

COVID-19: Interview with Tessa Clarke, Co-Founder and CEO of Olio

As we live our lives in lockdown we have been forced to re-assess our attitude and approach to so many things, including food. Maddyness spoke with Tessa Clarke, Co-Founder and CEO of Olio to understand how their company is coping during the COVID-19 pandemic and what the future holds.

[Maddyness] What is the biggest professional challenge for you today?

[Tessa] I'd say it's having to juggle so many things at once, under enormous pressure, whilst maintaining my sanity! The first three weeks post lockdown were unsustainably intense, but we achieved a lot in a short period of time.

That included launching our [#Cook4Kids](#) and [#Cook4Carers](#) campaigns which were all about galvanising our community of just under two million OLIOers to cook meals and share them with their neighbours who might be struggling to access food. We were very grateful to receive the support of over 20 celebrity chefs including Hugh Fearnley Whittingstall, James Martin and Melissa Hemsley, which really helped to spread the word.

We've also been working flat out to support our retail and catering partners to redistribute their surplus food from closing stores and warehouses – in the first 30 days post lockdown OLIO redistributed double the volume of food we had done the previous 30 days! So I guess having that much impact has been the silver lining.

What is the biggest personal challenge today?

I really struggle when I think about, or imagine myself in the shoes of, the 1.5M Brits who are going hungry every day, or the hundreds of thousands of school children who still aren't receiving replacement school meals. It makes me feel guilty that our family isn't experiencing the same hardship, but I know that's not the way to think about it, and so I try instead to focus on the difference we can make with OLIO.

What changes have you made to keep your business running?

At the end of March we crowd-sourced the wisdom of our investors and asked them how long they thought we should optimise our runway for. Whilst there were a couple of outliers, there was a clear consensus that we needed to extend out to 24 months. Armed with this insight my co-founder and I re-cast our budget, with the biggest changes being a reduction in our marketing spend, and pushing back this summer's campaign to next year.

How is your relationship with your investors?

From the moment it became clear that COVID-19 was a crisis, we were really proactive in communicating with our investors to let them know how we were responding. They've been incredibly supportive of our approach, and thankfully we raised financing in January and so we don't need to raise for the next 18 months.

Have you had to end or delay your office

rent contract?

OLIO has been a remote-first company from day one, so we haven't had an office to close! In the first few weeks, we spent quite a bit of time on webinars sharing our learnings about remote working with other businesses who were just starting out on the journey, and we consolidated some of our learnings into a blog post [HERE](#).

Do you feel confident in your business post-COVID?

Whilst the amount of sharing on the app took a dip in the first couple of weeks, it's since rebounded and in mid-May, we exceeded our pre-Corona peak. We believe the pandemic is in many ways acting as an accelerant, and that's certainly true of several trends that impact OLIO.

Specifically, there's been a massive jump in people valuing food (over 50% of people say they now value food more than before), and there's a far greater sense of, and appreciation for, the power of community – as evidenced by the fact that neighbour-to-neighbour sharing is up 30% since the start of the pandemic.

Plus, as the world starts to think about the type of society and economy we want to re-build post-Corona, we're hopeful that it will be a more sustainable, equitable world, which plays squarely into our vision too.

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