

Packaging made with seaweed: Meet Notpla's cofounder, Pierre Yves-Paslier

As part of our new quick fire questions series – or QFQs – we spoke to Pierre Yves-Paslier, cofounder at Notpla, about the sustainable offering of seaweed, juggling team growth and scaling up a business, and the problem with common-use packaging.

What is Notpla?

Notpla is a sustainable packaging company based in London that is pioneering the use of seaweed as an alternative to single-use plastic. The startup is addressing both the environmental and health implications of single-use plastic pollution by using only natural materials like seaweed that can biodegrade in nature in four to six weeks.

Notpla has received multiple awards and grants from Innovate UK and the Ellen Macarthur Foundation for our innovative product, Ooho. Our portfolio of packaging solutions is now much bigger, and we have new exciting solutions, from coating to seaweed paper!

Our prime focus is on applications that are consumed quickly on the go, because that usually leads to a higher risk of packaging entering the environment.

We're lucky to work with both large FMCG groups as well as small startups. Among them, Just Eat Takeaway.com has been a key partner of Notpla for the past years. After three years of R&D, we are now proud to supply JET with our Notpla coated takeaway boxes, now available in the UK and the Netherlands. We also recently announced our new partnership with Heinz!

With the development of our flexible films and our Notpla paper, we are now expanding from food & beverages service to the cosmetic, fashion and sports industries.

What was the catalyst for launching Notpla?

Rodrigo and I developed an early interest in plastic waste and the ways we could find a natural and innovative alternative to plastic. We started our journey as part of a student project for our Master of Innovation Design Engineering, a programme run jointly by the Royal College of Art and Imperial College.

In 2013, the first Ooho prototypes were made in Rodrigo's kitchen. It is an edible and flexible packaging for a wide range of liquids that is 100% biodegradable and home compostable. Oohos went viral online, with one *Business Insider* video gaining 20M views. The amazing reactions we received on social media and the uniqueness of our product convinced us to found our own company.

How has the business evolved since its launch?

We officially founded our company in 2014, literally from our kitchen. The real inflection point came in 2017 when we crowd funded our seed round with £850k invested by 900 investors around the world. From there, we were able to

grow the team, across chemistry, engineering, design and business development.

As we developed our Ooho product, we realised the great potential that seaweed offers for sustainable packaging and expanded our efforts to other products like our Notpla coating, films and eventually paper. Each project is like a mini startup within the startup, and the team is now 55 strong. While there is still a long way to go to make plastic packaging disappear, we're already really proud of making plastic-free hydration possible for marathons, festivals, and enabling restaurants to send their food to customers with an all-natural coated box in three countries in Europe with Just Eat.

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Our business has evolved a lot since its launch. One of the biggest change is the size of the team. From two people – Rodrigo and myself – we are now a team of 57, and we have much higher ambitions! From one product, we have now a large portfolio of products for various applications and different industries. These new packaging solutions are displacing conventional single-use packaging in consumer-oriented industries, and are supporting our mission to make packaging disappear.

How are you funded?

In April 2017, we raised £850k in a record three days on crowdfunding platform Crowdcube, thanks to the 900 investors who believed in our vision. In August 2018, we raised a convertible loan from our first VC fund Sky Ocean Ventures.

In December 2019, we raised our £4M post-seed round led by Impact VC funds Astanor Ventures and Lupa Systems, including participation from Doen Foundation, Torch Capital and our OG crowdfunding investors. In December 2021, we closed a £10M Series A financing round led by Horizons Ventures, with participation from existing investors Astanor Ventures, Lupa Systems and Torch Capital.

In addition, we have received a number of grants and awards from InnovateUK, Ellen Macarthur foundation and Climate Kic which have been an incredible extra help with our R&D activities.

What has been your biggest challenge

so far?

One of our biggest challenges remains the huge scale-up in industrialisation that is needed to make our innovative products manufacturable in large quantities. It requires years of R&D and many trials to optimise the material formulations, the process parameters and the level of performances needed to compete in this very commoditised space.

Luckily, there are champions out there that have the drive to enable change and we've been lucky enough to work with experts and industry leaders who've welcomed the opportunity to make better packaging.

How does Notpla answer an unmet need?

We are on a mission to make packaging disappear. We want to end packaging as we know it today. To do so, we are harnessing the power of seaweed to replace single-use plastic, one of the leading causes of environmental pollution across the globe.

The UN Environment Programme estimates that only 9% of all plastic waste ever produced has been recycled, while 12% has been incinerated and the remaining 79% has accumulated in landfills, dumps, or the natural environment. At Notpla, we create packaging solutions that are proof tested by nature.

Seaweed is one of the planet's most abundant sources of biomass (growing at a rate up to 1 metre per day), its production does not compete with food crops, requires no fertiliser or fresh water to produce and actively sequesters carbon dioxide.

In line with the new EU Single-Use Plastic Directive – which aims to ban synthetic materials such as PLA, PHA and other bioplastics – Notpla's products easily biodegrade in nature in just 4-6 weeks without the need for industrial composting or special conditions. The EU's ambitious targets cannot be achieved without innovative solutions like Notpla.

What's in store for the future?

We just announced the launch of our Notpla Paper and our Pipette for oil. We are also working hard on the industrialisation of our flexible film. Finally, we have another exciting project in the pipeline, tackling another category of

packaging.

What one piece of advice would you give to other founders?

Surround yourself with positive people, and no challenge will stop you in your tracks.

Pierre Yves-Paslier is cofounder at [Notpla](#).

Article by KIRSTIE PICKERING