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# MotMot Coffee Focuses on Ethical Sourcing and Innovation

Andru Zodrow, News Editor

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced small businesses to sink or swim, for MotMot Coffee at Seattle University, they have used the pandemic as an opportunity to innovate new ways to supply their products to consumers. The student-led company has honed their marketing and crisis response skills in the free market, and are excited about the future.

MotMot CEO Andrew Gao, a fourth-year marketing major, explained the company's structure.

"MotMot is a student-ran, student created company located within Seattle U," said Gao. "Our mission is to conduct ethical business, develop professional business leaders and to create sustainable environmental change."

The company is an incorporated non-profit which has built on its initial foundation by former Seattle U student Braden Wild.

"We found that there was a lot of profit from the supply chain being taken away by middle-men in the industry, and MotMot sought to change that," Gao said.

The company's commitment to sustainable business practices and ethical leadership is most pronounced in their commitment to a non-exploitative supply chain.

"We practice 'direct trade' rather than 'fair trade.' We believe that direct trade is better because it sources directly from the farmers," Gao said.

While the fair trade certification is a list of hoops for producers to jump through to receive verification as 'fair trade,' direct sourcing cuts out all possible intermediaries that could lead to farmers receiving a smaller share of profit.

MotMot continues to grow as additional generations of young business professionals join the company. Their status as a nonprofit and a student-run organization signifies a strong commitment to corporate social responsibility. The philosophy that businesses have responsibilities not just to maximize their own profits, but to enrich the communities in which they operate.

MotMot's Head of Sales Noah Charvat, a fourth-year international business student, described the company's social commitments.

"Corporate social responsibility has been at our core since the very beginning...It's been our first priority followed by the bottom line, not vice versa," Charvat said.



Kim Nucum

The COVID-19 pandemic posed challenges for small, direct trade coffee producers. MotMot's business model was based mostly on reaching out to retailers. The Seattle U bookstore, The Cave and various outlets around Seattle carried MotMot products. As the pandemic continued forcing many campus retailers to close, the company quickly pivoted to e-commerce.

Shifting an entire marketing plan and means of creating sales required a great deal of fast changes. Charvat described the work necessary to reposition the company's strategy in response to the pandemic.

"For a sales team, it's kind of a strange thing when you realize that you really do have all of your eggs in one basket," Charvat said.

The company built an online store and a new marketing plan in a matter of months to prepare for the fall season, and Charvat's team had to rethink their positions to accommodate the changing needs of the company. MotMot's sales team also dedicated its energy to breaking into e-commerce.

"Since our website went live in October, we've had over \$2,400 in sales, which is pretty incredible. That would be great even in an in-person sales environment," Charvat said. "We also have a 14% returning customer rate, so we've had really great consumer confidence in our online marketplace over the past couple months."

The company was able to restructure and find new success in part due to the ability of farmers to maintain a steady supply of coffee in the midst of a pandemic. Vietnam and Nicaragua, the two countries from which MotMot sources product, have both maintained an output of coffee since March 2020.

MotMot Vice President of Marketing Sofiya Koretskaya, a fourth-year marketing student, explained the measures taken to respond to supply issues posed by COVID-19.

"The complication they faced was the fact that people are supposed to practice social distancing. I believe their work is pretty active, and we are very thankful for all of the work that they are doing while still sourcing coffee for us," Koretskaya said.

While the company certainly faced challenges due to the shift in marketing strategies as a result of the pandemic, Charvat underscored the stability of demand for coffee.

"We've been somewhat lucky in the sense that we are in a kind of untouched industry in this pandemic. Coffee has done better than other industries—it's the second most traded commodity in the world after oil," Charvat said.

MotMot may be one of the few places on Seattle U's campus that has not only survived, but thrived during an otherwise devastating era for smaller businesses. Just as coffee has remained a staple in daily life throughout the pandemic, MotMot has remained an important part of the Seattle U business community.