

# A bitters sweet success story

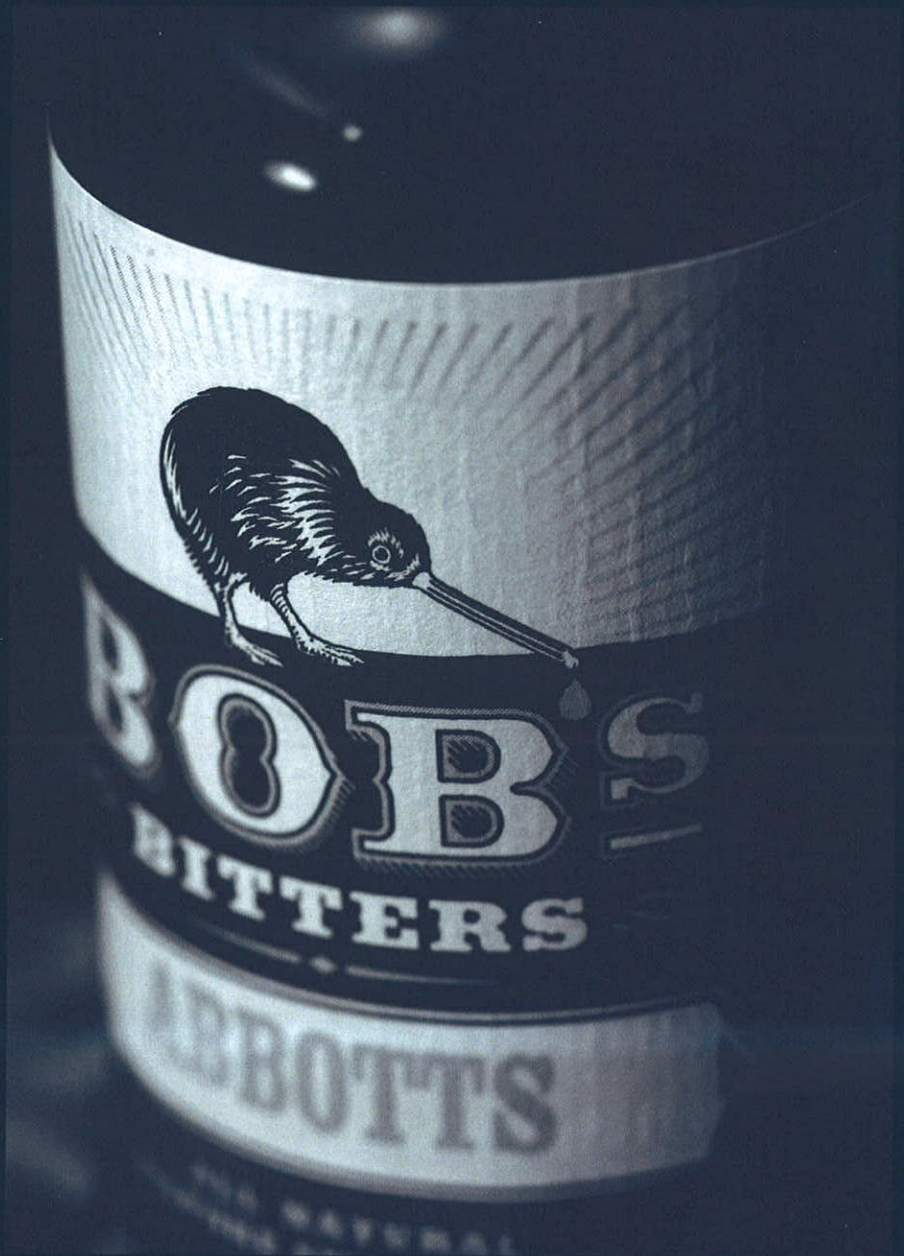
Category  
4 Packaging

Sub Category  
4.1 Branded – Food & Drink

Client  
Bob's Bitters

Design Consultancy  
Elmwood

Date  
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elmwood

# Executive summary



Before – just an ingredient.



Now – a global brand!

You're a one-man operation, devoting all your spare time to your passion – creating and mixing single-flavour bitters for London's top cocktail bars. A necessary full time job keeps you busy for most of the day, so fulfilling an order book of 50 carefully hand crafted bottles a month is a big challenge. But you do this because this is your dream and you know that one day you'll make a successful business of this.

