

A scenic landscape of mountains and a lake at sunset. In the foreground, a person with blonde hair tied back is sitting on a rocky outcrop, wearing a red jacket and blue jeans. They are holding and reading a book titled "KOOEE! All Natural Snacks".

# 325 CONSULTING INSPIRATION SERIES

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# KOOEE!

## ALL NATURAL SNACKS

### BIOGRAPHY

*Andy Fist worked with Bain in Australia and India, before accepting a role as a General Manager at Tough Mudder in New York. He worked as a contract consultant in 2014 as he got his start-up off the ground. He is now CEO of a Tasmanian food company, Kooee Snacks.*



### Interview

#### **What ignited the spark in you to start a new business venture?**

In 2012 I applied for a job at a hot start-up in New York. It had grown to \$70M revenue in about 3 years, and I was in awe of its success. When I got there, I realised their success did not result from getting everything right. In fact, there were many poor decisions being made. That was the moment that I realised—conveniently for me— you don't have to be a genius to start a business...

#### **How did you get your idea or concept for the business?**

Beef jerky has a terrible reputation in Australia, and rightly so. As I tell the crowds at the farmers' market, we've all been hurt before. Typically, jerky is made cheaply using a lot of additives, and then marketed using a hyper-masculine brand. There's nothing wrong with that, but it certainly isn't for everyone.

**INTERVIEWED BY TIM CARROLL**

My business partner Shaun was frustrated by the lack of healthy jerky options, so he started out making some for himself in his garage. It quickly spiralled out of control. Before long he was doing a roaring trade out of his office drawer (he was an accountant at the time). From that experience we were confident that a health-oriented jerky would work in Australia, and started putting together our business plan.

We've recently launched our first product in Australia: a health-orientated beef jerky with the goal to change the reputation of beef jerky.

### **How did you choose your company name and why?**

The “aha!” moment was the realisation that we wanted a sound.

From there, “Cooee” was an easy choice: it made sense for the healthy, outdoorsy ethos of our brand. What else would you yell while eating some jerky on a mountaintop?

Spelling cooee with a “K” resulted from some cross-cultural confusion when we first launched the brand in the USA. The Americans thought that “Cooee” might be related to cooing, a soft thing you say to a child (or a pigeon), rather than a mighty roar in the wilderness. The “K” makes it a bit more obvious. As an added bonus, the “K” also allowed us to easily register the trademark!

### **Where did your organisation's funding/capital come from and how did you go about getting it? How did you obtain investors for your venture?**

We were fortunate to receive a government grant. The funding came from the Australian Innovation and Investment Fund, awarded in 2015.

Our business is based in regional Tasmania, and there's a lot of enthusiasm for companies looking to create jobs in the area. The grant application process was very competitive, so it felt great to have our concept rewarded by a 3rd party. We were the only start-up to receive funding.

The rest of the capital has come from the founders, or friends and family.

### **How do you go about marketing your business? What has been your most successful form of marketing?**

My time as a consultant led me to believe that word-of-mouth marketing is the most important. So, my challenge in marketing is fostering ways that our customers can share our brand with others. Our packaging is inspired by national parks in Tasmania, and we're starting to see a lot of customers post photos of the product from their weekend adventures in Tasmania's natural areas on Instagram and Twitter – powerful brand advocacy.

### **What do you enjoy most about what you do?**

We've only had a product available for 6 months, so it is still a thrill for me to see it in shops. I also like unexpectedly meeting people who know and enjoy the product.

## **How do you conquer those moments of doubt that so often stifle or trip or stop so many entrepreneurs with great ideas...what pushes you through?**

A close friend is a winemaker who has just released his first vintage. Recently he had a sleepless night worrying about the quality of his wines. The next morning for breakfast he had some of his Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris – just to remind himself that his wines taste great!

This story resonated with me. We all have our moments of doubt, and it is easy to lose perspective. Ultimately I am comforted knowing that I am very fortunate just to be running my own business. How many people get to be their own boss?

## **Excluding yours, what business or organisation do you admire the most?**

I most admire the organisation “Giving Well”, which rates the efficacy of charities.

Their website has a section called “Our Mistakes” that systematically lists the details of every error they’ve made. It’s an incredible level of transparency that certainly has applications in other industries.

## **Besides money, what are your favourite ways to compensate people?**

Training.

My operational staff are very talented, but don’t necessarily have qualifications for the years they’ve spent in the food industry. We’ve developed a relationship with the local TAFE that allows them to learn on the job. This gives them recognition for the skills they already have, and the opportunity to learn more.

## **If you could offer a first-time entrepreneur only one piece of advice, what would it be?**

Get feedback early and often.

## **Where you see yourself and your business in 3 to 5 Years?**

Hopefully not too much will change.

We’ll be in more stores with a wider range of products, but with a bit of luck the day-to-day will be much the same.

## **In one word, characterise your life as an entrepreneur?**

Satisfaction.

**Try Kooee! now, use the promo code "325Consulting" for 10% off your first order at [www.kooeesnacks.com.au](http://www.kooeesnacks.com.au)**

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