



Crafting a Global Market

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Oregon Executive MBA class 28 members Andy Kalamaris, MBA '14, and Nate Webb, MBA '14, graduated from the Portland-based program with more than just an degree. Last year, they founded Craftport, an award-winning craft beer export management company. Craftport focuses on Oregon craft beer, wine, and distilled spirits to help local businesses expand their market to South America, Europe, Asia, and beyond.

The idea came to them during the Oregon Executive MBA global study trip to Brazil in 2012.

“We decided the beer in Brazil wasn’t very good, and it didn’t represent America,” said Kalamaris. “We don’t believe that Budweiser represents America—especially not Oregon—so we wanted to get some of the Oregon brands we love down in Brazil. Our goal was to get it down there by the World Cup, and we did make it with two breweries—Hop Valley and Alameda.”

And that’s no small accomplishment. International beverage options tend to be stifled by large multinational companies, but the demand for craft products is there and growing.

“We like the idea of dealing in a craft market specifically,” said Webb. “Oregon is one of the leaders in the world of craft brewing—and craft wine and spirits as well. We felt that we were very lucky being located here in this area with a good craft production base, and we want to help them find some new markets.”

Even with plenty of opportunities, the process of starting a new venture can be a daunting one—especially while trying to balance time with family and Oregon Executive MBA classes.

“Starting a business, working, and going to school might not have been the best idea,” laughed Kalamaris. “But it was rewarding, and we learned a lot.”

Webb agreed.

“From the time we founded the company, almost every course we’ve had, we’ve been able to do some kind of homework assignment or research project that would help us with the business,” he said. “And it’s been nice to get feedback on the business model from all of our professors in marketing, finance, strategy, accounting, legal—you name it. It’s been almost like our own little personal incubator, a nice stress-free environment where we can test the concepts and the model.”

The support and hard work paid off. After just one year, Craftport was honored with an Export Achievement Award from the Oregon Chapter of the U.S. Export Council in May 2014. In addition, the company has received two grants from the Oregon Trade Promotion Program.

But Kalamaris and Webb also have their sights on larger goals.

"I'd love to go to the 2016 Olympics in Brazil and drink Oregon beer on the beaches in Rio," said Webb.

Additionally, Webb's Oregon Executive MBA capstone project focused on expanding into Colombia, and he and Kalamaris are also considering other free-trade countries like Peru and Chile. "You can do things in international markets with beer, wine, and spirits that you can't do here because of national and state laws," offered Kalamaris. "It's exciting to think about the possibilities. Seeing the power of the different business and distribution models and how they can help the breweries—I think we're definitely on to something and with the way our business changes in the next five to ten years, moving forward into international trade, even retail."

Already putting their MBAs to good use, the recent graduates offered their advice to Oregon Executive MBA students and alumni looking to start their own business.

"Get as close in contact with the end customer as possible," said Webb. "You can spend a lot of time writing business plans and doing assumptions and financial projections, but that doesn't mean anything if no one's going to pay for what you're offering."

"Just go for it," added Kalamaris. "If you have an idea, try it. Test it out, see if it works, and if it works, keep going. If it doesn't, change it to what works. But also try to keep a work-life balance, that's the hardest part."

"And go on the Oregon Executive MBA trips!" they agreed.

"Going to Brazil, I never thought I'd come home with a business idea," said Webb.

Kalamaris, who also went on the Oregon Executive MBA trip to Vietnam and Hong Kong in 2013, predicts that "Asia will be a huge market, and Vietnam will be big."

"There are so many young people over there," he explained. "And they're starting to get a bigger middle class, and we saw that on the trip. Unless you see it with your own eyes you can't understand it as well."