



HOW IRON & AIR MEDIA GIVES ITS CUSTOMERS THE RIDE OF THEIR LIVES

Imagine you're on a classic motorcycle, say a 1959 Triumph Bonneville T120. You're on a crowded country road. The rear lights of the car in front of you flash. Just before you slow down, you anticipate a break in the traffic, punch the gas, and accelerate through an opening that materialized simply because you envisioned it. You're flying now. Weaving between much slower moving cars, the scenery passes by in a blur, until, suddenly, you leave the traffic behind completely and there's nothing ahead of you but the open road.

THIS IS HOW THE CREW BEHIND IRON & AIR APPROACHES LIFE.

They didn't set out to reinvent motorcycle culture. Yet, they did it anyway because they had a vision others didn't see and went for it, and left the competition in the dust. What was their formula for success? Following their passion and understanding a motorcycle is more than a collection of steel tubing, glass, and rubber — it's a lens through which to view the world.

BUT BEFORE ALL THAT, CO-FOUNDER AND EDITOR-IN-CHIEF ADAM FITZGERALD FIRST TURNED TOWARD MOTORCYCLES AS A DISTRACTION.

In 2011, Adam was burnt out. He'd been working as a graphic designer for more than five years within Southern New Hampshire University's College of Online and Continuing Education. This was a magical time to be at SNHU, as the school redefined and reimaged how students could be educated. It was also a time of hypergrowth.

"When I started, we had 25 people on the team," Adam said. "When I eventually left, there were 700 people. It was an exciting and exhilarating thing to be a part of. It was also exhausting."

To distract himself from the long hours of work and to remain creative, Adam decided to build his own motorcycle and got into the café racer scene. He enjoyed the process and began to post pictures of his build on Instagram — a new social media platform at the time.

His photos caught the attention of another motorcycle enthusiast named Brett Houle. The two conversed back and forth within Instagram's comments section (the social media giant had yet to release direct messaging). They communicated like this over several months until one day, Adam posted a picture of downtown Manchester, New Hampshire. It was then he discovered his digital pen pal lived less than a mile away. The two met up and discussed an idea called Iron & Air.

“At the time, we were both actively seeking a publication that didn’t exist,” Adam said. “There were two types of motorcycle magazines: extremely technical or the dirty biker mag. We didn’t want something in the middle. We wanted to go completely off the spectrum — something that was forward-thinking but paid homage to the past.”

In the early days of Iron & Air, Adam, Brett, and Gregory George Moore — the company’s director of marketing and co-founder — shared pictures and stories they liked on Instagram. They immediately discovered others felt the same way. But they never forced the issue. Their strategy was to remain authentic and build an audience.

“We wanted to build an audience first and then by engaging with that audience, put out products that they would want,” Adam said. “We always knew we wanted a print magazine. The company was called ‘Iron & Air Magazine’ long before we had one. But we moved responsibly and did tests. A lot of publications rush to put out a magazine and then try to find readers. But a magazine is a hard cost. There’s no printer that says, ‘No problem, pay me when you get subscribers.’ We worked hard to build a digital audience before we took that big swing. I think that approach has paid off.”

Iron & Air now has nearly 250,000 Instagram followers, publishes a quarterly print magazine, has a booming e-retail business, and brings its authentic storytelling to brands like Indian Motorcycle and Toyota. Adam says they will do more of those brand collaborations in the future.

“It’s fun to work with bigger brands that have bigger budgets,” Adam said. “They allow us to tell their story in an authentic way and we’re able to do some of the work we’d be unable to do because we’d be limited by capital.”

A few years ago, Iron & Air needed some capital and help with backend infrastructure, and they looked for a partner who shared their vision. They found that in Travis York, President and CEO of GYK Antler, an independent, full-service marketing agency. Through that relationship, Adam met Kyle York, Travis’ brother and CEO of York IE.

“THE YORK IE TEAM HAS HELPED US BECOME MORE AGGRESSIVE ON THE GROWTH SIDE,” ADAM SAID. THEY’VE HELPED US EVALUATE WHERE WE ARE, WHAT OUR GOALS ARE AND HOW WE WANT TO GET THERE. THEY ENCOURAGED US TO PUT TOGETHER A DECK AND AN ELEVATOR PITCH, WHICH HAS HELPED US NARROW IN AND FOCUS ON HOW TO DELIVER OUR MESSAGE.”

ADAM FITZGERALD

“The York IE team has helped us become more aggressive on the growth side,” Adam said. They’ve helped us evaluate where we are, what our goals are and how we want to get there. They encouraged us to put together a deck and an elevator pitch, which has helped us narrow in and focus on how to deliver our message.”

The message behind Iron & Air is more than cool pictures of motorcycles; the team has simply chosen motorcycles as their topic. What makes Iron & Air so special and so beloved is it focuses on the human element of the machines. The potential for human stories is limitless and never mundane or boring. Which is why after being at the helm for more than seven years, Adam feels like Iron & Air is just getting started.

“My passion is derived by my curiosity of the world around me,” Adam said. “The motorcycle is the lens through which we tell our stories. I feel blessed to do this job as a career.”

It’s certainly been a hell of a ride thus far, with still a lot of open road ahead.

