

# Snacking at the micro!

No in-house catering. One of the main rules to being a micropub. But bar snacks of all types and tastes are readily available and, as *Alex Wright reports*, are now big business for the micropub sector

↓ Mark Taylor, Mr Filbert's Fine Foods



A micropub, as defined by the Micropub Association, is “a small freehouse which listens to its customers, mainly serves cask ales, promotes conversation, shuns all forms of electronic entertainment and dabbles in traditional pub snacks”.

That last bit about the snacks is particularly important and the reason why so many food companies have been looking to get into the burgeoning micropub catering market.

Bar snacks are big business: today, the UK's savoury snack market is worth £3.2 billion.

It started off with crisps, nuts and pork scratchings. But now the menu has expanded to include popcorn, chocolate bars, cured meats and vegetables, and even olives.

Leading the way is **Mr Filbert's Fine Foods**, a venture that does most of the above and more and was started in 2010 by three food enthusiasts in a small country pub in Dorset.

“Over numerous yards of ale, the idea to create a premium adult snack brand that was better for you and that tasted better than what was already out there was started,” said managing director Mark Taylor.

“With more than 40 years' food manufacturing experience between us and in excess of 40 taste awards for our recipes, we launched the manufacturing business and snack brand Mr Filbert's Really Interesting Snacks.”



↑ The Great British Charcuterie's business partners, Steve Pineau and Phil Bartley

↑ A typical Great British Charcuterie board

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Mark Taylor, Mr Filbert’s Fine Foods

**Joint ventures**

After starting by supplying delicatessens, farm shops and local independent pubs, demand soon took off. Moving on to local bars and pubs, the company initially supplied 2kg bags of nuts in free premium glassware containers, before branching into micropubs and craft breweries across the country.

Since then, it has collaborated on joint venture recipes with the likes of Adnams, and St Austell Brewery to produce beery peanuts using Ghost Ship Ale and Proper Job. The manufacturer has also worked closely with microbreweries to create special recipes.

Currently Mr Filbert’s supplies more than 1,000 outlets nationally, either directly or through wholesalers, guaranteeing next day delivery for orders above £120. Among the favourite products are its natural dry roasted nuts with celery and shallots and its salt crust peanuts, made with sea salt brine.

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told *Micropub Magazine*. “Customer loyalty is a big brand builder for us and a big part of the attraction of working with enthusiastic and committed bar owners who love the trade.”

As micropubs and other businesses have suffered a slump in trade due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the company has offered credit, free deliveries, point of sale and, even, free snacks to help support them. Moving forward, Taylor hopes that this will pay dividends as they start to get back on their feet and business returns.

**Fine meat and cheese**

Another fine food specialist that has enjoyed similar success is **The Great British Charcuterie** based in Brighton. The company was started by chef and director Phil Bartley six years ago after he saw a niche in the market to supply quality meat and cheese cuts to pubs.

“I run quite a few kitchens locally and wanted to serve quality British charcuterie and cheese at these places,” said Bartley. “I noticed there were limited options to get the produce, especially if you wanted to do it all in one order rather than dealing with multiple suppliers, so I set up the company and the business grew from there really.”

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“

Targeting hot consumer trends, we're aiming to be the go-to for cool products that will help retailers stand out. Micropubs are relatively new to us, but we see the potential for our craft and healthier snacks to work well for pub owners looking to differentiate”

Michael Ratheram, Epicurium



↑ Serious Pig, part of the range of snacks available at Epicurium

Supplying micropubs nationally, the company's bestsellers include beer sticks, biltong and mixed charcuterie packs, as well as hard cheese with a good shelf-life such as charcoal cheddar and Irish porter. Because it only deals with British producers, Brexit hasn't been an issue either.

“We have found it great to be working with micropubs as the owners/landlords are passionate about their business and want high quality produce that they will be proud to serve,” said Bartley.

“For us, this transfers into regular orders as our customers are always happy with our products and service.”



↑ Noel Allen, Noisy Snacks

Becoming frustrated at the lack of good quality bar snacks available to complement craft beer inspired Noel Allen to start **Noisy Snacks** in 2018. The company, based in Newtonards, Northern Ireland, offers a wide range of snacks from nuts to beans, chickpeas, and corn.

“We mostly sell direct to craft beer and snack lovers, but soon we started to supply micropubs and local craft beer brands,” said Allen. “We have built a loyal following of customers and we want to continue to support and work with micropubs moving forward.”

### Healthier snacks

Health was the overriding factor behind the launch of **Epicurium**. Based in Consett, County Durham, the company was formed by Ben and Tom McKechnie in 2009 with a focus on supplying national independent retailers with a more nutritious and interesting snack range.

“Targeting hot consumer trends, we're aiming to be the go-to for cool products that will help retailers stand out,” said Michael Ratheram, customer engagement manager. “Micropubs are relatively new to us, but we see the potential



↑ Hot Nut Company product range

for our craft and healthier snacks to work well for pub owners looking to differentiate.”

Going with the more conventional, **The Hot Nut Company** has been a mainstay in pubs since it launched 15 years ago. Starting with one product, it has expanded to 20 lines and now supplies nationwide.

Recently, the Warwick-based

company, which is run by Richard Metcalf-Penny and Ian Newton, has diversified into pretzels, made from sunflower oil, free from genetically modified organisms and approved by the Vegetarian Society. Yet, its chilli nut remains a firm favourite.

Nick Coleman also went with the tried and trusted pub grub, pork crackling, when he started **Snaffling Pig** in Yattendon, Berkshire in 2015.

After finding a pork crackling maker in the Midlands, the company began producing a variety of flavours such as chilli and fennel and selling them to pubs across the UK.

With many more enterprises like these starting up, it's only a matter of time before even more extensive and exotic bar snacks become available in micropubs.



↑ Anthony Froggatt and David Wedgwood of Just Crisps

## Home-grown produce

A crisp manufacturer claims to be the only company that produces 100% British crisps.

**Just Crisps**, based in Hill Ridware, Staffordshire, was started 10 years ago by Anthony Froggatt, who combined culinary rapeseed oil and potatoes, both grown on his farm, to produce crisps.

The potatoes are hand-cooked, flavoured, bagged and boxed on site before being distributed nationwide.

The company, which exhibits regularly at beer festivals and trade shows, has been supplying micropubs for the last five years, including the majority in Staffordshire, as well as further afield. Its bestsellers are sea salt and black pepper, sea salt and apple balsamic vinegar, sweet chilli and jalapeno.

“The micropub trade is one of our most important channels,” said David Wedgwood, commercial director. “They like the story of our provenance and the fact that we are a small independent family business that offers something unique.”

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