (Interview of Simone Bruni by TuffWerk 2013). Simone took every opportunity to speak with disaster victims worldwide and promote the ideals of her business.

The Demo Diva's story is in articles from news outlets such as the [New York Times](#), [WYNC Radio](#), ( photo in **Appendix D**), and [NOLA Woman Magazine](#) ( photo in **Appendix E**). The company began as a business that worked for residential properties but has since expanded to include commercial. Simone's services have expanded to include slab removal, dumpster hauling, architectural salvage, insurance work, and ICC funding.

### ***Evaluation***

The Demo Diva is now one of the most unique and successful demolition companies in the nation. Simone's branding efforts made the company well known in New Orleans and all along the Gulf Coast. Customers can purchase Demo Diva branding items from their website with their classic black and hot pink colors. ( Photo in **Appendix F**). Simone's marketing and communication skills have won her awards, such as the 2016 Jefferson Chamber of Commerce Business Program Award and the 2008 City Businesswoman of the Year.

Since the start of her company, Simone has taken part in the 10,000 Small Businesses program at Delgado Community College. [In a video released by the program](#), Simone mentions,

"I am learning to think logically when running my business and not with my emotions" (Delgado Community College 2011). The Demo Diva has mentioned that even though she has been highly successful in the demolition world, her emotions often led her to make questionable business decisions. One of the challenges she faced was learning that her business associates were involved in unethical practices such as wrongful filings, irregular book-keeping, incorrect coding, and embezzlement. Simone separated her company from these individuals and partnered with Sharron Summersgil, picture in **Appendix G**. According to Lagniappe Online, "The two business owners meet once per quarter to discuss Demo Diva's books and strategies" (Lagniappe Online 2015).

Simone attributes the success of her company to her financial philosophy. Bruni says, "I treat my bank account like the Holy Grail. I don't spend lavishly in the business, and I've spent a lot back reinvesting in the company" (Lagniappe 2015). Simone started her company with \$250; the company now generates \$181.9K in revenue per employee (Owler 2021). The company employs around 80 people and is still considered a small business. Many employees are a product of her work with the New Orleans Mission, a homeless shelter for men.

Simone is promoting her business and actively seeking more ways to get involved in the community. Her success has led her to speak on podcasts such as The Home Service Expert, which discusses how to set yourself apart from the rest in your market. Someone spoke on her accomplishments at the Louisiana Girls Leadership Academy, where girls are taught empowerment and strength in the business world. See photo of girls at the Academy in

**Appendix H.**

*Future*



Simone defines the future of Demo Diva as expansion. She hopes to bring her company to different cities while still keeping to her brand and strategic approaches. Demo Diva will purchase more pink dumpsters as they are the essential item for the company's brand. Her overall goal is growth for her company and city. She hopes to inspire young women and homeless men to pursue their vision and goals. The Demo Diva stated in an interview, "You keep giving, and as much as you give is as much as you'll grow" (TheNOLA 2013).

### ***Discussion***

The Demo Diva became a successful company because of the public relations principles used during their establishment. The first principle used was to know your publics. Simone analyzed the need in her city and modeled her business to satisfy the presented problems. During the aftermath of Katrina, the citizens were facing safety concerns. The company branded itself as trustworthy and reliable so that the people knew they cared about the city and not just monetary profits.

The second principle seen in the case is the Law of Primacy. Demo Diva was the first company to set out unique advertisements in the city, such as pink equipment. They were also the first to place signs on demolished sites, so the population recognized their company name and work. Clients remembered the first company they saw taking action and making their presence known after the disaster.

The third principle involved in the case was the timing principle relating to catching and riding waves through society. Simone recognized that although she had not started demolition till after larger companies, she could use her yard signs to receive business. She waited two years after the initial recovery to begin and still excelled in her company because she chose the right time to present her skills.

The fourth principle used for success was audience participation. When Simone first began, her messages resonated with the community because her neighbors told their friends and family about her company. Simone thrived on word-of-mouth advertising. She also used audience participation when creating her first commercial. The competition allowed individuals who had never interacted with her company to take part in increasing brand awareness.

The fifth principle defined is the principle of reputation. Simone learned when she faced challenges with unethical business partners that her reputation was at risk. She began by establishing the company as trustworthy and honest. If Simone had continued business with such individuals, her company would have faced a bad reputation.

