

Meet Double Dutch, the premium mixer brand showing that expectations can be doubled

As part of our quick fire questions series - or QFQs - we spoke to Raissa and Joyce de Haas, twin-sisters and cofounders of Double Dutch about bringing flavour to a niche area, global expansion and empowering women in hospitality.

Temps de lecture : minute

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[Joyce] The inspiration for Double Dutch was ingrained in us from an early age, as our parents owned a licensed garden. They used to invite all of our neighbours and friends over weekly for gin and tonics tasting! Our Dutch heritage was the source of our knowledge and eye for good flavour with the Netherlands being the original home of gin. Being exposed to high-quality spirits throughout our formative professional years meant we understood mixers and tonics - it also made us notice the room for opportunity within the market.

We both studied for our Msc in Technology Entrepreneurship at University College London and we decided to devote our joint dissertation to finding a solution for our frustrations within the drinks industry. We were lucky enough to win financial investment off the back of this, which went into Double Dutch's first production lines and a year of free London office space.

Tell me about the business - what it is, what

it aims to achieve, who you work with, how you reach customers and so on?

[Raissa] Double Dutch is a premium soft drinks brand offering a range of tonics and mixers that are both a refreshing soft drink and a lively mixer to enhance any spirit. We wanted to create a portfolio of drinks which are never dull and always bring flavour, we currently have fourteen flavours on offer, five of which are stocked at Soho House globally, we're actually their exclusive tonic partner. The full range is also available via the *Double Dutch* website, with some of the brand's mixers available at *Waitrose* or *Ocado* as well being available to purchase via *Amazon*.

We initially focussed on raising awareness in the hospitality scene, by going from one bar to the next and introducing ourselves. We started our business in quite a niche segment and area, we started targeting 5* hotels in Mayfair, followed by cocktail bars and restaurants and eventually we targeted Soho House. We then began to grow our consumer market, through our presence in on-trade and direct consumer sales.

If you fancy a Double Dutch drink in a bar or restaurant, we're also stocked in Club Soda, the hub of mindful drinking, Nobu, Dishoom and The Mandrake to name a few.



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

[Raissa] We launched Double Dutch in 2015 with our first products Cucumber & Watermelon and Pomegranate & Basil, since then we have continued to expand the range with more recent launches including Pink Grapefruit and Elderflower. We are now stocked in over 45 countries globally and in the past 8 years we have gone from stocking Double

Dutch in a handful of hospitality venues, to listings with huge retailers including Tesco, Waitrose and Ocado. Last year we expanded into the USA and are now expanding into the UAE alongside strengthening our presence in our home market - Benelux.

[Joyce] Over the years we have started focusing more on the ingredients used and the nutritional values of our products as well as working on our sustainability credentials, particularly our Carbon Neutral status, and we're now pursuing B-Corp status too.

Pre-covid we were very focused on the on-trade, however, since the pandemic we have recognised the strength in off-trade listings and the fact that consumers want the same quality at home, with this in mind we diversified into both markets. We are always looking for new opportunities to expand the brand through all channels.

Tell us about the working culture at Double Dutch

[Joyce] We pride ourselves on the mantra 'work hard, play hard', and so we have created a super sociable working environment with flexible working hours to make sure our team can embody that. We give our staff the autonomy to make decisions within their specific business areas with everyone being experts helping to drive the business forward."

We strongly believe in female empowerment and working collaboratively as a team to innovate and produce campaigns which give back. This is why we decided to start our Female Bartending Scholarship Programme to help women to progress further in their career and support them building their personal brand in hospitality.

[Raissa] After seeing the shocking statistics that only 5% of females get appointed to the top job of CEO in hospitality, we created a programme

that covers all vital elements for a career and progression. This includes personal branding, building your own social media platform, photography, creating signature serves and flavour pairings, alongside looking at ways to capitalise on your skills, with the sessions delivered by key hospitality experts.”

How are you funded?

[Joyce] Initially our joint dissertation won the UCL Bright Ideas Fund and the Richard Branson Foodpreneur award inspired us to keep pushing forward with the idea using the financial investment towards the creation of our first production lines and our London office space.

We raised investment quite early on in our journey, as we started straight after completing our masters degree, so we didn't have much savings! *We have recently raised £4M in funding* which will be used to grow the brand within the UK, expand product innovation and drive growth in export, with a primary focus on its secondary home market, Benelux, the UAE, and planning entry to the APAC region.

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

[Raissa] One of the biggest challenges for us was that we had no prior experience within the beverage industry. This is often the case for young entrepreneurs and we started with limited contacts compared to our big corporate competitors, and this made it harder for us to grow as we couldn't make large production runs. To overcome this, we continued to meet with investors and those interested in our product to help build a strong brand presence within the industry which has helped us get key players on board such as Heineken and PepsiCo.

How does Double Dutch answer an unmet need?

[Joyce] Being exposed to high-quality spirits throughout our formative professional years made us notice the room for opportunity within the market for quality mixers. We recognised that people are looking for quality drinks and so we created mixers that tasted better than other products available on the market, with new and unexpected flavour pairings, and without compromising on the overall sugar content and calorie count. The possibility and science behind the blends and molecular pairings inspired us to make our idea a reality.

What's in store for the future?

[Joyce] Over the next 12 months we are working on some very exciting new products which will be launching this year. We are continuing to work on building a deeper distribution network in the UK. The hospitality industry remains our heartland, but we also want to develop our retail distribution so that customers can find us more easily and can get the restaurant or bar experience at home. We are also building our European market with a focus on Benelux and expanding into Asia for the first time.

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

[Raissa] My number one advice to young people looking to start a business is to do it around something you love or are passionate about. There will be lots of sacrifices in your personal life, so at least do something you enjoy.

Secondly, don't do it alone. Having a co-founder, mentor or someone close by you can always have access to or get to pick their brains as this

will massively help. Sharing the highs is much more fun, but sharing the lows is also a lot easier to get through when there are two of you.

Raissa and Joyce de Haas are the cofounders of Double Dutch.

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