

Case Study:

CREATING A SOCIALLY-DISTANCED, COFFEE-LOVING COMMUNITY WITH SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE SMOKIN' BEAN TRUCK



The Smokin' Bean Truck has been driving around the Epsom and Leatherhead areas delivering coffee to workplaces since 2018. It had built up a regular route and loyal customers loved the novelty of the coffee truck swinging by their office, delivering a proper coffee made by the hand of a barista (as well as delicious snacks and sandwiches).

Back in March, as the threat of COVID-19 became very real and very close to home, the decision was taken to close the doors at head office for the majority of our office staff. Workplaces everywhere were taking similar precautions, meaning our Smokin' Bean Truck customers were now working from home.

Taking the truck off-road

Manager of the Smokin' Bean Truck, Nicholas Campana, decided at that point it was time to put the brakes on and leave the truck off the road for a while for the safety of customers and staff. Shortly after, the government announced that the UK would be in lockdown.

The truck was out of action for several weeks and Nicholas used the downtime to consider what was next. He knew that loyal Smokin' Bean customers were missing their coffee – they told us on the SmokinBeanUK and SmokinBeanTruckLeatherhead Instagram – so after lockdown eased, he decided to test the water.

**SMOKIN'
BEAN**

Getting back behind the wheel (and the espresso machine)

In order to get the truck back on the road, it had a full COVID-19 compliance risk assessment from NCASS to be sure the truck was operating as safely as possible. An official COVID-19 barrier was put up to remind customers to practice social distancing in the queue and to keep their distance from the barista. Gloves are always in use and the truck was always cashless, so card-only payments were not a problem.

The first day out after a long hiatus was, in Nicholas' own words, a sad day. "All the previous buzz around the usual stops was gone, the roads were empty and the whole experience was different and surreal" says Nicholas, but that didn't deter him.

Nicholas started advertising that the truck was back on its rounds on the SmokinBeanTruckLeatherhead Instagram. With a dedicated following of customers who previously had the coffee truck visit their workplace, people started to ask whether the truck could deliver Smokin' Bean coffee to them at home. More and more requests for home delivery were coming in so Nicholas thought that they could be onto something.

He started advertising more readily on Instagram, offering the chance for people to contact the truck to arrange a private home delivery. Leaflets were also produced and put on the truck so customers could take one and tell their neighbours. Colleagues from head office also got involved by organising home deliveries for themselves and their neighbours.

Home coffee deliveries

Nicholas started pre-arranging weekly stops with residents in private roads. Some were huge roads, with hundreds of houses. It created a real sense of community in what was a challenging time for everyone. Not to mention the joy from coffee-lovers who hadn't been able to get a proper coffee for months!



Sam Newton was one resident who contacted Nicholas to get the truck to come to his road.

“I knew about the truck from working in Leatherhead, where the truck visits every day” says Sam, who thought his neighbours would also appreciate good coffee delivered to their road, so he spread the word. “My road has a group chat on WhatsApp that we created when COVID happened for anyone who needed help; it contains about 70 people. They loved the idea of having coffee delivered!”

“**The neighbours love it and are always looking forward to Wednesday afternoons now!**”
- Sam Newton, Truck Customer

Now it's a regular fixture once a week. Sam says “I've always loved independent chains as they do much better coffee and Smokin' Bean delivers on that. The neighbours love it and are always looking forward to Wednesday afternoons now!”

Tweaking the menu

When the truck's rounds included busy offices, it was a no brainer to stock sandwiches for lunchtime and these proved very popular at the time. As the route moved towards home deliveries, the food menu was reduced to reflect the new situation.



Now the focus was having a longed-for barista-made cup of coffee, small snacks and treats that complement coffee were the order of the day. All time best sellers like Fine Cookie Co cookies and Broderick's Tray Bakes continued to sell very well.

**SMOKIN'
BEAN**

Growing the message... and cup sales

The more stops Nicholas did, the more posts were put on social media and then more requests came in. The truck operates on a request-only basis; all stops have been pre-arranged by residents who were longing for their caffeine fix without having to ever leave their street! He also recently brought back the truck's regular barista, Jules, which meant they were able to work as a team. With Jules making excellent coffees and Nicholas behind the scenes, they were able to grow their following a whole lot faster.

“

"I visited your truck this morning and I was very happy with the service and coffee. Your staff were very friendly. The coffee was amazing. Just wanted to say thanks and I wouldn't hesitate to recommend you guys in the future!"
- Christian, Truck Customer

Growing the following even more meant rewarding those who had spread the word. A few free coffees here and there for those who had organised street deliveries or promoted the truck, kept the audience engaged with the brand and wanting to share their positive Smokin' Bean experience within their local community.



"It's almost been a community service. People come together, they get their drinks, they go back working from home or looking after the kids" says Nicholas. It has been a little bit of normality, a little treat, in amongst the stress and uncertainty of a pandemic.

**SMOKIN'
BEAN**

So, it snowballed from there, completely through social media and word of mouth. Commercially, Nicholas has seen coffee sales rise 310% from the first week back to the end of July. This means sales are back at the same level they were before the COVID-19 pandemic.

So, what's next for the truck?

"We're still visiting some workplaces with less staff in the office, it's just more of a mix of office and residential invites these days" says Nicholas, "but people are already wanting home delivery to continue."

But it's not just home deliveries that are being requested. The truck has been gaining traction and picking up new business throughout. There have been events requests, street parties and new customers who want the truck to visit their office when they go back to work.

“

"It's almost been a community service. People come together, they get their drinks, they go back working from home or looking after the kids"

- Nicholas Campana, Truck Manager

Key to the success of the truck during these unprecedented times, was the community feel. Keeping in touch with customers on social media and really listening to them meant the truck built upon its already strong following. It was a way to bring people together, even if they did have to stand 2 metres apart.

Want to find out more?

If you are in Epsom or the surrounding area and want to arrange delivery to your street, contact 07507 864 858 or send a message on Instagram @SmokinBeanTruckLeatherhead