

Small Business Spotlight:

Felix Böck | Founder & CEO **ChopValue Manufacturing Ltd., Est. 2016**

Life Story

Hailing from a small village in southern Germany, Felix was headed for a career in carpentry after leaving school at 15 to study the trade. Along the way he became the best Red Seal carpenter in south Germany, earned his degree in wood engineering and worked in Ethiopia as head of product development for a start-up creating bamboo-based alternatives to wooden building materials. Then in 2014, the University of British Columbia recruited Felix to do a PhD as part of a research collaboration on structural bamboo. Here Felix learned that each year in Vancouver as much as 600,000 tonnes of wood that could be reused for construction end up in the landfill, he knew he had to do something.

Following a sushi date with an accepted challenge and an estimation that 100,000 chopsticks are thrown out every day in Vancouver, the idea for ChopValue was born. The company collects used bamboo chopsticks from local restaurants and transforms them into beautiful products. ChopValue's team of builders, makers, designers, programmers, influencers, engineers and scientists have built a viable, carbon negative manufacturing business from 7,000,000+ chopsticks.....and counting.

What was the motivation behind starting your own business?

I took my frustration and turned it into motivation, to show everyone the feasibility and viability of working with underutilized resources. The idea to upcycle chopsticks fell into my lap as a crazy idea that could be an inspiring story for the bigger picture.

Who is your role model/mentor?

Two years ago I had said to my girlfriend I wish I had a mentor, someone to help guide my decisions. It wasn't clear to me at the time that everyone around me, who I talked to about my ideas, was doing exactly that.

What has been your biggest lesson learned about being your own boss?

I think accepting that it is impossible that everyone is going to like you and listening to each and every team member is super important.

What unique challenges have you faced as a small business trying to manufacture innovative and sustainable products and how have you overcome them?



If you look at manufacturing or consumer based product companies these days you will notice that to produce something locally you can't avoid importing goods or working with materials that come from all over the world, so we try to take this into account when we assess our production efficiencies. To remain carbon neutral we are collecting a resource locally and producing it locally. We take all of the touch points into consideration and try to balance it out – how much energy do we capture, how much carbon do we capture in our new product that would otherwise be released into the atmosphere and how much do we emit during production.

Looking back, what advice would you give to other aspiring young entrepreneurs from your experience?

You need a professional partner in crime to share stress, challenges and ideas. With growth comes risk and you need to constantly manage your expectations.

Your motto is?

"Do more, talk less ...or talk less – say more."

Where is your favourite B.C. destination?

I'm still exploring, but I just love everything in B.C., it just feels like home.

Bottom Line

- Plans for 2018 include expanding ChopValue's entire concept – recycling, design and manufacturing to three major North American cities, Vancouver, Victoria and Montreal
- National Clean 50 Company Award 2018
- ChopValue employs 18 staff
- ChopValue aims to have their first US city online in 2019

[Read the full interview](#)