



## **Kim Hack Biography**

A former advertising creative, marketing executive and strategic consultant, founder Kim Hack has been passionate about chocolate her whole life. Cocoa + Co. is the realization of a vision she has nurtured for more than a decade.

After graduating from Dartmouth College with a major in Visual Studies, Kim received a degree in graphic design before starting her career in advertising as an art director for several Chicago agencies.



Kim switched into brand management after getting her MBA from the Kellogg Graduate School of Management and worked for Quaker Oats and Amoco Oil before moving into the wine industry. It was while working with winemakers like Angelo Gaja and Michel Chapoutier that she began to understand the importance of varietal, place and craftsmanship and realized the correlation with chocolate. At the same time, the world of chocolate was shifting from monolithic mass producers to a growing number of small-batch bean-to-bar artisans. Yet no one was bringing these products together with the depth, breadth and knowledge to create an experience designed to excite chocolate lovers. Like wine, Kim believed that discovery, education and tasting are an integral part of the chocolate mystique. People passionate about chocolate, just like those who love wine, want the ability to choose among a range of brands and forms to suit different occasions and their ever-changing tastes. The concept for Cocoa + Co. was born.

The timing, unfortunately, wasn't great for outside investment. Unable to secure funding to open a retail store, Kim decided to launch Cocoa + Co. as a website instead. The site launched in October of 2003. She continued her career in the wine industry for several more years then launched The Athena Group to provide strategic consulting to a portfolio of corporate clients. She has also served as the Chicago chair of the American Institute of Wine & Food and is a mentor at 1871 and a founding member of SLoFIG, a network of angel investors working to rebuild the local food system serving Chicago.

Kim still couldn't shake the idea of opening a Cocoa + Co. retail store and café, so she (and her incredibly supportive husband) decided to bootstrap the project. After several years looking for the right venue, Kim is thrilled to finally be able to bring her vision to fruition and share her life-long love of all things chocolate.