

COVID-19: Interview with Alasdair Scott, CEO of Staark

Lockdown has led to a real drive towards active-transport with people looking to avoid public transport, this gives great opportunities for Staark in their mission to make performance cycling clothing for people whatever their body type. Maddyness spoke with Alasdair Scott, CEO to understand how the company is coping during the COVID-19 pandemic and what the future holds.

Staark Cycling was born in October 2018 when Steve and I met on a cycle ride in the UK. The concept behind Staark is simple – we wanted to make high-quality premium performance clothing for Cyclists that was designed to fit all keen cyclists, not just the super skinny 20-somethings.

We ran detailed research to back up our initial hunch and discovered that not only were we right, but that there was a significant market for Staark indoor training and general 'AthLeisure' wear, as well as road cycling kit.

Through 2019 we built a team (with ex-Rapha and ex-Tracksmith performance clothing specialists) and set about designing our Cycling ranges.

Steve and I immersed ourselves in the sports clothing market, visiting trade

shows across Europe, meeting with fabric suppliers and factory partners in France, Germany, Italy and UK.

In October 2019 we'd reached the point where we had our Spring/Summer, Autumn/Winter and All-Year ranges designed, prototyped and ready for production. We then started the search for funding so we could fuel our brand launch, initial production runs and our first sales & marketing efforts.

Staark hit the ground running in January 2020 and then suddenly COVID-19 struck...

[Maddyness] What have been the biggest professional challenges during lockdown?

[Alasdair] Both Steve and I have come from a background of digital marketing and product development. With Staark, we're dealing with physical product which means we really need to be in the same room with the fabric technicians, factory partners and material suppliers - so it's been a huge challenge completing work with FedEx-ing clothing samples around Europe and meeting over Zoom. And, of course, we're a pre-revenue startup looking for investment during Covid, which isn't the ideal position.

The upside is that there's a significant shift to 'active transport' with people choosing cycling over public transport and governments across the globe investing heavily in cycling infrastructure. We've already started on our Commuter range to address the new market opportunities.

What have been the biggest personal challenges during lockdown?

I live in a large open-plan warehouse in Hackney with my wife and two kids [12 and 14] so the entire lockdown experience has been ... interesting! We love to travel, so basically the last 4 months have been less than spectacular on that front. But the silver lining here is that we're all working from home on 1gigabit fibre and helping out in the local community.

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My background has been championing digital platforms since 1989 and so in a weird way the Covid crisis has brought about the change in work patterns we've been predicting for the last 30 years! The idea of better mixing the work/life balance and the ability to work from any location is highly appealing. But there's no substitute for face-to-face, on-the-ground team meetings.

As a leader, have you successfully managed your (and your teams) mental resilience through lockdown?

I've been really lucky that I've been helping out a new digital platform - WakeyTV- which delivers entertaining and inclusive mental wellness programming via an iOS and Android App, so we've all benefitted from having some excellently uplifting content to add to our weekday mornings. Also with flexible working schedules there's been time to get on our bikes and put some miles on the clock.

Since lockdown has eased slightly we've been cycling, testing new kit and trying to find the upsides of "the new normal".

What changes have you made to keep your business running?

As Staark is pre-revenue and on the investment trail right now, the main impact is that we've had to delay garment production and launch until such time as we're in funds and have our Italian factories back in production. So basically a pause on all that planned activity. We've had the time to start work on design of our Commuter range, which we know will be in demand come late Summer 2020 and Spring 2021.

Do you feel confident in your business post-COVID?

Staark is ideally placed to take advantage of the post-Covid world. Various reports are predicting a 30% - 50% increase in cycling year-on-year and our target audience is the segment that's growing fastest, so we're highly optimistic of the future. The focus for Staark now is to close our funding round as soon as possible so we can execute our go-to-market strategy and catch the wave of active transport that's almost upon us.

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