

SevenYays, making the advent calendar a year round treat

As part of our quick founder questions series - or QFQs - we spoke to Andrew Staal, cofounder of SevenYays about starting with a simple question, advertising on social media and creating unique gifting category.

Temps de lecture : minute

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SevenYays was sparked by a simple question my 16 year old, Anna, asked in 2019, which was 'why don't we have advent calendars for birthdays?'

This then became a GCSE business studies project for Anna and as we were in the midst of lockdown, when our calendars were pretty bare of exciting things, this idea of having a small thing or 'yay' to look forward to every day seemed like a great concept.

As a family, we got stuck in and the first ever calendar was gifted to our other daughter, Natalie, for her birthday. After lots of family feedback and consumer research, we realised that people really loved the idea and in June 2021, SevenYays officially launched.

Tell me about the business - what it is, what it aims to achieve, who you work with, how you reach customers and so on?

Essentially, SevenYays is all about spreading joy with personal gifts that last a whole week, as opposed to one day. SevenYays takes the idea of the traditional Christmas advent calendar and makes it year-round -

whether it be for birthdays, milestones or when someone you love just needs a bit of joy in their life.

Each box contains 7 individual gifts, to be opened across an entire week. Customers can choose from our Ready-Made box options or Create-Your-Own to truly personalise gifts for loved ones.

It's also important to us to support and introduce our customers to independent UK businesses, through the range of gifts we offer. We always use sustainably sourced and ethically produced products from responsible partners.

We've also been really lucky to build a small team of experts including design, digital marketing, copywriting and PR who believe in what we're trying to achieve at SevenYays and can be called upon to help adapt and execute our marketing objectives and strategy. Their help has been invaluable.

The vast majority of our customer acquisition marketing is of course digital - with SevenYays.com just a click away from any of our ads on Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and Google.

How has the business evolved since its launch?

SevenYays officially launched in June 2021 and since then we've seen very strong, consistent growth and have received valuable feedback from our customers. There haven't been any major changes to our product or business model, other than the expected refinements to the website and ongoing extension of our gift range.

I'm also really excited to share that we've now processed over 20,000 orders since SevenYays' inception and are nearing the £1M sales mark!

Tell us about the working culture at SevenYays

As a brand, we're all about spreading joy, so naturally we want the working environment to be a fun one. We're still a small team of 6 so everyone has a really meaningful role to play. We encourage flexibility in role and empower our team to actively participate in the ongoing work of improving our processes and working practices - something that's really important in a fast growing business.

We're very open and informal in our communication and encourage our team members to use mistakes as learning experiences so we can get better at what we do every day. The customer always comes first and we encourage our packaging team to approach every box as if they were making it for their own loved one.

How are you funded?

We are a bootstrapped business funded by owner savings, although planning to raise external investment in H2 of 2023 to accelerate the growth of the brand.

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

It's always difficult to drive awareness of a new brand and driving awareness of a new concept is even harder!

Being able to clearly and quickly communicate our offer in a compelling and differentiated way has therefore been a key challenge, as has delivering this message to the right people in a cost effective manner, and encouraging them to take action and convert.

It's an ongoing process where we've made big strides, but it remains the single most important determinant of our future success.

How does SevenYays answer an unmet need?

Essentially, SevenYays answers the question 'what is a gift I can get for someone I love that is personal, unique and shows that I really care?'

With so many generic gifting options out there, SevenYays offers something that can truly reflect the person you are buying for and show them how much you care. And who doesn't want an entire birthday week as opposed to one day?

What's in store for the future?

We've got some great new gifts in the pipeline including a range of personalisable products which we're really excited about - we're keen to keep the SevenYays offer ever-fresh so customers are never short of choice - whether that's for recipients with different interests, or new options for those recipients that want to receive a SevenYays every year for their birthday!

We've also got a range of web upgrades to further enhance the customer journey and make the process of building a Sevenyays box as easy and fun as we can.

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

Get to really understand your customer. It's vital for so many aspects of your success - be that optimising your product, segmenting your audience

to optimise ad spend efficiency, or avoiding costly mistakes such as launching new offers without customer validation.

We talk to our customers regularly. If someone's got a problem, pick up the phone and talk to them. Firstly they'll be amazed at your level of service, and secondly it's a great way to get qualitative insights into the way your customers think.

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

Running a business can be all consuming. There is an endless list of things you could do. If you allow yourself to be taken over by them then you can lose perspective very quickly. My daily routine is to get up at 7.00 (I don't function any earlier!) meditate and exercise before my phone is turned on. After breakfast I start to work down a list that I've prepared at the end of the previous day. At the top of the list are 'Must do' tasks (only one or two), then 'Should do' (up to a dozen), and then 'Could do' (everything else).

It's a really effective way of being clear about where the priorities are and avoiding being pulled into distracting 'nice to do' tasks that in reality aren't going to move the needle for the business. If you don't finish the 'Should dos' or even get around to the 'Could dos', no problem, you've done the stuff that really matters and tomorrow is another day.

Andrew Staal is the cofounder of [SevenYays](#).

