

How Try the World Brings Global Cuisine to Your Front Door



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We spend a "Day in the Life" with Katerina Vorotova and David Foult, founders of a fast-growing, subscription food-delivery service.

APRIL 22, 2015 In 2009, then-23-year-old Katerina Vorotova, a devout foodie, [started a blog dedicated to all of the weird delicacies](#) she tried in New York. Born in Izhevsk, Russia, near the Ural Mountains, Vorotova's family moved to the Big Apple in 1998—and she fell in love with the endless global culinary choices the city offered. Her blog was a way to share her experiences tasting items such as brain quesadillas, a (literal) scorpion cocktail and a “Dracula Popsicle” made with pork blood. It also led to a business idea.

Today, Vorotova, now 29, and David Foult, a 26-year-old native of France, curate the world's best gourmet foodstuffs and deliver them to your door every other month with their subscription-box service, [Try the World](#).

Food is the most powerful way to learn about a country, but few people are able travel wherever in the world they want. So we bring it to you.

"Between David and I, we've been to fifty countries," says Vorotova.

"Finding the best authentic local cuisine is in our DNA."

The partners, who met at Columbia University in 2012—she was in business school, he was at the School of International and Public Affairs—and bonded over their mutual love of food and travel, came up with the idea for Try The World and quickly put it into action. They completed a startup bootcamp program with Incubate NYC at the Google offices in February 2013 and launched a test run the same month with their Valentine's Day Paris box.

The goal was to make \$1 in profit, just to prove the concept was viable. The boxes sold out in two days. After that, Vorotova and Foults took the summer to build out the website, work on design improvements, find a reliable fulfillment center and hire their first employees. In June 2014, they raised \$800,000 from angel investors, and now Try The World has 12 employees, ships 35,000 boxes every other month, and the co-founders are preparing for a Series A financing round. They closed out 2014 with \$400,000 in revenue and the co-CEOs expect to close out 2015 with \$10,000,000 in revenue, and see enormous growth potential especially among the young, urban, educated, passport-owning crowd.

"There's so much interest in world cultures and food is the most powerful way to learn about a country, but few people are able travel wherever in the world they want," Vorotova says. "So we bring it to you."

As part of our "Day in the Life" series, we recently followed Vorotova around as she and Foults continue to scour the globe and shrink it down into a small, deliverable box.



8:45 a.m. Try The World is based in a shared office space for tech companies close to Manhattan's Madison Square Park, a short walk from Vorotova's home in nearby Gramercy. ("A godsend this winter," she laughs.) Vorotova and Foults meet every morning around 9 a.m., a half hour before the staff arrives, to map out the priorities for the week and to establish daily goals. The co-CEOs handle some aspects of the company together, like hiring, but in terms of overall focus, Vorotova handles marketing and Foults deals with product.



10 a.m. The boxes are kitted at a fulfillment center in Tennessee, but Foult and Vorotova are constantly looking for ways to improve the consumer experience. One big change from the Paris box is the price point. Try The World aims to be an “affordable luxury,” and the original cost of \$45 has been reduced to \$39 for one box, down to \$33 a box for annual subscribers. Another change was the addition of an e-shop for [purchasing the goods](#) found in the boxes. [Ketty Maisonrouge](#), who teaches luxury strategy at Columbia and is an investor in Try The World, believes in the concept. “The desire for discovery has increased exponentially and dramatically,” Maisonrouge says. “I come back from Istanbul with kilos of pistachios from a particular stand in the Grand Bazaar, so bringing in the best items of a certain place really resonates with me.”



11:30 a.m. Splitting a workspace with multiple tech startups means (somewhat) impromptu couch and chair meetings, depending on when they're available. In the ebb and flow of the office, Foult took a bit of time to do some sales training with a relatively green employee, to ensure she could answer any and all questions thrown her way.



12 p.m. Running a fledgling company doesn't leave much time for jetsetting. Vorotova and Foul's days as world travelers are nowhere near as frequent as they build Try The World. During this particular week, the company sent an employee to a large international food-and-drink trade show in London, but the co-CEOs stayed behind in the office. Grabbing lunch to go is the norm, although being foodies, it's never greasy fast food.



12:30 p.m. Every Monday, a tightly-structured laptops-and-lunch meeting brings all the employees into a conference room for updates and to cover particular orders of business. Vorotova and Foults know what topics will be covered after speaking with the employee who will be the focal point beforehand, but they generally allow the staff room to breathe once the meeting gets started. They keep the trains running, but most of the information and discussion comes from the employees themselves so they feel empowered. On this day, everyone sees the products from Buenos Aires and the near-completed culture guide, one of which will be included in every upcoming box. Vorotova also reads the bio of the Argentinian curator working with Try The World, chef Adolfo Suaya. (The best days are, of course, when they sample dozens of items to pare down the list.) Near the end of the meeting, an ongoing issue since day one will be battled around yet again: Is it better to label future boxes by city or country? Tokyo or Japan?



2:30 p.m. Vorotova and Foults conduct an interview for a community manager together. They have an international staff with varied home countries and ethnic backgrounds. They try to hire young people with at least some work experience, with a goal of not only finding the best candidate, but also bringing in a talented person who will attract other talented people down the line because word-of-mouth is still the best recruiting method. "Bringing in the right people was difficult in the early stages because Try The World wasn't a known company, but candidates still didn't meet our standards," Foults says.



4:45 p.m. The next round of fundraising is coming soon, so Vorotova and Foults take a couple of hours together to brainstorm the pitch they're putting together. They're working on describing the business model, spitballing words that best define the connectivity between foreign brands and American consumers. There's plenty of back-and-forth, a lot of erasing the whiteboard and starting over, and discussions over the right language, but there's not much in the way of tension or credit-hogging. "From very early on, David and I have had a good complementary working relationship," Vorotova says.



7 p.m. Different evenings mean different things at Try The World. There's an in-house yoga instructor on Tuesdays, and beers or off-site trips to the bowling alley or batting cages on Fridays. In general, however, everyone is gone from the office for the night by 7 p.m., and the co-CEOs let their staff be on the weekend. Vorotova believes not overworking the staff is essential for long-term success. On this night, Vorotova and Foults were invited to sip champagne at the 10th anniversary of the Luxury Education Foundation, a collaboration between Parsons The New School for Design and Columbia Business School, by its president, Maisonrouge. It's a room filled with influencers from luxury industries, just the global crowd who might be interested in trying Try The World.

Photos: Jehangir Irani

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