

COVID-19: Interview with Sean Sykes, Founder of Briiv

Created in Leeds, Briiv enables to live healthier, sleep better and breathe easier with the world's most sustainable air purifier. Good air quality means better sleep, higher energy levels and improved cognitive function. Maddyness spoke with Sean Sykes, Founder of Briiv to understand how their company is coping during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Temps de lecture : minute

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[Maddyness] What is the biggest professional challenge for you today?

[Sean] The biggest challenge for us as a new business has been launching a brand new product from our individual homes. The lockdown has made it very interesting to collaborate as we're usually a very creative and tactile team. As product designers we're constantly building prototypes and testing new ways of doing things, so to now have to do this development over screen share and video calls have been quite a challenge.

For certain aspects of the business introducing video calls into our daily work has massively improved productivity. With this unprecedented situation, everyone seems more willing to jump on a video call to discuss business, so we've had video calls from Amsterdam in the morning then San Diego in the afternoon, it's quite exciting and really keeps you engaged.

What is the biggest personal challenge today?

The biggest personal challenge for me has been to adapt my work-life balance to fit around the new situation. Staying motivated was difficult early on with all the distractions in your home, but I quickly adapted and now very much appreciate not having to do a daily 2-hour commute to work and can instead spend that time being more productive and use it to plan out my day.

Is remote working a new thing for you? How do you keep your employees happy?

Remote working is completely new to me, after spending many years as an engineer with a strict work schedule I became very used to that nine to five structure. When I eventually started my first company back in 2011 and worked two jobs with my flatmates my home became the main office, so I never really was outside of that work environment like I am today.

We have a pretty small team but employ a couple of amazing people to help us with marketing, I think they're enjoying the freedom at the moment, we check in every day and have a little catch-up, set some action points, then we just get on with our day.

As a leader, what do you do to successfully manage your mental resilience amid lockdown?

I think it's very important to have downtime and switch off from work to focus on yourself every day. It's very easy to fixate constantly on work as your office is now, in my case, attached to my kitchen. So I have a

schedule of daily exercise that gets me out into nature and keeps me sane, this includes things like a 6 am mountain bike trail and evening runs, to Yoga and climbing in my makeshift garage gym. I've also got VERY into gardening, which I've never had time to do before. I find this extremely relaxing and it helps my mind focus on something completely removed from work and the situation we all find ourselves in.

What changes have you made to keep your business running? What have you implemented to stay competitive?

We run a few different online retail sites and have our latest launch Briiv currently live on Kickstarter. We're quite lucky that the situation has not yet impacted our revenue streams, as everything we do is online. With larger corporations reducing their ad spend we've also seen a reduction in the cost of our ads, so in that regard, it's made it much more cost-effective to up our ad budgets and attract new customers.

How is your relationship with your investors?

We don't currently have investors but we're in talks with a few at the moment to take Briiv to a wider audience. Since it's a very sustainable project, we've had a number of investors from around the world interested in adding our company to their portfolios, it's early days for us yet, but we're excited by the prospect of taking our sustainable designs to a larger market.

Have you had to end or delay your office rent contract?

We're continuing to grow and have just signed the lease on a new office in Leeds City Centre, which we're hoping to be able to use in the coming

months.

What advice would you give startup founders to keep managing costs and cash flow efficiently during a crisis?

Take advantage of the government furlough scheme only if you have to. We've found that adapting to the crisis is better than hunkering down, so use all of your available resources to innovate and think of new ways to reach customers that are now largely sat at home with very little to do.

If you have contracts with clients, whether this is service or supply, don't just let them cancel if possible. Try and work to a middle ground, you may barely break even but it all adds to your cash flow and keeping that client on your books could mean the difference between surviving and failing in the coming economic crisis.

What do you think of the support packages for startups offered by the government? What have you been able to use?

The support packages available are great but I am concerned that the loan option could only be delaying the inevitable and forcing companies to be in serious debt when the 0% interest period expires.

Do you feel confident in your business post-COVID? Are there any changes in society/economy that you think will help you?

We feel very confident with our latest business, Briiv. We're innovating in a very on-trend sector at the moment (air purification) and our

sustainable credentials are attracting the right kind of media and investor attention which we are super excited about. Society as a whole is becoming increasingly aware of their well-being, with everything from the food we eat to the air we breathe, we're constantly trying to be the best we can possibly be.

The crisis has also highlighted the huge impact we have on the planet, with smog clearing in heavily polluted cities wildlife returning in abundance. I think this re-emergence of nature and with people spending more time outdoors, they will be much more inclined to invest in more sustainable brands going forward.



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