The sixth principle is the principle of credibility. The Demo Diva established themselves as credible by taking interviews with media outlets such as the New York Times that release articles generally trusted by society. Simone also attached herself to reliable brands such as Volvo in the beginning stages of creation.

The seventh and most used principle is the principle that states that companies must understand how their actions affect their publics. Demo Diva started under the philosophy of helping rebuild the community. The company completed all projects with the goal of "Transforming properties and people's lives to make neighborhoods safer" (Personal Interview 2021).

The eight-principle seen in this case is the principle of attaching the company name to a benevolent cause. The Demo Diva partner with many charitable organizations, including the New Orleans Mission, the Make it Right Foundation, and the Rebuilding Together Foundation.

Simone continues to partner with other organizations involving young women, homeless men, and service members.

The ninth principle described is the principle of adaptability. The Demo Diva was flexible with all the projects presented. Simone used the learning tactic of “learn as you go” to complete jobs that she did not know how to do. Her philosophy revolves around continually growing and constantly expanding. The need during a disaster was not event planning, but she adapted into the world of demolition.

The last principle used was the principle of calculated risks. When Simone bought her first pink excavator, the salesman warned her that she would not be able to resell the product, and as soon as contractors painted, it would lose value. She proceeded with the plan and used the pink color as her primary marketing strategy that proved a high success level in her field.

### ***Discussion Questions***

1. Would this case still have been successful if Simone started the business at the beginning of restoration rather than two years into the process? Why or Why not?
2. Do you think it was ethical that Simone placed her advertisements on what she did not complete herself? Why?
3. What are different marketing techniques you would have used in the establishment of this case?
4. What similarities do you see between hospitality management and demolition relating to public relations?
5. How do you think Simone could have incorporated social media into her company? If so, what platform do you think she could have used?
6. What do you believe was the most successful strategy in the case?

7. How could she have gotten different groups not mentioned to interact with her brand?
8. Do you believe the target audience was justified in the choosing? Why or why not?

## References

- Bruni, S. (2009). Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/demodiva>.
- Delgado Community College. (2011, August 5). *Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses at Delgado Community College*. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iX9cKHir01U&t=5s>.
- Demo Diva Founder Simone Bruni Demolishes New Orleans with Purpose*. TuffWerx. (n.d.). <https://www.tuffwerx.com/heavy-equipment-sales/heavy-equipment/demo-diva-interview/>.
- Demolition Diva Company*. The Owl . (2021).
- Entrepreneur Spotlight: Simone Bruni, the 'Demo Diva.'* Welcome. (n.d.). <http://www.inthenola.com/local-spotlights/entrepreneurs/item/3829-entrepreneur-spotlight-simone-bruni-the-demo-diva>.
- Eric Carle. (2010, June 22). *Real New Orleans- Demo Diva*. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0BU9fzwMIQg>.
- Lagniappe. (2015, November 1). Lagniappe - November 2015. <https://lcpa.advanced-pub.com/?issueID=43&pageID=8>.
- In New Orleans: Becoming the Demo Diva: Death, Sex & Money*. WNYC Studios. (2015, August 18). <https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/deathsexmoney/episodes/in-new-orleans-becoming-demo-diva>.
- Mack, L. (2019, April 9). *Simone Bruni*. My New Orleans. <https://www.myneworleans.com/simone-bruni/>.
- March Alumnae Spotlight, Simone Bruni Crouere, Skip of 1989*. Ursuline Academy of New Orleans. (2016, March 1). <https://www.uanola.org/News-Detail---Alumnae?pk=837901&fromId=176898>.
- Mello, T. (2018, July 11). *The Home Service Expert Podcast: Setting Yourself Apart From The Rest In Your Market on Apple Podcasts*. Apple Podcasts. [https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/setting-yourself-apart-from-the-rest-in-your-market/id1341478446?i=1000415624547&fbclid=IwAR1M4E4Mw4CUVIKdlsHb74Zkgf8VsJwE-akmqDY2FCXAJLzYkuEwE7TR\\_po](https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/setting-yourself-apart-from-the-rest-in-your-market/id1341478446?i=1000415624547&fbclid=IwAR1M4E4Mw4CUVIKdlsHb74Zkgf8VsJwE-akmqDY2FCXAJLzYkuEwE7TR_po).
- The New York Times. (2015, August 26). *10 Years After Katrina*. The New York Times. [https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/08/26/us/ten-years-after-katrina.html?\\_r=0&smid=tw-nytnational&smtyp=cur](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/08/26/us/ten-years-after-katrina.html?_r=0&smid=tw-nytnational&smtyp=cur).

