

How To Take Over the World, One Burrata At A Time
By The Lighthouse Founder, Hashem Montasser
August 11, 2020

Marc Andreessen's now infamous essay [Why Software Is Eating the World](#) sounds more prescient than ever. He argued almost a decade ago that it's time for companies in non-tech industries to start thinking and acting like software companies. Andreessen's essay marked the advent of the first wave of digitization on a mass scale at a time where consumers and investors alike were still doubting the many benefits they will reap. There is no question that we are currently witnessing the second wave of said revolution with every industry on the planet accelerating its online presence. Make no mistake, F&B and adjacent industries (hospitality, events, etc) are no exception. The winners of the post-COVID era will be brands that find the right balance between their online and offline presence, firing up multiple production engines at the same time. So whether you operate physically or virtually, you will need to create an authentic experience that your customers gravitate towards.

Over the past three and a half years, we have worked fastidiously with a single objective in mind: to establish [The Lighthouse](#) as a lifestyle brand synonymous with quality. We also initiated conversations centered around things we care about, whether it's food, arts and culture or entrepreneurship at large. Some of those dialogues happened around the lunch table in d3, and during the many events we supported and catered for such as [Dubai Design Week](#), [Sole DXB](#) and others that took place online via [The Lighthouse Conversations](#) podcast.

At the inception of The Lighthouse's journey, a friend of mine said that it's perfectly normal to start at point A and wind up at point C. Startup businesses evolve and agile founders adapt and, oftentimes, pivot along the way. His prediction was spot-on -- although none of us expected a viciously aggressive virus to dominate our daily rituals (wash hands, wear mask, elbow hug). So how do we adapt to this new reality and what have we learned from our multi-year journey that we can draw inspiration from during this difficult period?

Firstly, we embraced technology. Soon after launching The Lighthouse, we reached out to some of our Dubai Design District (d3) community partners that have a long track record in tech entrepreneurship (such as [Wamda](#)) for advice. We realized that minimizing friction for our customers is the name of the game, whether by automating our supply chain and inventory management systems, or enabling our customers to order directly via [Instagram](#). And while this made intuitive sense to us pre COVID-19, it has now become a necessity. And today you can order food, listen to our playlists and buy our gifts with just one social media click.

The same thinking that led us to launch multiple physical pop-ups throughout the year at [Art Dubai](#) and [Abu Dhabi Art](#) has led us to explore digital-only F&B brands as potential extensions to our main brand. When sh**t hit the fan, we felt ready because we had been steadily implementing these steps for almost two years.

Secondly, we want back to first principles. The Lighthouse had a strong mission statement from the onset centered around the belief that curating our customers' experiences enables us to become a reference point in regional design culture, and a hub for the nascent creative communities popping up around us. I dug out our original concept presentation from 2017 which very clearly outlined those values and still serves as a mental checklist for us. We understood fairly quickly that the common denominator in curating an experience, whether it's eating, gifting or listening to a podcast, is for that experience to stand out in terms of its quality, differentiation and relevance to our customers.

Thirdly, we knew we wanted to diversify our business lines and touch as many customers as possible who connect with our brand. So while our bread and butter is F&B, we featured a terrifically funky concept store with many hard-to-find gifting items ("books, cool accessories and Aesop" is a good way to describe it); we launched [Loulou](#), a sister brand focused on catering and bar management; and started [a podcast](#) that keeps the conversation flowing online. This allowed us to have multiple touch points with our core customers. Many of our F&B customers are the same ones that shop with us, ask for catering requests and listen to our [playlists](#). I recently came across the story of the Founders of [La Colombe](#) on the highly popular podcast series "[How I Built This With Guy Raz](#)" which narrates their fascinating story as entrepreneurs, but also touches on the importance of building a diversified brand with multiple revenue lines.

Finally, we strongly believe that our target audience will gravitate towards brands they trust the most in delivering a differentiated experience. In that regard, we consider the post-COVID world both a challenge and an opportunity. Our job is to translate our new reality into an experience that not only jives with the experiential nature of our brand, but one that our customers can wholeheartedly embrace. Strong brands evolve over time (La Colombe started with one small roastery in Philly, of all places) and embrace experimentation as a way to test new channels while remaining true to their core values. Many of the brands we feature such as [Martha Sturdy](#), [Aesop](#), [Bil Arabi](#) and others embody this. They are functional yet timeless in a [Dieter Rams](#) kinda way.

When it comes to The Lighthouse, and as we continue to expand our footprint, we can promise you this: delivering an experience that may look minimalist in appearance, yet is always fresh and innovative in its core. And we'll do it serving you one burrata at a time.