

How CREAM rose to the top

An unconventional product succeeds by following a conventional course.

BY ROBERT SBERNA

While it's not unusual to leverage a college major into a prosperous career, Chris Guiher has forged a successful business from experiences he gained outside of class.

Guiher, a Cleveland-based entrepreneur, is the creator of CREAM, an alcohol-infused whipped cream beverage that is marketed throughout the U.S. and several foreign countries. Guiher developed the idea for CREAM while attending the University of Toledo in the mid-1990s. After spending the past several years formulating and testing the product, he launched CREAM on a shoestring budget in May 2010. CREAM became an immediate hit and now sells more than 50,000 cases a month. Available in vanilla, cherry, chocolate and several other flavors, CREAM is typically used as a topping on desserts and various beverages, including coffee and hot chocolate.

Guiher says beverage wholesalers from around the world have contacted him about distributing CREAM in their markets. He's also heard from several national restaurant chains and fashion design firms that are interested in private-label versions of the product. Produced at a facility in Michigan, CREAM is marketed through Guiher's firm, Kingfish Spirits. He expects to be shipping 100,000 cases a month by early 2012, with overseas exports accounting for about 30 percent of sales.

Guiher, 27, recently shared his recipe for entrepreneurial success with *Neoconomist*.

Neoconomist: How did you conceive the idea for CREAM?

>GUIHER: While in college, I was planning a party with some friends and we decided that we were bored with the usual



Above: The cherry variety of CREAM, an alcohol-infused whipped-cream beverage.

Left: Product creator Chris Guiher



beverages such as beer, Jell-O shots, and hairy buffalo punch. So I started experimenting with alternative ideas. I found some tubs of whipped cream and mixed in vodka and whatever flavorings I could find. We served the whipped cream drinks at the party and they were very popular. I realized that the product had commercial potential, but I wasn't sure how to bring it to market.

Neoconomist: What were your initial steps in launching CREAM?

>GUIHER: In one of my college business classes, we had a guest speaker, Brian Pearson, a marketing expert from the Toledo area who spoke about entrepreneurial strategy. The next day, I called Brian

and told him about my idea. After looking at product samples, he was very excited about working with me. But at that time, we couldn't find a way to keep the alcohol and whipped cream from separating. Seven years ago, when CREAM was first being developed, the technology wasn't available to keep the product stable so that it could be shipped and stored without refrigeration. But we eventually found the right technicians who helped us make the product commercially viable.

Neoconomist: What were some of the business challenges you faced?

>GUIHER: Of course, we faced the problem of financing — that's Business 101. When you're starting a company, you first go to friends and family, then you move on to banks, angel investors and even max out your credit cards. Fortunately, I was able to find investment funds without giving up a majority share of my company.

We also faced some challenges from some of the state regulatory agencies. But we kept working at it and were able to get approval. Following a two-year test-



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— CHRIS GUIHER

as well as contacting retail stores, night clubs and other sales outlets. We realized that we could face competition from copycat products, so our idea was to get CREAM out quickly and saturate the market so that we could develop brand loyalty.

Neconomist: What advice do you have for entrepreneurs who are bringing products to market?

>GUIHER: My advice would be to make sure you do your research: Know your industry and know the players. Try and get a mentor who can guide you. If you're young, you may not have a large amount of experience in your field, so it's extremely beneficial to have the assistance of someone who's been in the industry for awhile. I would also tell young entrepreneurs

to stay true to their ideas. In my case, there were times when I felt like I was getting in over my head, especially when I heard negative comments. The process of bringing a product to market can be very discouraging for someone who is working on a tight budget. For us, there were some difficult months in the beginning when no money was coming in. But we were able to calm our investors' nerves until the product started selling. My final advice for entrepreneurs is to try and do everything in your power to keep a majority share of your business. Once your business takes off, you'll be glad you did. +

market process, we launched CREAM using a guerilla marketing strategy. We took advantage of viral marketing through social media such as Facebook and Twitter,

For more information, visit givemecream.com.

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