

# Double trouble?

OPENING A SECOND SITE WHEN THEIR FIRST ONE WAS GOING SO WELL SEEMED STRAIGHT FORWARD ENOUGH, BUT THE UNDERDOG DUO SOON REALISED THEY HAD A LOT TO LEARN



Will Beckett and Huw Gott had growing pains over the opening of new venture Green & Red (above)

As the Honeyz and Fifty Cent have, in their very different ways, sung recently, growing up is hard to do. Our development as a business was no different.

When we took the plunge and opened our second site we made a fair few mistakes that meant things didn't go as smoothly as they could have done. So much so that, when we opened our consultancy, Huw considered adding the tagline 'Underdog – we fucked up so you don't have to'. Then we thought that might not be the best way of marketing our talents, but it's obvious speaking to other people who've been there and done it that these problems come up time and again.

We'd been running the Redchurch for a couple of years when it became obvious that the bar-restaurant across the road was struggling. We'd always wondered how it managed to keep going with the few customers it managed to attract, most of whom seemed to be from a local cross-dressing support group. Honestly – they knew they could have a quiet drink and not get stared at.

## A COMPLICATED OPERATION

Once we'd persuaded ourselves we could do a better job with the site we approached the landlord and told him that if the current tenant ever defaulted, we'd be happy to take over. Luckily enough for us, a few weeks later the tenant did exactly that and the landlord took us on.

At 4,800sq ft it was over three times the size of the Redchurch, and because of the size it inevitably became a much more complicated operation. Instead of just drink we now had a 60-cover restaurant and a 150-capacity basement bar and below that, our first real kitchen.

Because it was just across the road we were acutely aware of one of the

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dangers of opening up a second site – don't poach your own customers. We had to make it different so the young, bizarrely-haircutted Shoreditch trendies who frequented the Redchurch didn't go there instead. So we did a temple to tequila, a cocktail bar and authentic Mexican restaurant named Green & Red.

In fact we probably made parts of it a bit too different, a bit too un-Shoreditch, particularly the basement bar, which at first ended up feeling a bit too West End for the area. Although early on we had a busy, vibrant restaurant, it took a minor redesign and a slightly later licence to get the basement buzzing.

We succeeded in not poaching our own customers, but the flip-side was that we ended up with two very different operations, which leads us the next valuable lesson we had to learn the hard way – running completely different styles of venues is more difficult than it might seem. Certainly more difficult than we thought it would be (not made any easier by adding a very English gastropub, the Marquess Tavern, and a steak restaurant, Hawksmoor).

We ended up with four sites that had completely different drinks lists, food

menus, music playlists, interior furnishings and by and large required completely different types of chefs, bartenders and front-of-house staff.

It's not that that's the wrong thing to do, but you need to keep an eye on your goals here. Before you open your second site work out what you ultimately want to do with your growing business.

It might be to live off the profit of your individual sites, in which case you don't need to worry about what a future purchaser might think. But, if like us, your aim is to one day sell up and swan around the beaches of the Caribbean, you need to bear in mind what potential purchasers might be looking for. This tends to be something very easily understandable that they can see working on a larger scale – usually something they can see themselves copying and pasting around the land. A group of completely different sites is never going to be very attractive to this kind of purchaser.

However, the best advice we can give you is before you do anything, make sure you have a solid base to grow from. Ensure your first venue is making good profits and running smoothly. Iron out any problems, however minor – they will just

**'Huw had an epiphany. If you want to grow your company effectively, don't act like Huw's mum at her very nice café'**



get worse and could spiral out of control while you're focusing on the new venue.

Make sure you have a strong team in place and don't be tempted to take all your best members of staff to your new site.

If you haven't done so you will need to quickly learn how to delegate effectively. This is something we struggled with. Before we opened Green & Red we appointed a general manager at the Redchurch and stopped doing so many shifts behind the bar ourselves. But we were still around a lot and because we didn't make it clear to everyone working there that the new GM was now in charge, we made it impossible for him to do his job properly.

## ARE YOU READY TO GROW? YOUR CHECKLIST

- First venue making money
- You have time on your hands
- You have good staff who you trust
- You know your end goal
- You have a business model for growth
- You have enough money to grow a new business
- You've ironed out most of the problems of site one

If there was a problem, people would bypass him and come to us direct, no matter how minor the issue. He couldn't do his job and we got dragged into things we didn't need to be involved in, distracting us from our job which was doing everything we could to get Green & Red open.

It was at this stage that Huw had an epiphany; he was being too much like his mum. Huw's mum owns a café in Shropshire, and a very nice café it is too (if you're ever passing through the town of Church Stretton pop in for lunch or one of her famous cream teas – [www.berryscoffeehouse.co.uk](http://www.berryscoffeehouse.co.uk)). Like many single-site retail business owners, Huw's mum is a very hands-on micro-manager. She is the centre of that business and finds it very difficult to not get involved in everything that's going on. But you can't be like that if you want to grow, you have to give people real responsibility and let them get on with the job.

So there you have it; if you want to grow your company effectively, don't act like Huw's mum. ■



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