



Brighton Beard Company

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As with films, music and art, our cultural output (including the fashions we follow), are more often than not signifiers of deeper cultural concerns. This is how trend forecasting operates. And so, in 2013, after studying such things to gain a degree in Fashion Promotion, Jessica Diplock and her bearded beau, Lloyd, founded The Brighton Beard Company. Initially stocking just three products, a balm, a wax and an oil, their online Shopify store made a sale in its very first day of trading (a veritable achievement in e-commerce standards). This study will explore the particular circumstances of managing growth for a trend-based business, and the almost exclusively internet-based marketing of e-commerce stores such as The Brighton Beard Company.

There are varying reports regarding where the most recent beard trend originated, some spurious, some less so. Most likely is that, like most things, it comes down to sex. If the Topman adverts are to be believed, prior to 2010 we had a superfluity of clean-shaven men in skinny jeans and polo shirts. Professor Rob Brooks of the University of New South Wales suggests that trends in beards tend to be aligned with masculinity in times of financial difficulty, 'Young men are competing to attract someone when work is not easy to come by. So we might expect some aspects [of masculinity] to get turned up to eleven.' Brooks comments on the apparent trend in beards after the Wall Street Crash, and is even interested to look into beard trends in Greece as related to their struggling economy. Certainly, that the lumberjack look has taken over that of the androgyne suggests a changing relationship with masculinity into the 2010's. Take a look at how Beard Shop (a Brighton Beard Co stockist), positions their brand. Hint: It's heavy on the burgers, beer and bikes - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZasI7emvP7I>

Aligned with the sense of masculinity attributed to beards, is that of the traditional. There is a draw towards the male zones of traditional barbershops, 1940's era nautical tattoos and until-recently-largely-defunct gentlemen's grooming paraphernalia such as cut-throat razors and ox horn combs. (A fascinating article which looks further into the history of the trend can be read here - <http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2014/01/the-racially-fraught-history-of-the-american-beard/283180/>).

The Brighton Beard Company have centred their marketing strategy with these themes squarely in sight. Each of their own brand products (they also stock Kent brushes and Jony Smith Beard Combs) are named after famous real smugglers, smuggler's gangs or smuggler's hideouts of the South Coast. With names such as Old Joll's Beard Oil and the Groombridge Gift Set, they are also accompanied by product cards, explaining the story behind the name. See, Old Joll:

*One fine morning, Old Joll and the rest of his merry men were ferrying a fine selection of tea inland, when a group of tea-hating grinchies crashed the party. Old Joll and the Groombridge gang were having none of it, and so marched them at gun point for four hours. A man of his word, Joll returned their weapons like he had said, if they promised to keep the tea hush-hush. And the moral of this story is karma, my friends. Be good to Old Joll, and Old Joll will be good to you; be good to your **beard** and your **beard** will be good to you.*

The image of the bearded smuggler represents a particular kind of rough and ready manliness that the beard trend is responding to. Its use as a trope by The Brighton Beard Company perfectly aligns with the aspirations of their growing market.

At time of writing The Brighton Beard Company boasts 5,281 Twitter followers. Almost all of their growth can be attributed to social media such as Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. The nature of their market is one that had, until recently, been very little tapped. The Brighton Beard Company and their competitors offer grooming products to men that might otherwise scorn such things as feminine. The bizarre contradiction at the heart of this male grooming trend is that it is selling cosmetics to men who don't buy cosmetics. In a quietly revolutionary way, the beard trend has allowed men who previously ridiculed male grooming to invest in it in a big way. One can almost sense an implicit gratitude in the viral response to The Brighton Beard Company's products.

The Brighton Beard Company's presence on social media began months before they began trading, building hype amongst the community of beardsmen that was already developing. Having previously maintained a fashion blog whilst completing her studies at university, Jessica had an intuitive understanding of social media growth. She describes herself as 'sneaky' during the early days, going to competitors pages and following their followers. She also had a feel for good social media practice, following back those that had followed her, and running competitions to inspire loyalty. She attributes the majority of The Brighton Beard Company's success to Twitter, a free platform.

Unsurprisingly, there have been barriers to growth in the first year. Inexperience led to dramatic difficulties in supply and demand as The Brighton Beard Company entered its first Christmas trading period, resulting in the hurried implementation of new equipment and staffing. The period was seen out with very little disruption to trading, but a more developed strategy will undoubtedly be needed to respond to demand as they enter Christmas trading for 2015.

The Brighton Beard Company is an example of the kind of rapid growth that has been the way for a series of online based companies over the past few years (see a Case Study on Yellowberry [here](#)). As such, much of Jessica and Lloyd's time is taken with the day-to-day of managing a hurriedly growing company. What began as a user-driven innovation for Lloyd's face itch has swiftly become a lifestyle for the couple. However, as the business becomes more established they are able to strategise for the future. Increasing their wholesale market is a major part of their plan, whilst also developing new products that may insure against loss if and when the beard trend subsides (there is talk about a cut-throat razor, although the specifics are all a bit hush hush until launch hype begins). Like Megan Grassell of Yellowberry, Jessica and Lloyd have tapped into a niche that was, in 2013, underserved, and manoeuvred that community's online presence to their advantage. As they establish themselves as serious players they will need to understand the developing needs of their niche market, even as the particular trend it responds to evolves.

You can read more about The Brighton Beard Company via their website [here](#).