Meet Peckwater Brands, Europe's largest virtual food brand operator

As part of our quick fire questions series – or QFQs – we spoke to Sam Martin, CEO and cofounder of Peckwater Brands about connecting innovative delivery-based food brands with suppliers, the importance of data and helping independent businesses to keep their doors open.

At its inception, Peckwater Brands was supposed to be the missing link between hospitality businesses with kitchen facilities and virtual food brands. The demand for virtual menus was growing, but too many were being operated out of ghost kitchens. Existing businesses were a more efficient option to meet that demand, as they made better use of the underutilised kitchen space that was already available.

Then the pandemic struck, and sadly a great many hospitality businesses shut their doors forever. Virtual food brands proved to be a valuable asset to restaurants, bars and cafés – many of whom had never offered takeaway services before – providing a novel source of revenue when much of their usual traffic was locked down.

Ultimately, Peckwater Brands was designed to connect the demand for new, innovative and exciting food options on delivery platforms with suppliers who already possessed the facilities, resources, and experience to capitalise on it –

they just didn't know it yet.

Tell me about the business – what it is, what it aims to achieve, who you work with, how you reach customers and so on?

Peckwater Brands is Europe's largest virtual food brand operator, operating more than 600 delivery-only food brands in a dozen countries throughout Europe, the USA and the Middle East. Our brands span several categories, from burgers to Korean-style fried chicken and Central American fare like tacos and burritos.

Our goal is to expand our scope and reach to bring our brands to more consumers in more countries, while allowing restaurants and kitchens of all sizes to benefit from the fullest demands of the market with the help of virtual brands. Our partners are hospitality businesses, ranging in size from independent eateries to major chains, whom we help to transform their kitchens into multi-franchise operations, preparing our menus alongside their existing offerings.

How has the business evolved since its launch? When was this?

While we've gone through massive changes in scale and approach since launching at the start of 2020, many elements of our business remain the same. In the past year, we have opened offices in Miami and acquired two European competitors, granting us access to new partners and new markets around the world.

We are constantly developing new brands to meet changing demands, whether that be the varying tastes of different countries or the fast-moving trends within the culinary sphere.

Our business has evolved to be more efficient, not only in the onboarding and data-analysis elements of what we do, but in our own ways of working and strategies. Rapid expansion requires a robust infrastructure, allowing new team members and departments to fit in and complement one another, so we have worked hard to build a solid foundation that we can continue to build upon.

Tell us about the working culture at Peckwater Brands

Our team has grown by leaps and bounds in the past year alone, which has required us to invest the time and effort to build a strong, sustainable working culture at the company. Nobody is more important than our team, so we've tried to instil positivity, appreciation and well-being as core values for leadership.

We work with stakeholders around the globe, with a multinational and diverse staff, so celebrating those around us while still emphasising that we are one team working towards a common goal is a priority for us.

Naturally, food represents a big part of the culture here at Peckwater Brands, as this is something that connects our team as much as it does people throughout our markets worldwide. We're always keen to break bread together, and although as a business we don't prepare food ourselves, we certainly enjoy it!

What has been your biggest challenge so far and how have you overcome this?

A huge challenge for us has been effectively tracking demand for different food types and matching partner businesses with brands that match not only their facilities and capacities but also the demand in their local area.

For each partner, we hand-pick the brand from our library that best suits their unique situation – a chain of restaurants preparing fish and chips, for instance, will have the equipment and some of the key ingredients to prepare fried chicken, but not pizza or burritos. The challenge is finding the brand that they can best prepare that is also in demand in their local area.

The solution to this challenge is data – we collect and analyse massive amounts of data on consumer preferences and ordering habits to identify the brand that will provide the greatest volume of orders to our partner business, allowing them to take full advantage of the available demand – and in turn, make the most profit.

How does Peckwater Brands answer an

unmet need?

Peckwater Brands was built to connect an unanswered demand with suppliers who did not know that demand existed. Delivery platforms have democratised foodservice, connecting consumers with all available food brands in their area and allowing them to make decisions based on user reviews and feedback.

To maximise order volumes, existing hospitality businesses cannot rely entirely on promotions and word-of-mouth to stand out. Branding and consistency are key to success, and with our help, these businesses can leverage our brands to access both.

What's in store for the future?

New brands, new partners, and new markets. The growth we've experienced in the past few years has empowered us to continue scaling and bringing our brands to new consumers everywhere.

What's more, we are better equipped than ever to support businesses that may be struggling with record food inflation, higher commercial rents and skyrocketing energy bills, so we hope to continue working with independent businesses to help keep the doors open and their loyal customers happy.

What one piece of advice would you give other founders or future founders?

Don't shy away from data. Analysing and leveraging data to inform your approach and strategies can reveal invaluable insights for businesses in all sectors, and overlooking its vast potential could be the difference between being a startup that made it and one that didn't.

Data is a key part of our strategy, allowing us to identify the most promising brands for businesses, analysing workflows to increase efficiency and develop brands that resonate with consumers.

And finally, a more personal question! What's your daily routine and the rules

you're living by at the moment?

Regular exercise is both a rule and a routine – it's something I try to do at least a little bit every day, and it helps me keep up my energy levels no matter how busy things get. In our new offices we have a gym, which makes it much easier to work up a sweat throughout the work week.

People have different definitions of 'keeping healthy', but whatever it may be, health and wellbeing should be a priority for everyone. For me, it's keeping physically fit!

Sam Martin is CEO and cofounder of _Peckwater Brands_.

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