

Face to face

Ben Bramich, 35, is the founder of Reason2.be, delivering boxes of organic produce. He believes the key to his success is good service

Interview by Jennifer Landsbert-Noon



Portrait by Cassandre Sturbois

I started Reason2.be in 2008, doing most of the work myself, with one employee helping out. Now I have three guys working here. We make 200 deliveries a week and have 300 households on our list. Demand has really exploded recently, all by word of mouth.

I first came to Brussels in 2001 as an engineer for Toyota, then I transferred to the head office in Nagoya for three years. While we were living there, my wife, Valerie, and I had home deliveries and were impressed by the fantastic service offered in Japan. That was when I first started thinking about running a delivery service in Belgium.

When my job moved back to Brussels, I started a part-time MBA at Solvay Business School and developed my idea as a project for the entrepreneurship module of the course. I spent a year refining it, doing market research and getting feedback from the professors. Then, once I'd finished my MBA, I quit my job and put the idea into practice.

I had no background in organic food, except as a consumer. Getting in touch with all the distributors and seeing it from a business point of view was a steep learning curve. For a start, I had to learn a whole new set of French vocabulary. Now I know the French name for any vegetable that anyone can think of – and even a

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few that most Belgians have forgotten because some vegetables, such as parsnips, have gone out of fashion here!

Most of my customers are expats. They've often had organic box deliveries in their home

countries and want to find something similar here. We offer options on our website, where you can choose how often you want your delivery, the size of box, and whether it contains fruit, veg or meat.

One of the big differences between my service and a supermarket, is that I always try to source the food locally. Seventy percent of my produce comes from Belgium or the Netherlands, and I even offer a Benelux box made up entirely of produce from those countries. The people signing up to our scheme are definitely interested in buying locally grown food.

We use vans for deliveries, so I donate to a carbon offsetting scheme, and I'm always thinking about how we can minimise our carbon footprint. One way is by delivering to offices, so that employees can take their groceries home with them without making a separate journey to the shops. And when our vans are delivering to individual homes, we use software to calculate the most efficient route. Quite often, one tank of fuel will be enough for almost 200 deliveries.

My aim is always to keep the vans as full as possible. Instead of bringing them back to our Sterrebeek depot empty, we pick up the customers' recycling and take it to the commune recycling areas, or to charity schemes. We collect letters for posting and take dry cleaning to an eco laundry, then bring it back the following week with the groceries. We also have a library of books and toys for lending, which you can order online with your groceries.

We've recently started working with Jack O'Shea's, delivering their organic meat, and I would like to work with an organic bakery so that we could supply bread as well.

Starting Reason2.be has been a huge challenge, but the time goes so quickly that it doesn't really feel like work. One of the greatest perks of the job is the contact with the custom-

ers. It's great to be on first name terms with them and to feel appreciated. I'm determined that, however much we grow, we should always keep that slightly old-fashioned, friendly feel.

www.Reason2.be