- Nola Demolition Diva. (2011, March 29). *It Takes a Diva - New Demo Diva Commercial*. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=coXH2--k6bI>.
- Pitt, B. (2009). Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/MIRNOLA/>.
- Ramirez, J. (2014, July 25). *Demo Diva: New Orleans Demolition, Dumpster Hauling, and Foundation Removal Services*. Demo Diva | New Orleans Demolition, Dumpster Hauling, and Foundation Removal Services | New Orleans Demolition Services. <https://demodiva.com/>.
- Rebuilding Together. (n.d.). <https://rebuildingtogether.org/>.
- Reclaimed Diva Millworks. (n.d.). *Antique heart pine flooring*. Reclaimed Diva Millworks. <https://reclaimeddiva.com/>.
- Simone Bruni, Personal Interview (Personal Interview). (2021, April 12).
- Strachan, S. (2016, May 20). *Prix d'Elegance Luncheon honors those who meld fashion and philanthropy*. NOLA.com. [https://www.nola.com/entertainment\\_life/society/article\\_a7dfa057-a25d-5579-af14-0289dc729b2d.html](https://www.nola.com/entertainment_life/society/article_a7dfa057-a25d-5579-af14-0289dc729b2d.html).
- TEDxTalks. (2015, May 26). *Takin' it down to the dirt | Simone Bruni | TEDxNapaValley*. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MdN7cPZMJV8>.

## Appendixes

### *Appendix A:*

#### Interview Questions from Personal Interview with Simone Bruni

- Can you give a brief description of the company?
  - Demo Diva was founded in 2006 to clean up the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Our motto is “Let me help you get home. Trust Me. I’m your neighbor.” I branded our public image as pink, including heavy equipment trucks and debris dumpsters. We have now been open for seven years in the New Orleans community and down to the Mississippi Gulf Coast. We’ve cleared away thousands of flooded and blighted homes.
- What did your career background look like before Hurricane Katrina?
  - I worked in the hospitality industry for ten years. I was a corporate event planner that sold the experience of New Orleans. It was an easy sell because of the culture, architecture, and cuisine. I love my city and my job. It was perfect for the classic party girl, but it all changed on August 26, 2005, at 5 p.m. when Hurricane Katrina was 60 miles from landfall. From then, I never returned to my desk.
- Why were you motivated to enter a completely new career field?
  - There was no commerce in the city. I was alone and did not have a husband or children to tend to, so I had the opportunity to fulfill the need. My neighbors started to call me to help check on their evacuated homes. My positive attitude and voice got my neighbors to come back. On New Year’s day, I decided to gut my house, but labor was scarce, so as I began to clean my own home, I

realized I could enter a new market and start my own business with the skills I already had.

- How would you describe the challenges you faced?
  - I knew absolutely nothing about demolition, but I learned. I didn't have any money after the storm. I only had myself and no equipment, so I subcontracted the equipment Ann work out to multiple companies. My biggest challenge was learning my own voice and realizing the skills and opportunities I had right in front of me. When I thought I was stuck in the worst devastation, I found my voice. I also had some unfortunate business associates that almost ruined my reputation. I risked embezzlement along with wrong filings, book-keeping's and not coding correctly.
- Who was your target audience when you first started the company? And has it changed since then?
  - I targeted women who did not know where to turn or what to do and did my help. I was worried that men would know that I knew nothing about demolition, but neither did my neighbors, and they still asked for my help. I thought women would be more compassionate towards me. I also thought that the women would make the final decision for their homes.
- What strategies did you use to reach your publics during the crisis?
  - I started with trust. I wanted my neighbors and community to trust me. I started the company with \$250, \$30 in business cards, \$50, and magnets for my own car, and the rest was in yard signs. Timing is everything, other companies cleared off lots, and I went in and asked the homeowners if I could



put out yard signs. In a week, I put out 100-yard signs, and it looked like I did the demolition. Perception is reality. People thought I was so busy when we weren't

