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2.5 Years in Business

MetaVega Supply is a family-owned business focused on delivering premium lighting products to their customers at an affordable cost. *INews* interviewed owners Britni and Jayson Tantalo to discuss integrity in business, customer service, and innovation.

WHAT DID YOU BOTH DO BEFORE STARTING METAVEGA?

Britni Tantalo: My background is in corporate finance and accounting. I have a bachelor's degree in finance and an MBA in accounting from private institutions in New York State. I worked for many years in various corporate finance roles as well as a public tax accountant.

Jayson Tantalo: I have a strong tech background in web design and search engine optimization. I also have over 18 years' experience within the industry of horticulture/hydroponics. I worked many years as a web designer and in sales for hydroponic equipment.

HOW DID YOU GET INTO THIS INDUSTRY?

Britni: Both Jayson and I shared a lot of commonalities as husband and wife. We both have strong personal opinions and standpoints on the sustainability of food and the freedom to have it be organic while being GMO-free. We also shared the belief that medical marijuana should be legal and made available to those in need. Instead of just having it be something we believed in, we decided to make it be a part of our lives. We were both tired of running the rat race and really wanted to spend our time doing something that would have a positive impact on people and communities.

WHEN AND WHERE DID METAVEGA BEGIN?

Britni: MetaVega began in our living room in the summer of 2014 as a conversation on how we wanted to not only change our lives, but help to promote and support causes that were really important to us personally. Right away, we began researching growing food organically and the medical marijuana industry. With Jayson's knowledge of the industry already at hand, we were able to really focus on the process and products in the marketplace that support these causes. Digging deeper, we realized that most of the products within the indoor lighting segment were either inexpensive and very poorly made, or were a lot more expensive and still very poorly made. We were both disappointed to see that everything was price-driven based off of consumer brand perception. There was no focus on the quality to the end consumer as the materials used to make most of these products were of very low standards. We also noticed that the online market really had the competitive advantage over retail brick-and-mortar due to their low overhead, and this was hurting the industry and American businesses.

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We both knew that we had to be a part of improving this and making a change. We had decided to place our focus on supporting and pushing forward the growth of brick and mortar hydroponic retail stores in the lighting segment of the market.

HOW DOES METAVEGA'S PHILOSOPHY TRANSLATE TO OPPORTUNITIES?

Britni: MetaVega's philosophy is all about its customers and positive change, not just to maximize profits. Since we began business two-and-a-half years ago, we have always taken a grassroots approach to getting our name and products out there. From day one, we have traveled throughout the East Coast, meeting with brick-and-mortar retail store owners, introducing ourselves and our products. What we came to learn is that more than 95 per cent of these businesses are family-owned, just like ourselves. It was truly amazing to see small business growing in the US, and it made what we had started to do become that much more inspiring. We believe that many of our customers support our company's philosophy because it is built for them and designed to help them grow. We believe they saw the positive change we are trying to make in this industry with our products, and at the end of the day, we are just like them—a family-owned business doing our best to make a footprint in this changing industry.

WHAT DID YOU FIRST PRODUCE?

Jayson: We both noticed that many of the products in the indoor lighting segment of the market were subpar with respect to their quality and pricing appeared to be skewed significantly. We had decided to take the approach of improving one product at a time, starting from the top down, improving their weaknesses while making sure cost was competitive. This led us to introducing our now industry-leading rope ratchets, or light hangers. Our rope ratchets are the superior ratchets in the market today with metal gears on the inside, metal crimp endings, and a much higher thread count rope. We looked at other competitors in the market that offer rope ratchets and noticed that some have plastic gears on the inside, which is a much weaker material. Some do not have metal crimp endings, but rather tied into knots, and most have a very cheap rope that tends to fray. These factors can lead to disastrous events such as much more expensive equipment, like lights or fans, crashing down. A lot of the time, the small details are what get overlooked, but they can cause the biggest problems.

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Many people within the industry knew of these weaknesses and were happy to see a more reliable product at a way better price.

WHAT WERE SOME OF YOUR STRUGGLES AS YOU STARTED METAVEGA?

Britni: We faced quite a few struggles when starting our business. We had some potential customers that held sour tastes in their mouth due to past negative experiences with their suppliers, so they were hesitant to trust in us. We had others that were hesitant to shop elsewhere due to their loyalty to their current suppliers. We also had to face the potential customers that were not eager to shop with us because we were just starting out as a small business and they wanted to only deal with larger suppliers. However, when something leaves a sour taste in your mouth due to a poor experience, you adapt and learn from that experience in order to survive. When you don't embrace change or look at alternatives, you fail to grow and remain competitive to survive. If you forget that at one point in time we all had to start somewhere, and you forget to remain humble, it can be difficult to survive long-term. Most of our struggles were overcome as stores owners adopted these ideologies because this market is very cutthroat and everyone is looking for an advantage. Even though MetaVega is not the biggest kid on the block, what we bring to the table is that much more superior and competitive that it's worth paying attention to. We will continue to grow and work hard for our customers because without them we are nothing.

