

Bamboo serves the best app-etite for lunch

**Fed up wasting half your lunch break waiting to get your food?
Bamboo is about to solve all your problems. We caught up with their
co-founder Luke Mackey.**

Background

I was always working when I was growing up but my dream was to become a pilot. When I was doing my leaving cert, I was also training to be in the Air Corps which was the easiest avenue for me to become a pilot. I felt the military route would also be more interesting. I made it to the final 50 cadets but unfortunately I didn't make the cut and when it came to my CAO, which was my back-up, I picked a marketing course in NCI which proved to be a great decision. In my second year of college, I spotted a gap in the market for restaurants and hotels for marketing. Social media was becoming more prominent and companies didn't know how to utilise this.

A friend of mine, who was a graphic designer, teamed up with me and we created a marketing service company and we ran company's social media account, built websites and developed their content. We had 20 companies at one point and by working with our clients, we became more aware of their daily problems.

Bamboo

The idea for [Bamboo](#) came from visiting the same coffee shop every day, getting the exact same order and calling into the shop at the same time each day. I came to know the barista and one day I got fed up of waiting 15 minutes every day so I asked can I take their number and text ahead and come collect it, which they agreed. These resulted in more people asking to text their orders and collect their coffee when it was ready and it made me realise that there is a business opportunity here.

As I was still in college at this point, and I was still working on the other business, I tried to brainstorm how I could turn this into a product. I wasn't very technical and I was finding it difficult to build. I started to enter college competitions and I won a few which validated my idea. I was quite insecure about doing this at first because I wasn't sure it would work and I really didn't want to fail. Through these competitions, I met my co-founder, Alan Haverty, who was building something similar in this space so we joined forces and started Bamboo. When we finished college, we worked out of a co-working space in Dublin 8 and we offered people free coffee to join our beta. There was a little café in the building and we used that to trial our product at no charge and we got about 50 people who were also using the space to use it to make their orders.

As a result of this, we got great feedback and we knew we were solving a problem for both the customer and the business. When it came to lunch time, companies were struggling to keep up with the demand with queues going out the door but thanks to Bamboo they were able to get more orders out the door quicker and it took the pressure off the staff.

Funding and growing

We applied for funding from Enterprise Ireland's CSF back in 2017 and at first we were unsuccessful, but they told us what we needed to do to be successful. We made the recommended changes and we were awarded €50k and with this we hired our first engineer, who was a specialist in iOS. Up to this point we were only available on Android. After a month we had the iOS app running and we got our first ten restaurants on-board and got them to use it for free to see how it worked. The result of this trial period was that restaurants that were getting customers coming once every two or so weeks, were now coming back a couple of times a week.

At the start of 2018, we closed a €500k round and we built our team to nine staff, over 200 restaurants on the platform, along with several hundred thousand transactions processed. Not only do we want to do this in Ireland, we want to take this to Europe and other interesting places around the world and basically own this market. As a start-up, it's difficult to raise money and get access to capital to dominate this market but that's in our plan down the line.

Challenges

Getting customers to use your product is very difficult. That's always a challenge for every company. When you place your first order on the app, we automatically contact the customer asking about their experience and we really value their feedback and it's used to shape our roadmap. Cashflow is also another major challenge. We're working on micro-transactions so for us it's all about getting more restaurants involved and getting more customers to use the app.

Change anything?

If I could go back in time, I'd look to get out of Ireland as early as possible. I think I would've gone straight for the UK because the market is so big there. I was also quite inexperienced as an entrepreneur so my approach to certain things would be different now and I'd know where to focus my time better. It mostly comes down to me wishing I learned a lot of things far earlier but that's natural for a young team. The mistakes I made brought me to where I am now.

Advice

If you have an idea, just go for it. I sat on the idea for some time before I put it into action and wish I pursued it earlier. This was mostly down to confidence but my advice for anyone is to go do it straight away – don't wait around. Find out if there is a need that needs to be fulfilled and once you figure that out, go crack it.

Written by Stephen Larkin

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