- How do you think you stood out in your field?
  - I painted everything in pink, including my first Volvo excavator. Volvo sent a photographer and did a story on it. I then decided to buy a pink dump truck and pink dumpsters. I purchased five pink dumpsters and put them out so the community and families would recognize me. I also think we stood out because we never turned down jobs. We were always the ones to say yes even if we had never done the task before. We adapted and learned.
- How would you describe the message you wanted your audience to recognize?
  - I wanted to be seen as trusting and a friendly face. I wanted to be seen as ready to serve anyone and everyone. I wanted my customers to know I understood their emotions, cared, and was adaptable and flexible to all their work environments. I sought out to satisfy the need. I wanted to be seen as fun and positive through my pride and passion for demolition.
- What surprises did you encounter as your company began to grow?
  - It's a dominating male industry, but I found success as a woman. I was invited all over the world to speak and encourage towns hit by devastation. I was surprised at how many people recognized me as the demo diva so quickly. Even a McDonald's worker addresses me as demo diva.
- Can you describe your ideas and process leading up to your first video commercial?

- I sponsored 400 girls to play flag football, and I started a competition with those girls that whoever wrote the best cheer would be featured on my next commercial. I then heard the chant everywhere, from my crew to people I didn't even know. It takes a diva to do what we do. The video helped women and girls see that they can accomplish the most tremendous success in an unknown world.
- How would you describe your company values and purpose?
  - Our company values are centered around passion and love for the diversity of people, cultures, architecture, and nature. We work with joy, enthusiasm, and a deep sense of purpose to make the world a better place every day. We were created to help and serve people following a natural disaster. We transform properties and people's lives to make neighborhoods safer.
- Do you think your values and purpose has changed since you first established your business?
  - No, from the beginning, I have always wanted to serve my community. I started by showing love to my neighbors and leading church groups to help clean up after the disaster. My passion for serving the community and demolition has only grown stronger as my company has grown.
- What advice would you give to individuals starting out in public relations or strategic communication?
  - Fake it till you make it, and always have a positive and trusting attitude. The faster you can gain the trust of your target audience, the quicker you will reach success.

*Appendix B:*

Image of Hot Pink Dumpster



*One of the Demo Diva's Famous Dumpsters at a demolition site.  
Photo Courtesy of Demo Diva Facebook page.*

*Appendix C:*

Photo of Cheerleaders at Flag Football Event



*Cheerleaders who won the commercial competition for best chant  
Photo Courtesy of Demo Diva Facebook Page.*

*Appendix D:*


Article from WNYC Radio



---

Published in  
Death, Sex & Money

## In New Orleans: Becoming the Demo Diva



Simone Bruni, a.k.a. the Demo Diva, on a job site with her signature hot pink equipment.

[\(Rush Jago\)](#)

---

Aug 18, 2015

---

Summary

*Article about how Simone Bruni Became the Demo Diva  
Photo Courtesy of WNYC Radio*

*Appendix E:*

Article from NOLA Woman Magazine Online

**Entrepreneur Spotlight: Simone Bruni, the 'Demo Diva'**

[IntheNOLA.com](http://IntheNOLA.com)



"This is a man's world!" the King of Soul, James Brown, famously proclaimed in 1966. While he was certainly right in some regards, there's no denying that women are doing big things as well.

And New Orleans women, in particular, are doing it in style.

Simone Bruni, Ursuline Academy and Loyola University alumna, is one of those women and she's doing it in hot pink. If you've driven around New Orleans in the last year or so, you may have noticed the hot pink that we speak of...dumpsters, excavators, and bobcats sitting pretty in pink awaiting the next demolition.

