



# cocoa mountain

wonderful world, wonderful chocolate

**Cocoa Mountain** won the inaugural Food Tourism Award at the 2009 Scotland Food & Drink Excellence Awards. Cocoa Mountain was created in June 2006 by Paul Maden and James Findlay with the aim of producing fresh, high quality and innovative chocolates without the need for preservatives.

Cocoa Mountain, probably the most geographically remote chocolate producer in Europe, is situated in the North - West Highlands near Durness. The business achieved their award-winning status after viewers of STV's 5.30 Show voted from the four short-listed companies featured on the programme.

James explained the reason for entering the awards was through recommendations from customers and business contacts who suggested Cocoa Mountain had a real chance of succeeding due to the popularity of the business and the personality of the people behind the scenes. The key would be to ensuring the promotional clip created for the 5.30 Show was fully representative of the business, those within the business and the quality of the products produced.

Initially Cocoa Mountain gained a great deal of exposure directly from the 5.30 Show feature article. This resulted in an immediate boost to the business through an increase in on-line sales. The business also maintains a 60% loyalty rate and this has resulted in many customers returning to Cocoa Mountain for additional purchases.

Winning the Food Tourism Award as a result of the viewers' vote led to an additional sales increase and the subsequent media exposure and interviews all contributed to a large increase in product sales. This has had an additional impact on tourism within the region with people willing to explore the unspoilt and beautiful landscapes of the North – West Highlands.

Immediately after their award win Cocoa Mountain did not produce any press releases of their own and relied on the generic Awards press release. This was mainly down to a few factors;

- Cocoa Mountain had already featured on the 5.30 Show as a result of being short-listed for the Food Tourism category and was subsequently featured days after to reflect on the Award win.
- Winning the award also took the business by surprise due to the high standard of the other short-listed companies, therefore the business was not fully prepared to instantly deal with winning the Award.
- Due to the small number of employees within the business and the increased demand for Cocoa Mountain chocolates, everyone within the business was back making chocolates to satisfy the demand.

Not having a press release ready prepared is something that, on reflection, James admits was a missed opportunity; when the next opportunity appears Cocoa Mountain intend to prepare an appropriate press release prior to the awards ceremony in order to maximize the potential immediately after the awards.

Cocoa Mountain would certainly recommend making the most from any Award win. The business ensured the Award winning logo was included on customer leaflets and literature. The logo also has a prominent position on the Cocoa Mountain website and within the shop. The business also utilises the services of a local freelance journalist to circulate stories on a periodic basis.

Cocoa Mountain has enjoyed a steady period of organic growth through their on-line activity and, since winning the award, the business has been approached by a number of boutique food retailers interested in stocking Cocoa Mountain chocolates – this is something the business is not keen to pursue as it may affect the quality of the fresh product due to the extended shelf-life required. James believes winning the award helped raise the profile of the business and bring Cocoa Mountain to their attention of specialist retailers.



The business is already well known throughout the Highlands but entering the Scotland Food & Drink Excellence Awards and the subsequent exposure on the 5.30 Show has led to increased exposure throughout Scotland and beyond.

When James was asked what were the key steps to getting the most from an Excellence Award he suggested the following;

- Spend some time and prepare a press release before the award ceremony as a company being short-listed is an achievement in itself.
- Try wherever possible to add something extra to the press release, for example highlight a new product launch, try to create a double whammy.
- Think of a strategy and use it to your advantage but also think of the knock-on effects, for example the increase in product demand.
- Incorporate the winning and short-listed logos on any marketing materials, newsletters, correspondence and websites.
- Inform customers of the Award win. Seize the opportunity and make the most of it.

James would definitely recommend entering awards as this provides an opportunity for businesses with little money to spend on PR and external marketing.