

As tasty as it is sustainable, meet DASH water

As part of a series about Virgin StartUp's Collective Impact programme, Maddyness spoke to Alex Wright, cofounder and CEO of DASH Water.

Temps de lecture : minute

21 September 2023

Jack Scott and I founded DASH 6 years ago as we both come from farming backgrounds and had seen first hand that 1/3 of fruit and veg were going to waste - which is not just a UK phenomenon but unfortunately consistent across the Western world - we wanted to use fruit which is rejected by the supermarkets infusing it into spring water to create great tasting beverages without any sugar or sweetener.

Can you share your elevator pitch?

In a world where consumers are starved of great tasting beverages with healthy and natural ingredients DASH cures this problem delivering delicious sparkling spring water infused with wonky fruit and veg without sugar or sweetener.

Our beverages infuse wonky fruit which is rejected by the supermarkets therefore celebrating imperfection and using our platform to raise awareness about the issue of food waste.

Can you tell our readers about your

engagement with Virgin StartUp?

Jack and I founded the business when we were 24 years old and as two young men with a big vision we had very little experience creating a product, business and team. We pitched DASH to Virgin StartUp who gave fantastic financial support - through a low interest loan - and business support - with an amazing mentor called Ben Keene.

Ben has setup/supported setting up dozens of businesses therefore played a key role laying down the foundations for DASH as a business with a clear mission and longevity.

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

In March 2020 Foodservice, hospitality and export collapsed overnight, along with 60% of our total revenue, because of the impact of COVID-19.

When consulting other founders and mentors, they strongly advised to significantly cut costs, stop all innovation to concentrate on our core, and go into hibernation mode in order to weather the storm.

However, following the old Winston Churchill quote, "never let a good crisis go to waste", we instead adapted to the changing environment. We moved resource from channels which were paralysed to others that could flourish - specifically Online and Grocery.

As an omnichannel business, Online was already a strong suit of ours, and we were able to see week-on-week gains that enabled the total business to grow more than 100% that year and survive the treat of COVID-19.

Can you talk about why you put purpose at the centre of building DASH Water?

The foundation for the business is centred around Jack & my experience seeing 30% of fruit and veg going to waste in the UK therefore we've laid down clear pillars for the business to be centred around which are:

1. Infusing wonky fruit which is rejected by the supermarkets
2. DASH is a proud *B-corp brand* which means have the highest form of environmental and sustainable standards
3. DASH is a carbon neutral business where we use leading regenerative farming techniques to improve soil quality and turn "sequester" carbon in the soil. What this process does is bury carbon deep in the soil where it naturally belongs and brings a raft of other benefits including improving soil health, nutritional quality which in turn leads to improved biodiversity

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

Don't be afraid to get the product out there, even if it isn't perfect. Start small, test it on people, take on feedback, iterate and improve.

As perfectionists we struggled getting out a product in the early days as we wanted it to get 100% perfect. In reality it's much better to actually start and learn, rather than worrying if something is perfect and falling into the trap of never starting at all.



What's in store for the future?

A lot!

In the UK we've recently launched a delicious new limited edition Grapefruit flavour that has been flying off the shelves. We're also currently running a campaign with the excellent food waste charity *The Felix Project* who we've already donated 150K meals to date.

Internationally it's been amazing to see distribution grow, especially with marketing campaigns such as sponsoring the very glitzy Melbourne Fashion Festival and executing our first national billboard marketing campaign Down Under.

We're also launching into France with an exclusive launch retail partner and big marketing activations to spread the DASH mission.

And finally, a more personal question! What's your daily routine and the rules you're living by at the moment?

My wife and I have recently had our first baby therefore I start the day feeding the little one before going to our office, Wonky HQ, in central London. I generally have early morning meetings with our team based in

Australia, then onto working with our UK and French teams during the daytime to fulfil our 2023 target to sell 25M cans.

I travel a fair bit to our export markets with Switzerland in September and a trip to Australia, New Zealand and China late October.

Outside the office you'll probably find me at the Emirates Stadium, fishing, music gigs or by my vegetable patch!

Alex Wright is the cofounder and CEO of *DASH Water*.

Virgin StartUp is the not-for-profit home of entrepreneurship at the Virgin Group, helping early-stage founders start, fund and scale the businesses they're passionate. Its *Collective Impact programme* is an investment-readiness accelerator specifically for UK startups that want to have a positive impact in the world and are raising investment for the first time. In 2022, 24 founders completed the seven-week programme and raised £4M.

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