



Guest Name and Title: Jerry Nevins, Head of Strategy & Customer Happiness
Guest Company: Snow & Co. – Artful Frozen Cocktails

David: Hi, this is David Patrick. Welcome to The Brand Show. Today we've got Jerry Nevins. He's the head of strategy and customer happiness at Snow & Co., which is a bar and restaurant here in Kansas City. Welcome, Jerry.

Jerry: Thank you. Glad to be on the show.

David: Tell us a little bit about Snow & Co.

Jerry: Snow & Co. is a frozen cocktail bar and lounge that's down in the Crossroads District in Kansas City, Missouri. We specialize in frozen cocktails that are made from scratch. They're fresh-squeezed juices, handmade syrups and premium spirits. So things like St. Germain elderflower liqueur or Hendrick's Gin, not your average kind of rot gut alcohol that you might be used to at most daiquiri bars. We also have more of a lounge kind of feel with big, overstuffed couches, chairs, low tables—things of that nature.

David: Tell us how you went from enjoying Slurpees as a kid to growing up and owning a restaurant and a bar that has adult Slurpees.

Jerry: Absolutely. I remember as a kid you get those frozen drinks, and they would always go away so fast because they're just such a delight to drink. There are three of us that started Snow & Co. together. The emphasis for it was that we'd run into a bunch of people on the same day while we were wrapping up our MBA program that all were talking about their favorite daiquiri bar from someplace else, so New Orleans or Tropical Liqueurs in Columbia, Missouri, or Wet Willie's out in the south. And we all looked at each other—there's a lot of people talking about starting something like that in Kansas City. And we've been a part of numerous conversations where somebody was daydreaming, saying, "I'm going to start one of these," and no one ever did it. And so we sat down and said, "Maybe that's the idea we should start with." We knew we wanted to start a business together because we've all been friends at school—just



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didn't have the idea around what we wanted to do yet, and that's where it kind of all came together for us. But we also liked really good drinks, so we liked to hang out at places that make things with fresh ingredients and good alcohol because we're a little bit older now, and so the rot gut doesn't necessarily fit as well with us. And we got the wherewithal to buy something that tastes good and makes you feel a little bit better the next day, and that's where we kind of came up with Snow & Co.

David: So there's always the difference between being behind the counter and being in front of the counter. So tell me a little bit about—you have a vision for this company and it's driven by, as you said, people you know talking about their experiences at a great frozen drinks bar, and now you start one. What's the difference that you learned on being from the other side of the counter?

Jerry: The difference is the scope of work that goes into pouring a frozen cocktail. I think when we started off, we thought, "We will come up with a couple of recipes, and we'll buy some equipment—we'll set a bar up, and we'll just serve that stuff." We've all been in the hospitality industry in some way, shape or form, but even with that there's a different just scope of work when you are putting together a brand and you're putting together the entire operation versus even working in part of it. And it's making sure that all those things are running smoothly, that people understand that brand and that they have some sort of affinity for it—that the operational pieces that go into making people like the product are all happening in a way that they're supposed to. Your employees are happy; your vendors are paid; the place is being cleaned up the way it's supposed to; and then at the very end, that the recipe is made in the way it's supposed to be made. But at the beginning of the process, you know being someone who is normally either just a cog in the machine or somebody that was just buying them, you don't get an appreciation for everything that really goes into it.

David: So tell us what you've learned from your customers that's kind of shaped how you evolved your business from maybe what you thought it would be to what it is now.



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Jerry: I learned from our customers two things: that they want to like you when they walk in, and they want to help you succeed. And talking with other entrepreneurs, sometimes they can get a little bit, oh I don't know, aggravated with customers that come in, because when you start a new business the first thing you hear from everybody is, "You know what you ought to do?" So you get lots of suggestions, and I think handling that with courtesy and grace is one of the most important things that you can do because they want to help you, and they're trying to point things out and they might not see again that whole scope of work that we just talked about, but they want to help you succeed because they see it through the eyes of the customer. So they don't care about the rest of that stuff, and those are your problems to deal with as an entrepreneur and rightfully so, but sometimes you can be a little dismissive. And you've got to really engage with customers and figure out, OK, they're telling me this for a reason, and if I don't listen to them and they start to leave and not come back, that's my fault as the person running everything at Snow & Co. That's not their fault, and I can't blame them for not getting my concept or not getting my brand. Because ultimately they see what I've presented to them, and if I'm not doing it in a manner that works, then that falls on me.

