

Matthew Dahm

St. Pete Beach, Florida



[Mastry's Brewing Co.](#)

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Learn about Florida Entrepreneur Matthew Dahm:

Born and raised in St. Petersburg, FL, Matthew Dahm, CEO and Founder of Mastry's Brewing Co., began a quest in 2014 to introduce St. Pete Beach to a new brand of craft beer. Combining years of experience as an engineer, a thirst for home-brewing and a desire to build something special, he pursued his passion with relentless determination and, by October 2016, celebrated the grand opening of Mastry's Brewing Co. Dahm shared the story behind his journey and how his brand of beer is bringing 'craft to the beach' and beyond.

"After graduating from The University of South Florida with a degree in Mechanical Engineering, I continued working with my family's mechanical contracting company," Dahm said. "From there, I spent time with two other companies in the HVAC and refrigeration world. During

this time, I was introduced to the design, manufacturing and implementation of tools used to produce beer. In fact, one of the companies I worked for, GEA Heat Exchangers, Inc., is one of the world's leading manufacturers of industrial brewing equipment. I became fascinated with this side of the brewing process."

Before being introduced to the engineering side of beer production, Dahm, like many craft beer enthusiasts turned brewery owners, did some home-brewing of his own. He produced some delicious beer but, more importantly, laid the foundation for his entrepreneurial journey into the world of craft beer. By the middle of 2014, his fascination with the entire process reached a tipping point.

"I was ready to start selling the beer I was brewing," Dahm said. "I approached my cousin, who owns a local restaurant with a great craft beer selection, CD Roma, about featuring my beer in his restaurant. He is also a big fan of craft beer and I thought the partnership would be fun for both of us. Plus, it would allow me to start brewing and selling my beer without having to get my own location. After a few days to think it over, he agreed to form a partnership."

Dahm purchased the necessary equipment, registered his business, acquired the proper licensing and, by January 1st, 2015, his beer was flowing through several taps at CD Roma. By all accounts, the partnership was a success. Customers loved the beer and Dahm was producing more of it every month. By September, it was clear that if he wanted to take his business to the next level, he would need to find his own location.

"At this point in the process, I did a lot of research," he said. "I also

started communicating with others in the industry and learning from them. With a project management and engineering background, I was able to use and understand Department of Transportation (DOT) studies to look for a location with good traffic flow.”

Dahm continued, “The location we found was pretty much an empty shell. We had to go through and do a full redesign of the infrastructure and worked with an architect to design a building that met city standards. It was a lot of work, but my experience with municipalities and building departments definitely helped throughout this whole process. By August 2016, we had our soft opening – followed by our grand opening in October.”

Like many startups, Mastry’s Brewing Co. faced its fair share of challenges. First was, as Dahm put it, “Determining what we wanted to be when we grew up”. That meant, identifying a target market and designing a positive experience for that customer. Other challenges were monetary in nature. As you’d expect, starting a brewery takes a significant capital investment. Between expenses and the fact that they were entering a new part of Pinellas County that had yet to experience the craft beer movement, making smart decisions was critical.

Fortunately, Dahm wasn’t starting from scratch.

“Our start in CD Roma really helped us out,” he said. “We already had a pretty solid customer base that loved our beer. As a third generation Mastry, I’m also familiar with a lot of people in town. I used those connections to spread the word. I also joined local chambers, hospitality advocacy groups and the Florida Brewers Guild. I pretty much did everything possible to immerse myself in the community and tell

everyone about the brewery.”

Between October 2016 and today, Dahm made the decision to add food options. The original idea was to invite food trucks to the brewery, but as he shared, that idea proved to be more difficult than anticipated.

“For many breweries, the model is often to have craft beer and food trucks onsite,” he said. “That’s exactly what we were originally planning to do. However, little did we know, the City of St. Pete didn’t have an ordinance around food trucks. This forced us down the path of operating under a special events permit until we could sort things out with the city. We finally got an ordinance passed in 2018 to allow food trucks, but it was still too stringent and costly for them to want to come to us. By the end of 2018, we made the decision to buy our own food truck. On January 1st, 2019, we opened The Kitchen at Mastry’s Brewing. It’s basically a stationary onsite food truck that we operate.”

Since launching the business, Dahm has added additional revenue streams including a small distribution of cans to local ABC, Total Wine and bottle shops, along with kegs to restaurants and bars. They also added merchandise and the ability for customers to buy beer directly from their website.

When asked what he enjoys most about owning and running a brewery, Dahm shared the following. “The leadership side of it is very rewarding,” he said. “A big reason I left corporate America is because I didn’t feel like I was in a position to be able to make a real difference. Leading and empowering a team of dedicated employees is also very rewarding. The process of creating great beer is a very collaborative effort. We’re not just spitting out generic products. It takes creativity and a certain spirit

to do what we do.”

Looking ahead, Dahm is focused on continued growth and long-term sustainability. He shared that they’ve almost outgrown their current location and will consider the possibility of a larger space to do more production and expand their beirgarten. He’s also interested in possibly adding one or two other locations throughout the Tampa Bay area.

What advice does Dahm have for aspiring entrepreneurs? “Research is the key and knowledge is power,” he said. “Get out there and be as informed as you can. It’s the only way to help mitigate your risk. Also, reach out to others that have gone through it. All the brewery owners I know are very open to sitting down and sharing what they know. Lastly, write out your plan to see where you have questions. Make sure you understand things like OSHA, taxes and P&Ls, but also understand that business ownership is a never ending learning process.”

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