

Entrepreneur of the Month – Charlie Pountney (September 2009 - New York)

What your company is/does, and your role in it.

Bottle & Bean is a craft beer and speciality coffee subscription service. We offer a monthly discovery experience to help people uncover new craft beers and speciality coffees from UK independent producers.

Every month we feature a different craft brewery and coffee roaster. We send you 12 beers, 3 coffees, or both, from these producers and invite all subscribers to attend a live beer and coffee tasting in the second week of each month. These tastings are streamed live direct to your laptop, mobile or device. This gives you the chance to understand more about the products and meet the artisan producers who make them.

What inspired you to set it up?

I started getting really interested in craft beer around 2012. My epiphany moment came during the Super Bowl where I picked up some beer to enjoy at home in front of the game with some friends. On this occasion the beer tasted like nothing I had had before. I thought, why doesn't all beer taste as good as this! Unbeknownst to me, the beer I bought was actually Punk IPA brewed by Scottish Brewery Brew Dog.

I started searching for this experience again and the more I got into drinking great beer, the more I was inspired by the stories of the small, artisan brewers taking on the might and size of the international brewing conglomerates. Until this point I was unaware that the beers I had drunk (with gusto) during my time on Mountbatten in New York had been 'sticking it to the big guys' since way back in the 1980's. Beers like Sierra Nevada, Anchor Steam and Sam Adams. I wanted to make sure people were aware that truly great beer exists, to encourage people see through the marketing gimmicks and give them access to these special brews.

The UK is still a long way behind the United States in its appreciation of craft brewing. Hopefully I can take inspiration from the positivity, go-get-em attitude and David vs Goliath success stories which I experienced during my time in New York, to continue my pledge to help people 'drink brighter'.

How you went about setting it up and getting established

I saw the need for an online beer retailer who catered for the new and emerging craft beer drinker, rather than purely for the beer enthusiast. In the early days this seemed like a daunting task, so after attending some beer training courses I began running my own beer tasting popup events in London in 2013. Running these events gave me confidence talking about beer and helped me become part of the beer community, building up useful contacts in the process.

As fate had it, at the very first beer tasting I ran I met my current girlfriend Alison, who, some months later, introduced me to my now Business Partner John! John and I share an evangelistic desire to help introduce people to new and exciting drinks brands and we both saw a crossover between the craft beer and speciality coffee movements. Not long later Bottle & Bean was born!

What your future plans involve

Bottle & Bean's first beer and coffee subscriptions went out in March 2015. Our short term plans involve us growing the number of monthly subscribers and helping provide unforgettable experiences when people discover fantastic craft beer and coffee through our service. We have dreams of opening a Bottle & Bean Brew Bar or tasting room and hopefully bringing exciting European beer and coffee brands over for our UK customers to try. For now we are keeping our feet firmly on the ground by focusing on the daily struggle of growing our business customer by customer.

Any words of advice/wisdom or encouragement for others thinking of setting up on their own

Once you scratch the surface of the startup scene, read a few books and attend a few events a whole new world opens up that you never knew existed. The startup world is exhilarating and much more open, friendly and encouraging than you would think. There are a lot of people out there happy to help if you attend events or just ask!

My main bit of advice would be to take the first step. Everyone talks about how they wish they could do XYZ or the great idea they have for a business, but 99% of people don't do anything about it. The hardest step is the first one and it gets easier from there. Starting Bottle & Bean was a relatively short process but it took over 2 years and lots of little steps to get there, including running a part time business on the side of my job in finance for 18 months. Take that first step!

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Charlie is a certified beer sommelier, passionate advocate of great beer and founder of bottleandbean.com a craft beer and speciality coffee discovery service.