

# Q&A WITH MANDEEP SINGH

## CO-FOUNDER, TROUVA



Ahead of its partnership with Jacket Required this month, MWB speaks to co-founder Mandeep Singh about the idea behind the online platform for independent boutiques and what drove the decision to partner with the UK's biggest menswear trade show.

**Victoria Jackson: When was Trouva formed?**

Mandeep Singh: Trouva was launched in September 2015, and enables customers to scour a huge array of over 80,000 distinctive, design-led products from the best bricks-and-mortar independent stores. My co-founders and I saw how technology was converging the worlds of online and offline retail and, while Amazon and some major retailers were adapting to this rapidly changing environment, independent shops – the lifeblood of bricks-and-mortar retail – did not have the scale and technology. So we set about building our own technology platform to take the world's best offline retailers online.

In just over two years, we've built a technology platform which empowers hand-picked offline independent stores to not just compete with, but beat the retail multiples and e-commerce giants, led by my co-founder and CTO Alex Loizou. Amid an accelerating industry shift to digital and omnichannel, the platform also offers real time 'click and collect', one-hour delivery (it has a record-breaking delivery time of just 22 minutes) and worldwide shipping.

**VJ: What was the idea behind the launch?**

MS: We wanted to merge the worlds of online and offline to really give bricks-and-mortar boutiques an opportunity to compete with

bigger businesses, like Amazon and eBay, by providing the tech expertise, delivery capabilities and scalability they need to reach a new customer base. In two short years since launch, the business has seen 1,509 per cent growth in revenue and has doubled profits for some of our top-performing boutiques, with many of them already having achieved over £100,000 of sales through the platform.

**VJ: Does the shopper have one basket and pay for everything through your website?**

MS: Yes, the shopper has one basket and we handle all logistics, from click and collect to same-day delivery and worldwide shipping. By doing this, we're able to charge a single, flat rate for shipping to the UK and internationally, no matter how many boutiques you're buying from, as well as free shipping for larger orders.

**VJ: Were you working in ecommerce prior to launching Trouva?**

MS: I was previously a retail strategy consultant at OC&C, advising the likes of Arcadia Group, DFS and Asda Wal-Mart amongst others. It was here where I first saw the impact that online was having on offline retail. I then went on to become an investor at BC Partners, one of Europe's largest private equity funds, which owned businesses such as Foxtons, Gruppo Coin/OVS, Intelsat and

PetSmart/Chewy.com. I started my first 'business', doing web design, as a teenager from my bedroom, and my co-founder Alex has been coding for over a decade.

**VJ: How many retailers do you have signed up currently?**

MS: We have over 400 boutiques in over 119 towns and cities in the UK. We're extremely selective in picking boutiques which customers will love, so cannot accept the majority of shops who want to join the platform – quality is far more important than quantity.

**VJ: What do you think has been the key to your success?**

MS: It is not so much about success, but solving a problem. When we founded Trouva, technological innovation was disrupting the high street at a fast pace. Our mission is to equip independent boutique owners with the latest technology to enable them to have a competitive edge in the digital world. We've been able to innovate by working with independent bricks-and-mortar-stores, for example, doing deliveries in less than an hour, even in 2015, or offering real-time click & collect.

**VJ: Which is your most popular product category – fashion, home or something else perhaps? How does menswear perform overall?**

MS: We are a destination for homewares which is our most popular category, with women's and men's fashion accessories a close second. Sales of men's accessories and menswear represent about 12 per cent of our overall sales, and we work with some amazing independents with great men's ranges, such as Yards Store in Manchester, Our Daily Edit in Brighton, AIDA in Shoreditch and Maze in Bristol.

**VJ: You're partnering with Jacket Required this season – what was the decision behind this?**

MS: Jacket Required offers boutiques the chance to uncover a diverse and premium range of international brands. The carefully curated selection of brands reflects Trouva's own mission of bringing together the best independent stores, run by independent buyers and curators, in the world. Jacket Required was an obvious choice as we are aligned in our passion to support design-led independent shops.

Members of the Trouva team will be available throughout the duration of the show to meet retailers. Find us in our very own Trouva Lounge – if you have a bricks-and-mortar shop and want to arrange a time to meet the team, simply email [apply@trouva.com](mailto:apply@trouva.com).

**VJ: What do you look for in an independent retailer when considering it for Trouva?**

MS: As mentioned, we only accept a minority of stores that apply to join our community, as we have to believe that they are truly amazing independents, with a very strong vision and identity and run by expert curators/buyers. Stores must have a bricks-and-mortar location, with regular opening hours and probably have a loyal local following.

**VJ: And finally, what plans do you have moving forward? Would you open Trouva on an international scale?**

MS: Certainly. We want Trouva to become the global destination for the best independent shops in the greatest cities in the world. Whether we're talking about Berlin, Montmartre in Paris or Shoreditch in London, our mission is to unite the world's greatest independents in one community and global platform.

# INDEPENDENT MINDS

We take a look at three independent boutiques available on Trouva, all of which offer a great experience, both in store and online.



**CASSIUS & COCO**

Cassius & Coco is a concept store based in the heart of Crouch End, with a second location in Chiswick. The store hand-picks emerging and renowned local and international designers, brands and artists, favouring those taking creative risks to manufacture one-of-a-kind objects. Opening its doors in 2015, the store has become a firm favourite with shoppers across the country.



**DESIGN MUSEUM SHOP**

Located at the iconic Design Museum on Kensington High Street, the Design Museum Shop showcases a carefully curated offering of homeware products. The shop reflects the values of the museum itself, with a focus on architecture, graphics, product and industrial design. Every purchase supports the Design Museum allowing it to expand on its roster of exhibitions and events.



**MR MULLAN'S GENERAL STORE**

Mr Mullan's General Store is located slightly out of the capital in Kingston Upon Thames, Surrey, offering a plethora of grooming products and accessories for the modern gentleman. The team source products from popular brands including Y-Studio, Armor Lux, and L.A Bruket, as well as its own Made in England brand Mr Mullans, comprising grooming products and accessories.