

Entrepreneur Interview: Lester of BevShots.com

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Even in these tough times, there are still plenty of motivated and passionate people taking risks and starting new businesses. One of these folks is Lester Hutt, who is the founder of BevShots.com, which takes microscopic photos of your favorite drinks and turns them into beautiful art. The piece shown above is English oatmeal stout. I know Lester through a long-time friend, and he agreed to share some of his business experiences as well as how it has affected his family's personal finances.

What was your inspiration for Bevshots?

I was working as a business research analyst at Florida State University, and my job was to find possible business opportunities out of university research projects and patents. I came across the work of research scientist Michael Davidson, who took photographs under a microscope of a variety of items including DNA, biochemicals, and more. He also did cocktails, which he initially used for a [tie collection](#).

I've never really understood abstract art, like a blue wall at a modern art museum that is supposed to express "man's frustration with industrialization in the 20th century". I thought that this would be a great opportunity to make a form of modern art that is affordable to the masses.

What previous experience did you find most useful in starting this new business?

For one, my time working for Apple taught me the power of good industrial design and creating a great user experience. In addition, I had just spent the last several years running every aspect of a small business, from product development to managing employees to sales.

How did you come up with the initial funding costs?

We used a combination of loans from family, personal cash reserves, and a revolving line of credit with local community bank. Thanks to my existing banking relationship from the aforementioned small business, it wasn't difficult to secure a loan with relatively favorable terms.

How did this affect your personal finances?

It definitely affected us quite a bit. For one, we went from two incomes to having only income to support our family. We started looking for places we could cut back, including going out to eat,

canceling our cable television, clothes, and travel. We're also thinking of buying a used car as our next work vehicle.

Besides trimming expenses, we also found that we were unable to take advantage of other investment opportunities like real estate that we might have otherwise pursued. We do still maintain an emergency fund with 8 months of liquid cash. Even in a worst-case scenario for the business, we will still be okay.

More after the jump:

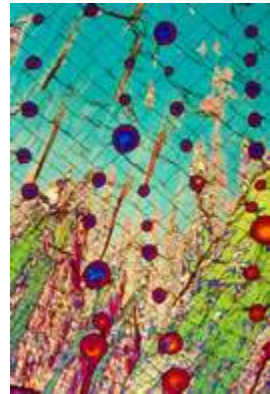
How did this affect your family life? What does your spouse think about it?

She is very supportive, as she has also been a small business owner and is looking to start a new business. On the personal front, she is great with Quicken and using it to help us manage our spending. For example, we set a goal of cutting back on restaurants by 50%, and we found it wasn't that bad at all. We recently had a child, and that has also helped save money by keeping us at home more.

What was one thing you learned during the experience that you would want to pass on to other entrepreneurs?

I would say to keep your monthly operating expenses as low as you can, both for on the personal and business sides. But for the business in particular, many start-ups may go out and lease an office that often requires a long-term contract or hire too many employees too fast.

Instead, I decided to work from home and rented a P.O. Box for \$10 a month. I hired a part-time Public Relations and Marketing Director, and brought on board 3-4 interns from FSU doing marketing and graphic design for free. I remember reading on your blog about the [Ooma VoIP phone](#) - we bought that and now have free unlimited phone use. (I'm talking to you on it right now!)



I'd also like to point out that our business model does not have large upfront costs. We have contracts with vendors for production, where each new purchase is made to order. We didn't have to purchase any large equipment or lease manufacturing space.

What was the largest obstacle so far in your venture?

I think we underestimated how difficult it is to get the word out about your product nationally. Even though we are well-connected on the local level, it was very hard to expand past that. We avoided traditional media due to the high cost and worked hard at using social media, but it was no silver bullet.

So how are you advertising?

In general, we are trying to get "earned media" as opposed to "paid media". We point out that we're a start-up business created from innovation of a public university, that we kept the business local, and that the products are all made in the USA. We're also trying to get on some "Unique Gift Lists" for Christmas, as we see BevShots as artwork that you can add to a man-cave or man-room above the stereotypical Bud Girl calendar.

On the local level, we are sponsoring a beer-tasting event. As part of that, we get a lot of publicity on television spots, magazines, and newspapers that would otherwise cost up to ten times more if all of that advertising was purchased separately.

How did you set the prices on your product?

With BevShots, I am targeting a specific segment of the art market. I didn't want to compete in the

cheap poster market where the price points can be below \$10, and I also felt that original art was too expensive for the mass market. Original pieces of modern art that are sold in galleries usually start at \$500 for very small pieces and can go as high as \$10,000 or more. I also took into account that it typically costs a few hundred dollars to get something custom-framed at a local shop. For the BevShots' price points, I made sure to have framed pieces that started at the \$199 mark and went as high as the 500's for the largest pieces. These are price points that you would find at home accessory stores like Z. Gallery or Crate and Barrel.

– end of interview –

Recap

I'd like to thank Les for sharing his time and knowledge. Starting a new business can be stressful, and I think there were a lot of good tips in there. You can learn more about BevShots by visiting their [website](#), joining their [Facebook page](#), or following them via [Twitter](#). They even have an [iPhone app](#) going.

If you're an entrepreneur with a unique story and would like to be interviewed here as well, please feel free to [contact me](#).