



Interview with Andy Gay and Garrett Waggoner

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– Andy Gay (left) and
Garrett Waggoner (right)
Co-Founders, Cirkul

Did your entrepreneurial path receive any pushback from family or friends?

Normally when you go against the grain of a “normal” path after graduation you will get push back from the people closest to you. Luckily for us, we have very supportive friends and family who have believed in us and Cirkul since the beginning.

What's the short version of the birth and incubation process of the Cirkul concept?

Cirkul started in the locker room at Dartmouth College when we were both studying for our exams. Garrett began pouring sports drink powder into a narrow mouth water bottle and started spilling and creating a mess. Garrett asked, “What if you could just insert something in and drink, no messes, powders,

or liquids?” Andy said, “Why not?” And from there we started brainstorming our perfect beverage system to solve the issues we personally experienced as athletes.

How much market research and/or product R&D was involved prior to launch?

We definitely didn't take the expedient route when it comes to launching a new product and business. Consumer products are a bit different in comparison to apps or software; you only get one chance to make a first impression, so the R&D process was extremely important to us. Hardware certainly can require more capital and prototyping time. In a total of three years, we were able to conduct all of the research and complete the R&D process. We created a first prototype that gave us proof of concept, but wasn't feasible to launch because of inconsistent performance. However, this muddled together prototype afforded us the opportunity to gain invaluable advisors, a group of investors, far and away better than we could have imagined. They brought on a great design team to develop the current product we have on the market.

How did nay-sayers attempt to rain on the Cirkul parade?

The most common critique we've heard since the inception of the idea is that the product and concept are great, but we're both too young to run a company because we lack the necessary experience. We've combated this by surrounding ourselves with experienced advisors and a great team at Cirkul.

At what point did you make the commitment to burn the boats and dedicate yourselves to success of the venture?

We burned the boats and have been working full time on this for 2 years now. Before that, we were still developing the idea and maneuvering through the prototyping phase. Andy worked different side jobs and Garrett was playing professional football in the Canadian Football League for the Winnipeg Blue Bombers. Garrett retired from the game to focus fulltime on Cirkul.

Your crowdfunding was oversubscribed by nearly 700%. What did you learn from that experience?

We were fortunate to have great success during the crowdfunding campaign, selling more than

\$150,000 in a little over a month and shipping out 5,000 bottles and 40,000 cartridges on the first day of launch. This campaign helped us gain a better understanding of our marketing strategy, messaging, and best target audiences. Those insights helped us at launch and beyond.

How big a role do you think product design plays in market acceptance?

First and foremost, the product has to perform great because without that you're dead in the water, no pun intended. Once you achieve the functional design, product design has a huge role on market

acceptance, especially in a crowded market like beverages. Product design for us comes in two parts. First, it needs to be designed in a way that's easy to understand for the customer. We're creating a way to hydrate that's never been done before, so to cut down on the learning curve for the customer this design needs to be easy to understand and communicated thoroughly on our packaging design as well. Secondly, the product needs to be aesthetically pleasing. Looking at the current market, people not only want a great performing product, but also want products that fit their image or lifestyle. For example, new water bottle companies have made a huge impact on the market by creating trendy bottles that serve as fashion accessories that are even sold in clothing department stores. This is extremely telling, in terms of the importance of product design.

Is it fair to assume that you're trying to disrupt the personal beverage category?

That's a fair assumption. We're looking to offer a new and improved, personalized way to drink more water and stay hydrated during the day. We believe everyone's beverage should be unique as they are. Keurig, for example, took the pot of coffee and made consumption cup by cup. We're taking a natural, flavored beverage and making consumption sip by sip. Although our business model



Cirkul
Changing
how people
drink water.

is similar to Keurig, our products provide completely different benefits to the customers. Keurig's done an incredible job changing an entire industry and we'd be very fortunate to become a part of people's everyday lives - saving them time, money and calories.

What's the most significant lesson you've learned, personally and business-wise, from this venture?

The biggest lesson we've learned so far, both personally and business-wise, is patience. From idea to launch it's taken about six years, so we've experienced most of the ups

and downs a startup has in getting off of the ground. The product development stage took longer than expected, and unexpected challenges have appeared along the way. So keeping the bigger picture in mind is extremely important. We've both been at this for a long time; so we're very excited to get Cirkul in the hands of the public.

Is there a "Phase 2" in your business plan, or is it too early to be talking about that?

We have different ideas of what Phase 2 might be, but you will have to stay tuned to find out! Right now

we're relentlessly focused on having a successful launch for the business. We don't want to run before we can walk.

Profiles: Andy and Garrett

Two standout scholar / athletes – from opposite sides of America, but with a common entrepreneurial vision – launched Cirkul in October 2016 to change the way that people drink water. Following successful high school careers in the classroom and in sports, Florida native Garrett Waggoner and Andrew Gay of Washington State met as football team members at Dartmouth, where they first began to explore the Cirkul concept of personalized hydration.

Cirkul co-founder Andy Gay, who played quarterback at Dartmouth,

served a short stint after graduation working for a New York City market research firm, where he gained insight into well-known consumer brands including Pepsi and Mountain Dew. Andy serves as Cirkul's President.

Co-Founder Garrett Waggoner, who holds the record for the most games played (42) for Dartmouth's Big Green, continued his football career following graduation, as a linebacker for two seasons with CFL's Winnipeg Blue Bombers. Garrett serves as Cirkul's CEO.

In their current positions, Andy and Garrett have gained first-hand, practical experience in every possible corporate function; from product development, patent application and fundraising, to marketing, operations and accounting. And as the Cirkul concept continues to gain market traction, their entrepreneur careers are just getting started.