

The Startups:

The City Swig helps bar hoppers find the best deal

RICHMOND -- “We liked to drink, but we didn't have much money, so we became obsessed with finding the best deals,” so said Tommy Nicholas, co-founder of The City Swig.

Let's face it: college-aged kids love to get their drink on, but are almost always constantly broke for money. Happy hours are truly that, because the prices become affordable for the co-eds.

But how does one find the absolute cheapest prices and best deals? In steps The City Swig to save the day. Originally began as a startup in Richmond, Virginia, The City Swig has expanded to Charlottesville and Blacksburg earlier this spring. Their mission: to inform bar hoppers on a daily basis the best prices and deals in their cities.

“Seemed to us like there had to be a way to automate this process,” Nicholas said of his experiences bar hopping in college. “Shockingly there was nothing online to really help us out.

“From there, a lot of planning and iteration happened. Now we have the start of what we ultimately hope will be something that can quickly and easily find you the best nightlife information.”

What came from this planning is the model of a 21st century company. The City Swig boasts a social media presence and an interactive website that also functions as an app on smart phones.

“This was very much planned based on what we've read but also how we think. The web is a great place to build products, but mobile is where you can enact truly amazing change in people's lives.”

The City Swig has spent considerable time building their website, with true mobile apps available in the future.

“That's why we haven't launched native mobile apps yet,” Nicholas said, “because we wanted even our first iterations to be truly spectacular. They're now well underway and we're very excited about them.”

After confessing it took “lots of beers and lots of thought,” the website offers an array of products for people to find the best deals. First, users select what city they live in. The website then lists the best prices for drinks at bars for that night. The website also offers some the cheapest prices for grocery stores in that city.

The interface is customizable as well. If users want to see the best prices coming up for Friday, they simply switch to that date. Users can hover over bar listings to see happy hour times and also see if a certain bar is “easy to talk” in or has “outdoor seating.”

Another interesting feature is the “Tonight’s Best Route” interface. From there The City Swig maps out a bar hop schedule for people to follow. The night can start out with \$2.25 rails and end in a beer pong tournament.

The City Swig looks to expand upon this foundation.

“We’re building the entire next generations of products around the concept of getting quick recommendations,” Nicholas described. “We’re having them personalized and dynamic, centered around sharing rather than static.”

Tommy feels this will help bar hoppers get the information they want more easily. “We came up with the idea because we realized we were asking people to do a decent amount of work to find the right information.”

“We had a long term plan for solving that. We wanted to start with the simplest possible solution. From there, you measure your users and how they interact with things and build your future plans that way.”

Most of the information comes from the bars themselves and The City Swig relies on them for it. Thankfully, bars are receptive.

“Bars love the idea. The only problem is that we’ve sold them a dream and that makes it tough to sell the building blocks,” Nicholas admitted.

“For example, we’re building a system with our mobile apps where bars will send push deals directly to our users to fill slow periods in real time, and they’re super stoked on that idea. However, we’re a few months away from that, so it’s hard to sell our other services when all anyone wants to talk about is what’s next. That’s alright though, we’d rather sell the dream anyway!”

Originally starting as just Nicholas and his co-founders Matt Russo and Nik Philipsen, The City Swig now employs eight people full-time and others on a part-time basis.

“We have a bar in our office with two taps. It’s a good place to work,” Tommy admitted.

He even lives with some of the other employees. If you walk into their apartment in the Fan you’ll find random Nerf darts on the floor. That’s because the apartment randomly engages in Nerf wars.

“We’re extremely close knit. The people who work for the company either already were or have become my best friends.”

In the future The City Swig is looking to expand their operations further.

“We'll be focusing primarily on east coast college towns and college centric, mid-sized cities.”

“I'm looking at you Charleston, South Carolina!” Tommy quipped.

Wherever they expand, The City Swig will continue to find the best prices for fellow bar hoppers.