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# Collaboration over competition

## The NZSCA on working together to grow the specialty coffee industry.

A previous article of ours had front footed the situation of explaining what goes into each cup of coffee. As we all know, there are hidden factors which are our customers, some of whom are predominately driven by price, don't want to pay for. Educating the public has been relatively easy, probably even romantic for the New Zealand wine and craft beer industry but drawing comparisons with coffee, our daily luxury, has been slightly harder as the consuming public are reactive to any price fluctuations. We must remember that 70 per cent of the New Zealand public drink instant as their go-to morning beverage. So how do we tell and sell them the story on specialty coffee?

The uncertainties of COVID-19 have been a challenge for us all, emotionally, mentally and financially. When a clickbait article hit the media on the price of the NZ\$7 flat white, Richard Corney of Flight Coffee in Wellington defended his company's stance. We have all felt the impact of inflation, rent, minimum wage increases, packaging, and transport as well as the cost of green. Consumers seem to have forgotten January 2020 when it was reported that the flat white would hit \$5 and the outrage it caused then.

We all need to stand in solidarity when selling the story of the value in each cup. The comments (on *Stuff*, New Zealand's online media platform) generated more traction than if we were arguing which side of the trans-Tasman the flat white or pavlova was from. Other members jumped in on the cause. David Huang of Society Coffee broke down the exact price of each component in the cup. Our consumers are passionate coffee drinkers and we are united

in serving them tasty brews. We are lucky to have a market where everyone can operate and cooperate. We can't succinctly capture the feeling of having to operate a business with ever changing mandates, passes, border closures, and logistic challenges of the past two years. It's the networking and knowledge sharing on things like subsidies, business risk assessments, and government requirements which has allowed us to continue to trade.

After the snap August lockdown, a prolonged period of limited hospitality and negotiating the traffic light system of restrictions, our industry has a lot to deal with. Closed borders have made employing transient staff a challenge, working from home has decreased inner-city foot traffic while regional is increasing, and many of us are buying coffee machines for our own home kitchens. This is a definite win on machine sales, bean subscriptions, and home barista training for our members and it's this concept of diversifying the market that has allowed our members to continue to trade. Recently, we heard a great example of this from one of our members: 'What about an advent calendar featuring NZ roasters, a different coffee to discover each day, and a tasty cup to countdown to the holidays?' So, Paul Harris from member company A Snobby Collective collaborated with packaging suppliers, green bean suppliers, and 20 roasters to create a New Zealand coffee first.

"To be able to create something that gets us all in front of our target market with little financial risk is exactly what we needed. Though the reach may have been small, it has not gone unnoticed. It's exactly what I had wanted to do, but hadn't thought of that format or any way to make it reality. A

bit of a daunting task, it's definitely revived some of my lost passion and enthusiasm since this whole pandemic debacle," Paul says. "The Coffee Advent Calendar was a highlight and a perfect way to get coffee drinkers stepping outside their routine and trying coffees and roasters they may not have otherwise sampled."

Paul says the aim of the collaboration was "to bring as many roasters together under one roof as possible".

"That process lead me to wanting to create something of a coffee festival in a box. I think it hit that mark," he explains.

"Given the success, I am committed to doing the same again next year and have confidence it will grow." Paul has ideas to other boxes in a similar series, and the sizes will vary as will the theme.

Paul says he was inspired by exactly what he didn't want to do, but now has the perfect reason to get roasters together again. Isn't that the nature of coffee?

Sometimes we have to do things we don't want to do, like put the price up after absorbing the variable costs for too long. Each coffee in the advent calendar may have a perceived high cost overall, but knowing the value in sustainably sourcing, roasting, and packaging, we are creating the base knowledge for our consumers.

Despite the daunting task we have ahead, our industry is inspiring you to explain the value in the cup to your customers, diversify, innovate and collaborate to spread the message. **E**



For more information on the New Zealand Specialty Coffee Association, or to join, visit [www.nzscsca.org](http://www.nzscsca.org)