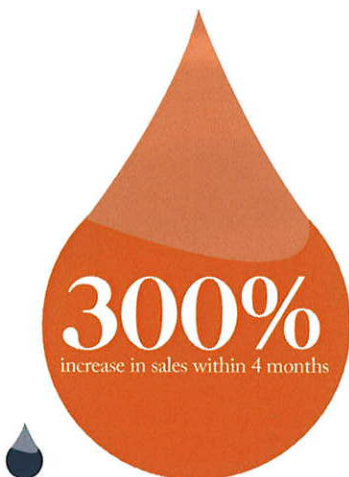
You're well known in the world of London Mixologists (that's cocktail creators to you and me) but how do you reach a wider audience to increase sales and tip the balance from passion to profession? You've walked your business all over the streets of London but how to stretch further afield and reach a wider audience? Give you're tired feet a break - A great USP and a compelling brand story will take you to the next level.

Since launch the newly branded 'Bob's Bitters' has gone from strength to strength:



5-Star rating in Class Magazine, the drinks industry bible

- His product is now a brand, rather than just an ingredient, and his **fame is growing** – Bob's are the only bitters to get **5-star rating** in Class magazine, the drinks industry bible
- Sales went from £750 a month to £3,000 within 4 months of launching – **an increase of 300%**
- Bob is now selling to the rest of the UK and **globally online**, and is in talks with distributors in other key markets
- His reputation has grown. Testimonials are appearing on cocktail forums worldwide and his bitters are now specifically named as ingredients in online cocktail recipes
- Bob's life has been fundamentally transformed – **his passion is now his career**



## Project overview

### Our task:

# Turn a part-time passion into a full-time business



### Outline of brief

Bob asked us to create a brand identity and language for his bespoke, flavour-specific bitters that would help him turn his part-time passion into a full-time business. As a budding one-man operation, Bob needed everything done on a shoestring budget. At a sales rate of 300 bottles a month he felt the brand could be doing much better.

Key objectives:

- **Build brand awareness**
- **Increase sales**
- **Increase his London-centric customer base by attracting new customers in the UK and abroad**
- **Keep packaging costs low**

### Description

New Zealand-born Bob is a chef with a passionate sideline in cocktail mixology, which began when Guiliano Morandin asked him to create a new bitters for the relaunch of the Bar at The Dorchester Hotel. Bob, intrigued by the tiny bottles of elixir-like flavours that elevated a drink from the special to the sublime, took an innovative approach. Rather than ape the traditional mixed flavour bitters like Peychaud's and Angostura, he created a single flavour bitters based on his own culinary perspective. The traditional bitters was reborn.

Pretty soon, other flavours followed and Bob built up a range of more than 10 flavours based on flowers, fruit and spices such as lavender, grapefruit and liquorice.

The art of creating cocktails and bitters demands a high level of craftsmanship and delicacy of skill with some fairly volatile ingredients. Having the best ingredients can be the difference between an exquisite sensual experience and the bitter grimace of a disappointed drinker. That's why Bob searches out the best quality, always natural, ingredients for his bitters. For instance his orange and mandarin bitters are made from 20-year old sun dried mandarin skins because he knows that the older they are, the better the flavour.

Bob's part time passion had begun to blossom but he needed some help to turn it into the full-time business he dreamed it could be. With such a great product, sales had the potential to be much higher than 300 lovingly hand-mixed bottles a month. This is where we stepped in. Bob needed a brand identity and a language with which to reach a wider audience and tell customers the Bob's Bitters story.

# Project overview cont.

## Overview of market

A bitters is a tincture or elixir of flavours, usually made by infusing high-strength alcohol over time with barks, fruits and warm spices before filtering it. As you would expect – it's extremely bitter and whilst it's original function was as a Victorian medicinal stomach soother for seasick sailors, it soon gained in popularity as a cocktail enhancer. Declining almost to vanishing point in the latter half of the last century, bitters are now making a comeback, thanks to the resurgence of the cocktail.

The new bitters market, although young, is a serious and traditional place and any brand wanting to exist here has to have both a compelling story and the highest quality product. Your success relies on the word of mouth goodwill of mixologists at the most exclusive bars - these are craftsmen who won't accept inferior ingredients to work with.

Angostura are the most famous brand and have dominated the market for many years. After a dispute with their bottle producers though, the 'great Angostura drought of 2010' offered an opportunity for the smaller players in the bitter market to come to the fore. Global headlines brought publicity to the situation and niche brands like US-based Fee Brothers, The Bitter Truth from Germany and of course the UK's Bob's Bitters got their chance to impress the cocktail community. Bob saw an opportunity in the market and exploited it by rebranding, and being one of the only UK-based brand also gave Bob prime mover advantage to capitalise on this whilst the mixologist world was open to experimenting with suitable alternatives to Angostura.

