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70%
of Britons have a phobia



£25,800

is the average annual median pay for full-time employees in the UK

SOURCES: ANXIETY.UK/ASHE

Surprise in a glass

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

How successful entrepreneurs often make their own luck

Think innovation and whisky isn't the first market that comes to mind. Yet in the moist cellars where distillers are patiently waiting for their current batch to reach a delicious age in exotic oak barrels, they are also dreaming up new combinations.

For William Grant & Sons, that dream is the perfect beer-finished blended whisky. Which is why the firm engaged beer industry veteran Dougal Sharp to create a special brew that would infuse the oak barrels with a malty, hoppy flavour that could become part of a whisky during the ageing process.

SUCCESS AND THE DRAIN

William Grant & Sons were pleased with the results. The Grant's Ale Cask Reserve whisky that had rested in the barrels after the beer had been discarded had an exciting and distinctive taste. But as the ever diligent distillery staff discovered during the process of emptying the barrels, so did the beer itself. So Sharp arranged a partnership with William Grant & Sons that enabled him and his brother Neil to take the waste beer from the whisky manufacture and bring it to market under a new label bearing their middle names, Innis and Gunn.

SUCCESS FROM THE DRAIN

From there, things have gone well for Innis and Gunn. Starting with an advance commitment from Safeway and Sainsbury's in 2002, before the brand had even been introduced, the firm

has now gone on to ship nearly half a million cases of beer in 2009 that would otherwise have gone to waste. The product has also been a hit internationally and is now the leading British bottled brew in beer-loving Canada and the number two bottled import ale in Sweden.

BUSINESS SURPRISE

The story of Innis and Gunn offers two insights into innovation. The first is that many innovations are not true inventions — created from scratch — but rather new combinations of things we already have. The second is the role of surprise. Had not the employees of William Grant & Sons sampled from the waste, the world would have one fewer premium micro-brews. What is also surprising is how many of the products we know and love today came from accidents and the unintended results of completely different ideas. For instance, consider the following three beer-compatible products:

CRISP SURPRISE

At the pub, you might enjoy a crisp with your beer. Legend describes these popular snacks as born of customer complaint. In 1853, tired of having fried potatoes sent back to the kitchen of Moon's Lake House near Saratoga Springs, New York, because they were soggy, a frustrated George Crum sliced potatoes as thinly as he could, then fried and salted them. The popular result has gone on to please beer consumers around the world.



Some bottle
Brewer Dougal Sharp made it his business to turn whisky into beer



TRANSPARENT SURPRISE

Perhaps after a pint in the laboratory, French scientist Edouard Benedictus accidentally broke a glass container and observed that the shattered pieces remained bound as a result of a plastic liquid that had formed a thin film inside the container. The year was 1903 and safety glass was born.

ROMANTIC SURPRISE

While we'll leave the connection with beer to the reader, Viagra was also discovered completely by accident. The active ingredient never became the intended solution to heart disease, but in lab tests, new applications popped up. Viagra was created and became the first

oral treatment for men with erectile dysfunction.

THE SURPRISING ENTREPRENEUR

In thinking about how new opportunities arise, these examples highlight the importance of 'doing', and the role of the entrepreneur. While we love to tell stories of divine inspiration, the actual events behind many products are unplanned surprises that an entrepreneur was able to transform into an opportunity. The implication is clear. Those awaiting the perfect idea will have to be patient, while those taking action will likely create something interesting and then need only figure out how to make a business of it. Maybe that will change the way you see your next surprise. ●

details

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It's catching on