

Première partie de l'épreuve**CEO Secrets: The graduates launching start-ups in lockdown**

Student friends Joshua Barley, Sonny Drinkwater and Kieran Fitzgerald, all aged 22, realised the job market would be tough for new graduates, as the huge impact of coronavirus became clear in March and April. Joshua and Sonny are old school friends. Joshua met Kieran at the University of Birmingham, introducing him to Sonny, who
5 studied at Bristol.

The three final-year students saw work placements and graduate scheme opportunities disappear in the spring. Job interview processes would draw to an early close, says Sonny.

So they decided to take matters into their own hands and started a company, pooling
10 their abilities and expertise.

Both Joshua and Sonny had studied nutrition, while Kieran had been working on the benefits of gift exchange in the workplace as part of his end-of-year project. They combined these interests to focus on what was clearly becoming an important new fact of life: working from home.

15 The trio created the company Snackcess, to provide gift boxes of healthy snacks for businesses to post to employees working at home. The box contains high-end, healthy, branded snacks, the kind that you might find in organic food stores. The team negotiate lower prices by buying directly from the manufacturers.

When they started in July they sold five boxes. That increased tenfold in August and
20 in September they sold 800 boxes, with a turnover of more than £9,000. Originally they did the packing themselves in Sonny's parents' garage in Kent.

They have now hired their first employee, a "chief packer". Large corporate clients include HSBC, Iress and Lululemon.

The success has resulted in a dilemma for the team. It was never meant to be a
25 permanent venture, rather they thought of it as a stop-gap, until the economy picked up again and they could find other jobs, explains Sonny.

"That's all changed now," he says. "We've had such a big growth, we're going to try and see this through." Joshua adds: "We see this as a long-term opportunity for us now."

30 Kieran, meanwhile, has found a graduate placement with HSBC – but reluctant to completely leave the company he helped to found, he is remaining involved in a lesser capacity. For all three, it's been a massive learning curve.

The coronavirus has thrown many graduates' plans for the future up in the air. By starting their own businesses, some feel they are taking back control.

Adapted from www.bbc.com, Dougal Shaw, 6 October 2020