Entrepreneur & Innovation Exchange
Published online at EIX.org on September 26 2019
DOI: 10.32617/436-5d8cdf03a2b43

How Love Your Melon Turned a College Assignment Into a $40 Million Company

James Beal (Stealth Startup)

KEYWORDS: Entrepreneurship, Higher Education, Student innovators, social entrepreneurship, student entrepreneurs.

Zachary Quinn and Brian Keller turned an entrepreneurship class assignment into a fast-growing brand built around purpose, social media and student ambassadors.

Editor's Note: This article and podcast originally appeared as part of "By All Means," a series about entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs produced through a partnership between University of St. Thomas and Twin Cities Business.

His story has become legendary at the University of St. Thomas—and beyond. Zachary Quinn was a sophomore when he enrolled in an entrepreneurship class. There, he met Brian Keller, and together, they turned an assignment to create a business into Love Your Melon, the $40 million hat company that donates half its profits to fighting pediatric cancer.

“We wanted to start something that would make a difference,” Quinn says. On this episode of By All Means, he outlines the key moments and decisions that set Love Your Melon up for success, including its college ambassador program, a hockey bus tour that garnered national press, and brand building through social media. Quinn talks about Love Your Melon’s commitment to U.S. manufacturing and its first brick and mortar store, which the company is using for special events designed to tell the brand story and build engagement.

What’s next? “I never look more than six months out,” Quinn says. But he does have “more crazy stuff” in the works, including a concert series and e-gaming competition.

After our conversation with Quinn, we go Back to the Classroom with his entrepreneurship professor at the University of St. Thomas Opus College of Business Jay Ebben. “We really push students to build their career or a business around their own values, their own sense of purpose and mission,” Ebben says. He describes what it was like to have the Love Your Melon founders in class, and why he gave them an A- for the semester—a grading decision he’s never quite been able to live down.

Listen to the podcast featuring Quinn here (https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/episode-3-love-your-melon-co-founder-president-zachary/id1455668048?i=1000436262258) .

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Additional search terms: student innovators, successful businesses started by students, entrepreneurship classes, college entrepreneurship, hat companies, companies with a social mission

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