



## THE gift-givers

Meet the entrepreneurs making the most out of the gift industry, including luxury chocolates, a unique gift-giving platform and the fast-track to perfect online shopping

### Luke & Nathan Cornish

Co-founders, timto

[www.timto.co.uk](http://www.timto.co.uk)



Luke and Nathan Cornish are brothers from Cardiff with entirely different career backgrounds, who decided to set up a business together. Nathan was working in banking at Barclays, while Luke enjoyed a career as a civil engineer, but when they discovered a gap in the market for a feel-good group gifting service, they decided the time was right to take the leap and launch timto.co.uk.

The idea came during Nathan's daughter's birthday party. It was as Luke and Nathan looked at the huge sack of presents that they asked themselves how many of the gifts would be used. Nathan, CEO of timto, explains, "In the UK we spend £10 billion a year trying to buy the perfect gift. Unfortunately, we identified that £2 billion is spent on gifts that are never used, or are given away or even sold. Further research told us this was because people are time-poor, budget a certain amount to spend, or just have no idea what to buy."

Luke and Nathan challenged themselves to convert the generosity of friends and families into a more positive gifting experience. A way that not only enabled friends to give better gifts together but also helped a charity at the same time. The solution lay in aggregating the gift expenditure.



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The brothers provide a quick example of how it works: "Lucy was celebrating her 40th birthday. Instead of buying individual gifts, her friends wanted to buy her a watch that they knew she would love. A gift fund was set up, and Lucy's friends chipped in a total of £250; so £200 was used to buy Lucy the watch and she donated £50 to the charity important to her.

"We initially released a BETA website to test various aspects of the idea," the pair explain. "The service has continued to evolve and can now be used for any type of gifting occasion; from weddings to Christmas, from office collections to birthdays (both little ones and big ones). The unique gifting platform we have created contains millions of products and allows the celebrator to donate to any charity. To do this, we have built connections with a range of well-known retailers to provide consumers with more choice – and, right from the beginning, charities of all sizes have been keen to get involved.

"As with most start-ups it is a real rollercoaster ride. We have received numerous innovation awards from organisations such as the UK Government Cabinet Office, NESTA and the charity sector itself."

Luke, Chief Operating Officer (COO) of timto, said, "One of our proudest moments came this summer when we won the DNA Profit with Purpose Prize, in collaboration with Bridges Ventures and the UN Office for Partnerships; it affirmed our belief that we are creating something really special.

"The real joy comes when we receive feedback from happy customers who have loved both the presents and the opportunity to donate to the charity important to them.

"Our big ambition over the next 10 years is to raise millions of pounds for good causes, whilst celebrators receive the most amazing gifts."

Nathan adds, "We have big plans for timto in 2014, and hope that is just start of an exciting journey."

### Amelia Rope

Chocolatier & Founder,

Amelia Rope Chocolate

[www.ameliarope.com](http://www.ameliarope.com)



Before launching her own luxury chocolate brand, Amelia Rope's career involved roles as a massage therapist, an aromatherapist, a PA, and a doctor's practice manager. Food and creativity had always been important to her, but it took some encouragement to take the first steps into setting up her own business.

Amelia explains, "I went to see a life coach, Merry Graham, to help me manage the practice. I discovered self-belief and grew in confidence so much that I finally had the courage to take the plunge and go for it, leaving a monthly salary behind for a life with little security, but tons more rewards.

"I had also appeared on *Masterchef* twice," she continues. "It opened up a mental door of allowing myself to dream of having a business that tapped into my interest in food and creating. John Torode came backstage and said what I had in my head was unique and I had to do something with it. That stayed with me. I had something deep inside me which I think I have had from a young child – the need to prove I could do something and take a risk.

"Looking back, I think I was destined to run my own business. The chocolate bars became my product to market, but I had no idea when I received a commission from Patrick Reeves, co-founder of sofa.com, for 1,000 bars that this would become my chocolate business. I designed them as a one-off!"

Raising funds to get the business going was one of the biggest challenges, Amelia explains: "To get the bars kick-started and into the marketplace, I ended up raising £7,000 from friends and family. Banks had refused to lend me any money – even though I had two confirmed orders, from Selfridges and hush-uk – and my father had offered to guarantee an overdraft. My major frustration in the



early days was lack of access to financial support. It wasted a lot of my time, but in the process I learnt a lot."

