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Breaking the mould

Lucy Do is out to break the conventional stereotype of a micropub owner.
Alex Wright finds out the full story

As a female from an ethnic minority background, Lucy Do, who launched **The Dodo Micropub** in Hanwell, West London in January 2017, has regularly experienced racism, sexism and prejudice in the industry.

After appearing on a recent documentary about micropubs on London Live, she received a violent and racist threat via her website, telling her to go home to her own country (even though she's originally from England) and threatening her with an acid attack if she didn't shut her business. But her single-minded drive and

determination has enabled her to rise above this kind of abuse and make her business a thriving success.

"People who don't know me will often say 'Do you really own the micropub?' and 'What do you know about beer?'" said Do, who claims to have tasted more than 3,000 different beers in her lifetime.

"I certainly wouldn't get these questions if I wasn't female and a person of colour, that's for sure."

One incident stands out in particular from her time in the industry. She had to meet with a male police

officer to go through the objections to her licensing application.

"The police had objected to my application because they had to be seen to be protecting public order," Do said. "I distinctly remember the officer saying that they had objected on the grounds that I was female and had never run a micropub before."

"That's when it really hit home for the first time. The application for the other micropub down the road sailed through with no objections, purely because the owner was older, white, and male. It was then I realised what I was up against." →

Breaking the mould



↑ Micropub frontage

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Lucy Do, The Dodo Micropub

Kick up the bum

Do had worked in marketing for publishing companies for 15 years but her heart wasn't in it, and she had always harboured dreams of doing her own thing. So, when she was made redundant in August 2015 and handed a generous package, it was the perfect opportunity.

Having visited the Just Reproach in Deal, Kent on a whim a year earlier, Do was sold on the idea of starting her own micropub. It wasn't a matter of if, but when.

“It was everything a pub should be: fun, unpretentious and welcoming,” said Do. “I fell in love with it straight away.”

Admitting that redundancy was the “kick up the bum” she needed, Do went to seek out other

micropub owners for the benefit of their wisdom. After visiting the Watchmaker's Arms in Hove and the Booksteed Alehouse in Worthing, she had a clear idea of what she wanted to do.

Deciding to establish the micropub in her home patch of Hanwell, Do looked at four locations, before honing in on one in Boston Road. The former children's arts and crafts café ticked all the boxes – and because it was set up for hospitality use required little work, save installing a stillage unit and some furniture.

“Having always lived in West London, I knew that Hanwell was the perfect place to set up,” said Do. “It has a great community vibe about it, with lots of independents and small businesses operating in the same area. I also knew that I wanted to be in Boston Road because it has a nice atmosphere and feel with its traditional Victorian shop fronts.”

Ludicrous objections

The whole process from finding the site to getting planning and licensing approval from the local authority Ealing Council, took eight months. This was mainly due to delays caused by countless objections and a licensing hearing.

“Some of the objections were ludicrous, to put it mildly. They argued that if there was a pub there would be fighting and blood and broken glass on the street outside.”

Naming the micropub The Dodo as a nod to her family name and the original pub concept, Do said that initial set-up costs for the one-room, no frills establishment were £45,000. But every penny of that investment has been worth it, she said.

“The first year was just non-stop. My feet didn't touch the ground; it was all-consuming – I was owner, financial controller, bar manager, beer taster, cleaner – you name it”

Lucy Do, The Dodo Micropub

Having never worked in hospitality before, Do described running a micropub as a “massive learning curve.” But she threw herself into it whole-heartedly and has never looked back.

“The first year was just non-stop,” said Do. “My feet didn't touch the ground; it was all-consuming – I was owner, financial controller, bar manager, beer taster, cleaner – you name it. It was long hours and very tiring at first, but since then I have built my own team and that has allowed me to take a step back and focus on marketing, product launches and the like.”

But then in March 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic struck and Do had to start over again. Pivoting the business, she got creative and started doing deliveries and takeaways, cheese and beer pairings, and online corporate beer tastings, amazingly coming out of 2020 with 14% growth.

By contrast, 2021 resulted in a sharp decline in trade, with people reluctant to come out even after lockdown and social distancing was lifted. In a bid to drive sales, Do holds regular events including free cheeseboard Sundays on the first weekend of every month, food and games nights, pub quizzes and even blind beer tastings where punters are asked to distinguish “between sh*t and craft lagers.”

At full capacity, The Dodo can take 45 people, with seating for 30. Most business comes from word of mouth and social media, notably Instagram and TikTok, which has enabled Do to form a loyal band of supporters who she collectively and affectionately calls “The Hanwell Massive.”



↓ The Hanwell Massive!



Independent champion

Do champions London microbreweries, where she sources most of her cask and craft beer from, including Brew By Numbers, Park Brewery, Elusive Brewing and Anspach and Hobday. She's also planning to resume trading with former Hanwell brewery Weird Beard Brew Co when it completes its relocation to Manchester.

Do also launched her own gin – The Dodo of Hanwell – during lockdown, which has proved a hit with patrons. Her online shop also stocks everything from take away bottles and jugs to Dodo-branded fashionwear such as T-shirts, sweaters, beanies, and bags.

Over the last five years, The Dodo has won a string of accolades including the Campaign for Real Ale's Ealing Pub of the Year for 2018, 2020 and 2021; West Middlesex Pub of the Year 2018, 2020 and 2021; and Winner at the Young British Food and Drink Awards 2019. It was also shortlisted for High Street Entrepreneur of the Year at the Great British Entrepreneur Awards 2017 and Do herself was also nominated as Inspiring Woman by Ealing Women's Forum in 2018.

Do also gained national notoriety when she starred in the

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Lucy Do, The Dodo Micropub

documentary *Micropubs: The New Local*, which covered The Dodo's first 18 months. It was an experience she values highly, fondly watching herself go from micropub novice to hardened businesswoman.

As a community hub, The Dodo does a lot of work in the area, collaborating with and supporting local businesses. It also hosts regular charity fundraisers, with a raffle of rare beers held recently for Action Aid on behalf of the DEC Ukraine Humanitarian Appeal.

But this is only the start. Do has more ambitions she wants to fulfil, starting with launching her own rum, and no amount of prejudice or abuse is going to hold her back.

“I’ve become a lot bolder and braver in the last few years and willing to stand my ground,” she said. “But, then again, I’ve had to be, in the constant face of long-standing prejudices.”

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