

PROFILES



# This Meal Subscription Service Focuses on Sustainability

by Sheri Radford / Apr 13, 2022

Photo (above): Nick Spina, founder and CEO of Ethey

A common complaint about meal-delivery services is the amount of waste. Canadian company Ethey is tackling the problem directly

As long as he can remember, Nick Spina has been entrepreneurial. “When I was a kid, I loved shovelling my neighbours’ driveways,” he says. Even at that young age, he was already a savvy businessperson. He didn’t charge a specific price for his snow-shovelling services, instead saying, “Just give me whatever you think is fair. And some people would give me a toonie, and other people would give me 20 bucks.”



Spina worked as a manager for a large hospitality group for several years, but his strong entrepreneurial streak soon led him to venture out on his own. At just 23 years old, he opened a 2,500-person venue, the Gatsby Sound House & Bar in Ontario, and was able to experience first-hand “the positives and the pains of running your own business.”

The idea for **Ethey** grew out of his busy lifestyle. Spina says, “I was running another venture, and in between my meetings and the life of a crazy entrepreneur, I just had really no time or, quite frankly, desire to cook all my meals for myself.” He asked a friend who was an executive chef at a nearby restaurant, “What do you think of making my meals for me?”

That was the light bulb moment for Spina, when he realized that other busy people might be interested in chef-prepared meals, too. “We started off with 60 meals the first week with just me and him, and then the next week we doubled the meals and added another employee, and kept on snowballing like that.” That was in 2016, and since then Ethey has expanded several times, moving facilities to keep up with the growth.



Each meal is carefully planned to be both healthy and delicious. “Our internal meal development team is led by a nutritionist and dietitian,” Spina says. “The key is really balance. It’s moderation.” The ready-to-eat meals include options for an array of dietary preferences, such as vegetarian, vegan, keto and gluten-free.



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And the whole operation is designed to be eco-friendly, avoiding the excessive plastic packaging and food waste common to most meal-delivery services.

Spina laments that sustainable packaging is still expensive to produce and not yet widely available. “So we went out and we developed our own,” he says. “All of our containers are made out of sugar cane pulp, and that is something that we developed internally. The sugar cane pulp can do everything that plastic can do. It can be heated in the oven or the microwave. It can hold liquid. It can be sealed. And it’s fully compostable.” He adds, “All of our packaging is fully compostable, consumable or reusable.” And soon, Ethey’s ice packs will be made out of juice. Spina explains, “You’re actually going to be able to drink it when you’re done with it.”

About a year ago, Ethey set up a 30,000-square-foot worm farm in the facility’s basement. The industrious worms break down food scraps, producing natural fertilizer that gets sent to local farms. This clever setup makes Ethey completely zero-waste. Spina says, “Ethey’s main focus is being not just good for your mind and your body, but the planet as well.”



Ethey’s chef-prepared meals are currently available for delivery from coast to coast in Canada. The company is launching soon in New York, with plans to expand their sustainable meal-delivery model across the United States after that.

“We’re not just trying to feed people anymore, right? We’re trying to make an impact. And I think that adds a lot of purpose to our business,” Spina says. “It’s something I feel great about. It’s something our team feels great about. I think hopefully we can inspire other businesses to do the same.”



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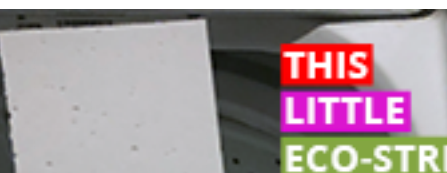
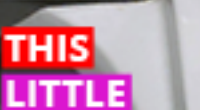
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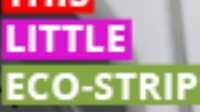
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