

# Philanthropy Powered by Business

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“The two most important days of your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why.”

Mark Twain’s words have served as a compass for **Nirit Harel** for most of her life. A YPO member, she is a veteran of the Israeli startup environment where she successfully positioned ventures for growth and acquisition by NASDAQ-traded entities. Though smaller in size than the U.S. state of New Jersey, Israel boasts the highest concentration of startups in the world, second in absolute numbers only to Silicon Valley. As part of [YPO Innovation Week](#) in May, Harel will be pioneering an immersive innovation experience, featuring talent and ground-breaking developments from a cross-section of Israeli industries.

“The late Israeli President Shimon Peres used to say that what drove innovation in Israel was a sense of dissatisfaction: the feeling that we can always push the boundaries further to challenge the status quo. If you tell an Israeli that it can’t be done, then they are that much more motivated to prove you wrong,” says Harel. As she likes to point out, Israel is a beautiful innovative miracle and a startup itself. Eighty percent desert, with a population of 8 million and no natural resources, Israel is a green oasis: the only country in the world with a growing net number of trees, and a world leader in agritech, water tech, military technology, cybersecurity, medicine and alternative forms of energy that depends entirely on its human capital.

Harel has thrived in the Israeli startup environment acquiring more than 20 years of management, branding, public relations and consulting experience with recognized global innovators such as Siemens Biometrics, including five negotiating partnerships upwards of EUR20M each for Technion Israel Institute of Technology and others with world leaders such as Siemens, Zeiss and Philips for bids in the European Framework Program (now Horizon 2020).

While she thrived in the global corporate ecosystem, her need to do good has followed her throughout her life. Today, Harel focuses her efforts on bringing innovation to the social sector: applying high-impact startup and investor relations methodology to assist entities in nonprofit, impact investing, social mobility and life-transforming emerging tech in better positioning themselves to become viable, self-sustainable, efficient businesses.

## The next step

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“If you look at the challenges of the startup environment, they are almost identical to what

you find in a nonprofit,” says Harel. “Small, passionate teams called upon to wear various hats, diminishing funds, short time to enter the market.”

Over the past nine years, Harel has been leveraging the corporate management skills she had adeptly applied in Israeli startups to nonprofits with astonishing results. She shifted her focus from investor relations to donor relations. She took what she was good at — building the infrastructure of a business, communications, marketing and public relations — and rather than packaging and selling a biometric sensor for a startup, she was launching nonprofits and social impact ventures that were making a difference, turning around and leading some of the largest NGOs, as well as new entities to scale globally into more than 60 countries.

Founded in 1999, with clients on five continents, IMPACT Manhattan is a full-service strategic marketing consultancy focused on bringing international and multinational emerging and established ventures to the United States and other new markets. Harel helps companies and organizations define their unique value propositions in order to best differentiate, package, brand and position themselves in a competitive philanthropic landscape, organizing pitches, and growing market share exponentially for both IMPACT and the nonprofit.

“I love the creative process of building an organization from the ground up,” she says. “It’s very fulfilling to take an idea, give it a name, a narrative, and an identity — and watch it come to life and make a lasting impact.

“Our slogan is ‘Marketing what Matters’: since all of IMPACT’s profits are reinvested into the company in support of worthy causes, we only take on partners that put passion behind purpose and are in it for the right reasons. It has always been my philosophy that the collective is better than the individual so part of our strategy is to put together best teams that take the process from inception and all the way through to what I call three-dimensional marketing.” With this approach, the IMPACT teams orchestrate in-person events, mission trips, site visits and other experiential opportunities for their clients. “When they physically come to experience and touch the work- that’s our opportunity to create life-altering moments: to shape opinions and ensure lifelong commitment to partner with a cause.”

## **Residing in the circle**

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For Harel, the future of IMPACT remains focused on the convergence of passion, mission, vocation and profession. “The point at which these converge is our purpose,” says Harel. “The special sauce here is knowing how to bring real, quantifiable business skills and drive the bottom line for causes that matter, while also employing softer people skills unique to this business, from industries driven by the heart, such as education and social services.”

IMPACT forms multidisciplinary teams that bring best-in-class marketing and business skills to the table while maintaining empathy. Their best-practices model is unique as they employ almost one-to-one the skills and methods of the Israeli tech startup environment in a social setting. “We employ real business skills and push for sustainable and quantifiable results, but also maintain an environment with a flat structure that encourages risk-taking, participation and unconventional creativity,” she explains.

“As my colleague, Daniel Gradus, Founder at Homrun Group, often points out, the Israeli military teamwork experienced by all young Israelis has infused a guiding principle into Israeli civilian entrepreneurial culture that just because you are not directly responsible for something, it does not mean that it is not your problem. Our teams come together, respect their complementary skills, but fill in the gaps as a team without ego — and in support of the client’s higher mission.” Her ultimate goal is to develop the infrastructure and creative direction to a point where organizations become scalable, sustainable and self-sufficient in the shortest time possible so her team can exit most cost effectively and move on to the next challenge.

Harel succeeds in the space where philanthropy and business meet, and is increasingly asked to present on marketing methodology. “I wake up every day feeling blessed. It is a privilege to do what I do.”

*Harel is chairing “InnovNation: Israel Innovation Experience,” as part of YPO Innovation Week and the program is currently open to YPO members for registration.*