David: So part of your title is customer happiness, head of customer happiness. So tell us some of the strategies, fundamentals or essential truths that guide you as wearing the title head of customer happiness.

Jerry: It's just keeping the customer front of mind. We talk a lot at Snow with our employees about it not being about us. And what that means is that all those processes that go on in the background, at the end of the day it needs to make the experience unique, special and simple for them. So we try to build things in that make it easier for them to get in and to get out. So for instance, we've got TabbedOut, which is a platform where people can use their smartphones to pay for their tab without going through a server. We don't do that just because it's a tech thing, although it's very cool, but because one of the pain points that we identified very early on is getting tabbed out at the end of your meal or having a couple of drinks. So you can have a wonderful experience all the way up until the time you're ready to leave. So if you're in a hurry or you got to get some place else and you can't track down your server, it can ruin the entire



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experience. And that you know has an impact down the line for our server staff as well, because they don't tip as well for something that's really kind of minor in the scheme of things if you've gotten great service up until then, but it's your last experience with us before you go and so it can color everything else. So we built things like that in for people that are very sensitive to it, to make sure they have a great experience and they can get in and get out on their own terms. Other things that can come into play in making sure that people are happy is explaining things to them. There are a lot of concepts that are unique and that have offerings that people aren't used to. Sometimes they can put their nose up in the air at people when they come through and they don't understand what the ingredients are—they miss pronounce something. We had a running joke about a coffee shop that I won't name that was correcting customers and not in a very nice way about how they were pronouncing some of the names. And I've always told my staff that is what you don't want to do. People come in and they want to learn—they want to experience new things, and it's your job to guide them through that and make them feel like they all of a sudden have some inside information. So we're very big on making sure that our staff has their own spiel. It's not an award track where it's like, here, please learn and recite this exact phrase every time you present someone with a flight of frozen drinks because we do tastings, but what we say is you need to know the basics. You need to know what the ingredients are specifically. You need to be able to walk through it with your own style and personality and make people feel like they learned something when they left, because that goes a long way.

David: Now you mentioned tastings. What are some of the other successful marketing initiatives that you've found especially helpful as you started your business and now you've probably taken to the next level?

Jerry: Probably the big three when we started off were social, sampling and philanthropy. So those were really how we kind of kicked things off. We did a lot with social media before we ever opened our doors, just trying to generate some buzz and get people excited about it. Part of that was out of necessity because you worry about generating business those first couple of months. So we had a Facebook page before we even had a location. We were talking about Snow & Co., and then we continued to build that to the point where we've got.



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I think we're approaching 8,500 followers on Facebook right now and maybe around 1,500 on Twitter. So we do a lot with that. Sampling can be either in-store—so we do have flights where you can taste things or you can take a sample of something before you commit to it. Because the worst feeling in the world is buying a brand-new drink you absolutely hate, because then again you're not very happy about that experience. So the other part of that is gift cards or coupons. Things like that get people to come in and experience the brand. You can explain a lot to somebody when you meet them, but it's much different to tell them, "Hey, come in and try this on me, and I promise that you'll like it and you'll want to come back again." And the last part being philanthropy—we do try and give back, but it's also a great way to you know get people to come in and try your brand as well, and it ties into sampling where you are hosting people and providing a little bit of either free or discounted food or drink to get them into your place or to get them engaged with your brand, if you're not a retail location. So that way, they understand No. 1 that you care about the community that you live within, and No. 2, they get a chance to experience what you're about, but the things that we've been doing lately is we've done some print, we've done direct mail a little bit, probably half and half on the results on that. We did start to dip our toe into radio. We've done it last year, and again this year, but we did it more carefully where we tried to figure out what kind of station do our core fans usually listen to and can we find more of them. So we started advertising with 96.5 The Buzz because we found a lot of our fans that come in all the time listen to that station. So we're trying to find more people like them through those channels.