*Image of Simone Bruni in a Spotlight for a magazine  
Photo Courtesy of NOLA Woman Magazine Online*

*Appendix F:*

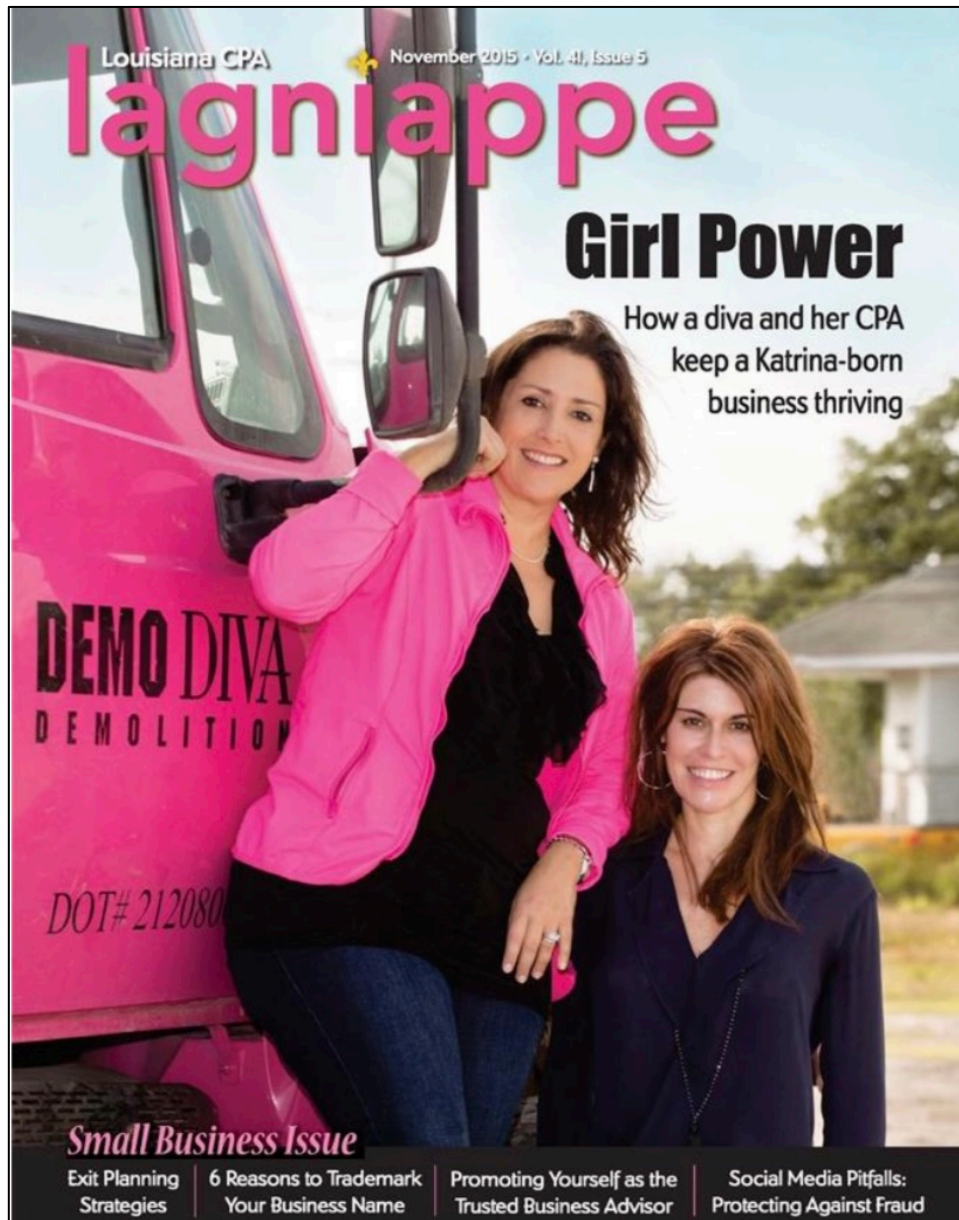
Demo Diva Apparel



*A group of women in classic Demo Diva colors and logos.  
Photo Courtesy of Demo Diva Facebook*

*Appendix G:*

Cover of Lagniappe Magazine



*Simone Bruni on left and Sharon Summersgil on the right  
Photo Courtesy of Lagniappe Magazine.*



*Appendix H:*

Young women from Louisiana Girls Leadership Academy

*Kaitlyn Hall, Hally Brown, GraceAnn Carroll, Catherine Dicano, and Robin Capps from the Louisiana Girls Leadership Academy*

*Courtesy*

*Photo  
of*



*GraceAnn Carroll- Academy Participant*