"I have been very fortunate so far with the stores who have approached me and where my bars have been stocked. My first two chocolate bars were launched in Selfridges in September 2010, after dropping samples off to Ewan Venters, ex-director of Food Halls, who made me realise I had created a brand and viable product. After launching in Selfridges, I began to create my flavoured bar range and approached Wholefoods late in 2010 who took all the bars. Liberty approached me in the summer of 2011, and recently I have been approached by both Fortnum & Mason and Heals.

"I think it helps that I front my brand and am my brand 100 per cent. I do all my own in-store tastings and also online orders, which helps me to build up a relationship with my customers."

Amelia also uses her experience as an aromatherapist to blend the chocolate, allowing the oils to 'sit' at their own level in the chocolate. "I create my own recipes in my little kitchen at home," she says, "and if I find myself licking out the bowl then I launch the flavour, as they tend to attract more fans, too!"

"Launching the company has been the largest learning curve I have been through: demanding, challenging and frustrating – but also hugely rewarding in so many ways, and addictive, too. It continues to be so. I want to take the business to where I really feel its potential is – and believe me, I am a woman with very high expectations!"

**Cally Russell**

CEO, Mallzee  
[www.mallzee.com](http://www.mallzee.com)



“I used to kind of hate shopping online,” says Cally Russell, CEO of new shopping app Mallzee. “I always struggled to find what I wanted to buy amongst all the noise, and would end up sending screenshots and links to friends before I bought anything. So I decided to create something that would help me find the stuff I wanted to buy, and would also let me get the opinion of certain friends before I bought anything.”

“Mallzee works by hunting all over the web for a variety of brands and their products. We then match those products to your style by finding the sort of products you love, and discarding the ones you don’t,” Jamie Sutherland, Mallzee’s Head of Product, explains.

“I was working on another idea at the time,” Cally says, “looking at how people shopped online, but it wasn’t really going anywhere. It was an interesting idea, but trying to get the product built and the traction needed to make it a success, it looked like it just wasn’t going to happen. So, one day I locked myself away in a room and started from scratch. Over the next week, we put together a single-page website that explained what we did and let people register for access. Then we started sending the link to bloggers and influencers. We also started to run a couple of different social media campaigns. Within three weeks we had nearly 1,000 people signed up and hadn’t spent a penny.

“We won awards from Bizcamp Tel Aviv and our incubator, Entrepreneurial

Spark. “With these wins we managed to get to the stage that we had something that looked like a product, and had also managed to sign up nearly 3,000 people with pretty much no advertising budget. Getting brands on board was relatively easy. A lot of them were really keen to buy into our concept and could see the potential that we had. Quite quickly we had a lot of the big high-street retailers signed up.”

The team at Mallzee now consists of seven members, who are all very enthusiastic about the product and were keen to explain their roles and how they’ve been finding the process.

Developer Ro Ramhotul adds, “I’m in charge of getting the products into the app and building everything behind the scenes. We use a technology called Node, which is taking the world by storm right now. We’re very proud to be part of that.”

COO Callum Stuart remembers the moment when it was evident they were on to something: “When we got the first app working in a short time-frame – seeing people engrossed in sharing and commenting really was a milestone.”

“Brands are really keen to be involved now,” Laura Faint, International Engagement Officer, adds. “They see the benefits of working with Mallzee and are always really interested in the fact that Mallzee is like a portable personal shopper, recommending their products to the right consumer.”

Designer Alex Humphry-Baker says that creating the product and seeing the feedback was an enriching experience. “It’s great to get feedback from fashion bloggers and professional stylists,” he



says, “who really see the potential of using the app as a tool to search for a specific item from a bank of 750,000 products. A key moment for me was during our presentation of the app in the Apple store in Covent Garden, realising that a good half of the audience was male and that they were really receptive to what we were trying to achieve.”

Rachel Arthur, Head of Content, says, “We’ve had a great response to the app, considering we are at such an early stage, and it tends to be our more out-there marketing ideas that get the best response. We hit London Fashion Week with four three-foot gold magnifying glasses which went down a storm!”

Cally says, “We were able to go from two people to seven really quickly and we attracted a lot of attention. I don’t think we’ve done enough to be proud yet, but hopefully by the end of the year we will have and we’ll be well on our way to creating a global e-commerce brand.

“We’ve got a long list of ways we think we can improve people’s shopping experience that we’re currently working on. We’re really happy with the iPhone version that we launched at London Fashion Week, and we’re now working on the iPad version which will be out before Christmas. Past this, we’re keen to trial an international version of Mallzee in 2014, and we’re currently working to raise our second round of investment.”

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