

COVID-19: Interview with Julia Kessler, Co-Founder of Nix & Kix

Nix & Kix offers all natural, low calorie, sugar free vegan adult soft drinks with a Cayenne kick. Maddyness spoke with Julia Kessler, Co-Founder and Head of Sales and Operations to understand how the company has coped during the COVID-19 pandemic and what the future holds.

Temps de lecture : minute

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Nix & Kix was born when co-founders Julia and Kerstin realised that there were no grown-up soft drinks around that weren't full of sugar or artificial ingredients. They founded the company in 2014 and started selling the current range in early 2017. Since then they've grown the brand from initial sales at a London market stall to over 5,000 distribution points in the UK and abroad. In the UK they're stocked at Waitrose, Wagamama, Tesco, Morrisons, Sainsbury's, Booths and Ocado.

[Maddyness] What have been the biggest professional challenges during lockdown?

The initial fear was: what will happen to the team? Will they be ok at home? Some didn't even have a desk so all the basics needed to be sorted.

But the team has actually also been the ray of sunshine: they adapted very quickly and we have now been working remotely as a team for the last 3 months without any major problems!

What have been the biggest personal challenges during lockdown?

Communication is a challenge, it is not necessarily more difficult but it's different. It takes a bit more effort to pick up the phone and talk to someone, particularly when we all are adapting and trying to figure out our new way of working. Also, it's the office chit chat that is missing. Zoom meetings are the best next alternative but they are usually set up for a specific purpose and it's easy to just switch Zoom off once the agenda points are discussed.

So we have been making an effort to come together as a team on Zoom every morning to discuss what we did last night (something we sometimes forgot to ask when we're still working together in an office) and talk about our actions for the day. Now it does seem like we're all much more informed about what's going on with everyone else, especially the Sales staff that would not usually pop into the office every day.

We end every week with dress up Friday sessions with quizzes and general chat about things we're up to. We've also had a session on more serious topics such as Black Lives Matter, discussing our feelings about it and what we can do as a team.

Is remote working a new thing for you?

It definitely is, we have to thank COVID-19 for helping us figure out that it's possible to work fully remote as a team.

How have you been keeping your employees happy?

We are conscious of how we can maximise employee happiness but we

also have to be honest with the team and share the not so great news. We probably won't go back to some sort of office set-up until September. Some of the team find it hard to deal with this as they miss coming to the office.



As a leader, have you successfully managed

your (and your teams) mental resilience through lockdown?

It's important to adjust your communication. Some people enjoy regular 121s, some enjoy more down time. We also received a few different collaboration opportunities for platforms like Healing Clouds which we shared with the team.

What changes have you made to keep your business running?

We reacted really quickly and have leveraged the furlough scheme and also moved the rest of the team to a 4 day working week which we are intending to keep running until the end of the year. In addition, a lot of events we signed up for, have been cancelled and got refunded for.

What have you implemented to stay competitive?

We effectively set up D2C overnight via our own website as well as Amazon and other D2C channels.

Despite the lockdown we still managed to win new business and have just launched in Booths as well as a big national casual dining chain.

How is your relationship with your investors?

We have a very good relationship with our investor base. They stand 100% behind us and trust us which means they will mostly let us get on with what we are meant to do - run and grow the business. Most of our investors have been with us since our very first funding round. There are two things that make them a great addition to the extended Nix & Kix

team and a useful sounding board: they are not too close to the day-to-day activities so it's easier for them to see the bigger picture, and because they are personally invested they care about the business' success more than any external independent advisor would ever do.

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

The government definitely did not have an easy task to come up quickly with support that fitted the majority of companies in need. As a start-up we were grateful for the Bounce Back loans scheme which we took advantage of. Being able to furlough some of our staff was also very useful for us.

In regards to the Future Fund scheme we were disappointed to see that only a very small number of approved applications were from sole female led companies.

Do you feel confident in your business post-COVID?

Absolutely. Consumers are actively looking for healthier options and in-home consumption is here to stay. Our product is great on its own as well as a mixer. This in combination with our multichannel strategy gives us tons of confidence.

Are there any changes in society/economy that you think will help you?

Consumers are spending more time reflecting on their habits and have

more time to select what they are eating and drinking. Online delivery has scaled up significantly over the past months and will continue to grow.



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