



We spoke to a serial salad entrepreneur about the pressures, pitfalls and positives of building a business around your passions.

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From the seafood joints lining the locks of Leith to street food sold from the brightly painted police boxes of the Old Town, Edinburgh is a city well catered for. Scotland's capital boasts mosque kitchens, artisan burger bars and the most Michelin-starred restaurants in the UK outside of London – but for Joy Schlageter, neither love nor money could get her a decent salad.

So Joy, a 26-year old Geography graduate from the University of Edinburgh, decided to make her own. After a successful crowdfunding campaign she started Bloombox, a high-end homemade salad delivery business.

One year later, she's preparing to repeat the trick with a new venture, this time in London. I spoke to Joy to find out what she learnt from her first start-up and how she's planning to implement those lessons in her new business.

Speaking on the phone from her new place in London, she said "I love wholesome food, cycling, being in the outdoors, talking to people and connecting people with where their food comes from. I've always wanted to somehow weave these things together into a project; it was something in which all of my interests concerning sustainability and good food came together. I saw a gap in the market in Edinburgh – there are other sustainable food businesses but it's hard to get a decent salad."

Bloombox's salads were organic, seasonal and locally sourced. In summer, salad lovers could grab a box of kale, gem lettuce, rocket, dill, lemon verbena,

broad beans and strawberries; or spinach, beetroot, coconut, nasturtium, marigold and tahini-honey-mustard dressing. In autumn, the menu changed to include massaged kale, millet, quick pickled cucumber, apples, elderberries, sesame & coriander seeds, cornflower and cider vinegar pickled dressing. In winter, she sold homemade energy bars; apricot and fig; dark chocolate and sea salt; lavender and beetroot. All the ingredients were bought from local farmers in East Lothian or foraged by Joy herself, sometimes from her back garden (dry ingredients were sourced from wholefood suppliers such as the Greencity Wholefoods Co-op).

Before Bloombox was six months old, the seeds for Joy's next project had been sewn. Her new business – called David & Joy – is a collaboration with Salad Pride blogger David Bez. The partnership, which was launched recently, arose when Bez got in touch during the Bloombox crowdfunder.

Once her plans became London-bound, Joy said that she treated Bloombox like an extended testing phase. She said that, "Looking back, I guess Bloombox was a pilot for the new business. It'll be more streamlined, more focused. The main difference is that, with Bloombox, I was relying on spontaneous sales, so I didn't know how many sales I'd make on any given day. This time we're setting up an online delivery model, so everything will be paid up already and we'll know how many orders we have to make."

David & Joy won't be as community focused as Bloombox was – something



Joy says was an example of trying to run before she could walk. In Edinburgh, she ran outreach activities in local schools. “I got involved with a few primary schools in the area and went to them to teach them how to make salads – about where the food was coming from, how to massage kale and make delicious dressing, that sort of stuff. The feedback you get from five year olds is amazing – seeing them learn about vegetables and loving the food.

“With the new business, I’d still like to do social enterprise activities. I’d like to make the food we sell more accessible to people on lower incomes; it’s a high quality product and we use high quality ingredients, so it’s perhaps not as accessible as I’d like it to be. But this time we need to get the business up and running, get to the point where it pays for itself and can stand alone, before we start doing more things that tackle food poverty and get this fresh healthy food to the poor as well as the rich, and that might take a couple of years.”

She won’t be able to forage for ingredients in the capital, either. She said, “I’ve tried going foraging in London, but it doesn’t feel as clean as Edinburgh – you can just sense the high levels of pollution and concentration of people using the green spaces so the plants don’t feel as untouched or fresh. It’s nothing like being able to cycle out to East Lothian.”

I asked Joy whether she had any advice for would-be entrepreneurs. She told me, “Basically, just do it.” For first-time start-ups, she recommended

crowdfunding as a way of getting the capital needed to get an idea off the ground.

“The crowdfunder was a great process – it was amazing, being able to build a brand through crowdfunding and at the same time get feedback from your audience. It’s a really good way of engaging with your audience – people follow the crowdfunder until the end to see if you make the target amount, and you get the chance to tell your story through a short video in the early stages of a business.”

For Joy, Bloombox didn’t seem like a realistic project until she began working out potential costings. “When I actually sat down and did the maths and I began to see that it was viable, that was a turning point,” she said. “If you find a really interesting idea then write it down and take a step back from it for a while. When you come back, if you still find it interesting then go away and do the research, do the maths – see if it’s viable. Then you need to go from talking about it to doing it; even if it’s just sampling your idea on a small scale so that you can start to see if it is working and getting feedback from your target audience.

“You learn so much more on the job, about what works and what doesn’t work, about things you might want to change, than you ever would just sitting at home behind your computer with a business plan.”