

LiberEat: simplifying how we manage food allergies

Meet LiberEat the free UK app that allows people with food allergies to monitor and manage their dietary requirements. This innovative app allows users to scan products, search recipes, filter ingredients and find restaurants that match their food requirements. Now, LiberEat provides allergen detection technology for food businesses, acting as a second line of defence against allergens and lowering risk.

LiberEat is a technology business with a mission for good. We recently spoke to 5 key stakeholders in the LiberEat business about what problems LiberEat is solving and how this app can ultimately benefit the lives of millions of people.

Hear from Barry Leaper the founder of LiberEat, Lynne Watson, a LiberEat app user, Erika Durgahee, Business Development Marketing Manager from the Vegan Society, Professor Alexandra Johnstone from Rowett Institute, University of Aberdeen and The Allergy Table, a Blogger/LiberEat Creator.

Barry Leaper, Founder LiberEat

Why did you decide to get into the foodtech sector?

It wasn't something I was planning on. The idea for LiberEat came about through personal experience and problems family members and friends with dietary requirements were having. We had looked at the apps for dietary requirements available at the time and wanted to improve on what was available, which was basically apps that gave general suggestions and recommendations. Essentially, we wanted to provide an app that could show you easily exactly what you could have whether you were shopping for groceries, eating out or cooking recipes at home. We soon realised that for an app like that to be safe we would need to develop tech which could extremely accurately identify allergens in food data and this took us a few years to develop. We now use that unique technology to help businesses significantly reduce the risk of errors in allergen communication.

What is it about allergy detection that is so critical to both consumers and businesses?

Errors in allergen communication can lead to serious injuries for customers, as well as costly recalls and severe reputational and financial damage for businesses.

At what stage did you realise there was a gap in the market to serve food-allergy communities and businesses?

We found by accident that our technology was catching errors in live food label data and menus and began to investigate the causes of these errors. We realised that we had the potential to help make food products and eating out much safer for people with dietary requirements by helping businesses reduce risks of errors.

LiberEat has won many startup and innovation awards, how have these achievements helped you scale and develop valuable partnerships?

These have been great exposure for us and helped make more people aware of LiberEat. We've been really fortunate to develop some fantastic collaborations with organisations such as the Vegan Society Vegan Trademark and high-profile food businesses.

How is LiberEat super serving people who have or work with dietary

requirements via data analytics and technology to ultimately make food safe and easy for everyone?

our goal is to become a gold standard in the food sector and hugely reduce the risk of incorrect allergen information reaching consumers. In addition we can help to save businesses from the costs of product recalls and reputation damage.

Lynne Watson, LiberEat App User

What are your specific dietary requirements and how has this impacted/shaped and informed your lifestyle?

I have gluten, dairy, egg and onion intolerances plus I don't eat meat. It makes it especially difficult when going out to eat in cafes or restaurants without contacting them ahead of time, and also makes me feel like I'm always labelled 'the fussy one' by the people I'm with. At home I almost always make things from scratch rather than having ready meals so I am sure of the ingredients. There is more choice available in supermarkets now though - even if you do have to go to them all to get the things you like / need!

LiberEat's app has some 150,000 grocery products already included in the platform. How has LiberEat simplified your dietary requirements?

I mainly use the scanning facility on the app, mostly for frozen foods but also for anything pre-packaged, it's so much quicker than reading through all the ingredients, especially if something is frozen! I also really like the recipe section but I haven't used the Eat Out part of the app as I don't generally go to chain restaurants - although their choices are generally better for me my friends prefer more 'local' places.

Can you explain what you did before this app to educate and inform yourself on special dietary and allergy foods?

Previously I had to go through all the ingredients on everything - and trust they were accurate. It is easier now the common allergens are in bold type but scanning the barcode is so much quicker! I am also on a couple of FB forums too where good information on new products is shared.

What do you love most about the LiberEat app and community?

I just love how easy it is to use the app, making my life quicker, simpler and safer. It's great to get new ideas from the recipe section, and just to know there are lots of people in the same situation.

Why are apps such as LiberEat so important to those with allergies and dietary requirements?

It works so well just for me (as I said making my life quicker, simpler and safer), but I have also recommended it to some of my friends who have children with allergies / intolerances because it must be so hard to cater for everyone's different needs - I think it really comes into its own when multiple profiles are required.

Ericka Durgahee, Business Development Marketing Manager, The Vegan Society

The Vegan Society's Vegan Trademark and LiberEat have partnered to enable LiberEat app users to search for highly trusted and reputable Vegan Trademark products in their searches. Can you tell us why you choose LiberEat to partner with and what this partnership means to the Vegan Trademark?

The mission here at The Vegan Society is to make veganism accessible and easy for everyone. LiberEat allows users to see vegan options with verification from the Vegan Trademark, alongside allergens, meaning vegans with allergies can shop easily, and those who maybe didn't think of a vegan option before will give it a go. Combining our strengths has allowed thousands of people across the UK to cut through the sea of confusing labels and quickly find what suits their needs. There wasn't another app out there that could provide that clarity for people, and the team at LiberEat embraced our request with open arms this year! Thank you for working with us.

While the app was initially envisaged for those with allergies and intolerances, it has also been embraced by vegan, vegetarian and flexitarian communities to help navigate their options from the grocery aisles and restaurant menus. There are numerous dietary education apps on the market, can you tell us what sets LiberEat apart from other dietary apps on the market?

We know that many vegans are the only ones in their household and that many have other allergies or dietary requirements beyond. LiberEat is the only product search app in the UK linked directly to supermarkets and allows you to add individual needs into profiles and shop for the whole family without feeling confused or put off by unvalidated product claims. These values align with the goals of the Vegan Trademark, which is the sunflower mark you can find on verified vegan products, and it made perfect sense to add the trademark against all registered products within the app, alongside any other status',

making shopping simple.