HAS METAVEGA MOVED OR EXPANDED SINCE THE BEGINNING?

Jayson: Since inception in 2014, we have had to expand our warehouse facility by a few thousand square feet due to increasing our product offerings.

WHAT IS YOUR CURRENT PRODUCT LINE?

Jayson: We currently offer products within the indoor lighting accessories segment of the market with plans to expand into lighting equipment in 2018. Our current product line is the standard 1/8-inch rope ratchets, or light hangers, as well as the heavy-duty 1/4-inch rope ratchets. All of our ratchets are made with the highest quality materials and are backed with a lifetime warranty. We also offer the single and dual analog timers, and we

introduced our single and dual digital timers in December 2017. All of our analog and digital timers are made for digital ballast usage, unlike any of our competitors. Our timers are upgraded and made to handle the digital ballast without frying out the timer due to the frequency discharge.

WHERE DO YOU DISTRIBUTE?

Jayson: We currently distribute on the East Coast and Midwest but have plans to expand in the near future further west.

WHAT ARE METAVEGA'S STRENGTHS?

Britni: MetaVega prides itself on having the ability to be forward-thinking by always looking for ways to produce products that are more efficient and more reliable than what's already out there in the market. MetaVega does an amazing job building and cultivating the interpersonal relationships that we have with our customers. Whether it's a phone call to say hello or to discuss business, we always want them to know they are a top priority to us. MetaVega has also worked diligently to build strong supply chains in order to deliver rock-bottom prices without sacrificing the quality or integrity of the products.

WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR PROUDEST MOMENTS?

Jayson: Some of our proudest moments may not necessarily be the biggest moments to others but to us, they were huge. We can remember making our first sale to a brick-and-mortar hydroponic retail store. Pitching who we were and what we had to offer was one of the biggest rushes of our lives as well as the scariest. To have a store owner purchase our product and place it on their shelf for the first time for sale was a moment we will never forget. Our first sale showed us that we had a place in this market and gave us the encouragement we needed to continue on this path.

WHAT SIGNIFICANT THINGS HAVE YOU LEARNED SO FAR ABOUT THE INDUSTRY?

Britni: One of the major things we have learned so far is that nothing is given but has to be earned. This industry is tough and can be very cutthroat, meaning here today and gone tomorrow. You have to truly believe in yourself and what you are doing, and give it all you have in order to be successful. For us to enter this industry with just a few products while going up against supplier giants, and

make the footprint we have, shows that through hard work and determination anything is possible. This industry wants change, but it has to be positive change and work for the greater good of pushing things forward, not holding it back.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED ABOUT STARTING AND GROWING A COMPANY?

Britni: We have learned that starting a company is difficult and has many risks, and that you have to be all in from day one for it to succeed. Staying true to your morals and values and respecting others through integrity and honesty are key factors in growing a company. You would be surprised to know how often this is forgotten. We want to see things within this industry flourish even more than it already has. We want products and businesses to be more efficient and sustainable. It's all about supporting the causes of this industry and ensuring that you do your part to have it move forward. We believe this is why we have been able to see our company grow leaps and bounds.

WHAT WORDS OF WISDOM CAN YOU SHARE ABOUT THE BUSINESS, THE INDUSTRY, OR THE FUTURE OF THE INDUSTRY?

Jayson: For this industry to continue to grow, we cannot lose sight of the ultimate goal and that's helping people. Whether your focus is on food sustainability, organic GMO-free foods, or medical marijuana, it all points back to helping people and communities. If we can all continue to keep this our main priority instead of maximizing profits, our end goal can be achieved.

CAN YOU SHARE YOUR FAVORITE STORY FROM A DAY ON THE JOB?

Britni: We had planned our first sales trip to Michigan and had heard about all the changes legally made for medical marijuana purposes but had no idea what we were about to see. To our surprise, there were hydroponic shops and dispensaries at every corner on every block. We had never seen anything like it, especially being located in New York. This was our first taste of how the industry was moving forward. It was so insane for us to see these shops and dispensaries, as if you would see a CVS or Rite Aid at every other intersection. This was one of our favorite days on the job because it showed how marijuana was becoming less taboo and more integrated into society. It was something we will never forget. ■