

# Tony's Chocolonely

## Crazy about chocolate – serious about people



A lot of Dutch citizens will be familiar with Tony's Chocolonely because of the quality of its chocolate and the innovative packaging and marketing which makes the product stand out on the shelves of the retailers. But not a lot of people know that Tony's Chocolonely owes its existence to the Dutch television program 'De Keuringsdienst van Waarde', which focuses on finding out the truth behind consumer products.

In an episode broadcast in 2005, presenter Teun van de Keuken investigated the chocolate industry. On the premise that large chocolate companies at the time claimed that child labour no longer existed in the industry, Teun decided to find out if this was true. During his investigation, he was shocked to discover that 'chocolate slaves' still existed. As it is illegal to buy a bike off a junky in Holland (because you know that the bike has probably been stolen) Teun believed that buying and eating chocolate from companies that have child labour (up to three percent in some cases) in their supply chains, was also illegal and chose to notify the authorities of his crime.

The case went to court, yet although the judge agreed with Teun in principle, he was not actually charged for committing a crime. This inspired Teun to start his own chocolate company and become recognised in the industry for fair-trade chocolate products that did not use child labour – this is when Tony's Chocolonely was born. The success of the TV episode meant that the immediate demand for the products was very high. As sales began to grow, it became increasingly important to introduce better management to the company. In 2010, Henk Jan Belten joined the business to help it reach its goals. But what exactly were these goals and how did Tony's Chocolonely manage to achieve them?

**Consultant Ruben Reus met Henk Jan Belten, CCO of Tony's Chocolonely, to discuss his view on marketing, people and last but not least, chocolate - the three pillars that have proved to be the key to the success of Tony's Chocolonely. Let us review how this interesting, innovative and creative fair-trade company came to be.**

According to Henk Jan, it was never the objective of Tony's Chocolonely to become a bigger chocolate producer than the industries leaders. "The main goal was to become big enough to be heard and to be taken seriously, so that other companies would embrace the concept of fair-trade chocolate. Getting the other chocolate producers to make fair-trade chocolate would be the best way to make a difference. The only way to achieve this goal was to lead by example and hope that other companies would follow. Success depends on people - from the people who work on the cacao farms, the people buying the products and the people working at Tony's Chocolonely."

### CRAZY ABOUT CHOCOLATE

"It finally boils down to the product", Henk Jan says. He emphasised that a great idea on its own isn't good enough – to make a difference you have to prove to other chocolate companies that fair-trade chocolate is sellable. In other words, Tony's Chocolonely would have to be a success to succeed. And to sell the product you would have to think about the consumer. At Tony's Chocolonely the consumer is reached through a marketing strategy based on innovation and creativity.

"The business really takes pride in its products, this is articulated very clearly in the vision: 'Crazy about chocolate'. We spend a lot of time on product development and organising regular brainstorming and tasting sessions to find the latest chocolate flavour. After all, people eat chocolate because they like it and this is why we put a lot of effort in getting the taste right, working closely with taste experts, to combine various interesting flavours."

### SERIOUS ABOUT PEOPLE

Tony's Chocolonely stands for fairer distribution and wants to ensure that there is no longer a need for child labour or 'chocolate slavery' within the chocolate industry. Henk Jan indicated the business does not stop at paying fairer margins to fair-trade brokers. One of the projects now underway is visiting the chocolate farmers in Africa, to better understand the work site conditions and enable farmers to produce child-and slave-free chocolate. By directly dealing with the cocoa farmers, fairer prices can be offered and chocolate slavery and child labour can be prevented.

"Serious about People" does not stop with the people in production - the employees of Tony's are also of primary importance. "In the first place people come here because they stand for the moral reasoning behind Tony's." Furthermore, employees are given the opportunity to volunteer during working hours. Henk Jan also considers it important that employees are able to achieve their personal goals. Thus, once per quarter a scholarship is awarded to an employee, for example "an Italian course for someone who always wanted to learn this language." There is, however, one condition for the scholarship - it must not have anything to do with work!

All in all what can be said about Tony's Chocolonely is that the inspirational, creative approach is already beginning to deliver results. One of those results is that more and more organisations have begun to switch to Fair-trade chocolate - during last Christmas almost all chocolate letters were available were fair-trade. This shows how a small player can really make a difference. One of Henk Jan's favourite quotes is: "If you think you are too small to make an impact, try going to bed with a mosquito in the room." At Tony's Chocolonely you can taste the passion for the product and the desire to make a difference. For me, that tastes like more.

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