## Project launch date

August 2010

## Size of Design Budget



Bob v. the competition

## Project overview cont.



### Outline of design solution

Our objective was to create a unique on and off-pack brand identity that gave Bob's Bitters credibility with mixologists and visual impact at the bar. We wanted to stir interest by telling more of a brand story to customers, both existing (top London mixologists) and new (in the UK and abroad).

Bob, when you meet him in the flesh, exudes an infectious enthusiasm for his bitters. We were keen to explore the twin themes of Bob's New Zealand heritage and his craft in our work to create a unique brand story that could live on the pack and beyond. We also had to be conscious of the fact that production costs needed to be kept to a minimum.

Combining the Kiwi, emblem of Bob's home country, with highly crafted, fabulously evocative type, we created a strong, brand identity that could be used on and off pack. We added a quirky twist, the Kiwi's bill transforming neatly into a pipette dropper, the drop of precious elixir in turn becoming Bob's comma.

We designed a single label that could be used for any variant with a little bit of effort from Bob to add the flavour name in the blank space provided. Seeing as he's making so many these days, we created rubber stamps for him to use, rather than handwriting each one. There was also space for Bob to add the batch number and bottling date. These personal touches added to the authentic, bespoke feel of the packs as well as keeping the solution cost effective and wastage down to a minimum.

A new website is Bob's next endeavor so we've also created an online look and feel for him, which is already intriguing potential customers from across the world.

The new Bob's Bitters brand identity is both professional and engaging, bringing personality and high quality craftsmanship to a very traditional and serious sector.

# Summary of results

*The Dorchester*

  
**CONNAUGHT**



Since he launched in August 2010, Bob's business goes from strength to strength, with the bitters being the only ones to achieve **five stars** in *Class* magazine, widely regarded as the drinks bible.

Various mixologists have scored a number of drinks awards using his bitters in cocktail competitions and Bob's is stocked by **The Dorchester**, **The Connaught** and **The Portobello Star**, to namedrop a few.

His popularity with top mixologists stems from the fact that his product sits at the heart of cocktail creation and the single flavours enable mixologists to be much more flexible with their inventions than in using conventional bitters.

Our key objectives were:

## **Build brand awareness**

**Bob & his bitters regularly feature on bar and mixology websites in recipes and reviews**



'I can safely say that after trying Bob's Bitters, both by themselves and in various cocktails, I give my thumbs up! Bob can count me into his line of regular customers.'

*AMountainofCrushedIce.com*

'What Bob does so well is that each bottle of bitters is a specific flavour which is usually directed towards a specific drink.'

*Tristan Stephenson, Purl.*

On a personal note, the design is helping to fundamentally change Bob's life, transforming his passion into a career.

# Summary of results

# 300%

increase in sales within  
4 months

# 2,500 bottles sold in December alone.

The new packaging has allowed much greater brand awareness and recognition both behind the bar and online

## **Increase sales**

Bob's sales are up from 50 bottles (£750) per month to 200 (£3,000) per month – a rise in sales of 300%.

And in the month leading up to Christmas, Bob managed to further increase his sales to a staggering 2,500 bottles.

## **Increase customer base**

The redesign has led to listings with speciality drinks in the UK which has enabled him to reach outside London. He has now expanded Bob's bitters into the US, selling online to bars and private households. The Meadow in Portland and New York - a place where the beautiful, the delicious, and the unexpected are brought together - is now a regular customer. And finally, Bob is currently deep in talks with distributors in Australia, Italy, Spain and the Middle East. All have approached Bob due to the new packaging and outstanding client testimonials.

## **Keep packaging costs low**

The new packaging is one single label that can be bespoke stamped to specify the flavour and batch number, thus reducing wastage as well as cost.

# 200

bottles sold a month  
up from 50 within four  
months of launching the  
rebrand

## Summary of results cont.



**Bob's  
passion  
is now  
his career**

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'My new packaging is a real talking point with potential customers. It's been great to work with Elmwood, and the end results have made such a difference to me and my bitters. The packaging has given me the confidence, and ability, to take the business to the next level.'

Bob, founder of Bob's Bitters

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# Other influencing factors

## **Any other influencing factors**

No. Bob carried out no advertising, direct mail or PR campaigns. The redesign and brand story was the only investment Bob made in his brand, and so Bob attributes the bitters' success to this.

## **Research Resources**

Sales figures provided by Bob himself. Other resources include [amountainofcrushedice.com](http://amountainofcrushedice.com) and [metro.co.uk](http://metro.co.uk)

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