

Shaking up soda with Pura Beverage Company's Greig Jansen

 By [Lauren Hartzenberg](#)

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The soft drink category has long been dominated by large corporates, but nimble startups like SA's Pura Beverage Company are taking them on by launching innovative products designed to cater to changing consumer needs.



With its focus on "evolved refreshment", Pura Beverage Company aims to challenge the traditional perceptions held about carbonated beverages - that of stained teeth, sugar highs and weight gain. The startup's founder and CEO Greig Jansen noticed that people wanted to be healthier and to consume more natural products, but they still wanted the taste and refreshment that traditional sodas offered.

In response to this, Pura Soda was born and launched to market in 2017 as a better-for-you alternative to mainstream soda brands. The beverage is much lower in sugar (below the sugar tax threshold), has no colourants, and only uses natural flavours.

Despite being a relative newcomer, Pura Soda is already being stocked nationwide by major retailers, and is available online from Yuppiefresh and Buyfresh. It's also found export success in markets outside of SA like Namibia and the Middle East, and will soon launch in the USA.

In the spirit of [Entrepreneur Month](#), Jansen reflects on his entrepreneurial journey and the growth of the Cape Town-based Pura Beverage Company.

📌 Tell us a bit about your career prior to Pura Soda, and what inspired you to launch your own soft drink business.

I have always been in the FMCG space and enjoy the fast pace that the sector demands.

I cut my teeth in beverages when I headed up the East Africa Bottling Share Company, a Coca-Cola bottler based in East Africa.

On leaving Coca-Cola in East Africa, I wanted to stay a part of the industry, as I really enjoyed it, but I also wanted to add my own spin on things based on the consumer insights I had garnered.



Greig Jansen

What are the big differences between the production of Pura Soda versus the mainstream soft drink brands we've grown accustomed to?

Pura Soda has been developed and based 100% on consumer insights and market research, highlighting the need for a 'better for you' soft drink that still delivers on taste and refreshment, sold at an everyday price point.

Pura Soda is made with pure natural cane sugar, but a much smaller amount than other soft drinks, contains no artificial sweeteners and has all-natural flavours with no colourants or dyes. Most mainstream drinks are made with artificial colourants or dyes, artificial flavours and artificial sweeteners.

Changing consumers' pre-conceived associations with 'soda' must be a difficult task. What is Pura Soda's strategy for doing this?

We are very fortunate as we are tapping into global trends, where consumers are looking for taste and refreshment in what they drink but would like it to be better for you than the current offering. This is a massive trend in the USA

which is leading the charge.

Sugar taxes, which are global, have further highlighted the need for healthier alternatives, as well as the drive towards natural drinks and foods. Hence, our biggest task is amplifying Pura Soda as an alternative to what consumers are looking for in their drinking repertoire. The easiest way to conversion is to get people to taste the product. Once they taste it, most are hooked!

What would you say are the pros and cons of operating in a category that's for a long time been dominated by multinational FMCG giants. Do you think being a startup gives you an edge?

The cons are that you are small, and as such, you have to fight for every inch of ground that you take. Economies of scale are against you and you certainly are on the back foot or back of the line when it comes to dealing with customers or distributors. Budgets are smaller and you have to be very strategic and ensure ROI on every cent you spend.

The pros, however, if you have done your homework, can outweigh the cons.

“ Smaller entrepreneurial companies are more agile and are able to be more in-tune with changing consumer needs than the corporates. ”

One is also able to be more dynamic as layers of red tape do not exist. Decisions come faster. Successes are amplified and repeated and mistakes are evaluated and corrected quicker.

In a small business, you tend to wear multiple hats and your job descriptions tend to be whatever needs to be done. One has a much better grasp on the business and opportunities as they come your way. As budgets are limited, spend is scrutinised to ensure traction. Running a start-up correctly allows one to entrench the right protocols and philosophies in a business to allow it to grow to success.

How has the Pura Soda business been funded?

Pura Soda was initially self-funded. We were helped along the way by a small number of angel investors (all captains of industry in their own right) who believed in the journey, and we are now backed via venture capital.





■ **Some of the biggest struggles and major highlights on your startup journey so far?**

One of the biggest struggles is to constantly believe in yourself, your journey and your product and to sell your vision to retailers, funders, and distributors alike. There are no tailwinds in a startup, so every day you create your own motivation and your own momentum. We tend to celebrate our wins, both big and small, as they all count as a step forward.

Getting into retailers with a national footprint in South Africa has been a big highlight for us. Our first exports into the Middle East and shortly into the USA are big milestones for the company. We will be sold through a global QSR chain from December.

We will also be launching our 200ml offering in November based on the feedback and collaborations we have had with a number of major liquor brands.

■ **There's been quite a bit of innovation in beverages over the last few years. What do think are the factors driving the growth of craft beverages particularly?**

There has been very little innovation in the commercial soft drink space for a number of years, with all the major brands having provided a limited offering to the consumer.

“ However, with easy access to the internet consumers are becoming more aware and discerning around what they drink and eat, as well as what goes into these products. ”

This information revolution has led to people (predominantly startups as they are more agile) being able to respond with products that people are asking and looking for.

■ **How do you plan to grow your business, and what is your ultimate vision for Pura Soda?**

We plan to grow Pura in two ways, both horizontal expansion throughout South Africa, where we want to become a household name – available in most stores across the country, known as the better for your option that still delivers on taste and refreshment.

We obviously also want to grow our export markets. And although we are exporting to a few countries, our vision is to have strong growth in the USA, which would be our core target market out of SA, and to tap into the ever-growing category we call 'evolved refreshment'.

■ **What is the most valuable lesson you've learnt on your startup journey?**

Always believe in the art of possibility. If you think you can – you are right.

Visit [Pura Beverage Company online](#) for more information, and connect with the Pura Soda brand on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

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