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Young coffee devotee enjoys tweet success

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Camille Strowger is no twit.

The vivacious young woman, who has a maturity that belies her 21 years, is using social networking - particularly Twitter - to talk about coffee, as she combines business with study.

With 1500 followers on her @bezzeraespresso Twitter account, Miss Strowger describes herself as the "go-to person" for all things coffee.

She was frequently asked where to get a good coffee, while also tweeting more than 23,375 mostly coffee-related messages.

Social networking has been a "massive part" of her establishing the Italian-made Bezzera coffee machine brand in New Zealand.

When not accessing social networking sites on her iPhone, Miss Strowger can be found in Timaru, where she is studying towards a bachelor of commerce degree, with the intention of becoming an accountant.

That's a fair cry from the dream she had had since she was 7 of becoming a farm adviser, but life has taken a few different turns for the self-confessed perfectionist.

After leaving Craighead Diocesan School, Miss Strowger headed to Lincoln University, where she started studying towards a bachelor of agricultural science degree, before switching to tourism management.

Then an opportunity arose for her to go to Brisbane and work for her uncle at Bezzera Australia for three months. He imports Bezzera coffee machines from Italy and also owns Bezzera New Zealand.

Bezzera, still owned by the Bezzera family and located on the outskirts of Milan, invented the espresso machine in 1901.

The first shipment of coffee machines arrived in New Zealand in June last year and Miss Strowger has been distributing and promoting them.

Click photo to enlarge



[1]
Camille Strowger hones her coffee-making skills at Pen-y-bryn Lodge in Oamaru. Photo by Sally Rae.

She was living in Christchurch when the earthquakes hit. Her car was crushed and she was struggling to deal with it all, so she shifted to Timaru.

Aoraki Polytechnic staff had been "fantastic" in allowing her to take papers to fit in with her accounting degree, which she had decided to pursue.

Because of her social networking profile, she was contacted by CNN, the BBC and ABC to give accounts of the earthquake.

Apart from tweeting about the earthquake, she kept tweets relevant to the coffee business - anything from little coffee quotes to tips - and she calculated that each of her tweets has made her about 50c. She has sold about 60 Bezzera machines in New Zealand, saying it was a "pretty hard time" to get into marketing them.

Domestic machines started at \$2700, while commercial models started at \$5500 and went up to \$22,000.

Her customers have included television newsreader Mike McRoberts, whom she followed on Twitter. He contacted her and she went to his house and taught him and his wife to make coffee.

She had attracted such a following that companies sometimes sent her "free stuff" and restaurants and cafes invited her to dine at their establishments.

At one restaurant she visited in Newmarket, she attracted 50 more followers to the restaurant's social media account during her brief visit, by posting about it.

When she was turning 21 and wanted a recipe for mint sauce to accompany the spit-roast lamb at her party, she tweeted celebrity chef Annabel Langbein. Not only did she get the recipe, but she also got a birthday greeting.

Down-to-earth and yet with an innate sense of style, Miss Strowger admitted she "absolutely loved" social media.

"To me, a lot of marketing is just common sense. People have got a need and a want to find out stuff," she said.

Social media provided a way of marketing to people at their subconscious level. It did not matter whether they wanted to buy a coffee machine now, or in five years' time - they were going to remember the Bezzera brand, she said.

She did not mind giving advice about competitors' machines, saying she had never put out a tweet saying "buy a Bezzera" and never would. "I don't push sell at all."

She was grateful for the support of her accountant, Kerry Adams, from Dodd and Associates in Christchurch, whom she got to know through Twitter.

She has always wanted to run her own business and anticipated having her own accounting firm "within five years [of becoming a chartered accountant] or something like that".

While she acknowledged she would have made a good farm adviser, it would not have employed her talents fully.

It was not until she got to Lincoln - where she was the recipient of a Future Leaders scholarship - that she saw "the other stuff out there" she could be doing.

"I like things that are black and white. And accounting's either right or it's wrong," she said.

Her rural background is important to her. She always wears a dog whistle around her neck to remind her of home and she likes nothing better than getting out on her parents farm at Waianakarua. Rabbit shooting is a particular interest.

When she was 13, she would get up at 4am and milk the 750 cows on the farm her parents were running, and she looked after a 350-cow dairy farm when she was 17, while the owners were on holiday in Australia.

While Miss Strowger admitted her phone did not stop ringing, she was getting better at turning it off at weekends and she did not tweet as much as she used to.

It was about getting a balance between communicating with people so they kept coming back for advice "and actually having your own life".

She is also in the process of launching a new coffee-related business called Triple Shot, after her favourite coffee - a triple-shot flat white.

And the parting shot from the young coffee queen?

"I'm going to be the prime minister one day. I'm going to do a John Key and make my millions first."

Business

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