



Hannah Mellsop

Real Rad Food

Hannah Mellsop, a Mount Maunganui local, began making raw treats and sharing her passion for plant-based desserts on Instagram while she was studying at university. The 24-year-old now heads her own business, Real Rad Food, that creates raw plant-based slices and treats for her online store and 64 stockists throughout New Zealand.

We sat down with Hannah to discuss her business success and what the future holds for herself, and Real Rad Food.

STORY

Bella Williams

Baker Tilly Staples Rodway NZ

Where did your love of food, and raw treats originate from?

When I was studying at university, I was working in cafés, and we started putting a lot of healthier options into the cabinets because there was such a demand for it. It grew a lot from Social Media, and I really wanted to share the things that I was making in the cafés and that I was making at home and people just really loved looking at them, so it developed from there.

When did you decide to turn your Instagram into a business?

I finished my degree in 2016, I had a degree in Geography but wasn't that keen to go into that field. I knew that I had this Instagram page, and I was really enjoying posting about the plant-based foods that I was creating, and people were slowly starting to want to buy some of the cakes. I guess I saw a gap in the market of distributing the cakes to cafés across the country and locally and thought



I didn't have anything to lose because I was young and I had the motivation for it, so I just gave it a go.

What were the biggest challenges you faced in the beginning?

I would say frozen freight. Distribution was a really big one for us; we struggled for a really long time for a frozen freight company to want to deal with us because they only work on such big scales we had to work hard to get some big contracts in place before they would allow us to send with them. We were very much confined to local from the beginning and then once we had contracts in place with the cafés in Wellington, Christchurch and Auckland, we were able to then negotiate on using their services, and from there we were able to make sales all over New Zealand, which was amazing.

We ran into the same issues in terms of our online orders and distributing our product to households throughout the country. Because our products are perishable goods, we needed to make sure we had good packaging, a service that was going to go overnight and not five days. There was a lot of trial and error with that and luckily enough, after a lot of innovation in our packaging, we

have finally hit the nail on the head in terms of distributing our product. Now they arrive still frozen, with minimal issues, unlike what we experienced when we first started.

Can you describe one of the proudest moments in your business's success so far?

We just got a machine that cuts all of our slices. I've been hand-cutting hundreds of slabs of slices for the past two and a half years and last week we finally received a machine from Italy that automates all of that for us. It goes through these wires, and I never have to touch a knife again!

We also won the People's Choice Award at the Bay Hospitality Awards which was really cool, because obviously, we're not an established brick and mortar store but for our community to get behind us, and put votes in for us, and then to win alongside some really amazing companies was a proud moment.

What do you think are some of the key contributing factors to your success?

I think growing a community online around our product and offering more than just a product around our brand. I've always prioritised branding and made sure I've invested into the community that supports us. Because they have given us so much support over the last few years and I really don't think that we would be here today without having that community around our brand. They're invaluable – they support the cafés we are in, they support us online in terms of buying our product from the website and then just supporting us even if they don't buy the product through Instagram is something in itself.

How do you balance your business with 'you' time?

When people ask this question about balance it's kind of a tricky one, I go through phases of feeling like 'yeah, I feel quite balanced. Still enjoying going to the gym, I'm working, I've still got a social life, and everything feels in harmony' but, balance comes in waves. At the moment I'm totally off balance – I haven't been to the gym in a week, I am doing crazy hours, and I am working hard. But I think that knowing it's not going to be like this forever and still hustling on is really important.

I do think that sometimes balance is unobtainable when you're trying to get to a certain goal and I'm totally fine with being out of balance for periods, but to get that balance back I know that I need to put in the work. I know that what will get that is better systems, then I'll be able to get back to having a social

life and going to the gym. I love going to the gym, yoga, going for a walk up the mountain and getting a coffee with my friends but right now I'm about the business, and I'm here to see it succeed, I would do anything to have it do what it needs to do out there in the market.





What are your goals, personally and in your business?

For the business it is to be in our own space and working efficiently. In terms of myself, I would love to be able to reach more people in terms of a platform that provides some insight into being a young businesswoman. Maybe that's a podcast, or something else, but it's something that I am really passionate about, and I think that there's a gap in the market for someone that provides some insight on that. And I'd love to go on another holiday next year!

What keeps you going during long days in production?

I know that there is a demand out there for our product and I will do anything to meet that demand. It's a stressful thing not to be meeting demand, and it's not what I want to be doing. Sustainable growth has always been at the forefront of my mind. I am so passionate about what we do and the product that we produce that if the work needs to be done, I'm there to get it done. I'm working hard to secure new premises so that we can have more space, which means we can have more people and more efficient systems.

What advice would you give to those wanting to start their own business?

I think that there's huge merit in having a side-hustle and testing the market before you launch. Instagram is a great tool to be able to test how the market is going to react to your product or service, so I would say use that to your advantage while you're still working your full-time job and paying your rent. Also, in saying that don't be too slow to pick up a good thing when you see it and trust your gut. Make sure you've got determination and passion because passion quickly dies when you're doing 100 hours a week, but determination is what will get you back up. I don't think everyone's cut out for business, but I guess you look into yourself and think about the five to ten-year goal and the life you want to be living and weigh it up from there.

Sometimes, I think small businesses are glamourised, but it's actually hard yakka, so doing some soul searching before you jump right into it is important.

Since our interview, Hannah has secured new premises and is kitting it out for her Real Rad Factory.

