

MARKETWATCH

20 UNDER 40

Cheers to the 20 under 40
By Lee M. Oser Jr. - 10.2008

Greetings once again to the readers of Gourmet News. In this month's issue, we're proud to bring you profiles of twenty up-and-comers in the specialty foods and kitchenware industries. These young people - all under 40 - are enhancing and even revolutionizing our industry with their energy and vision, and it's a pleasure to have the opportunity to read about their accomplishments and to share them with you through the pages of Gourmet News. We know you'll enjoy meeting people like Ryan Montague of Gourmet Business Solutions LLC, a Web-based consulting and marketing company for gourmet food businesses in Clearwater, Fla. I'm sure you'll be inspired by his story of starting a business amidst the devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina with only a \$500 credit card for startup expenses and a flooded, gutted home, a pregnant wife, and a one-year-old son to take care of. We'd like to congratulate Ryan and all of our 20 Under 40 for having the guts, persistence, and creativity it takes to stand out in a world that can be challenging and occasionally downright hostile.

Ryan's just one example of those who are using new technology to enhance sales, promote their stores, and to create a more appealing marketplace in both the virtual and brick-and-mortar worlds. Check out our pages this month for more information on how they're pioneering the use of YouTube videos, podcasts and video webisodes, and Web 2.0 virtual communities to promote the specialty foods industry.

So this month Gourmet News brings you much to think about, from our oldest traditions to our newest technology. And along with it, our heartiest congratulations once again to the people who are revitalizing our traditions and infusing our desires for community and connection into cyberspace. I lift my teacup in salute to you all.

Ryan Montague, 24, owner Gourmet Business Solutions LLC, a web-based consulting and marketing company, Clearwater, Fla.

Describe how you got involved in the gourmet/specialty food/ business: I got my start in the gourmet industry when I had the opportunity to work for then-New Orleans-based GourmetFoodMail.com, a startup that launched in 2001. This is where I got my first real-world experience with web-based consulting work



and both BtoC and BtoB online ad campaign management. Following Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans was no longer a safe or economically sound living environment, so I decided to relocate permanently and start my own

business based on the gourmet food industry experience I had gained.

Most valuable lesson learned: To embrace

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things that most people despise—failures, competition, and stress-inducing matters because I have learned and grown the most from them. I now find positivity in failed initiatives because I know that I will learn something to help me improve next time. I now build relationships with perceived competition because open doors can lead to new opportunities. I now find stress to be healthy because success and happiness wouldn't be the same without it.

Describe how your business has grown and what your plans for the future are: My business started out with one basic website, one pro-bono client, and one employee (me) offering only a handful of consulting and web marketing services. Since our first year, we have now increased revenues by more than 400 percent, in part because of to our growing staff (now seven) and network of eight highly trafficked websites including a consumer shopping site, a discussion forum, an online business encyclopedia, a video site, a PR portal, and a business directory—all specifically for the gourmet food industry. Since launch, we have worked with more than 200 gourmet food companies and currently have roughly 60 active clients that we serve. In September, we launched FoodFunding.com, an online portal dedicated to connecting food companies with investors.