David: So in Kansas City, Snow & Co. has become the place to go for entrepreneurs and tech enthusiasts. Did you design—did that just kind of happen as partly your location? How did that come about?

Jerry: It actually was something that was kind of intentional for us. When we got started, one of our inspiration as I'm sure for a lot of brands is Starbucks and that "third place" type of feel. But that's not necessarily unique in the whole span of time to have that third place. If you actually look way, way back to kind of the starting place of coffee houses, if you're familiar with Lloyd's of London, which most people associate with insurance now, that was a coffee house back in



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London. I forget the exact date, but I want to say it was like the 1500s. That's where the insurance industry was born out of, and that was a bunch of entrepreneurs who were shipping things to and from North America and other places that needed to come together with people that had the money to insure or underwrite, which is where the term underwrite comes from, to ensure the safe passage of those goods so that if they didn't make it they didn't lose their shirt on it. And so that became a coffee house that slowly turned into a marketplace, and then became Lloyd's of London where they now insure stuff like Beckham's foot or whatever else it might be, and they're really good at coming up with inventive ways of insuring unique risks. We looked at that and said that's kind of the feel that we wanted to have for the modern day, not necessarily that we're trying to get into the insurance business, but we wanted a place where entrepreneurs could come together and meet people from different walks of life and figure out if they could solve problems together. So it was very intentionally in that realm. So I guess some of that derived from our love of Starbucks and their model and some of it from other entrepreneurial ventures. And so we tried to build a place that was comfortable for them, that was low pressure, and a place where you go to hang out for long periods of time. So again, hence the big couches and overstuffed chairs, some place that felt comfortable and felt like home but had the amenities of a restaurant and a bar, so you could meet people there and still get your needs taken care of. Restaurants to a limited extent are conducive to that but usually feel like you're rushed in and out. If you're sitting in a table for too long at a traditional restaurant, you feel like you've got to go because that person needs that table turned over. We very specifically instruct our staff to let people hang out, because a lot of times you make better tips that way. It's a win-win.

David: So at the end of the day, the end of the year, what are some essential retail truths that you've been reminded of? Having now gone from the front of the counter, from an MBA student, now you're an entrepreneur; you're an owner; and you're the person mixing the drinks behind the counter—what are some of the essential truths you've kind of learned by doing it?

Jerry: As a retailer, I think the biggest thing is that you're going to have your unexpectedly good days, and you're going to have your unexpectedly bad





days. And you can't let that get to you. What really matters at the end of the day is for whatever period it is, your quarterly, your yearly, it's money in, money out. It's cash flow. So sometimes you get really excited by a great day and you get really bummed out by a bad day and you're looking at that bank account, but that's not really what matters as long as you got enough cash to keep stuff going. That will all balance out in the end. We know other people as well, the bank account gets really low and it's a bad day for them and it gets to you, but if you've got a vision for what you want to build and how you want to build it, then you just have to keep focus on that and that you're managing things appropriately so that you can get to that point. I think Seth Godin talks about the dip and getting through the dips. You're going to have a lot of those, and if you don't keep your eye focused on it, that's where I think some entrepreneurs just, they may not run out of cash, but they just run out of passion because they can't handle all those low days. And you just have to say that this too will pass and the unexpectedly good day is somewhere over the horizon there for you. So you have to have that optimism.

David: Jerry, this has been great. Thank you for sharing your insights with us, and our listeners go across the country so when they're in Kansas City and it's hot out or not, I encourage them to visit Snow & Co. And why don't you tell us your address and website so people can find you.

Jerry: Absolutely. We are at 1815 Wyandotte in Kansas City, Missouri. The website is snowandcompany.com all spelled out. And we'd love to have them out. We actually specialize in hot drinks during the winter, too. So we've got one of my favorites is apple butter whiskey. It's spiced butter mixed with apple pie moonshine and a whiskey that is infused with a Vermont maple syrup. So it will keep you feeling good in the wintertime there as well. But we're just really close to the Power and Light District and the Kauffman Performing Arts Center, right around the corner of all that. And First Friday's are a really big thing, too, so if they're in town for the first Friday of every month, then they can swing through for a cocktail with us and see some great Kansas City art and culture.

David: Super. Thanks, Jerry.

Jerry: Thank you. Pleasure being on the show.



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