Read also

[An interview with Meatless Farm founder, Morten Toft Bech](#)

I understand the partnership will allow LiberEat users to easily access vegan recipes and gain the ability to use an in-app scanner to double-check whether a product is suitable for their vegan diet. Is this correct? If so, can you please elaborate on why this functionality is important to the estimated 13 million people in the UK with food allergies and other dietary requirements?

The Vegan Society exclusively creates the recipes on the app under our profile. We have dieticians on staff to help create balanced, easy recipes for everyone, and LiberEat provides another way to follow the recipes, add the products needed to the cart and ensure they're vegan. Of course, if you don't have the time to choose a recipe in the app and you're just looking to check if a product is vegan, or meets your other dietary needs, the scanner gives you a quick way to make sure you can have that product. This combination within one app creates one place, rather than 5 or 6, that matches up your requirements to the product label, doing all that hard work for you.

Why is it important for the Vegan Society to support, endorse and empower dietary requirement apps such as LiberEat?

Our vegan product labelling scheme puts us right at the centre of demanding clear product labelling from businesses, and we believe that self-claims aren't very useful, both for vegans and otherwise. LiberEat has the funding to understand allergens alongside veganism and allows everyone to find vegan products easily or try vegan products they might not have before because it meets their other needs. Together, we share the desire for food and drink to be accessible and transparent, which means we had no choice but to team up!

Food safety is mission critical to LiberEat. Can you elaborate on how this mission aligns with The Vegan Society and what can we expect to see next from this empowering partnership?

We'll continue to share each other's work and grow the database of verified vegan products available on the app. The Vegan Trademark has over 18,000 food and drink items verified now (amongst plenty of other products), with

more hitting supermarket shelves every day. We're hoping to see some new supermarkets soon on there that we're both working with, and we will of course be adding new recipes and sharing our stories together throughout 2022!

Professor Alexandra Johnstone – Rowett Institute, University of Aberdeen

Please explain your role in nutrition and education and why you think LiberEat is a vital tool for informing both the health industry and general public on health and wellbeing?

Using digital technology is the future for healthcare – this smart app has the potential to make food easier and safer for people with specific nutrition or dietary requirements. I have been working with LiberEat in an academic capacity since 2017, particularly in the development of their smart app. This app guides people to make informed food choices, such as avoiding allergen ingredients and animal products.

LiberEat has also forged a partnership with Robert Gordon University and The Data Lab to collate data to better inform health campaigns, interventions and dietary strategies for the general population. Why is it important that technology companies and startups such as LiberEat create easy to use platforms for people to identify allergens and ingredients?

This is a solution that informs people to make educated decisions about their nutrition. The LiberEat smart app is able to guide consumers about allergens and ingredients to fit with their personal choices or allergies, which includes recipes, meals from restaurants & supermarket groceries. It is exciting to think that we can use technology to guide our food choices.

Do you see enough research and funding going into the food tech sector and if so, why do you think this sector is suddenly growing and becoming increasingly important?

That's an interesting question. As an academic nutrition scientist, I am always looking for opportunities to share my knowledge and expertise with business partners. LiberEat has over the years developed industry and academic collaboration with Universities and UK businesses in the food industry to build their profile. The technology they have developed offers invaluable market insights from their data on consumer preferences and trends and helps businesses keep customers safe via allergen detection and communication.

Has public health promotion become more or less paramount since the pandemic and if so why?

Since the COVID pandemic, some of the diet and health inequalities in the UK have become more apparent. However, we have had to embrace digital technology to support our healthcare goals and using these tools for health promotion has become ever more important over the past 2 years.

What is it about LiberEat that sets it apart from other B2B and B2C dietary requirement apps on the market?

The future vision of using the LiberEat app is unique, which looks beyond helping people to avoid certain ingredients; the app will eventually support consumers to live a healthier lifestyle including food shopping choices, at home cooking and eating out.

The Allergy Table, Blogger and LiberEat Creator

What is about the LiberEat app that you find empowering and relevant?

I really like how there are multiple different creators on the platform. I never get bored and there are so many recipes and cuisines to choose from.

Why did you choose to be an advocate/influencer/content creator for LiberEat? Can you explain how you align with their mission to make food easy for everyone?

I love the way the app is super user friendly and actually gives options of the types of products we can buy in the shops- which truly helps people who are new to this way of living and eating. It's also great that you can filter the supermarket you go to! It's like an allergy friendly supermarket on your phone. Product and menu filtering is incredible for people who want to eat out but unsure where to start. It gives people the confidence to try something new.

The LiberEat app currently offers over 460 recipes from food bloggers and organisations such as The Vegan Society. Can you explain how you are creating content and helping amplify the LiberEat mission via content, ambassadorship or promotion?

My recipes are easy recipes for people with multiple food allergies. I develop content that isn't difficult for people who are new to cooking free from and not

so simple that it's boring for others who have years of experience.

I promote LiberEat's mission to make food easy and safe. The multiple profiles is a terrific resource, especially when different people in your life have different restrictions. It puts the stress off of you. It's a one stop shop for homemade food, restaurants and store-bought products: all catering to your specific needs.

What do you love most about the LiberEat community?

There is something for everyone, and everyone is on a different walk of life: but this app brings us together.

What exciting projects, collaborations or projects are you undertaking with LiberEat in the near future?

I am developing recipes that are cultivated for LiberEat's loyal customers that are simple with minimal ingredients, so they don't have to worry about the small details and they can focus on the bigger picture: enjoying their lives!

This article was originally published on ParlayMe.

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