

## Brewing an Idea for a Business - With a Twist

In 2017, Claire Ayres founded **Twist Teas** with her Mum and best friend after she spotted a clear gap in the market for a premium tea brand with a difference.



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"We found that a lot of teas really didn't deliver on flavour and a lot of them that said they were 'artisanal' or 'family owned' were actually owned by large conglomerates so, in a moment of madness, we decided to set up our own brand."

Concentrating on hand blending to preserve flavour, the brand quickly grew selling through independent cafés across the whole of the UK, and that's when Claire knew there was potential for further growth: "We realised we could do so much more if we raised some funds and that's when I started talking to Hatty, the founder of Funding Accelerator. The more time I spent with her the more I realised how much I had to learn and how much support and guidance she could provide so I signed up to the programme. I wanted guidance and expertise and I got it in spades."

### The Perfect Blend of Flexibility and Discipline

After joining the eight-week programme, Claire quickly started to pick up the information she needed through a series of immersive workshops and group discussions, something she found surprising: "I've never been someone who particularly likes group discussions but I found the opportunity to be able to ask questions that

weren't pre-planned a real benefit. It also meant you could get a sense of whether other people had been through the same thing."

As well as finding value from meeting other entrepreneurs, Claire also believes the discipline she gained from the programme was what helped her get ready for investment: "The programme gives you a regime with deadlines where you have to get everything ready for different sessions, from your financials and valuation document to your pitch. So in this condensed period of time you actually create all of the documents that you're going to rely on when raising funds in the future. And if you time it properly and you're actually raising funds at that time you've also got a support network. It was like a boot camp helping me get ready for fundraising and it works, it just works - it's brilliant."

### A Thirst for Knowledge

Once Claire had finished the programme, she immediately began to raise funds and encountered a

*"The programme has given me the confidence to raise the funds I need and the confidence to run my business."*

*"It was so well structured and from the first moment I realised it was an excellent decision to do Funding Accelerator. It was a very carefully considered, well structured regime for putting in place the kind of discipline that I'd need to apply for my business and for the challenges that I had ahead of me."*

number of hurdles along the way, many of which she says Funding Accelerator helped her tackle: "Knowing how to value the business has been incredibly transformative. Also understanding exit strategy was important."

Throughout the programme Claire also picked up a variety of other tools, from understanding financials to talking terminology, and says the biggest takeaway was something very tangible: "Above and beyond anything else

the course does, it gets you your money," explains Claire. "It makes you more likely to raise your funds because it trains you on everything; how to raise funds, how to pitch, how to understand the terminology but also the substance (what you should say to investors) and it gets you thinking about your business and how you should run it. The programme will make you think about opportunities that you haven't even thought about yet."

## Making a Stir

Fast-forward to the present day and Twist Teas is stronger than ever. Originally starting out with just three people around a farmhouse table, the business has now transformed to include a board of directors (made up of some of the industry's most well-known experts), with four routes to market, 50 different blends and 21 great taste awards in the bag. Claire says a lot of the transformation wouldn't have been possible without Funding Accelerator: "We raised £125,000 within 90 days and within less than a year we raised another £360,000. I really would attribute the success in large part to the programme; I don't think I would have had the confidence to do any of this prior to doing it."

*"In a condensed period of time you actually create all of the documents that you're going to rely on when raising funds. And if you time it properly and you're actually raising funds at that time as well you've then got a support network and the ability to ask questions whilst you are being asked questions. It was like a boot camp for fundraising and it works, it just works - it's brilliant."*



Funding Accelerator is an eight week programme designed to make it quicker and easier to raise equity investment

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